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By GORDON KEYNE

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

MAY, 1937 VOL. 65, NO. 1

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Coming!

"A Chinaman's Chance"

A swift-paced novelette of adventure with the border patrol, by the author of the Tiny David stories.

By ROBERT R. MILL

A Great New Series, by

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Since completing the "Arms and Men" series this favorite writer has been working on an even more fascinating group for you—a historical series following the development of the famous Foreign Legion. Part of the stories are already done and the rest are planned—as follows:

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VI—Hellfire.
(Magenta, 1859)

VII—Life, Not Courage, Left Them. (Mexico, 1863)

VIII—Red Snow.
(Orleans, 1870)

IX—Baby of the Black Flags.
(Tonkin, 1885)

X—The Bamboo Fort.
(Formosa, 1885)

XI—No Sound of Drum.
(Siam, 1892-'3)

XII—One Lemon.
(Dahomey, 1892-'3)

XIII—Pipes of the Sudan.
(1893)

XIV—In Order to Die.
(Madagascar, 1895)

XV—Very Detached Duty.
(Morocco, 1900)

XVI—Red Hair, Blue Cross.
(Berber revolt, 1908)

In an Early Issue!

Made in America

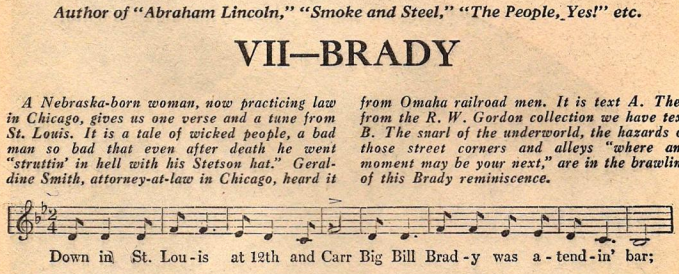
Guaranteed Antiques of Song and Story

Edited by CARL SANDBURG

Author of "Abraham Lincoln," "Smoke and Steel," "The People, Yes!" etc.

VII—BRADY

A Nebraska-born woman, now practicing law in Chicago, gives us one verse and a tune from St. Louis. It is a tale of wicked people, a bad man so bad that even after death he went "struttin' in hell with his Stetson hat." Geraldine Smith, attorney-at-law in Chicago, heard it from Omaha railroad men. It is text A. Then from the R. W. Gordon collection we have text B. The snarl of the underworld, the hazards of those street corners and alleys "where any moment may be your next," are in the brawling of this Brady reminiscence.



A

Down in St. Louis at 12th and Carr
Big Bill Brady was a-tendin' bar;
In came Duncan with a star on his chest
Duncan says, "Brady, you're under arrest."
Brady—why didn't you run?
Brady—you should a-run!
Brady—why didn't you run
When you seen Black Duncan with his gatling gun?

B

1 Duncan and his brother was playing pool
When Brady came in acting a fool;
He shot him once, he shot him twice,
Saying, "I don't make my living by shooting dice!"

Brady won't come no more!
Brady won't come no more!
Brady won't come no more!
For Duncan shot Brady with a forty-four!

2 "Brady, Brady, don't you know you done wrong
To come in my house when my game was going on?
I told you half a dozen times before,
And now you lie dead on my barroom floor!"

3 Brady went to hell lookin' mighty curious,
The devil says, "Where you from?" "East St. Louis."
"Well, pull off your coat and step this way,
For I've been expecting you every day!"

4 When the girls heard Brady was dead
They went up home and put on red,
And came down town singin' this song—
"Brady's struttin' in hell with his Stetson on!

"Brady, where you at?
Brady, where you at?
Brady, where you at?
Struttin' in hell with his Stetson hat!"

Several hundred of our pioneer songs have been gathered by Carl Sandburg, and published in book form by Harcourt, Brace and Company, under the title "The American Songbag."

Beau Brummel

Steel rings clear and deadly through this memorable story by the author of "Springfield 00078596."

THERE is nothing quite so annoying as a show-off. When you get two of them at it together, the ultimate worst can happen, and generally does. And when you toss a beautiful girl into the game, it's time to leave that place and make for parts remote. I didn't, and that was my mistake.

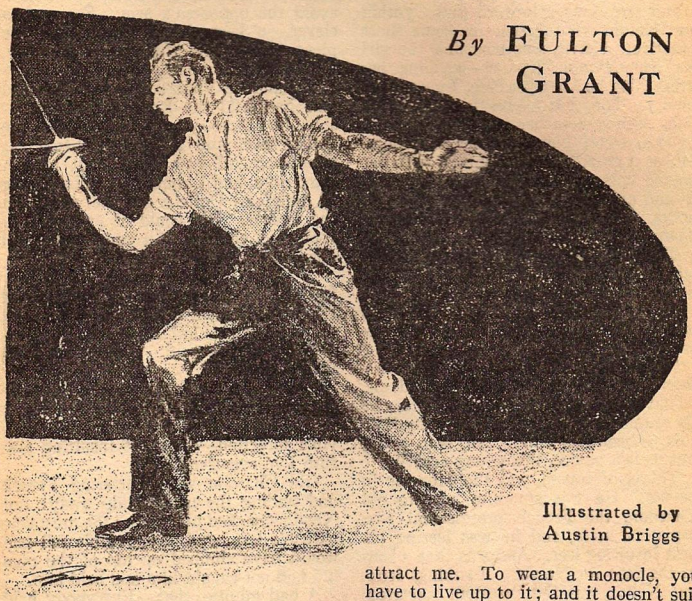
Now, I like Arnold Nelvin. Call him a show-off, a boasting, swaggering, conceited young ass, and I'll admit it. But I like him. The trouble with Nelvin was that he got to be the American fencing champion. I know well enough that Americans don't make top-notch swordsmen. We don't have the tradition of the sword. And when we send fencing teams to Europe, they hardly ever reach the semi-finals in the international matches. Still, an American fencing champion is something over here, and Nelvin was pretty good—which is just what caused the trouble. . . .

There's good blood in Nelvin. He's a Bostonian, and one look at him would show you that his folks came over first class in the *Mayflower*, and that he didn't need to swagger. Furthermore, he inherited enough money to make life comfortable for him. This, I suppose, is why he took up fencing. But when he discovered that one of his ancestors must have been a D'Artagnan or a Bussy d'Amboise or somebody like that, it went to his head, and there was no holding the boy.

Now, the leading lady in this yarn is Cynthia Lane, and I want to go on record as saying that she's about the handsomest thing in a red skirt and a V-shaped fencing-plastron I ever had the privilege of seeing. I don't blame Nelvin for losing his head about her; and I can't blame Cynthia for liking Arnold Nelvin, show-off or not, because she had sense enough to see through his inferiority complexes and know that he's a pretty grand lad underneath. Well, he's proved that now, which makes the whole story.

of the Blades

By FULTON GRANT



Illustrated by Austin Briggs

Briefly, Cynthia is runner-up for the women's championship with foils and the pride of the famous *Salle d'Armes Chardon,* which, of course, is how she and Nelvin met and got together.

They didn't need a chaperon, those two; but they used to drag me along to Chardon's two or three times a week because Cynthia used to say that I could keep Nelvin from making a fool of himself. That wasn't accurate, but I did my best.

On this particular night Nelvin won a challenge match, and the way he acted up! Swank! He strutted and bravoed and swaggered and kissed his hand to the gallery and made a condescending speech about the challenger afterward, until I was blushing down to my toenails, and even Cynthia was so ashamed for him she wanted to go out and cry.

Cynthia and I were sittin up in the gallery, watching, when I noticed the fellow with the monocle. Now, monocles attract me. To wear a monocle, you have to live up to it; and it doesn't suit the American way of living at all. So I figured this man for a foreigner, but something rather special; and believe me, that turned out to be neat guessing.

But the thing I noticed was his staring at Cynthia.

I'm no prissy person, but I don't like obvious public flirting. And this bird sat back there, just behind us, and ogled the little lady worse than the South American gigolos you see in the movies. What's more, she knew it. And worse yet, she liked it.

He was tall and lean and dark, and slick of hair and feature, with an inverted "V" for a mustache, and nice Byronic features which would go well in the collar ads. And just as Nelvin won his last touch, this monocle handed Cynthia a high-powered wink which made her miss her hero's play altogether. And that made me sore.

But the crowd started clapping and yelling just then, and Nelvin pulled his gallery play by smirking at them and

then stepping to the edge of the platform and kissing his hilt at Cynthia and calling her "Queen of the Tournament." Then there was a rush to go downstairs, and I lost sight of the monocle.

It wasn't long afterward that Cynthia and Nelvin got together for some short practice. Nelvin was coaching the girl for her Olympic try-out—teaching her everything he knew—which, I guess, was plenty. They left me on the edge of the floor with some other visitors, and went to their sword-play, hammer and tongs. It was a grand show. Cynthia, with her golden hair and her elfin way of flitting in and out, is a pretty splendid sight in action; and Arnold Nelvin—well, he was champion.

Then Nelvin caught her in a fault, and started to explain some movement or other. He said something like:

"Keep that point to a small circle when you disengage. Remember, Gorgeous. It wins."

"*Pouf!* Now that is *drôle*, is it not—*hein?*" said a foreign voice behind me. "That is not so, what he says there, eh? So stupid it is to give so-bad lessons to this so-beautiful child. Ah, *mon vieux*, but he is a novice, this young man?"

There, of course, was the Monocle in person. He was standing next to old Chardon, the French professional who owns the *salle*, and he was leering his best insulting leer. And was that a slap in the face for Nelvin! In things fencing, Nelvin was the President, Congress *and* the Supreme Court; he'd tell you so himself, if pressed. He got red, and then white. He stepped out and came over to the Monocle, mad as blazes. I had to laugh, secretly, because the foreigner had made just the same kind of a show-off play that Nelvin himself might have pulled, and now he was getting his own medicine, and not liking it a little bit. Nelvin stood there in Napoleon's favorite posture, and said:

"Listen, Glass-eye: I'll let that crack pass because you're only a stuffed wop; but I suggest that you go back to your banana-stand and don't try to mix with decent people."

THE noise that came from the Monocle sounded like: *"Puah-ah-ha!"* Then he bowed grandiosely toward little Cynthia, and said:

"Permit me, mademoiselle, to present myself. I am Armand Victorien de Vielle, of France—a name not quite unknown in the world of fencing. Therefore, mademoiselle, I permit myself to ignore this stupid little man and to explain to you this thrust. In the *dégagement,* my child, the point describes a large arc, not the small circle. It is so to avoid the opponent's arm. For one so clever, so beautiful, I would take the pleasure to show this thing—one day, perhaps, mademoiselle?"

Armand de Vielle! He was the bird who had held the European championship for three years—had beaten the Italian ace, and a lot of other great swordsmen. I had read about him in the papers, and I knew that he had come to America. Quite a guy, he was, from the reports. But could he swagger! I could feel the chuckles running up and down my sleeve.

NELVIN went crazy. I thought he would smack this Frenchman across the face with his foil. But he didn't quite.

"Get out," he said. "Get out of here, you Frog."

"So?" said the Frenchman, "The little bantam, *hein?"* And he stuck his thumb behind his teeth and pulled it out in Nelvin's direction—the most insulting gesture I've ever seen.

Old Chardon was chattering French and pulling the man bodily away; but Nelvin smacked him across the mustache with his left hand, dropped his foil and would have climbed on top of the man if I had not caught him and held him.

A bad minute, that. Everybody held everybody. I was afraid there would be a free-for-all. And if it had not been for Cynthia Lane, it might have been worse. She took Nelvin by the shoulder and tugged him away, saying:

"That's enough, Arnold. Don't be a fool. I believe you've met one man who is more conceited than you are."

Cynthia could say that.

Well, it was all over. The sneering Monocle went away, still sneering, and Nelvin was led out of the *salle* grumbling and swearing and out of face. But a whole lot of people were laughing, which included me. It was time somebody took Nelvin down.

Next day Cynthia called me on the phone.

"Listen, Harry," she said, "I've got an idea."

"Better forget it, youngster," I said. "Women shouldn't have 'em. What's it cost me?"

"It's about Arnold," she said. "And I want you to help. You're our best friend,

and you understand him, and you know that he's not really the way he acts. I want you to fix it so I can meet that Frenchman."

"Not me, kid. I don't want to see murder."

"Please. I think we can cure Arnold."

"Deal me out, Gorgeous," I told her. "The kid will outgrow all that in time. Why don't you marry him instead?"

"I'm going to marry him; but I don't want to have to apologize for my husband all my life. He needs a lesson."

"Not from your old pal Harry Cautious Brown. So long—see you in the movies."

Nelvin was coaching the girl for her Olympic try-out. It was a grand show: Cynthia in action is a splendid sight; and Arnold Nelvin—well, he was champion.

And I hung up on her.

Well, I saw Cynthia's point, but I wasn't having any. Arnold Nelvin loved that girl, and I knew it; and maybe she could hand him a lesson in modesty by a little judicious cheating with the Frog who could outswagger him; but not with my help. No sir, not me!

However, it just happened that she didn't need my help. The breaks of luck in this world make you wonder about fatalism, sometimes. A few days later Nelvin got a wire from home telling him his father was pretty sick, and calling him to Boston. He came to my place and asked me to keep an eye on Cynthia.

"Take her down to Chardon's, will you, Harry? She ought to go on practicing, and I can't be with her for a while."

Now, I don't like chaperoning a man's girl friend, but I said I'd do it.

Nelvin left. Cynthia had to keep up her practice for the Olympic try-outs. So I went on nightly duty.

The first night down at Chardon's nothing happened. But the second night

"Monsieur Nelvin," he said mincingly, "it is rumored that you have done some little fencing. You will please to choose one of these fine rapières and to try to defend yourself—if you are not afraid!"

this Monocle called Vielle turned up, and he made his play. Nothing slow about those Europeans; they work fast, well and strong. He just moved in. He came over to where Cynthia was practicing with one of the instructors, and simply took her away. But this time he had no monocle. Instead, he was wearing a fencing costume of canvas, and a mask; and in three seconds he had the girl in a corner and was crossing swords with her. I couldn't exactly rush out of the gallery and yell, "Stop that!" So I just watched.

This Vielle was good. He was like magic. He had a control of that thin steel blade that made me think it was magnetized. Maybe he was a swanking, monocled fop otherwise, but that man knew his fencing. And he toyed with poor Cynthia, chattering at her as she tried to touch him, explaining thrusts, kidding her, smirking and generally showing off. He made me think of the fanciful duelists you read about in the books. It was really a pretty fine show. But it worried me, too.

When they got through fencing, I went down and waited for Cynthia in the lobby. But she didn't come alone. She was dressed and bright and chattering on the arm of this Beau-Brummel-of-the-Blades, and having herself a simply immense good time. All of which made me pretty sore.

"Oh, Harry," she said to me, coming in, "this is Armand de Vielle, the great French champion. . . . Meet Harry Brown, one of my *very* best friends, Armand." And there was a quart of sugar in her voice. "And Harry, dear, don't bother to wait for me. . . . Monsieur de Vielle is going to take me to dinner. He's been *so* kind to me! Just imagine, a poor little American girl with a *great* champion! And he's going to teach me some wonderful things—about fencing, I mean—while Arnold's away. So run along, there's a dear. Don't mind, will you, Harry?"

Oh, no, I didn't mind. Not I! Not any more than you mind the hives.

Well, that's the way it happened. And I began seeing less of Cynthia Lane after that. She didn't answer the phone. Or she was just going out. Or she was going down to Monsieur de Vielle's "perfectly wonderful" apartment, where he had a "perfectly wonderful *salle d'armes* all of his own" to study some more fencing. What about Arnold? Oh, Arnold was a dear. *He* wouldn't mind. Besides, she did have to keep up for the Olympic try-outs, didn't she, now?

Well, I wasn't going to stick my chin out. Cynthia seemed to fall for the

show-off kind, anyhow, and I began to think one was just as good as another to her. But I liked Arnold Nelvin, in spite of his fantastic gallery-playing, and I knew that underneath, he was going to get pretty badly hurt out of this.

And then, one day and unexpectedly, Nelvin came back to New York.

I WAS at home that night, catching up on a bit of reading. He blew in on me like a gust of wind, ringing the doorbell so loud and hard it sounded like a summons from the cops, and then tearing into my place like a madman.

"Where the hell is Cynthia?" he yelled at me. "I thought you were going to take care of her! She isn't home, and she isn't at Chardon's, and she never answered my telegram, and she didn't meet me at the train. Where *is* she, dammit! Stop gaping at me and talk, can't you?"

Poor devil, he was really half-crazy. I didn't know he cared that much. And there he was, and there I was; and I didn't like my spot a bit.

"Why, you double-action idiot," I bawled at him, bluffing, "I don't keep your girl in moth-balls!"

"Listen, Harry: Cynthia hasn't been to Chardon's for a couple of weeks. They told me down there. They said she went off with that damned Frog—you know, the glass-eyed son of a worm who wise-cracked at me one night. . . . I told you to keep your eye on her, didn't I? Hell of a friend you are!"

The boy was nearly in tears, and I simply couldn't hold out on him any longer.

"Well, old kid, it's kind of true—in a way. She takes fencing lessons from this de Vielle, down at his place, in Greenwich Village. But there isn't anything to get excited about. She can take care of herself. Give the girl a break, Arnold."

He just went white.

"Get your hat," he shouted. "Get your hat, we're going down there. I'll show that French basket, I'll smear him all over Washington Square. Come on, come on—*move,* damn you!"

We went down. De Vielle's apartment, or studio, or whatever it was, was in one of those grand old buildings down in St. Luke's Place; so we took a taxi. All the way down there, Nelvin was telling me what a so-and-so I was, interspersing advance notices about what he would do to Vielle. I didn't mind the first, because I couldn't blame him; but the chorus about the Frenchman had me worried. If I had sized up this Frog right, he would be plenty able to take care of himself, monocle or no monocle. He was a few inches taller than Nelvin and nobody with his crust can be a sissy and live long.

When we got there, Nelvin bounced out of the cab and leaned on Vielle's bell. We ran up to the top floor, and he rang and pounded on the door. That man was mad, and I mean it.

A pretty nice place, that apartment. I gathered that Vielle had money. A manservant came to the door and started to talk French; but Nelvin pushed him aside and rushed in. It was really swell, that big drawing-room. Old tapestries and fine paintings and a lot of French sculpture, and a deep tufted carpet that made you feel pussyfoot.

Nelvin started yelling:

"Cynthia! Cynthia!" But we could hear steel scraping down the hall, and he followed the noise. A big door opened onto what must have been a sculptor's studio once, but Vielle had fixed it up as a swell old-fashioned *salle d'armes* for himself. The floor was stretched over with canvas and marked out in squares, numbered to study footwork and so on. A flock of trophies and cups were on one wall, and on the others were every kind of sword you ever saw in a museum. I learned later that these were family heirlooms, and that Vielle came from one of those old clans who went to the Crusades to make the world unsafe for Mohammedans.

But there was Cynthia—and Vielle.

AND they were both in plastron and mask, and swishing stiff, bright *épées* at each other, fast and furious. When Nelvin burst in, they stopped. Cynthia screamed. It was a good honest scream, too—screamed and lowered her blade and backed away against the nearest wall and screamed some more. I didn't think her second yell was so honest, but it didn't make any difference. The first one was enough to set off the firecrackers.

"What the hell does this mean?" panted Nelvin. "Cynthia, why didn't you come to the train? What the hell are you doing here with this cheap tailor's dummy of a Frog? Dammit, can't I even go and see my sick father without having you running all over with a lot of phonies? You get dressed and get out of here before I tear this place down. Get going!"

That was pretty bad and pretty stupid of him, and Cynthia was no girl to take that from anybody, not even a man she was more or less engaged to. She started forward, and believe me, when that golden-haired sylph gets angry, she's something to see; and when her tongue gets started, it cuts like a buzz-saw.

But she never got a word in. The Frenchman stopped short and stared. He listened as if he couldn't believe it. And then he walked over, without a word, and slapped Nelvin across the face. Slapped! With his open hand!

"Sale vache!" he hissed, which is French for "Dirty cow," and is pretty scandalous in his country. *"Imbécile!* What do you intend, *hein?* You would come here into my home, *hein?* To insult the guest of me, *hein? Sacre nombril d'un singe!* Go, before I break you in two!"

That's all he said, because his mouth was full of Nelvin's fist after that, and he was sailing across the slippery canvas and rolling hard against the hardwood wall where the swords hung.

NOW, an American and a Frenchman are fundamentally different. I don't mean to imply that Frenchmen are sissies. That's just a legend that somebody (probably an English sorehead) started. But they're different as can be. Frenchmen don't, instinctively, use their fists. In France you can stab a man, kick him, shoot him or bash his head in with a club; and you might get away with it legally if you have cause enough. But hit a Frenchman in France with your fist, and you land in jail. They simply don't think it's cricket. They run to knives and foot-boxing, called *savate,* and that's the reason what happened did happen.

An American would have got up and climbed Nelvin's frame, but not Vielle. He got up, all right. He stood there, cold as ice. He seemed to calm down and grow frigid. He wiped the blood from his lips, smiled a nasty little smile, fished into a pocket of his plastron for his monocle, stuck it in his eye, and lifted two long, needle-sharp swords off their hooks on the wall.

"Monsieur Nelvin," he said mincingly, like a school-child trying to talk lofty, "it will give me pleasure to be killing you for that blow. It is rumored that you have done some little fencing, *n'est-ce pas?* Then it will not be quite the murder, *hein?* You will please to choose one of these fine *rapières* and to try to defend yourself? If you are not afraid —*Meestaire* Nelvin!"

"Some little fencing!" That crack did it, of course. Arnold Nelvin was no fool, fencer or not. I don't believe he would have accepted this challenge to a duel if he had been entirely sane. But he wasn't sane. Vielle had touched him in his most vital spot—his terrible, incomprehensible conceit. Nelvin shouted, with mad, hysterical laughter.

"A duel, you yellow Frog? Ha, ha, ha, ha! That just makes me laugh. Ha, ha, ha! Why, you dirty double-crossing snake, I'll cut you in pieces. A champion, hey? I'll champion you, by God! Give me one of those swords—a good one, by God! None of your slimy tricks!"

He ran over to the wall and plucked down a handful of those splendid old-time weapons—tools that were meant for business.

The Frenchman merely stood there, smiling that devil's smile, and waiting, while Nelvin picked out a long Italian blade (I later learned it was Italian) with a deep silver guard and a thin flexible *lama* that scintillated like a ladies' foil when he whipped it.

About then Cynthia started screaming again; no doubt she saw by this time that things had gone too far. Anyhow, she screamed and ran out into the apartment. I dashed after her, but when I saw her run to a telephone I stopped. Maybe she had the right idea.

She called police headquarters, and she yelled as though ten men had been killed and ten others were bleeding to death.

"Police! Police!" she screamed. "Send somebody quick! There's trouble here—100 St. Luke's Place—top floor. . . . Oh, hurry, hurry, for God's sake!"

Well, I wasn't sure, but maybe she was right. Anyhow I went back into the *salle* and then I saw something I'll never forget if I live to be a great-great-grandfather.

You've read of duels—old-fashioned, bloody, rip-roaring duels of the d'Artagnan-and-Three Musketeers kind. Well, I want to state that this duel—right here in New York and in our porcelain-fitted Twentieth Century—made all those look like cream-puff tossing.

I HAD never figured Nelvin had a chance. I've already said that Americans don't make fencers, which is true.

I figured Nelvin was plenty good enough to beat our run-of-the-mill fencers in the U.S.A., but that he'd look like a ham against any good European.

Oh, well, I've been wrong before.

I hadn't figured on the change in Nelvin. I don't just know how to explain it nor how it happened nor why. But all that cheap swagger, all that bluff and show-offism, all that conceit and patronizing swank—all that was suddenly gone. He wasn't the Arnold Nelvin I knew any longer. Or maybe he was the Arnold I used to know as a kid in the days before he won a championship. But right now that lad was doing things with that long Italian pig-sticker that I had never seen him do before. And there was a queer, boyish expression in his eyes—a kind of eager excitement and earnestness and not a little grimness. It came over him the second his blade kissed the other. Arnold Nelvin was a changed lad then.

BUT the Frenchman was good; no mistake. Only now it was he who did the swaggering. Cold and hard and cruel and so damned sure of himself, he was, that he handed Nelvin his own sneering act, right back at him. He played like a master toying with his pupil.

Only there wasn't much toying.

Silver blades whistled and sang and whirred, clicked, danced, spun, darted in and out. Naked, those blades! No buttons on them. Death in them too. Probably they had killed hundreds, each of them, back in their own century. And now they were singing a death-song of tinkling music as they flashed at each other, clinging to each other as if magnetized, weaving fantastic patterns in the air.

I tried to stop them. I rushed over there and grabbed up one of the foils they had dropped on the floor and tried to knock down their swords. But all I got for my pains was a slap across the chest from the Frenchman's whiplike steel that would have drawn blood if it hit flesh. And Nelvin yelled savagely at me:

"Get away, you fool! Let me show that louse's son—"

I was outnumbered. I just stood there, fascinated, hoping the cops would come quick. I think I prayed for the cops.

And then I caught on that it was Nelvin who was forcing the Frenchman back, step by step. Feinting, lunging, parrying, turning that killing point by miraculous and subtle wrist-movements.

"Police!" she screamed. "Send somebody quick!"

He was on fire, that lad. He made one series of passes that seemed to develop in a crescendo of design like a campaign in a chess game. At the end of it he had Vielle off-balance and he was in with a deep lunge and a wild yell. . . .

But that devilish Frenchman made his body shrink imperceptibly, and Nevins' point passed his chest by a fraction of an inch.

Then Vielle came back at him, sweating after that attack and getting down to business. Constantly his point was at Nelvin's throat or breast. I died a hundred times just watching it. Only by miracles of lightning play did Nelvin escape being run through time and time again. They had turned into twin furies. They would lunge together, engage at the very hilts, locking their wrists like a couple of Japanese wrestlers. Then they would leap back with points lowered, fairly breathing fire and glaring—and then they were at it again.

Up and down, back and forth they battled. I didn't think a human body could stand such a pace, and both Cynthia and I were exhausted from just watching them.

Then suddenly it happened!

It was one of those simple "boob plays"—an elementary thrust such as you

see between beginners just learning their one-two tempo, and Nelvin pulled it. It might have meant death for him; Vielle should have caught his point in tierce and made an easy riposte which would have gone through him like butter.

But he didn't. Vielle was *too* good a fencer. He hadn't forgotten, but he couldn't make himself believe that a man would be such a fool as to make a play like that; evidently he expected that thrust was only the beginning of some complex attack—only it wasn't at all. The very simplicity of it caught him flat-footed, and Nelvin yelled:

"Take it, you damned Frog!" And the point of his sword went swiftly into the Frenchman's shoulder, coming out crimson.

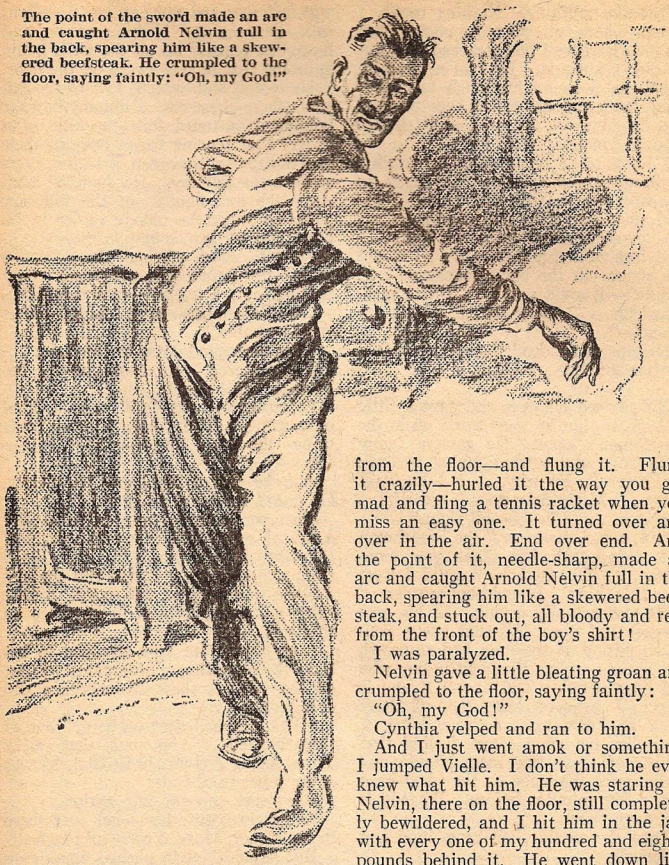
Nelvin followed up like a flash, taking quick advantage of the French champion's astonishment and wounded arm. He wrapped his steel around the other blade and gave it a quick wrench—and Vielle's sword clattered to the canvas.

Vielle just stood there, gaping with the pain and bewilderment. I thought Nelvin would run him through the body any minute. I thought right then and there we were going to see that murder I had been worrying about.

But he didn't.

Instead, Nelvin just grinned—not meanly nor sneeringly. He just grinned, pleased as Punch.

"Well, Frenchy," he said, "so we don't do so badly in America, hey? Really,



The point of the sword made an arc and caught Arnold Nelvin full in the back, spearing him like a skewered beefsteak. He crumpled to the floor, saying faintly: "Oh, my God!"

now, I didn't think that you'd fall for that trick."

Then he turned away to walk over to Cynthia and me, saying:

"Come on, let's get out of here. There's been enough of this damned foolishment. Come along, Gorgeous."

I told you something new had happened to Arnold Nelvin.

But the Frenchman spoiled it. He had been standing there, disarmed and bewildered. He couldn't even believe what had happened. Then his face went queer and drawn and I guess he was a little crazy. And as Nelvin turned to walk away, he snatched up that sword of his from the floor—and flung it. Flung it crazily—hurled it the way you get mad and fling a tennis racket when you miss an easy one. It turned over and over in the air. End over end. And the point of it, needle-sharp, made an arc and caught Arnold Nelvin full in the back, spearing him like a skewered beefsteak, and stuck out, all bloody and red, from the front of the boy's shirt!

I was paralyzed.

Nelvin gave a little bleating groan and crumpled to the floor, saying faintly:

"Oh, my God!"

Cynthia yelped and ran to him.

And I just went amok or something. I jumped Vielle. I don't think he even knew what hit him. He was staring at Nelvin, there on the floor, still completely bewildered, and I hit him in the jaw with every one of my hundred and eighty pounds behind it. He went down like a lead weight and skidded halfway across the slippery canvas floor. And God only knows what I would have done to him next if Cynthia hadn't yelled at me.

"Harry! Don't—oh, don't, Harry!" she yelled, and I got control of myself. I let Vielle lie there and ran to Nelvin. There was blood all over the place. I tugged at the sword and managed to get it out. I picked the boy up in my arms and tried to get his shirt off. Cynthia was fluttering around, trying to say something about it being all her fault. Which, of course, it was.

Anyhow, I didn't see the Frenchman get up and come over. He wasn't try-

ing to do anything. Nothing rough, I mean. There still was blood oozing from his mouth where I had smacked him, but he didn't know it. He had a strained, frightened look on his much too handsome face, and he leaned over me and laid his hand on my arm, and tried to take Nelvin away from me.

I let him. I don't quite know why.

"Monsieur—monsieur!" he began to say in a queer, wheezing voice. "Oh, God, monsieur, I did not mean that. . . . No, monsieur, I would not do that. . . . God forgive me, monsieur. . . . I would not strike—in the back, monsieur. . . . I didn't—I could not. . . . I was mad, monsieur. . . . *J'etais fou.* . . . I did not intend—"

Nelvin wasn't dead though; those old Puritan families are tough.

HE opened his eyes and gave a little groan, but he tried to sit up in the Frenchman's arms. He gave a funny little smile and started saying weakly:

"Forget it, Frenchy. . . . I know—I know. . . . Might have done it myself. . . . Forget it. . . . I'll—be—all right."

"Ah, merci, monsieur," the Frenchman was saying, "Ah, but thank you, monsieur. . . . Oh, God, how could I have done this thing! I would not murder—"

He was actually crying. All his own swagger had gone. All that nasty, conceited posing of the man had vanished, and he was crying, like a little boy who had been naughty and knows it and is sorry. I believed him, too. I don't think he knew what he was doing. I remember having a queer feeling that neither of those two men, Nelvin and Vielle, were the same as they had been only a few minutes before. Tragedy is a strange thing.

Then the outside bell rang, loud and ominously.

"It's the—police—police!" It was Cynthia saying that, almost to herself. "Police—the police!"

The Frenchman got to his feet, stiffly, laying Nelvin gently on the floor.

"I will go, messieurs," he said. "It is I who have done this thing." He started toward the door. "I am a Vielle," he said, half to himself and as if anybody cared. "We understand how to pay when we are wrong. . . . Do not disturb yourselves—"

But Nelvin got up to his knees, somehow and called out weakly:

"Come back here—you—fool! Stop him, Harry." I started after Vielle, who was faltering and not getting it. "Cynthia—help me up," Nelvin went on, and he pulled himself up on the girl's body, grabbing that bloody sword off the floor.

He took it and tottered toward the end wall where there was a dummy-bracket holding a buttoned foil—the kind of a gadget that fencing fiends have in their apartments so they can practice alone against the dummy. He fumbled with the catch and finally got the foil out. Then he stuck the bloody rapier in its place and turned around to us.

"Listen, folks. When those cops—come in—remember—we were only fencing. . . . I backed—into this thing. . . . Remember—don't forget—don't want—trouble."

Then he sagged down to the floor.

Vielle stared. He could hardly believe he had heard it.

"Monsieur—monsieur!" he said, kind of gasping. "It is there a most noble thing—the *geste magnifique!* I am—I am—"

And he waved his hands, helplessly. He didn't have any words for it.

Then we heard the cops. Cynthia did a bit of quick thinking. She grabbed the other sword, wiped the little blood from the end, where it had run through Vielle's shoulder, on the inside of her skirt, and hung it back in its place on the wall.

And when John Law tramped in behind the squealing manservant, we put on the swellest show of innocence you ever saw.

"What the hell goes on here?" one of them bawled. "Who made that call?" Then, seeing Nelvin: "My God, Mack! A guy's been stabbed!"

The other cop got into action.

"All right, you others—get over there in the corner. Move. You're all pinched."

But Arnold Nelvin pushed himself up from the floor, leaning on one hand.

"Go on, get out of here, flatfeet. . . . You don't—make any—pinch. Anybody—can see—accident. . . . Look at that damned sword I ran into. . . . Get me—a doctor—hospital—stop being—fools."

Then he fainted.

THOSE cops were hard to persuade; I shut Vielle and Cynthia up and did the talking because I was afraid they'd let it out. I used words of one syllable to explain about that dummy-foil rack and how Nelvin hadn't seen it until he got run through the back, and finally I made it stick.

But I had my fingers crossed, believe me.

"Gees!" said the cop called Mack, finally. "They oughta have a law against it. Just imagine playin' around with them pig-stickers! Youse guys is nuts. C'mon, now, get that boid to a hospital."

Which we did.

The cops helped, taking Nelvin downstairs and riding him to Bellevue in their prowl-car, while we followed in a cab.

NOBODY said much on that trip. Cynthia sat beside me, sobbing her heart out and dripping all over my shoulder. Poor kid, I was sorry for her, though the whole thing was her own fault and made me mad. "Oh, Harry, Harry!" she was sobbing. "I'll never forgive myself—never—if he should—" She didn't dare to finish that sentence.

And Vielle was no better. Stiff and breathless, he was, and from the expression on his face I could see that he was looking himself over from the inside and that he wasn't liking the picture very much. A queer fish, Vielle. I wasn't used to his kind. But I was pretty sorry for him, too—and made him take off his coat while I tied a clean handkerchief around his own wound.

And as for me—well, we were riding to a hospital to see about a man I like as well as anybody. And maybe to see him dead. The shadow of death hung over that cab and we could feel it.

And just before we got to the hospital, Vielle grabbed Cynthia's hand.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" he said. "Ah, mademoiselle!" Like that, only full of agony. "Mademoiselle," he said, "if we find—if I have killed—your *ami*—then will I know—what I must do. I would cut off my hand, mademoiselle. I would destroy this arm which has done this thing. I cannot . . . but no, I cannot ask you to forgive me, mademoiselle. But if—he should die—then I am giving myself with the police. I am a de Vielle. We know how to pay our debts."

Sententious, eh? Just sententious nobleness? Well, maybe. But I had a hunch that this Frog was pretty fine underneath, too. I had a hunch that he meant just that. Tragedy does queer things to a man.

I remember how Nelvin looked on that white slab. I remember the thin-faced doctor and the white nurses and the smell of ether. And I remember how the doctor said:

"We can save him—just. It missed the heart and lungs by a miracle. A transfusion will save him."

I wasn't being just a good guy when I offered to be the donor. I could hear the wings of Death fluttering around us and I was scared. You see a man—just a conceited kid who didn't mean any harm—you see him all full of life and fight. You see him get mad enough and serious enough and honest enough to defeat a man twice as good as himself. And then—you're afraid you're going to see him dead. So I offered blood. I had plenty of it.

But Vielle wouldn't let me.

"But no, *Monsieur le Docteur*," he was saying, and he was strong and calm and full of sudden meaning. "But no," he was saying. "If it is that blood can save this man, then I will give all the blood of my body. Very old is this blood, *Docteur*. Very good blood, the Vielle blood, for many centuries. And I have this night brought shame to it. But no, *Monsieur le Docteur*, it is I who will give—to mingle the blood of the Vielle with that of this brave boy, to take from mine the shame."

Well, they gave him a blood test, and found he was the right type. And as I learned afterward, he managed to hide his own wound from them—for fear they wouldn't use him if they knew about it. They discovered it only when he collapsed after it was over.

I CAN remember those two cots, next day, side by side, in a little ward. There were two pale, white faces on them—very near together. Cynthia was sitting on the edge of Nelvin's bed, and her hand was stroking his head. Vielle's eyes were closed, and he was thanking the God of the whole Vielle family that his vain conceit had not made him a murderer.

And then I heard Nelvin's weak voice saying, while a funny little smile played over his face:

"Hey—Frenchy—"

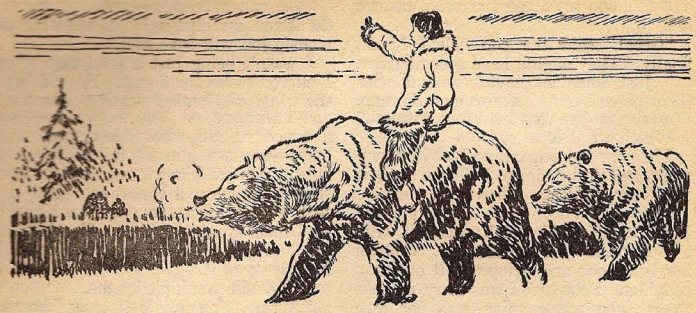
Vielle's eyes fluttered open. He was still pretty weak.

"Hey, Frenchy—what about that *disengagé* now? The big arc, hey? Not the little circle? Funny how you remember things, isn't it?"

And I saw them stick their drawn white hands out from under the covers and grip each other's hand for a minute.

That was when I quit.

Another memorable story by Fulton Grant will appear in an early issue.



ONE AGAINST

An extraordinary adventure of the white boy Kioga, who was brought up by the Indian-like natives of a newfound volcano-warmed forest land beyond Siberia.

THE Snow Hawk, called by the Shoni folk Kioga, retired from the village of Hopeka in some haste, yet certainly not fast enough to sate the wrath of three termagant squaws who chased him to the gate, reviling every step. But at the gate they paused, while he fled on—out into the fierce unconquered wilderness his white parents had discovered in the Arctic—a volcano-warmed region only lately known to civilized men.

The cause of his precipitate departure was a captive yearling bear, Kioga's favorite pet, unwittingly admitted to a storage lodge. What happened there is still a cause for merriment in Hopeka: The bear went in thin and came out round as a Shoni signal drum. And since this was the third occasion of the sort, quite naturally the squaws gave way to anger; and Kioga, in his turn, to shrewd retreat.

Whereas to all the other red-skinned children, Hopeka-town was sanctuary, for Kioga to flee out into the forest was typical. For in the forest—as every Shoni old enough to speak could tell—Kioga had a host of friends. Of these none were more dear to him than the troops of shaggy bears who roamed the virgin timberlands some leagues distant from Hopeka.

Now, as ever in the past, it was these friendly beasts Kioga sought, before the first storm of the season broke. In seeking them he found another—but of that other, more in its place. . . .

Through an old and hoary forest rooted along the sloping shoulder of a northern mountainside, a winter gale blew moaning, spewing frigid diamond-dust in hissing clouds upon deep drifts of snow already crusted with the glaze of freezing weather.

III—"Unharmed, He Dwelt Among the Forest People."

a WILDERNESS

By WILLIAM CHESTER

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

Once, through the dimness of the blizzard, a lone lean skulking form came floating past, thick brush between hind-legs—a gaunt old solitary wolf, the very grayish ghost of wintry loneliness. Even as he went, his trail was covered, his scent obliterated. And a moment later, a young spike-buck passing by took no alarm until white bayonets were shearing his jugular.

Dead in his tracks the spike-buck fell quivering; and instantly the wolf crouched beside him, tearing out great chunks of flesh. . . . Already the buck's red lolling tongue was freezing. About the two prone forms the driving icy crystals were piling up, effacing carmine spots, concealing the grim marks of wilderness tragedy.

Gorging on the fat and tender venison until his shaggy sides were swelling, the old gray killer heard no sound beyond the savage crunch of bones between his teeth. But up along the trail T'yone earlier had used, two other shadows now came silently. Of these, one was feline, close to the ground, with a round furry tail that made its length a good eleven feet. Its eyes were burning beryls.

The other shade belonged not in this wintry scene of savagery; yet somehow, after second glance, did belong. For as the puma crouched, thus also crouched the man-cub, so close beside the brute that the coats of thick warm fur, in which their bodies were enclosed, touched. They somehow looked alike, both lean and lithe and supple. The fur capote with which the man-cub's garb was capped, fell back behind his neck. His tangled thatch of raven hair, powdered through with gems of sparkling snow, tossed unruly in the tearing winds, and stung his lean brown cheeks.

From green-blazing eyes no whit less fierce than those which burned on a lower level beside him, Kioga the Snow Hawk intently watched that little hillock on the trail ahead. And in the handsome dark-skinned face a light of understanding broke.

"Ho, Mika!" he breathed to that lean, grinning panther at his side. "T'yone leaped before us—for I hear a leg-bone crunched! But I am empty—yah!—just like a bullock's horn. No wolf will rob me of my meat, *ehu!* Not while my leather snake is close at hand!"

And with the whispered words Kioga took from round his waist a plaited tapered hide lash and flicked it flat behind him. Then—*ssss-whack!*—he whipped it sharply forth against the hillock. Up with a snarl bounded the old lone wolf, baring bloody fangs at this strange pair who faced him down the trail.

"*Hai,* Crack-bone! Quick—away with you!" cried the Snow Hawk, moving forward two quick paces and staking all on one good bluster.

But here was one not thus simply to be fronted down. Close against the snow the old lone crouching killer held his vulnerable throat, and circled half around his fallen prey in search of better foothold.

Once more the leather thong came slashing forth and drew his blood behind the shoulder. Then old T'yone, two hundred pounds of bone and leathery sinew, and lightning-quick for all his years, came rushing fire-eyed upon the Snow Hawk, his ruse in this attack an old and subtle one. For as he came, the great wolf slashed not at the throat, as is the custom of his breed, but chopped instead with deadly ferocity lower down—a snap that must have cut Kioga's knee-pan cleanly out.

But if T'yone was quick, Kioga was the quicker by the fraction of a second. There was no tear of flesh and gristle. Instead a hollow traplike clash foretold T'yone's miss. Nor had he second chance to snap again.

A steely grip concealed in gloves of buckskin clamped quickly round those jaws just as they closed. Legs like links of iron chain closed tightly round his flanks—all in that little moment before T'yone could come erect from his rush.

With sudden movement of the wrist Kioga cast two half-hitches of his leather lash about the wolf's long jaws. Unscabbarding, he plunged his thin bone knife deep into the shaggy chest, severing the great blood vessels with two rapid thrusts, and leaping clear. And as he sprang away, Mika rushed in belatedly, then drew away, to watch T'yone die.

T'yone still bit the snow in his death-paroxysm when Kioga and his snarling consort were in their turn crouching at the new-killed spike-buck. Without a pause they ate, Mika the puma shearing off great pieces with his side-jaw teeth, Kioga severing juicy steaming slices with his knife and wolfing them down in the need to fill his famished belly, empty these three long hungry days. They ate incredible quantities, as hungry meat-eaters always do, and then ate more for fuller measure. And having swallowed all they could contain, both looked together for a warm place in which to digest their meal in comfort.

LUCK held. Kioga, probing with a tree-branch, broke through a thin crust of ice, to find an empty cave; into this they disappeared, the man-cub first, the puma slinking slowly after. And though a clinging scent told them they had pre-empted the former home of a bear, they gave the fact but little thought. Presently their trail filled up with snow. No one, not having seen them enter, could have known that two wild creatures had denned up there.

Strengthened by the fresh meat, Kioga felt about him in the darkness and raked together a heap of leaves and trash. On this he threw himself to rest. Soon the panther, having investigated each corner of the ancient lair, returned and stretched beside him. Upon the warm and silken side Kioga laid his head.

Without, the cold winds howled and muttered eerily. The great trees cracked and groaned, straining at their anchoring roots and bowing in homage to the

winter storm, like subject warriors armored in ice. Within, drawn closer by the need for common warmth, Mika and Kioga fell asleep.

SIX hours passed before they stirred. Then neither could have told what brought his head erect, with listening ears and muscles tensed by strange suspense. Beyond the entrance to the den the winds were muttering still, and crystal snow still hissed to earth. These sounds had not awakened them. Some other new, extraneous note had broken through their slumbers.

It came again. A thin yet piercing cry, not brute, but human, threaded through the moan of the winds. Hard on its terror-note, there came the voice of fiercest hunger ravening through the night.

"T'yone and his brother-wolves are on the run," Kioga said with a curl of the lip that told his hatred of the pack.

Too long had he roamed beyond the walls of the primitive village that was his sometime home not to know the meaning of those sounds. Somewhere out in the dark of night the panting pack was closing in. Somewhere a hunted creature—a human creature like himself—stood back to tree, with pounding heart and fear-dilated eyes. Ever closer came a ring of shining double disks, and fangs that dripped with hot saliva whetted and champed together. Then, suddenly—could that be human scream, so frantic, so wild with terror? Silence put a stop to it. The pack was feeding. The end had come.

Mika's savage head dropped back contentedly. Too late, Kioga thought, for him to offer aid. He also sought oblivion. He laid his head upon the puma's side and heard it purring like the stone with which the Shoni women ground up berry-pits. But sleep would not return. Out in that stormy darkness one of his own kind had perished. The timbre of the voice still puzzled him. Then with a start, he realized. No man's scream that last one, but a woman's.

With a cry that was half-sob, he sprang up with a bound. Had not Awena, his Indian foster-mother, gone to visit in another village before the rivers froze? The chance was remote—and yet, it could have been her voice that he had heard.

Outside the den, the winds howled louder. A skin of ice had formed upon the wall of snow which sealed the cave—condensing moisture from the lungs of those who lay within. Without a pause Kioga smashed it through and moved alone into the storm, armed with his whip.

The icy snow slashed down like buckshot. The faintest light from moon and northern lights high up above the storm relieved the gloom of open spaces. But elsewhere the forest loomed blackly.

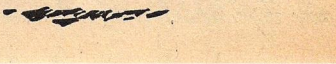
How, out amid that screeching chaos, would he find the scene of forest tragedy? Wolflike, he gave the answer by his acts, first circling to get the wind from every quarter in his nostrils. The place could not be farther than the span which human voice could carry through the noises of this night. Then—ah!—two-thirds about the ring, Kioga stiffened. Blown by the north wind close against the earth, the strong wolf-smell was in his nose. A moment leaning low against the storm before he heard the yap and snarling of the pack, with now and then the crack of splintering bone in jaws of iron.

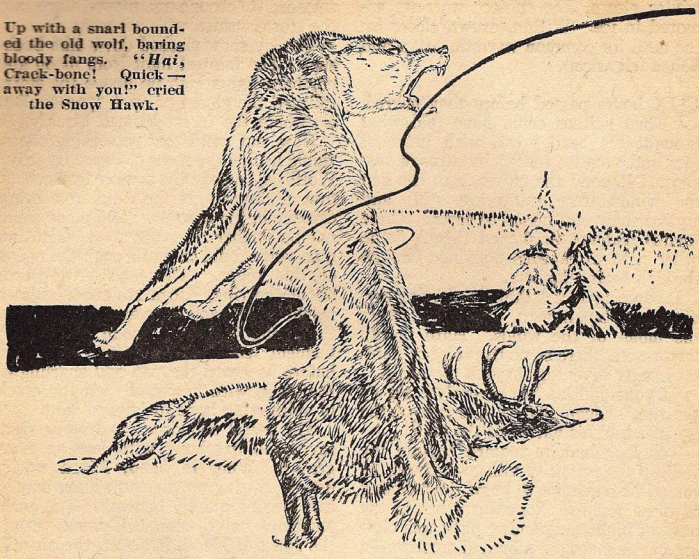
The awful sounds came from a deep ravine all overhung with leaning evergreens. Whip in hand, Kioga warily neared, raising up the snow-hung boughs and passing quietly beneath. The acrid stench of wolves came evilly, and with it the smell of blood, fresh-let, the air still warm with it. Parting the branches on the lip of the ravine, Kioga looked downward into a little open space, wherein one tree stood solitary. The vague auroral light intensified, lighting up the scene in ghastly green and silver.

A dozen of this earth's most savage life-destroyers crouched feeding on new-killed prey. Ears laid back and fangs displayed, each tore off a share, retreating snarling to consume its grisly portion.

With anxious eyes upon the dead, Kioga loosed a sigh of deep relief. That poor unlucky thing below those crouching forms had not been Awena. The copper band about the hair marked the victim as of another tribe.

All this he noted in the briefest instant—then something else which made him start: Two of the pack, both lesser brutes not yet full-grown, and driven by





Up with a snarl bounded the old wolf, baring bloody fangs. "*Hai*, Crack-bone! Quick — away with you!" cried the Snow Hawk.

the others from the feast, leaped up and down in most peculiar fashion. Observing them, Kioga soon glimpsed the thing at which they sprang.

Swinging, swaying, dipping from a long evergreen bough, it was a cradle-board, hung by its thongs almost within the reach of snapping jaws, had not the howling winds tossed up and down the branch from which it dangled. Within its wrappings would be a child, saved by the last act of a devoted mother.

TIME and again the young wolves sprang to seize the dangling prey, and each time fell a little short. But presently one of the older feeders rose, licking his chops, and snarled the young pair aside. Then with a single leap, straight up he rose, above the level of the bough. His white-steam breath blew on the infant's face; his great jaws clamped upon the cradle-board.

But before the force of gravity could pull both down into the red-stained snow, a writhing snakelike thing came darting forth, and with a smart resounding *crack* drew blood from the leaping wolf's soft flank. Loosing his jaws to howl in pain, the brute fell sprawling in the snow.

Without a sound the two young wolves were at his throat, tearing out his life, while up above, the cradle-board hung for the moment safe. And in a ring about the struggling three, the pack drew in to watch—with wicked slanting eyes and open jaws a-grin—the outcome of the fight.

In tumbling, squirming, snarling mass the wolves rolled to a little distance. Then a straggler perceived that swaying thing above. The little warm and pulsing life called out with fierce temptation to the killer beast. He leaped, caught hold and pulled the child to ground.

Once more Kioga brought the whip lash into play—one stinging cut to draw the wolf's attention to the raw red slash it made. Before the echo of the stroke had blown away, Kioga jumped.

Full twenty feet he dropped in breathless fall, crushed the wolf down deep into the snow, slung the cradle-board upon his back, and like a flash leaped upward, grasping the limb from which the child had dangled.

His speed had served him well, but only by the thickness of a skin—the skin of which his furry garb was made. For as he drew himself aloft, long rows of gleaming teeth snapped viciously, hooking off a strip of skin and laying bare his leg. Six wolves fought hotly to possess the leather, and shredded it to ribbons.

From above, Kioga loosed the vials of his wrath upon them: "O Gobblers-of-Ancient-Bones! O Slayers-of-the-Helpless! Blunted be thy fangs, and may thy whelps be born with eyes that cross! O Cowards-of-the-Forest, may skunks invade thy dens, and at the end the meat-birds peck thy yellow eyes out!" And as he spoke, Kioga plied the lash with cunning malice, stinging one wolf, that it might think another had ripped it from behind, until two separate brawls progressed below.

Kioga's bared leg grew cold; to get back to the cave was imperative. And now the little swaddled creature slung upon his back gave out a hunger-cry.

The distance from the solitary tree to the ravine ledge Kioga measured with his eye. Another time he would have chanced a leap, success a probability. But with this cradle-board upon his back, two lives would be the cost of one least slip upon the icy footing. Nor dared he linger here for fear of freezing to death.

Along the edge of the ravine he glimpsed a stout protruding root. Upon this root he flicked the loose end of his whip and saw it lap three times around. Testing it, he felt it bind securely. Below, the wolves were still at grips among themselves when taking hold upon the handle of his whip, Kioga dropped through space. One short breath-taking instant he swung down, not more than inches high above their heads. Before the pack took notice, Kioga clung safely to the sheer side of the ravine, beyond the point at which the whip was fixed.

Loosening and drawing in the coil, Kioga climbed still higher to the top of the ravine. Then through the eddying swirls of snow he hastened back toward the cave where Mika slept.

Along the route he paused to kick the snow from the spike-buck's carcass; and from the kill, now frozen stiff, he broke off a ham. New paw-marks at the cave-mouth showed that Mika had prowled out recently. Within the cave, of leaves and twigs Kioga made a little fire, started with thong and drill from his belt-pouch. Outside the den he found firewood and brought it in.

Against the wall he set the cradle-board and put the haunch of venison to thaw, returning next to contemplate the stoic little bright-eyed mote of life that he had snatched from the grim powers of the wilderness.

DESIGNS upon the cradle-board denoted a child from the tribe known as the People-of-the-Plume, the Wacipi, foremost musicians of all the Shoni nation. Then in the growing light he saw another mark, a small blue circle on that smooth brown brow, the sign of lofty rank among the Wacipi.

"Son of a higher chief!" Kioga breathed in surprise. "What do you out in such a storm? The walls of Magua are high and strong. The gates are closed when such as you would venture forth. *Ehi*—this has the smell of wickedness! But that can wait. Here, eat." And Kioga held a chunk of hot and dripping meat to his foundling's lips.

Wild children early learn to crave the taste of flesh. The two-year-old ate much and rapidly. And as it ate, Kioga pondered aloud:

"All winter long, I alone of Hopeka-town go forth into the snows when there is not the need. How is it then, that a woman of Magua comes roaming out, a child upon her back, alone? It smells of wickedness, I say—how or why, I do not know. But never mind, my little chief, I'll take thee back, to the very walls of Magua, and there we'll learn—"

Kioga did not finish, for as he spoke, a plume of steam blew in at the entrance to the cave. Two round and steady flames came in, behind them the sinuous length of Mika, snow upon his fur. Glimpsing the child, the puma crouched and bared white fangs and snarled. When Mika sought to pass, Kioga cuffed the animal roughly as only he would dare. In the end the puma retreated to a corner.

All unaware, the infant fell asleep. Once more the only sounds were the soughing of the winds beyond the cave, the rustle of embers settling in the fire, or the crackle when Kioga threw on a handful of fresh twigs and wood. Now and then Mika made a stealthy move to circle round Kioga, but settled back each time the boy's gaze fixed him.

Time passed. The sharp report of bursting trunks bespoke a sudden drop in temperature out in the forest.

The pile of twigs was nearly gone. Kioga hacked some pieces from the cradle-board and finally removed the child completely, slinging it upon his back by the leather thongs, then burned the entire board. This was his last resource. The wood was gone, and he dared not trust Mika with the child while he sought more outside.

And then the fire gutted out. The cave was almost dark—save for the embers' ruddy glow. The panther crept a little nearer—Kioga heard the ominous scratch of claws.

THEN suddenly there came diversion from without—a heavy thunderous growl, but muffled by passage through banked-up snow. Then came the tear of hooks through snow and ice. The armor which had locked them in the cave crashed through like isinglass, admitting gusts of stinging snow and fresh air.

A mighty paw, broader than three men's hands laid side by side, intruded, studded thick with long curved claws all blunted at the ends. A bear's vast head appeared, haloed by the sickly glimmer of the northern lights.

The eyes were small, close-set, a wicked red. The open-hanging jaw uncovered black and stumpy teeth, the canines worn and split with age. A roar burst from the twitching lips, and Mika answered with a fierce and warning scream, his earlier threat to the child forgotten before this common danger—an aged solitary bear come home to claim its winter den.

Its burly shoulders filled the entrance. Three living lesser things pressed back against the inner wall. Upon the red-hot embers the bruin dropped a paw and roared anew with doubled fury, then with a lumbering rush charged through on the intruders.

IN desperate defense Mika drove curving sickles deep and fastened fiercely on the bear's head and shoulders. Back and forth between the cramping narrow walls the battle raged and roared, with Mika slowly being worsted.

Then, quick as thought, Kioga saw his chance—the bear's left paw upreached to claw the puma to the ground. As snake's tongue darts, Kioga's knife licked swiftly forth, and back, and forth again—three deep and telling thrusts that found the bear's aorta. The brute reared up, then crumpled on its quarters, and rolling over, fought no more.

The way to liberty was clear. Without delay Kioga took his opportunity, the infant on his back. Mika remained behind to make a long and satisfying meal.

At large again, out where the air was clean and pure, Kioga saw the storm-racked heavens clearing of their clouds. The winds were silent; and on silent feet Kioga turned toward the ravine.

The wolves had gone upon another chase. Among the little they had left of what had been a woman, Kioga picked up some copper ornaments, a head-band, a string of beads and other little trinkets. Then he turned toward Magua, the village of the child which was slung on his back.

Few forest prowlers were abroad. Without mishap these wanderers of the midnight, hurrying along the frozen rivers, drew nearer to the northern village. And in proportion as they neared, Kioga watched ahead more carefully for signs of hunters or those wayfaring in the wilderness. Ahead, against the trees, he caught a golden glow thrown by a camp-

ing-fire. Another might have gone ahead boldly; but Kioga, lone hawk of the wilderness, approached with all the stealth of a lynx. Friends or foes he wished to see, before being seen.

From beneath a branch that cast a solid shadow he looked forth upon a band of scouts squatting round about their fire, with painted robes drawn close about their shoulders. Lean stalwart red-skinned men they were, without warpaint, but wearing each his weapons in sheath and quiver. A little nearer Kioga drew to hear their words.

" 'Tis passing strange," said one as if in answer to an earlier question. *"Iho!* More than strange, that the child should vanish from our very midst."

"Think you so?" queried another, less doubtfully. "The like has been before, Catesa."

"Ah, when the shamans took a child for sacrifice, indeed. But this is otherwise —the mother vanished too. Wayona was a favored wife of Twenty Scalps. Her issue would inherit chieftainship."

"So, so?" said the other warrior in surprise. "Then there is mystery here. Some one had cause to put this only child away. Some one,"—with a shrewd glance about the circle,—"who would gain by such an act."

Catesa raised his brows a little. "You mean—Otakte of the crooked hand?"

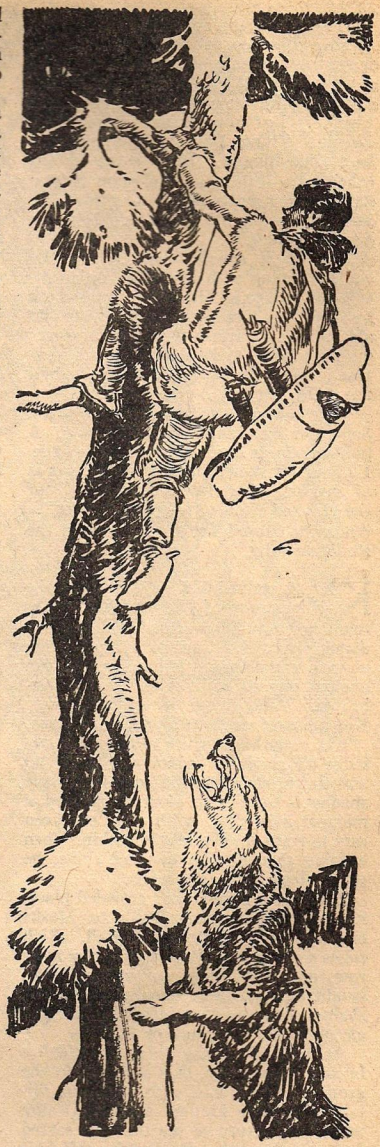
The other spread his hands before the blaze. "I do not mean a thing," he answered warily. "But anyone can guess."

"There would be great reward for him who brought Wayona and her child back home again," interposed a third warrior thoughtfully.

"All Magua would be too small to honor such an one!" agreed Catesa.

Kioga listened carefully. About to give the child up to these friendly warriors with the story of all that had befallen, he checked himself. Here was the chance to gain that for which any boy yearns—honors, recognition by the tribal elders. Here would be requital for his outcast days!

In Magua, a village not his own, he would be honored, made much of, his bravery lauded to the winter skies. Already he had visions of how the news would spread, and how Hopeka-town would at last put on gala dress when he returned triumphant. With that alluring thought, he changed his mind. With growing pride he swelled his chest, then left the winter camp behind and journeyed on toward Magua.



Like a flash Kioga jumped; his speed served him well—for as he drew himself aloft, teeth snapped viciously.

The fires of the northern river-village threw a glow against the white-sheathed forest overhanging its walls.

"Now," said Kioga, to that silent sleeping mite upon his back, "I'll take thee in. But not through open doors. Eh, no! Things that are good are often best done quietly. We'll enter by another way—I've done the same before, last summer with the trading men. I know a certain log that offers hold for hand and foot."

Without a sound Kioga scaled the wall, dropping with his little burden inside the village of Magua. A lodge near by reflected firelight. Stealing to its side, Kioga ascertained that no one was within. Here, to be lighter for his venture through the populous village, he laid the child and left it, still sleeping.

"Wayona will suckle thee no more. Some one has done a mighty wrong. A punishment is due. When that is done, I'll hope for something better than words of thanks. Now I will seek Otakte of the crooked hand. If I recall aright, he tends the sacred fire that burns in the medicine-lodge."

KIOGA walked boldly forth into the village proper. The sounds of rhythmic music amplified as he drew near the dancing-ground. The deep low chants of men came in a stirring chorus. An ancient day of holiness was being celebrated. Among the increasing throng Kioga passed easily as a youth of Magua.

But near the entrance to the medicine-lodge he shed his boldness, glanced up and down, then stepped into its purple shadow. Beside the door he paused a moment, listening with his owl-keen ears to learn if anyone was within. Then melting through the hanging skins, he stood alone inside the walls.

This was a strange and crowded place, filled up with ceremonial objects. Masks and shields hung along the wall. Rich robes were draped from racks, row after row, one close upon another. At the height of a tall man above, rough-hewn shelves contained a hundred different garments for the dance or feast.

At one end of the lodge a little fire burned perpetually, in a hole dug in the ground. From this, each year, the village fires were kindled afresh. Otakte must soon return to see that the sacred fire still burned. Failing in this, his lifelong trust, the penalty was death. . . .

Otakte came back sooner than the Snow Hawk had expected, and more quietly. A rustle at the door was Kioga's first warning. Without a sound he drew behind the robes that curtained off one side of the lodge, then from concealment observed Otakte narrowly.

Otakte was in genial mood. He rubbed his hands and warmed them at the fire; he chuckled often and contentedly; he lit and smoked his pipe, and blew smoke rings above his head. Once he laughed aloud in great good humor with himself, then rose and strutted back and forth before the fire. And presently another joined him.

The door-skin rose, admitting a village warlock, old and stooped, and formed like a djinni from a fairy tale. He strode in triumphantly, barefooted for all the cold, and clad in a tattered blanket he always affected as evidence of humility.

"Welcome, Man-of-Magic," sounded Otakte's greeting. "Draw near beside the sacred fire, and warm thy holy bones, and smoke a pipe with me."

"*Eh-hee!* Right gladly that I will," the other lisped through toothless gums. "Methinks we have more cause to celebrate than they!"—holding up a hand to indicate the music from the village.

"Indeed, Okeela, you are a shrewd one," said Otakte admiringly. "'Twas you who found the way to make my son become a ruling chief."

Okeela spread his warty hands and gave a modest laugh. "'Tis nothing."

"'Tis everything," Otakte contradicted him; "and cheaply w[illegible]

"*Ai*, now that is true," Okeela laughed. "We have not even taken life to gain our ends. Eh, true enough—Wayona took her babe and went into the forest when I told her that its name was on the shaman's lips for sacrifice. And then a storm came up and she has not returned. Whose fault is that? Not ours, indeed. The forest gods favor our acts. This is the proof."

BUT there was one, himself no small influence in the forest, who heard without approval. Kioga's brows drew together in a scowl. Ambition—here he saw it at its worst—ambition of the kind which crows about ignoble ends, won by deceit at little risk. "The smell of wickedness grows ever stronger. What more?" he wondered silently. Almost as if in answer, Otakte spoke.

"What if Wayona should escape the storm and return?"

"Then it will be time to use the knife," replied Okeela harshly, and added more

"'Tis passing strange," said one warrior, "that the child should vanish from our very midst—the mother too!"

which Kioga did not hear, for he had slipped to the entrance, softly raised the skin and left the lodge.

Back to where he had left the child he went, and took it on his back again, and at a trot ran toward the house of Twenty Scalps. The distance was not great from one wall to another; but as the Snow Hawk swung round a corner, he saw a group of people congregated, and coming toward him a bent and crooked figure—Okeela.

Kioga checked—Okeela, too, his black quick eyes instantly noting the child upon Kioga's back. Okeela knew—it was his business to—that Kioga was not a youth of Magua. Almost at once

he recognized Kioga's burden for the son of Twenty Scalps, and with the knowledge gasped in sheer astonishment.

But he was sharp and cunning. Okeela raised a bony forefinger and pointed at the Snow Hawk.

"*Aya-yalai!* Who are you, boy? Where go you with that child?"

"Back to the lodge of Twenty Scalps," Kioga answered, essaying to push his way beyond the shaman. Okeela seized him by the arm, and with a shrill yell drew forty pairs of eyes upon them.

"*Hai,* worthy folk of Magua! Behold the stealer of a high-born child! Fall on him! Out with his eyes!"

"A moment!" said the commanding voice of a chief among the throng. A tall and stately figure stood forth from the press and took the child up in his arms, inspecting it intently. "In truth, this is the child of Twenty Scalps." And turning to Kioga, "How came you by him, boy?"

"I saved him from the wolves," Kioga cried loudly that all might hear. "The pack has killed his mother."

"A likely tale," shrieked the shaman, beside himself with rage and guilty fear at this failure of his schemes. "He stole him from the mother, whom he slew. Behold the blood upon his furs."

"'Tis not the truth," Kioga shouted stoutly. "Bear's blood this is, upon my furs—blood of the bear I slew to save our lives."

"The bear he slew—*ha-ha!*" mocked Okeela in derision. "Defies T'yone and his pack! Destroys a bear—'tis nothing! What next is there for him to lie about?" And with the words, Okeela snatched at Kioga's belt-pouch.

The ornaments Kioga had taken from the victim of the wolves fell out upon the ground. Okeela yelled in triumph, turning to the populace, gathering now from everywhere. "Behold—the rings and strings and bracelets of Wayona, favored wife of Twenty Scalps. How now,"—to Kioga, with a deadly sneer,—"were these Wayona's gift, my honest youth?"

"Not so," Kioga answered, visions of great honors dwindling. "I took them from among her bones."

"HE took them from among her bones!" derided Okeela, with a high shrill laugh, the cackle of the rabble-rouser. "Was ever falser tongue than this? He stole them! Why do we wait? Away with him! The tribal penalty for stealing a Wacipi child! Tie him up outside the wall along a tiger's beat—then let him tell the truth!"

Still the multitude did not respond, until Otakte of the crooked hand, arriving on the scene to see his hopes for his own son crumbling, beheld the danger to dreams of power, and rushed upon Kioga. Another savage followed suit, another still. Then all the senseless mob, its herding instincts fanned by the shaman's words, closed in upon Kioga.

In vain he shouted out above the din what he had heard within the medicine-lodge. His voice was as a breath drawn in a hurricane. A score of hands tore at him, and held him out at painful stretch. Out through the gate they bore him, struggling.

BUT as they went, Kioga suddenly ceased to squirm, for something still unknown to the mob from Magua came to Kioga through the medium of his sharper nostrils.

Without a word he let them tie him up against a sapling thickly sheathed in ice, in view to all of Magua's populace. With stoic face he endured it when Okeela spat upon him; nor did he flinch when others threatened him with their knives, played round about his head. But when they turned to go, Kioga made a last demand.

"A bow, a full quiver—a bit of meat—the right of all who are to die," he said without emotion. One of the warriors, obedient to the ancient custom, paused to leave these things beside the doomed boy. Then all departed; and ranging behind the walls of Magua, prepared to watch the drama on the hill-top, when Guna of the hundred stripes should come along and find a captive tethered ready for his fangs.

Still in his bonds, Kioga did not struggle, but with the patience of the Indian he was by training, waited for what his nose had told him soon would happen—the coming of the bears of Indegara. Down-wind they were, and so he could not scent them at the moment. But call he did, a shrill and penetrating whistle that echoed from the village walls, and sounded for a mile into the still white wilderness. One note he sounded, then waited.

But what he heard was not the sound he wanted. A tiger's jarring note shook white flakes from the branches just above. Upon the breeze a dread scent

came; and looking to the north, Kioga saw a grayish form stride into view.

Guna was coming on the prowl, his great paws loosely swinging, massive head close to the ground, long belly-hair brushing the snow, his furry tail up-curled. Regally he slouched along, careless as befits the emperor-king of all the killer-cats that walk the earth.

A mighty shout betrayed excitement running high behind the walls of Magua. And with the sound the tiger glimpsed the prey and crouched to stalk Kioga. More slowly now, the muscles rolled beneath that perfect coat. Flat on the snow the active tail now quivered, twitching only at its end.

Then suddenly the hue and cry in Magua died down, replaced by a hush of silent wonderment. What the villagers saw from a distance, Kioga saw close by.

The tiger crouched to spring upon him, rose up with arching back instead, retreating step by step with wet fangs bared, and snarling in his fury.

DOWN the trail, advancing in a slow and ominous swagger, a huge she-bear came lumbering. On either side of her, a little back, a half-grown bear-cub shuffled. Then from behind, four other shaggy heads came into view, and after them many more.

Along the palisade a warrior spoke, in tones of awe: "The gathering of the bears! Look! See their numbers! Even Guna of the hundred stripes retreats!"

He spoke the truth. The tiger disappeared. The bears were milling round the tree to which Kioga was bound. Some reared erect to gaze straight toward Magua. Amid their throng Kioga could not be seen.

But licking at his cold and tethered hands, the quick hot tongue of his old friend small Aki had already done what no amount of straining could have achieved—melted some of the ice upon the knots, thus loosening the leather cords a little. Kioga, conscious of the easing tension, writhed and strained within the cords. . . . A little later he was free, and threading his way among the bear-people to an eminence whence he could command a view of Magua. A shout rose up:

"He is free! . . . . He goes unharmed among the forest people!"

Along the wall two figures stood apart from the village throng. Of these, one was Okeela, the other Otakte, tender of the village fire, bow in hand and arrow on the string.

"Unharmed—but not for long!" he muttered, sighting down the shaft and letting fly at little more than point-blank range. But what with his haste, the whistling arrow flew aside and pierced one of Kioga's bears.

With lightning fingers Kioga whipped forth an arrow of his own and sent it singing at Otakte. The Snow Hawk's shaft flew true. Otakte saw it coming. To save himself, he jerked Okeela before him. Pierced through the breast, the shaman wheeled, reached for his knife, and in retaliation sought to lay Otakte low, but age and his wound deprived him of the power.

But as he fell, he called the name of Twenty Scalps, and in a dying voice confessed their double guilt in the matter of Wayona's death.

Eyes blazing, Twenty Scalps turned upon Otakte, his tomahawk uplifted; but Otakte took a defiant stance.

"You dare not strike. I am the keeper of the sacred fire. I am immune to punishment."

Twenty Scalps drew back, the blow unstruck, his eyes aflame with boundless hatred. But then another voice was heard, a woman's cry, ringing with religious hysteria through all Magua:

"The sacred fire has just gone out! Ten years of hardship threaten us—unless Otakte dies."

Otakte, pale, dismayed, turned to run. But with one sudden mighty blow, Twenty Scalps clove him to the eyes.

IN all the rush of these events Kioga and his bears had been forgotten. When again the folk of Magua looked forth, the snowy hillside was alive with giant shadows, disappearing two by two around a ridge. Upon the back of one, Kioga rode astride, their shadows black against a shieldlike moon.

As he vanished, one warrior said to another in Magua: "Unless I had seen, I would not now believe this thing."

The other pondered thoughtfully, then answered: "I thought I recognized that face. He was Kioga—of Hopeka-town. What you have seen is nothing. He saved but one life here. Once the entire village of Hopeka was endangered. Ten times a hundred of the Shoni folk might then have died. I know, for I was there. Listen, and I will tell you of it."

But that's another tale.

Young Man from

A spirited novel by the famous author of "Sea Scamps" and "Mile High."

By HENRY ROWLAND

SAID the yacht's captain to the quartermaster: "There's nothin' so bad as nerves all struck adrift, Ricky."

"Don't I know, Cap'n? My Uncle Mav' that fetched me up had the same trouble for a spell, and he was the best doctor on the Rio Grande."

"So that's how you come to learn all about it!"

"Yes sir. His car-lights quit on him one night when drivin' home from a patient that'd got shot up. He went into a gully and like to broke his neck and stove some ribs. It left him right poorly."

The Yankee skipper nodded. "I'd be a lot better at sea. It's this lyin' at anchor drives me distracted. I know it's foolish to fret about them two ashore, but I jes' can't help it."

"They're all right, Cappy," the young quartermaster said soothingly. "Chasin' butterflies can be right fascinatin' to a couple fixin' to get married."

"Well, maybe." The Captain looked shoreward. There was a sweep of glaring beach fringed with tilting palms; a river-mouth edged with mangroves; and a shabby little port that at close range accounted for the swarm of vultures hovering over it like flies over a dirty dish.

This desolate strip of coast between ports of any size appeared to be a no-man's land. Even the big fruit-company that can grow avocados in Avernus had ruled it off because of the poor soil and its scanty yield. A fat and dirty little sloth who called himself the captain of the port had told Ricky that the only commercial activity for some months past had been the shipping of cattle from a great hacienda back in the hills. The only other vessel there was a tubby old steamer of about one thousand tons moored alongside an ancient stone wharf.

"Eight bells, Ricky. Better go eat," said the Captain.

The quartermaster went below. He was the only one aboard who was aware

Illustrated by George Avison

of the skipper's suffering, a nervous breakdown following a long siege of septicemia from an infected hand. The prospect of a fortnight's inaction was driving Captain Tibbetts frantic.

Professor White had gone upriver and into the jungle to hunt for Mayan relics, taking with him the mate, machinist, second cook and two sailors; also three La Bosta natives as guides and camp servants. A Mr. Van Beekman was the patron of the expedition and paid its cost. He was himself an entomologist and specialized in moths; but this scientific interest was now secondary to one of which the collection limited itself to a single specimen.

Ricky made a light and hasty meal. He was worried about his skipper, but he was not worried about Miss Francy and Mr. Van Beekman. They had gone ashore early on a quest for butterflies. The dried-out strip of jungle back of the shore did not look to Ricky as if it would support many butterflies. It was poor range. The couple might have had to penetrate more deeply to strike butterfly-pasture. Besides, they were either engaged to be married, or on the verge of such a state, which is known to destroy all sense of elapsed time.

The Captain was examining the hillside through a marine glass when the quartermaster came on deck. "I thought

Texas

Ricky held his breath as the troop thudded past. "We sure got under cover just in time!"

I heard some hollerin' over there when you was below, Ricky."

"Guess not, Cap'n. It's too far. If they were to hail us from the beach or the wharf, we could see 'em. Or it might have been cattle. There's a bunch in the savanna back of the port, waitin' to be shipped. Good stock, fine mouse-colored coats, and sort of humped on the shoulders."

"That's what's botherin' me. These spiggoty herders aint such good citizens."

"There's lots worse, sir, right at home. What if I flop into the dinghy and spin over and do a scout, sir?"

"Let's wait a spell, son. You know how Mr. Van Beekman is about anything looks like meddlin'."

"Yeah. That millionaire gentleman can be right perempt'ry. Apt to get sore at anything of the herd-ridin' aspect. He don't intimidate so's you'd notice it. No lousy gaucho's goin' to pick that *patrón* for a shakedown. He aint a promisin' candidate for extortion."

The harassed skipper gave a bleak smile. "You got a line of language, Ricky. How much schoolin' have you had?"

"Quite a heap, Cap'n. You'd be surprised. When I'd mopped up most of the learnin' in Laredo grammar-school, I had me a whirl in the San Antone high. Yes sir, I been educated good. English was the hand I drawed to, and filled."

"Yeah? I sort of got that idea from the way you talk," the skipper said dryly.

"Talkin's different, when you aim to get your idea through and not to strut your stuff. I speak English sloppy, but I know how she's rigged. My Spanish is different. Growin' up on the border like I did, and squabblin' with greaser kids and help, I spoke it natural. Then a padre that was a patient of my Uncle Mav's learned me to read and write it shipshape and proper."

"How come you went to sea, Ricky?"

"Well, sir, you see, my Uncle Mav' aimed to send me to West Point, because

his father'd been a general and his older brother was a major in the reg'lar army when he was killed in France. We had a governor of Texas in the fam'ly too; so he figgered I ought to be somebody. Then Uncle Mav' died, and the plan sort of fell through, and I drifted down to Galveston and went broke and shipped aboard a tanker. Made two trips, to Portland, Maine, like I told you. Then I shipped aboard a four-masted schooner that was totin' oil and gasoline round the West Indies. I stayed with her a year."

"What made you quit?"

"Wanted to learn more about this oil business. We went to Tampico to load, and I got me a job with a drillin' outfit that was just settin' up the rigs in different oil-fields. After a couple of years of that I joined up with a bunch of prospectors. There was a good guy that was geologist and mining-engineer, not many years out of school, and he taught me a heap."

"What about?"

"Locatin' oil. We sort of swapped lessons. His Spanish was lame on one leg and had string-halt in the other. We conversed odd times, and he got pretty good."

"Ever study piloting and navigation?"

"Yes sir. This same lad showed me. I was packin' the transit, and he learned me how to work her. When that job was over, I was qualified to pilot a four-masted mule from Tulsa to El Paso by dead reckonin' and plain sailin'. After that I went back to settin' up derricks and drillin' for 'bout a year."

THE chef, a French creole from New Orleans, bulged through the pantry hatchway. "You like to eat somezing, Captain? I have make your favorite *bouillabaisse*."

"Afraid I couldn't do jestice to it," the Captain said irritably. "When I'm upset 'bout somethin', I find it's better I don't eat. If I bite into anything at all, it bites back at me."

"S'pose I take a couple of hands and make a *pasear* ashore, Cap'n," Ricky said; and without waiting for the order, hauled the motor-dinghy in alongside from the end of the boat-boom. "You best try to eat somethin', sir. They'll soon be here."

The Captain had a fresh surge of worry. "Mr. Van Beekman said to look sharp for a wave about ten o'clock, and it's now eight bells gone."

"Well, sir, butterfly-prospectin' is allurin', like oil. And to drift back to that, did you notice that derrick and gear unloaded onto the end of the wharf back there at that last place we looked in, El Cabando?"

"Puerto Cabando? Yeah, a fruit-agent told me it was brought there on spec' by an American oil-driller that heard the government was sinkin' test-wells in diff'rent parts and was lookin' for a job. But they'd got sick of gettin' only dry holes and quit, when the appropriation was used up."

"So this fella's stuck with his derrick-gear and stuff?"

"I reckon so," the Captain said abstractedly. "Seems to me the agent said somethin' about there bein' a good concession all drawed up and waitin' for the first parties to bring in a pay well."

"No matter who? Foreigners or anybody?"

"Anybody that strikes oil, was what he told me. . . . There—look over yonder on that hillside." The Captain stooped and took a marine glass from a rack inside the hatchway. He focused on the higher ground back of the beach. "There's somebody wavin' up there. . . . Now, what in heck—"

Ricky looked, and saw against the olive drab foliage a speck of color moving jerkily. At first glance he took it for Van Beekman's pink butterfly net, then saw that it was not quite the same shade. The Captain handed him his glasses.

"See what you make of it, son. My eyes blur, like."

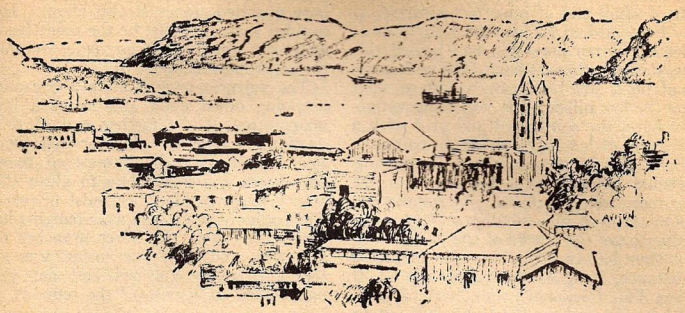
Ricky looked. "It aint pink. It's—sort of—"

"Mauve—heliotrope," the chef decided. "I notice zis morning Mr. Van Beekman have on a mauve *chemise*. And Miss Francy, she wear a robe rose."

"Right again," Ricky muttered. "Why should he be wavin' his shirt—way up yonder? He's wig-waggin' S.O.S.—only he's got her tail-end-to—the signal, I mean. O.S.O.—now he's runnin' 'em together."

"By heck, I knew it!" the Captain burst out. "That dud has gone and went and run Miss Francy into some sort of a jam with these here half-breed spiggoties. I might ha' known it. Bandits, maybe!" His face was drawn and haggard, with a frantic look about the eyes.

Ricky laid the glasses on the cabin house. "Don't get all hot and bothered, Cap'n. If they'd got tangled up with a bunch of bad *hombres*, they wouldn't let



him wave his shirt. More likely he wants some help to pack somethin' back down to the beach."

"He don't need help to pack a passel of butterflies."

"Well, one of 'em might have turned an ankle or somethin'. Suppose I take a couple hands and hop in the dinghy an' lope up there."

"Now he stop," said the chef. "Maybe a serpent have bite zem."

"Or a spider-monkey," Ricky said scornfully. "It aint anything to cable Washington about. I'll just mosey over and see what it's all about. I speak panned American good."

The distressed Captain called two of the crew from their leisurely dinner. They came up still chewing and dropped into the small-boat. Ricky spun the little whip-top outboard engine. "Don't you worry, Cap'n," he called back. "If you see me wave my white *chemise,* that means everything's okay."

He did not feel as optimistic as his tone implied. The nature of the signal was ominous both in message and in the means employed. An S.O.S. is always sinister, and Van Beekman was the last man Ricky could imagine as apt to send it with his shirt. Besides, there was the pink butterfly-net. Why not use that? Perhaps Miss Francy had been carrying the net and had got separated from Van Beekman in pursuit of some rare specimen, and he could not find her.

She would herself be as tempting a specimen to any roving bad-actors that might be about, as would the brightest of butterflies to Van Beekman. But this was a peaceful, slothful region. That was the trouble with it. Bandits must be more rare than butterflies, about the scarcity of which Van Beekman had complained, and for the same reason. There was nothing to attract them.

There was no more signaling. Ricky headed straight in for the beach opposite the point on the higher ground where the mauve shirt had been sighted. This stretch of shore was sheltered from the trend of the tradewind swell, and there was scarcely any surf.

LEAVING one man as boatkeeper, Ricky with the other sailor went through the fringe of palms, then up a slope, where the going was rough and jungly. Presently they struck a trail. It was scored by the tracks of a mounted party that had evidently just passed that way, coming from the port. This was not reassuring, because there were no signs of cattle having been driven over the trail. Still, it might be a shorter and rougher way for the vaqueros to return to the hacienda described to Ricky by the fat little port-captain. Or perhaps it was merely a line of communication along the coast. It mounted at an easy slope, and the two sailors came presently to a native hut. There was nobody about the premises. A little farther up were other shabby dwellings on either side of the trail, and these also were deserted—temporarily, it appeared, for there were hogs and chickens about.

Ricky began to feel a distinct disquiet. It looked to him as if the natives dwelling here had been frightened at something and were hiding out. The path emerged presently from the shade of a larger growth beneath which were a good many straggling coffee-trees, and dipped into a swale where there was an unkempt plantation of bananas, of which the big

leaves were sickly and yellow, and the fruit small and of imperfect clusters.

It seemed to Ricky that a party of at least a dozen horsemen had passed this way within the last hour. The path came out on a small plateau, a sort of shelf on the low hillside. It was comparatively bare, the soil baked and arid with a growth of cactus and scrub palmetto. From this point and altitude the sea was visible, but only at a distance of a mile or more from the shore. By stepping up into the fork of a small tree Ricky was able to see the trucks of the yacht.

Then he saw something else at a little distance, lying in the yellow grass. It was Van Beekman's pink butterfly net. Ricky shouted several times, but got no answer.

He said to the sailor with him: "This don't look so good, Joe. You lope back aboard and tell the skipper we hiked up to where Mr. Van Beekman was wavin' from, and there's no sign of them. There's been a party of about a dozen riders just passed this way. Tell the skipper he'd best go ashore and get hold of that lousy guy that calls himself the captain of the port, and find out what's been goin' on here."

"What about you?" asked the sailor.

"I'm going to rack along a spell on the trail, and see if I can learn anything, or get hold of some native and drag something out of him. These people have been scared by somethin', and beat it so's not to be questioned. Never mind about me."

The sailor set off on the back-track, evidently glad to go. Ricky followed the trail with increased forebodings. It looked as if the Captain had been right, that this might be a brigand ransom job. In that case he might, if able to catch up with the party, be of use as messenger or interpreter or something of the sort. He knew that Miss Francy and Van Beekman spoke scarcely any Spanish; and his respect for Van Beekman's resource or general adaptability to such a situation was very slight.

PRESENTLY there came another and worse shock. The path, rising gently but steadily, came out onto another natural terrace, so it looked at first. At the far end of this opening a swarm of vultures was circling. Ricky discovered then that there had been at some remote time a fortified position here, whether of pirates or as a base of defence against such marauders. There were low ruins overgrown by jungly vegetation, and big bare quarried stones strewn about. He decided that this must be the point from which the signal had been made, and not the other shelf below.

The vultures were circling above and dropping down upon and about a big mango tree at the farther end of this dominating terrace. A closer investigation showed that the interest of these scavengers was more than to glean the scanty leavings of a brigands' bivouac. The bodies of three men were hanging by their necks from the lower branches of this tree, and their suspension was so recent that the vultures had not yet undertaken to dispose of the remains.

CLOSER examination showed Ricky that the victims of this lynching had been ship's officers. The soiled white tunic of one of them showed three stripes of tarnished gold braid. Another bore a single stripe; and the third, also a uniform of sorts, had a few black smears as of burned oil.

Ricky thought of the stubby little steamer lying alongside the wharf, probably waiting to load cattle. Somebody had evidently objected strongly to having the herd in the savanna back of the port shipped aboard that vessel and transported by these three, whom he had reason to consider parties to an unlawful transaction. This same individual had perhaps resented the accidental intrusion of a pair of foreign visitors at the moment of his summary justice.

As a rescue party of one, unmounted and unarmed, Ricky did not impress himself as apt to prove an effective unit. He would have given up any further immediate pursuit as futile, if there had not appeared at that moment from behind a clump of palmetto some fifty yards away, a saddled pony with reins dragging as it cropped at the wiry grass.

It was not much of a mount, scrawny and old and with one ear that flopped; but at least it offered the means of following on. Ricky did not like the idea of turning back when he might be able to serve Miss Francy at least as an interpreter. Van Beekman, even if able to make himself understood, had impressed Ricky as a stiff-necked and peremptory young man who was most apt to make matters even worse for them both.

The pony made no protest at being caught and mounted, and Ricky found it willing and smooth-gaited. He followed

the trail until presently it forked. Here the party appeared to have split, five or six of the riders turning north on a smaller, less-used path, and about the same number, so far as the tracks showed, keeping to the trail that appeared to parallel the coast.

For obvious reasons it seemed that the prisoners would be taken into the wilder region away from the shore. Ricky took the smaller path. He was beginning to feel a little better about the business. It looked to him as if Miss Francy and Van Beekman had unluckily run into a punitive expedition at the moment when the execution was taking place.

In this case the party might not be a mere bandit one, but a sort of vigilante committee. This did not entirely explain the kidnaping of the pair from the yacht, but it made it a little better.

He came presently to what appeared a small abandoned fruit-plantation. There were banana and citrus trees and some few straggling coffee ones, but all were dry and half or wholly withered and choked by jungle. It was at the end of the dry season, but this did not seem wholly to explain the blighted vegetation, because the cleared space was in a basin formation that looked swampy in the background, as if it ought to hold moisture as long as any other place. There was a sort of poisoned aspect, and a dank disagreeable smell. The vestiges of a ruined shack were visible through a grove of shriveled orange trees.

RICKY was thirsty, and in the hope of finding a spring or well rode into the plantation to some distance from the trail. There were the traces of a path leading from the shack down into a hollow. He dismounted, secured his pony and followed a sort of gully. It went down into what at other seasons would be a small swampy patch, and Ricky caught the glint of what seemed to be water in small standing pools.

Then, at something in the curious smell and the iridescence of the reflection of these moist patches, his heart whirred off like an alarm clock. He knew instantly from past experience what was the matter here. The cultivation had been poisoned by petroleum! The whole place was saturated in crude oil. There was a pool of it so close to the surface that it was drawn up into the humus by capillarity. When water also was abundant, this should not prove so fatal; but at the end of a season of drouth even the vigorous tropical growths could not survive the soaking.

"Gee," said Ricky to himself, "and to think they never guessed it! Well, the same thing happened for years and years in Texas and Oklahoma and Louisiana and lots of other places."

HE came to the edge of the waterless sink and stared at it with a fascinated gaze. During the four years that he had been employed by prospecting parties and worked on drill crews, he had never seen anything like this. The patches of bare muck shone like a peacock's wing. Ricky had been told by Señor Torres, the *soi-disant* captain of the port of La Bosta, that the past season had been the dryest for many years. It seemed as if the surface of this marsh now acted like a layer of blotting-paper to suck up the oily constituent with which the soil beneath was impregnated. Ordinarily at this time there would still be some standing water, and a spillway.

Ricky found a gourd, split it and scooped a hole in the viscid mud. It filled sluggishly. He took his sailor's bandanna and used it as a filter through which to pass the turbid fluid into the other half of the gourd. The filtrate looked and smelled like crude petroleum.

"Gee," Ricky muttered to himself, "here I come taggin' after a million-dollar girl and her million-dollar boy-friend, and bog into a million-dollar oil-pool settin' on the surface!"

But it did not occur to him to let this discovery interfere with his quest. The only difference was that now instead of feeling apprehensive about what might be immediately ahead, he found himself impatient to catch up with the party. What had seemed a hazardous undertaking before he had blundered on this potential fortune, now presented itself as an exasperating delay to a priceless opportunity.

Ricky was now eager to make this contact as soon as possible. Van Beekman had suddenly become a person of vast potential value to him. He was a business man and capitalist. Ricky's opinion of Van Beekman as a good scout was not high, but he judged that in a business relationship, Van Beekman would prove as competent and as safe as a good bank. . . .

The lop-eared pony seemed eager to catch up with its comrades on ahead and pushed on without urging. The path led through an arid tangle of dessicated

jungle, sometimes traversing swampy places that were now caked dry and hard. Ricky saw no more indications of oil.

Late in the afternoon the trail dipped into a big ravine with steep jungly sides. In the rainy season it would be gorged by a torrential stream; but now it was a part of this dry-season trail, wherever it might lead. There were sandbars, and banks of round alluvial stones, and pools of clear standing water.

The lop-eared pony gave a curious whistle. One ear became erect. Ricky knew that his pursuit was getting hot. It was time, as the shadows in the ravine were deep and cool, and it would be dangerous to overtake the party after nightfall. In fact, it might easily be fatal. Even now there was a fair chance of his being taken for an enemy scout, and shot before his white clothes could be identified as those of a yacht's quartermaster.

To announce himself a little better, Ricky began to sing, hoping that his rendering of an old pioneer melody would not in itself be enough to get him killed as a disturber of the apparent peace:

As I was a-comin' down the road
With a tired team an' a heavy load,
I cracked my whip an' the leaders sprung
And the off-hoss broke the wagon tongue.
Tu'key in the straw, haw-haw-haw—

HE had got this far when a tall man in khaki stepped out from behind a boulder ahead and to the right. He held a carbine. Ricky stopped singing, but continued to advance. The bivouac came into view. Miss Francy and Van Beekman appeared to be none the worse so far. Coming closer, Ricky found himself under the cold hard stare of a man who seemed to be an army officer in a uniform from which the insignia of rank had been removed. He showed no surprise nor pleasure at sight of a sailor sitting a lop-eared pony with a cowboy ease that included the cheerful expression of his schoolboy face. Ricky observed also the five men in peon-vaquero costume and provided with carbines or rifles. One of them had been tending a small campfire on which was a large-lidded pot and a smaller one. A good many chicken-feathers were strewn about. Though an unbidden unexpected guest, Ricky was at least not late for supper. The ponies were tethered against the dense jungle.

All of these details were gathered in a brief glance about. As Ricky reined in, the chief asked curtly in well-accented American: "Well, what's the big idea, sailor?"

"The skipper sent me ashore to see what was keepin' Miss Francy and Mr. Van Beekman, sir. When it looked like they was taken for a ride, I got aboard this little ol' takki and trailed along to see what it was all about."

"We've got to hand it to you for a sense of duty." There was a dry cut to the man's voice. "Where did you find that pony?"

"Back yonder by some old tumble-down ruins, sir."

"What else did you find there?"

"They was three guys had been strung up, sir. Cattle-rustlers, maybe."

THIS last venture brought a gleam from the man's eyes. Ricky's innocent gaze had not missed much about him. There were two marks on each shoulder where the bars of a captain's rank had been removed. Similar but longer streaks on the left side of the chest, and some small holes, looked as if left by a string of detached decorations. The official buttons had been changed, and there were the traces of a Sam Browne belt.

But these indications impressed Ricky far less than the face of this ex-officer of some country's army. It was the face of a killer. Ricky had been born and raised in a country and later worked in regions where such types were not infrequent. These were of the earlier nomadic sort, and no more to be classed with the city rat species than is a timber-wolf with a rabid pariah dog. Here, he felt, was a man with whom one could not trifle.

"Who said they were cattle-rustlers, sailor?"

"Nobody, sir. I haven't seen a livin' soul since I hit the beach. Looked like all hands was hidin' out."

"Then what gave you the idea?"

"Well sir, that orn'ry little cuss that claims to be cap'n of the port told me yesterday they been shippin' cattle from a big hacienda back here, and there's a little old steamer lyin' alongside with nobody aboard her. When I come on three *hombres* dressed like ship's officers fresh hanged, it looks natur'ly like they been helpin' load cattle they got no business to when the owner hops 'em, unexpected."

"Not so dumb. What next?"

"It looked then like Miss Francy and Mr. Van Beekman rambled into this hangin'-party by accident, and the gentle-

Closer examination showed Ricky that the victims of this very recent lynching had been ship's officers.

man that was conductin' it carried them along with him so's they couldn't broadcast it right off."

The chief turned to the captives, who were near enough to hear what had been said. "This sailor has got exactly what I've been trying to make you believe."

"Smart lad," Van Beekman said ironically.

"Oh, shut up, Van!" Miss Francy's low-pitched voice was in strong contrast to the high pitch of the rest of her. "I believed you from the start," she said to the chief. "But what made me sore was that you wouldn't take our words that we'd keep our mouths shut. It wasn't our funeral."

"I'd have taken *your* word, young lady." The uncomplimentary implication about Van Beekman was obvious. "But that was only the half of it." He looked at Ricky curiously. "See if you can't guess another reason for my not wanting to leave these two back there?"

"Shucks, Cap'n, that aint so hard, no ways. Here's this outfit been pilferin' your cows, and you get hep to it, and ride down there and grab off these three cow-pirates and string 'em up, *pronto*, before the rest of the bunch can organize to stop it any. Then as the ceremony is concludin', you find that Miss Francy and Mr. Van Beekman have been watchin' the play from the sidelines. Am I right so far?"

"Practically. Carry on."

"Then you reason that this thievin' bunch is quite capable of hoppin' a pair of American visitors and takin' 'em for a ride—one way, maybe, and hangin' it on you. So partly for their protection, partly for your own, you gather 'em in. Say—" Sudden illumination shone from Ricky's boyish face. "I jus' wonder—"

"Well, what?"

"Did you split your party, back there where there's a little path turns off the trail past the old ruins?"

"No, I didn't. This is all I had."

"Then there was another bunch about the same number, near's I could tell from the tracks, that must ha' been close on your trail. But they went straight on past where you turned off."

The Captain frowned. "That means that we've got to shove along." He gave a sharp order in Spanish to the man acting as cook. Ricky asked in the same tongue: "You think that they have gone

to get reinforcements and follow you, señor?"

"Yes." The Captain looked surprised. "So you speak Spanish, with your other accomplishments."

"I was born and raised in Mav'rick County, on the Mexican border of Texas, Cap'n."

"So that's the answer. How does it happen you're a sailor?"

"Just driftin' round, sir. I worked three-four years for different oil outfits, locatin' and drillin' test wells, then sagged down to Galveston and made a voyage north on a tanker, and then went fishin', and all this and that. I take it you're headin' back to your hacienda."

"What makes you think that?" The Captain's voice was sharp. He did not wait for an answer, but set the cook to dishing out what was a sort of impromptu pepper-pot of chicken and chile and tomatoes. There was also coffee that was black and strong, and sweetened with tiny cubes of honey-colored sugar. One of the men produced a wicker-covered flask of rum, or aguardiente perhaps.

Ricky was glad to see that Miss Francy made a hearty meal. He was tremendously relieved about her. He felt that a quest that had started so forbiddingly was getting better and better. There was a good deal that puzzled him. How could there have been going on what looked like a large and steady business of stealing and shipping cattle from the hacienda of a man who gave the impression of being about as safe to victimize as Captain Sir Henry Morgan? It did not need the worn but well-cut service uniform with the insignia of rank and honors removed to mark him as a military officer, while the autocratic hanging of the three ship's officers showed a temperament that might be one reason why he was an officer no longer.

THE ponies were quickly saddled, and that was another indication of the *ci-devant* cavalry commander, as hardly anybody else would have bothered to offsaddle and cool the horses' backs during a brief halt. The daylight had gone by this time but the stars were low and very bright and large, of so vast a multitude that there was ample light to travel, and there would be a full moon presently.

Van Beekman asked harshly when they mounted: "What's the use of keeping up this farce? You are running Miss White into greater danger all the time, with this gang out to get you."

The Captain said with curt impatience: "She'd be worse off with the bunch that's trailing us. They take their orders from a Brazilian escaped convict named Da Silva who has been chief herdsman of the hacienda. He'd stop at nothing, to frame me."

"WHAT if it comes to a fight?" Van Beekman asked.

"Then the best you can do for both your sakes is to lend a hand."

"I'm not armed."

"I'll arm you, if it comes to that."

"Me too, Cap'n," Ricky said. "I'm right handy with a gun."

"Wait and see, sailor." He gave the order to march; and as they started off, said to Van Beekman: "If I had left you two back there, Da Silva would have run onto you and very likely shot you both and told the captain of the port, who is in on this cattle-stealing graft, that it was my work, because you witnessed the hanging."

"He couldn't put that over," Van Beekman said stubbornly.

"What do you know about it? I have no standing here at all. Not even though my mother owns the hacienda, and I am now her only child. My father was exiled years ago for political reasons, and I went with him."

Francy, who was riding close on his flank, asked: "Have you made up with your mother?"

"Yes, now when it's too late," the Captain said bitterly. "She is dying—cancer. Apt to go at any minute. The superintendent, Gonzales, is her relative, and has been systematically robbing her for years. This Da Silva is his right-hand man. Gonzales would back him up in anything."

"Where is Gonzales?" Van Beekman asked.

"Hiding out somewhere on the hacienda—at one of the plantations, probably. I should have got him first, and Da Silva. This raid of mine was to hold up the shipment of the last of our cattle. I couldn't find Da Silva. I collared those three back there in the act of loading the stock aboard."

"You're in rather badly, if this Gonzales has documentary authority for what he has been doing," Van Beekman said.

"Don't I know that? But was I to sit tight while these rascals got away with the last of our herds? I'm damned glad I did it, come what may."

The trail narrowed, making it impossible to ride together. Francy and Van Beekman fell back out of speaking distance. Ricky rode close to the Captain.

"Cap'n," he ventured, "it looks like this org'nized crowd of cattle-thieves figger you can still make a heap of trouble for 'em, or they wouldn't be tryin' to get you."

"That's right, sailor. Glad to find somebody that's got some sense, if it's only the quartermaster."

"Well, Mr. Van Beekman is a tight New York swell, and Miss Francy just a young girl. I've knocked around a heap. Do you reckon, sir, that the Señora could have willed the hacienda prop'ty to this coyote of a Gonzales?"

"No. She began to get suspicious about three months ago, and sent a message to one of my friends to try to get hold of me. He had some trouble to locate me. But it doesn't matter a whole lot, now." His tone was bitter.

"Why not, sir?"

"Because Gonzales has stripped it clean and mortgaged it to the ears. The chances are he holds the mortgages himself."

"All the same, Cap'n, if you heired it even all cleaned out and mortgaged up, you stand a better chance of gettin' back at him. No amount of papers and documents can license a crook to grab off a big estate. You can show undue influence and the like."

"You seem to be something of a lawyer too, sailor."

"My Uncle Mav'rick that dragged me up, heired a big ranch down on the Rio Grande, and had a lot of lawin' to do, one time. They got it away from him, fin'lly. He was a busy doctor, and I used to help him study on the papers. The prop'sition was something like yours."

"Well, the upshot of this is likely to be like yours, but worse, sailor. I've got no political or financial backing, no money, and I'm a citizen of the U.S.A. Not even sure they'd let me into the country. And now I've hanged three robbers. That was a good job, anyhow."

HE fell silent. The interview was over, Ricky perceived. He fell back until abreast of Francy and Van Beekman. The latter said curtly:

"Well, what is it, Quartermaster? Learned anything more?"

"Mr. Van Beekman, there's somethin' I want to talk to you about."

"All right. Go to it."

"Have you any idea what this stuff is all about, sir?"

"No more than you have, yourself. You seem to have guessed it."

"How soon d'you reckon we'll be able to get back aboard the yacht?"

"You'll have to ask this man that's running the show, Quartermaster."

FRANCY said: "We saw this crowd coming, and slipped into the bushes. They had three men bound on their ponies. We saw them hanged. It was awful."

"Well, Miss Francy, it looks sorta like they had it comin'. Maybe the Cap'n strung 'em up so's the ship couldn't get away right off, with all his stock. How come they caught you?"

"They found my net," Van Beekman said. "I'd thrown it down to show a moth I'd just caught, to Miss White. She was over on the edge of the hill trying to find an open space where she could wave for a boat. We were about to start back. Then this crowd came. When I saw what was going on, I slipped off my shirt and fastened it to a stick and tried to send an S.O.S. They collared us while I was signaling."

"We got it," Ricky said, "and I hustled ashore. You heard me tell the Cap'n what happened then. What d'you reckon he is, anyhow?"

"I think," said Francy, "that he was fired out of this country for some reason a long time ago. Or maybe he got fed up on it and left his hacienda to be run by some crook that's been stealing his cattle. And now he's come back to see what's been going on—and doesn't like it, so he's started in to clean things up."

"Some start, Miss Francy. I guess you're right. He sure seems like the wrong sort of party to steal cattle off'n. P'rempt'ry and sudden."

Van Beekman said angrily: "He didn't have to take us with him at all. We could have worked our way down to the beach and signaled for a boat. Nobody was going to bother us." He reined in his pony to let Francy go ahead. Ricky, on Van Beekman's flank, reined in to let him pass. The Captain had turned out of the wide watercourse and into a gulch that entered it at an oblique angle. This arroyo mounted at a fairly steep pitch until a fissure in its bank enabled the party to climb up onto a small mesa, the flattened top of a ridge.

At this elevation the moon was well clear of a broken line of hills, and the

whole place flooded with light. Francy had gone on ahead, and Ricky's pony seemed to think that it was in a walking race with Van Beekman's, and must win by a nose. Some ponies are like that, sociable, but intolerant of even a few inches overlap as they go along.

"Mr. Beekman," Ricky said, "I've struck her rich."

"You've what?"

"Stumbled onto a fortune, sir."

Francy, who was a length ahead, turned slightly in her saddle and backed her pony into the cactus so that it lifted its hind legs angrily. As Ricky came abreast of her, she asked: "What's that about a fortune, Quartermaster? Are we held for ransom?"

"No'm." Ricky hesitated, then decided that the girl might as well hear what he had to tell Van Beekman. The two were virtually engaged, he thought. Miss Francy was apt to prove an aid. "I'm tellin' Mr. Van Beekman that whilst joggin' on your trail I come onto a pocket where the oil was oozin' out all over the place."

Van Beekman said ironically: "Aint Nature grand?"

"There's a good many million dollars says so back there, sir. What's more, this country's got a concession ready to be handed over to the first party that brings in a pay well."

"Yes, I've heard something about that." The tone was edged.

"Mr. Van Beekman," Ricky said earnestly, "not only was I dragged up in an oil country, but I've hiked round a lot with prospectin' outfits. I'm telling you, sir."

Francy asked: "Why has nobody stumbled on it, Ricky?"

"It's off the trail, Miss Francy, and anyhow it mightn't be noticed, only for this long drought. The marsh is dry, but the mud's greasy and shines like peacock coal. I scooped a hole and filtered what seeped in through my bandanna." He drew out the soiled greasy rag.

Van Beekman said in a grating voice: "You're apt to be in 'Who's Who' pretty soon, if you're not in the hoosegow first."

"Which says?" Ricky asked slowly.

"You're so quick to grab an idea, Quartermaster. Even a simp one," Van Beekman said contemptuously.

Francy asked sharply: "What are you driving at, Van?"

"Oh, this would be funny, somewhere else. Like most men that have inherited a couple of million, I've been invited to hold the bag in moonlight wildcat hunts before, but never an impromptu one like this." He gave a short harsh laugh.

Francy was puzzled. She looked again at Ricky and saw that he was trying to understand what Van Beekman was driving at. She said:

"I can't see that you're being invited to do anything that the quartermaster's to blame for, Van."

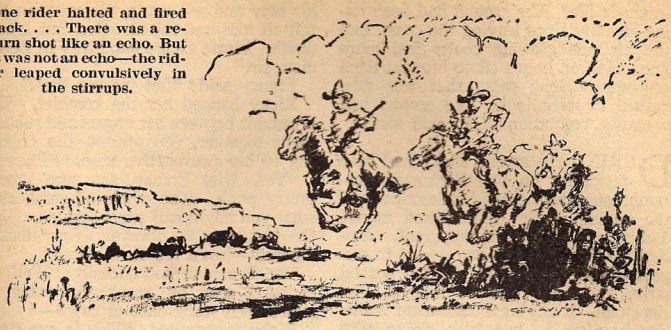
"Oh, he had nothing to do with it until he crashed the gates of this riding-party, back there," Van Beekman said sourly. "Since then, this Don Edmundo desperado seems to have coached him for his act."

"What act, Mr. Van Beekman?" Ricky asked.

"Yes," Francy said impatiently. "Spell it out, so that even a dumb jane like me— Who's Don Edmundo, and what sort of play is he trying to put on?"

"That needs a bad-actor like me to help shove across," Ricky added softly.

Van Beekman may have lost his head a little. "You're not entirely the blue-eyed boy from Texas that you look, Quartermaster. I'd say that you were pretty well posted up about this Don Edmundo rascal and his alleged wrongs when you started to ride after us. You



One rider halted and fired back. . . . There was a return shot like an echo. But it was not an echo—the rider leaped convulsively in the stirrups.

seemed to guess right every time back there. Knew all the answers."

"For Pete's sake, Van," Francy interrupted, "start in the beginning."

"Yeah, that's right," Ricky agreed. "This is a right poor time and place to begin with the dirty cracks. We got fun enough the way things lay."

"Who and what is Don Edmundo?" Francy repeated.

Van Beekman said sullenly: "He claims to be Don Edmundo de Trujillo. His father was a big shot down here until he got kicked out of the country, twenty years ago."

"For what?" Francy interrupted.

"The usual stuff. Revolutionary ideas. He'd already had a row with his wife. She was the heiress of an old *conquistador* family and owned the several hundred square miles of hacienda we're heading for. This Don Edmundo was their only child. He sympathized with his father and went into exile with him. Mind you, all this is his story."

"Interesting," Francy said. "Go on. When did he open his heart to you?"

"When I told him who I was and he started in to try to interest me in an oil proposition," Van Beekman said ironically, and gave Ricky a hard look. "That was right after his pressing invitation that we visit the hacienda."

"And now here's me tryin' to interest you," Ricky said. "Aint that funny!"

FRANCY asked quickly: "Why did he hang those three men?"

"The quartermaster guessed right. Don Edmundo tells me that he has just come back for the first time since he went into exile with his father. He learned indirectly that his mother was dying and the hacienda being systematically plundered. Lands mortgaged, cattle stolen, plantations neglected. It seems the superintendent is a cousin of his mother's, and a crook."

"Then he's the one he ought to have hanged first," Francy said. "Or perhaps he has been."

"No; Edmundo couldn't find him. He collared his secretary, put him through a third degree, and found out what had been going on. Then he gathered up these vaqueros and made a raid to keep that little steamer at La Bosta from sailing with the last of his cattle. Those ship's officers he hanged were helping drive the herd down to the wharf."

"But why hang them?" Francy asked. "They were probably doing no more than obeying the superintendent's orders."

"That was their bad luck, I should say. This Don Edmundo claims they were all in cahoots. He meant to get the hacienda's chief herdsman, one Da Silva, at the same time. The man's fairly rabid. God help the superintendent if he gets hold of him!"

"He's the guy he should have nailed first," Ricky said. "Him and his papers. It's a safe bet he aint been actin' without some sort of authority."

Van Beekman was about to answer, but Francy forestalled him. "What has Don Edmundo been doing all the time he's been away from here?"

"He told me that he graduated from a military school and stuck on as cavalry instructor until the war. He got a commission and served overseas and was mustered out with the rank of captain, I believe. The last few years he says he's been training race-horses at some stable in the South."

The narrative was interrupted by the trail's narrowing so that the party rode

in single file. The ground had been rising steadily since leaving the coast, and the air was growing cooler and more fine. Half an hour's climb brought them up onto a long mesa that was now bathed in moonlight. The ground had a scanty vegetation of an arid sort.

DURING the ascent Ricky had been pondering on Van Beekman's contemptuous treatment of his description of the finding of the oil-saturated marsh. The reason for it was apparent. Evidently Don Edmundo had reason to suspect the presence of oil on that coastal strip, and had tried to interest Van Beekman. Ricky's announcement immediately after he had been riding with Don Edmundo had not unnaturally roused the suspicion of collusion, and a clumsy effort, at that.

Ricky decided to disregard Van Beekman's sneers and make another effort to convince him that there was no conspiracy. He urged his pony abreast of the others, and tugged out his greasy bandanna.

"Mr. Van Beekman, I wish you'd look at this exhibit before leapin' to conclusions I'm tryin' to gyp you. Honest, sir, I found somethin' back there."

"Then you better go ahead and form your company, Quartermaster. I've already been approached, and I'm not interested."

"But I know my stuff, sir. You heard what I told the Cap'n about havin' worked with oil outfits."

"Oh yes," Van Beekman said cuttingly; "but the trouble is, I didn't hear what he said afterward to you."

"Do you really think, sir," Ricky asked slowly, "that the Cap'n fixed it up with me a spell back to try to sell you such a dumb bet when we're fixed like we are just now? Or that I'd fall for any such slicker stuff?"

"Oil is a slick game, Quartermaster, and I'd say you were both of the opportunist breed," Van Beekman said harshly. "You've shown samples of how quick you are on the uptake."

Ricky spread the greasy bandanna over the pommel of his saddle.

"Well sir, it's plain how dumb I was to think it would fool a business man of your experience. You'd guess right off that I antic'pated all this stuff before I come ashore, and got me some crude oil from the fuel feed of the engine, and ran her onto this wipe, and then fixed it up with Don Edmundo yonder to back his play and sell you a wildcat with his tail all nice and salted. Gee, but I was dumb. Please excuse *me,* Mr. Van Beekman, sir."

Francy said: "Let me see that."

Ricky handed her the kerchief. She pressed it between her fingers and rubbed them together, then raised the greasy rag to her provocative nose. "Phew!"

"Yes, Miss Francy, she sure smells pretty punk. The whole oil-game aint what you might call sweet-scented. Nor the people in it, always. Now stock's different—less'n it's on the hoof."

Van Beekman said uneasily: "Well, of course I may be wrong; but when a man's been stung once or twice—"

Ricky interrupted: "This is one time you aint in any danger of gettin' stung, sir. Not one .ittle chance. We both had a close shave—you from makin' a few millions more you got no need of, and me from goin' into partnership with a man that can't even wait to be told about the proposition before he sails in to call me a slicker and a crook and a dumb sap-head one, at that."

"Oh, come now, Quartermaster, if I've said anything to hurt your feelings—"

"You haven't, sir. You've taught me a lesson that may be worth an awful lot, if the breaks are good. When I come on this pan just before I struck the river bed,"—Ricky hastily shifted the true location by about five miles and one low dividing ridge,—"I says to myself: 'Mav'rick, you may know oil land, but your ignorance about the business end is a total eclipse. The gentleman for you to team up with is Mr. Van Beekman.' But now I see that this idea was jus' the dumbest part of the whole dumb plan."

FRANCY said lightly: "What about me, Ricky? I believed you all the time. Even when Van got through telling us his bedtime sob story."

"What d'you mean, Miss Francy?"

"You might invite *me* to sit in. I inherited a little stake from my grandmother when I came of age. Not enough to live on its income, but it ought to bore quite a deep hole in the ground."

"It wouldn't be right for me to let you take the risk, Miss Francy."

Van Beekman stepped into the trap. "Then it isn't such a sure thing, after all."

"Not now, since I went and told you all about it, Mr. Van Beekman," Ricky said gently.

Van Beekman turned and gave him a hard stare. "Well, I'll be—"

Ricky interrupted: "A lady present, sir! .... But you sure *will* be, sir, before you get into the oil business with me."

WITH a grunt of anger Van Beekman lifted his reins, and his pony moved ahead more rapidly until abreast of the leader, who was riding alone some fifty yards in advance of the others. Francy laughed nervously.

"That got through, Quartermaster. He had it coming, though."

"Yes'm. The Van Beekmans may be old New York quality, but my folks've always been good people too. Even if some ancestor was fond of collectin' unbranded calves, so that they got to be called gen'rally 'mavericks.' But I guess likely the Van Beekmans staked out quite a lot of their New York real estate a good deal the same way."

"How sure are you really that you've located oil, in quantity?"

"Miss Francy, I'm just as sure as I am about there bein' lots of dirt under these ponies' hoofs. Why is the land back there on that strip of shore so poor that sca'cely anybody lives there? Because there's so much oil close to the surface. The earth's all poisoned by it."

"But why has nobody located it?"

"I reckon the rainfall's always been so heavy that oil seeping through's been diluted and washed off. The ma'shes are flushed out. That's kep' things green and growin' pretty good."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"That's the point. It takes some figgerin'. I was too quick on the trigger."

"Van was too quick. He's apt to try to beat you to it, Ricky."

"Well, that ought to be a good break for you, Miss Francy."

She shook her head. "Not after today. I was already beginning to weaken. We'd mix like your oil and rainwater. Very much of Van would wash me out without a trace."

Ricky wondered that she should say this to him. But he had learned this girl was not convention-bound. She went on now: "To the Dutch tradition, all's fair in love and trade. I'll bet that right now he's telling Don Edmundo that he's inclined to reconsider his proposition."

"Like enough," Ricky admitted. "But it might not do him such a lot of good, at that."

"Why not?"

"Spanish blood is plumb curious. Don Edmundo has been so long in the States that he might be American, far as one can see. But now he's back home and Spanish, and all hot and bothered about the stealin' of his mild-eyed kine. Mr. Van Beekman has r'iled him. A Spanish guy may take a likin' to you for no reason you can put your finger on, and then you can count on his backin' your play and shootin' square with you. But once he don't like you, it's all off. He'll have no truck nor traffic with you; and if he does, you better watch your wad."

"He liked you, Ricky."

"Well, I said the right thing at the right time. That was luck." Ricky spoke absently. He had suddenly become interested in his pony's one useful ear. It was pricked alertly and slanted to the right, then quickly to the left. Its head lifted and twitched in the same direction. As Ricky watched these symptoms of unrest, the pony blew out its nostrils with a faint whistling sound.

"Watch out," Ricky whispered. "Somebody's flankin' us."

Fifty yards ahead, Don Edmundo reined up sharply. Whether from his mount or through his own alert senses he also had got an alarm. In the bright moonlight they saw him reach to his belt and hand something that gleamed to Van Beekman, then swing in his saddle and call in a low voice to his peons, who were immediately behind him. They closed up, handling their carbines. A single rider who had been following some distance in the rear of the party, detailed as scout, came scampering past Ricky and Francy. *"Los ladrones!"* he called, and something else they did not catch.

At the same moment Don Edmundo straightened in his stirrups and fired two quick shots, then spurred forward and to the left. Van Beekman and the others followed him. A series of shots rang out from somewhere ahead, and there came a yell from some distance in the rear.

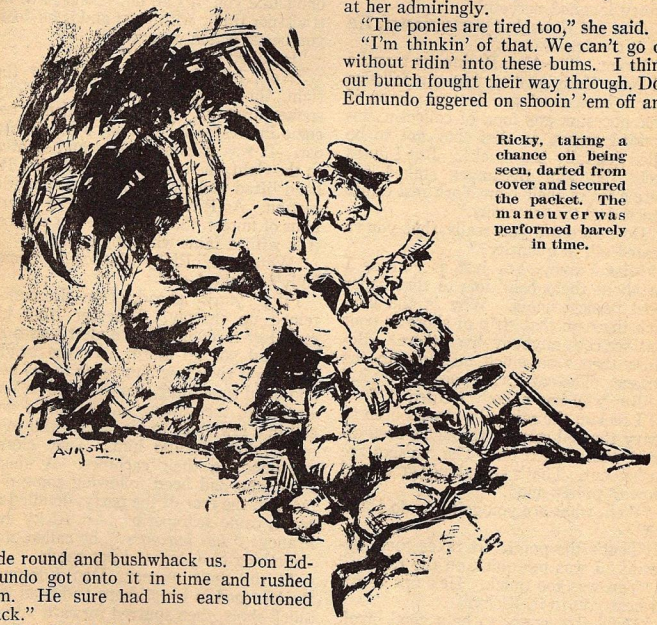
RICKY'S first thought was for Francy's safety. To their right about a hundred yards away there was a broken mass of rock about which grew cactus and scrub palmetto and some stunted trees. He grabbed her rein, struck his heel against his pony's ribs, and they scampered across the sunbaked turf for this shelter. It screened them barely in time to avoid their being seen by a party of half a dozen riders who came pelting up over a rise of ground to the left and

from behind, then swerved slightly to follow the course taken by Don Edmundo and the others.

There were a few more crackling shots, then silence. Ricky said in a low voice: "Looks to me like that try at a surprise party had failed."

"Failed?" Francy asked. "Why do you think that?"

"There'd be more firin' if they'd got away with it. One bunch was tryin' to ride round and bushwhack us. Don Edmundo got onto it in time and rushed 'em. He sure had his ears buttoned back."



Ricky, taking a chance on being seen, darted from cover and secured the packet. The maneuver was performed barely in time.

"You heard them too."

"This little old cayuse of mine told me. This aint so hot for you, Miss Francy!"

"It's all right so far. But I wish I knew—" She paused.

"We got to hand it to Van Beekman that he was game. Don Edmundo slipped him a gun, and he went to it. I missed somethin'. Looks like our best play now might be to take the back-track. Let's wait a minute, though."

They kept silent, listening. There was no more firing. Francy shivered. Altitudes are chilly even in the tropics. The air was still and fairly dry but keen.

"You must be pretty well tuckered, Miss Francy."

"A little," she admitted. "It's been a busy day. A swim at sunrise, then a thrilling butterfly-hunt, followed by a long ride. We've been in the saddle since noon, with half an hour out for a pepper-pot of fighting-cocks, and it's now"—she glanced at her wrist-watch in the bright blaze of the moon—"half-past eight."

"You are sure one good sport. You left out the wear and tear of a triple hangin' and a gun-fight." Ricky looked at her admiringly.

"The ponies are tired too," she said.

"I'm thinkin' of that. We can't go on without ridin' into these bums. I think our bunch fought their way through. Don Edmundo figgered on shooin' 'em off and then collectin' us. Or he counted on our followin' on. He didn't know about this bunch in the rear."

Francy shivered again. "I could curl up right here and sleep until daylight if it wasn't so cold."

"We better be amblin' back, Miss Francy."

"All the way?"

"No, a little over half—to where I located the oil. There's a played-out plantation and an empty house."

Her fatigue seemed instantly forgotten, or set aside, as if he had told her that there was a fine hotel three hours' ride away. Ricky suggested that they change ponies. "The different saddle and gait

sort of bears on different muscles and rests you some. These ponies will be all right when they get a drink, now it's come cool."

THEY started on the back-track. That spotlight for all within its horizon, the moon, not only made objects brilliant but seemed to magnify them. The air was clear and still. Francy told Ricky that his pony was a lop-eared rocker, and that she was going to sleep. From the willingness of both beasts when headed back, it looked as if their home corral was down on the shore, so that they had traveled about twenty miles, probably less. They should do another twelve.

Francy asked presently: "If they've been stealing Don Edmundo's cattle right along, why should the thieves attack him for having hanged three of them? They've got the cattle."

"I been studyin' on that, Miss Francy. It looks like they felt they had some rights. Maybe they have, at that."

"Yes, and Don Edmundo the real villain of the piece."

"That's possible too. The stock wasn't his, anyhow, but his mother's. Maybe this super'ntendent persuaded the old lady to sell it off, but has been holdin' out on her. Likely Don Edmundo's got wise to that and sailed right in to stop the graft and save what's left of the herds."

"Yes," Francy agreed; "and when he nabbed us, and Van began to strut his stuff, and told him he owned a few skyscrapers and bus lines, Don Edmundo may have seen his chance to sell him some shore lots here."

Ricky nodded. "It's an even bet which band is the bandit one. I'd say, though, that Don Edmundo was makin' a right desp'rate play to hang on to the bitter end. Most likely that squad of peons he had with him is all he's got, that he can count on. They didn't look so hot to me."

"Nor to me," Francy agreed. "They were surly brutes."

"Well, he is sure one hard guy. About the last bird I'd pick to rob the nest of. When he found out the graft that was goin' on, he takes this bunch of gauchos and romps down and grabs those three cow-pirates and strings 'em up and halts the racket. That's what makes me think these peons with him are all he's got."

"Where does he think it's going to get him, then?"

"Maybe he figgered to hang 'em first and do his thinkin' afterward. This other crowd aims not to give him time for that. Mos' likely they know he can put 'em in pretty bad when he gets a breathin'-spell, and want to get him first. But my guess would be they got their work cut out for them."

"Do you think they'd dare attack the hacienda?"

"No, not likely. Their game is to nail him before he gets there. He'd be onto that, and it's why he pushed ahead and forced the fightin'. I don't reckon he believes that you're in any danger from the other crowd. That aint their game. On the contrary, they'd claim they rescued you. This whole thing is beginnin' to clear up."

She was silent for a moment, then asked: "What about your oil well, Ricky?"

"Well, that aint so easy. We got to wait and see how things break."

"But you say there's no time to spare."

"There aint. That prospect is about as safe as a milk-snake in a hog-run. 'Specially now that I've spilled it to Mr. Van Beekman."

Francy said slowly: "Your interests are really in the other camp, Ricky. With the crowd that is trying to get Don Edmundo."

"And Mr. Van Beekman? No; that aint my stuff. I hope they get through all right, come what may of it."

FRANCY turned and looked at him. "You're the real thing, Quartermaster!"

"Thanks, Miss Francy. So are you, a whole lot."

"Don't you want to let me in?"

"Sure I do. You're already in, stake or no stake. I found her, trailin' after you, and if anything comes of it, you get yours."

"Oh—Ricky! Really?"

"You bet. I'm goin' to show you where she sits, if we can get there."

"Why?"

"Because I think you're one swell girl, if you don't mind my puttin' it that way. This thing makes us partners, automatic."

She laughed. "You're priceless, Ricky. You're the one that ought to be hard-boiled, but you've stayed a sweet-natured kid. My trouble has been a sort you'd scarcely understand."

"Oh, I don't know—"

"I've always been the one that other people pay for. I mean the poor member of a rich crowd. Dad's the same, but he doesn't notice it because all he cares

about is science. Somebody always puts up the money for these expeditions. Or it may be a museum or scientific society. This time Van is paying the yacht's charter and overhead. You can guess why."

"Gee—I never thought of that."

"Well, I have, and quite a lot. Sometimes I can hardly bear it. I try to shock him, and I do. Everybody else too, I guess."

"Say, that's tough, Miss Francy. Like he was buying you, or something."

"There's no something about it. You can see where it places me."

"But why do you have to marry somebody with money?"

"That's what I meant when I said you couldn't understand. Almost everything I know spells money. Practically all of my friends are rich. I got sick of being a sort of hanger-on, what you might call a professional poor friend. I'm an unpaid entertainer and filler-in to gay things up at wild and at domesticated parties. I've had to admire so many people's houses and gardens and yachts and horses that if anybody showed me a railroad wreck, I'd probably say, 'How lovely!'"

"Lots of people have to admire shows they don't think are so very hot. But put that marryin' idea out of your head, Miss Francy. You don't have to tie up to money that way any more'n I do. We got our health and class and education, and now we got a big break. All we got to do is to grab her off."

Francy laughed, amused at Ricky's claims. He guessed this and said: "My folks've been good way back. We had a governor of the State, and a general, and a major was killed in France; and my Uncle Mav' was one grand doctor. I been educated good, if I do speak careless."

"And I speak correctly and am a perfect ignoramus," Francy said bitterly. "I couldn't prove that the earth is round."

"Well, she aint, longitudinally. She's a flat tire, on the poles."

"So am I, all the way round. There's not a thing I know enough about to make it earn me a decent living."

RICKY was distressed. It seemed to him the girl's nerves were beginning to slip their cogs a little, from sheer exhaustion. But he felt that they ought to push on. It was getting warmer as they wound gradually down from the high mesa, and the torrent-bed was near. It would refresh them and the ponies to drink from one of the clear standing pools; and if Francy's strength gave out she could dismount and sleep for two or three hours. He suggested this.

"No, I don't want to risk fever. I'm just a bit low in my mind. . . . What would—I mean, will you do when we strike oil, Quartermaster? Or hadn't you thought?"

"Oh, I thought, all right, lots of times. The yacht'd be the first bet. I'd ram all round the world studyin' on how different countries do things. When their way seemed better'n ours, I'd note down how it worked and let the other customs slide."

"Then the curious ones wouldn't interest you?"

"Not much. What's the use of wastin' time on played-out habits and methods?"

"As for instance?"

"Oh, slave or peon labor, and polyg'my and mean old religions that got no sense, and cruel spect'cles like bull-fights and the wrong sort of democr'cy that's just plain dumb. Then I'd sail home with the best ideas I could c'llect and see they got public'ty."

"Grand, Ricky! I'll have a yacht, too, and we can cruise in consort and collaborate—work up the best in each country visited."

"That would be good, Miss Francy. Write us a book."

"Why not? What's to prevent?"

"Nothin'. All we need's a few oil-wells. I write in a different language than what I talk."

"Spanish?"

"No, English." He laughed.

"You hold out on people, Ricky. You wear dialect because it's easy on the tongue. But what if your wife should get jealous and feel herself neglected while we're collaborating on our book?"

"Well, maybe your husband might be willin' to entertain her now and then if she got feelin' that way about it."

Francy burst into laughter. Ricky's quick answer had landed squarely on her sense of humor. She seemed unable to control a hysterical paroxysm that was partly nerves. She rocked in her saddle.

"Hold on, Miss Francy, you'll pitch overboard." He reined his pony alongside hers. Francy's intelligent beast was sidling to keep her balanced in the saddle. Ricky put an arm round Francy.

"Stop it—please. We got our fun, but we got some trouble too. We better get down and rest a spell."

"I'll—be—all right. Just my nerves stampeded. It's so—so"—she began to shake again—"ridiculous."

"I know—it's plumb foolish—but don't laugh like that." He held her firmly but with a sort of detached support, as if she had been stepping into a boat that was bucketing about.

"All this rough stuff!" Francy sighed. "Men getting hanged—and taken for a ride by Don Edmundo, and Van boiling and fuming and then charging into it as if he had to shoot somebody or blow up!" Her shoulders heaved convulsively.

"He was good," Ricky said. "That try of theirs to head us didn't work. Don't you worry, Miss Francy. This Don Edmundo party is a shootin' wiz', and Mr. Van Beekman was just startin' to have a real good time." He loosed his hold of her. "We got to make trail before these coyotes find they bit into p'izened bait, and start back. By the way, when you all rode away from there, you passed some native shacks. Was anybody round?"

"No. At least, I didn't see anybody. Why?"

"I'm wonderin' if this other gang knew he'd kidnaped you. That would give 'em the edge on Don Edmundo. They'd claim they wanted to rescue you."

"That's so. The chances are somebody was watching from the scrub. There were some game-cocks pecking about by one of the huts. Don Edmundo snatched out his pistol and fired two quick shots, almost together, and cut their heads off. It was wonderful, but I wasn't admiring his marksmanship such a lot just then."

"Some shot! There are men like that can handle a gun as if it was part of 'em—same as you'd point your finger straight at something. Sort of natural gift. My Uncle Mav' was that way."

"One of the peons got down and picked up the game-cocks, and Don Edmundo tossed a coin where the blood was spattered. He wanted them for our supper. We were waiting for them to finish cooking when we heard you singing 'Turkey in the Straw.'"

The ponies were picking their way down the bed of the ravine. They turned out of it a little later and took the narrow trail. It had been a fairly constant descent from the high mesa; but after leaving the torrent-bed the narrow path wound in and out nearly at sea-level. Ricky had asked Francy to ride ahead so that he might keep his eye on her, but it was the poor old lop-eared pony that first showed signs of giving out. It stumbled frequently and its head hung low. A little later it began to stop, and needed urging to go on.

Francy called back: "This poor little takki is nearly out of gas, Ricky."

"I know it. How about yourself, Miss Francy? Another half-hour ought to get us to our oil mine."

"How far is that from La Bosta?"

"Four-five miles, maybe. But that cayuse is quittin'. He's limpin' on all four legs and his back is saggin'. You change with me, and I'll go under my own power and tow this game little old critter."

He came alongside, slid down, then lifted Francy from one pony to the other with no apparent effort. They kept on their way, Ricky leading the spent pony, and in a little over half an hour came to the deserted fruit-plantation that the jungle was now rapidly reclaiming.

THE old shack was about fifty yards from the trail. It was at least dew-proof, but Francy glanced inside it and shook her head.

"Too creepy. Vampire and baby bats, snakes, spiders, centipedes, tarantulas and scorpions and hitherto undiscovered species of ticks, jiggers, lice and other bugs."

"Hold on, Miss Francy! I'm startin' to prickle all over. It don't look so temptin'; but this a damp fevery place, and you'll feel the chill now you've stopped movin'."

He tethered the ponies by their lariats in the moribund bananas, where there were still some clusters of which a little of the fruit was edible. Ricky cut some of them for the ponies, trusting to their experience in this equine dietary experiment.

Francy peered into the cabin again.

"Look any better?" Ricky asked.

"Worse. I'd rather sleep in the crotch of a tree. This hut smells like disease."

"That smell," said Ricky, "is a million-dollar smell, Miss Francy. It comes from our oil land."

"Not this one. It's the panting breath of ravenous microbes. I've got sleeping-sickness already, and don't want any complications. What's that over there? A chicken-coop?"

They investigated. The little shack had a corrugated iron roof, rusted through in spots, and thatched sides. Some fragments of tobacco leaf showed what its use had been. The floor seemed to be of hard clay.

"This aint so bad, Miss Francy. Tobacco is anti-bug. I'll spread down some dry palm-brush and banana leaves."

"Listen!"

There came the sound of hoof-beats over on the trail. They looked through under the tangle of foliage and saw a cavalcade of ten or perhaps a dozen riders passing the place, coming from the interior. Ricky held his breath as the troop thudded past.

"That was close," Francy whispered.

"We sure got under cover just in time. Looks like these cow-robbers gave it up and hiked out for home. Mr. Van Beekman must be passin' from one conniption fit into the next."

"Why are you so sure they got away?"

"I was lookin' sharp for led horses. They didn't have any."

"You're certainly a comfort, Ricky. I'll write you a recommendation as a good man to get lost with."

"All we lost is Mr. Van Beekman, and I reckon he's safe enough. Any man that can shoot like Don Edmundo is powerful bad medicine to monkey with. Likely they found that out, if they crowded him too close."

He gathered several armfuls of dried fronds and spread the big banana leaves over them. "Now you lie down and get some rest, Miss Francy."

"Do you want me to get a chill? If I'm to rest, you'll have to keep me warm."

"All right," Ricky said readily. "My Uncle Mav' told me once that the human body works just like a stove, and that if anybody could invent one to shed as much heat with as little fuel, his fortune would be made. So you can just pretend I'm a sort of jointed automatic heater."

CHILL did not disturb the slumber of either during what was left of the night, nor even in the early morning hours when it can be searching in the tropics. There was enough warmed area to fortify the circulation of the surfaces not in contact, as when one sleeps beside a campfire. The old tobacco shack kept off the dampness and vagrant eddies of the night breeze.

Ricky was awakened by a slanting sunbeam that stabbed him in the eye. He sat up—and sneezed. Francy laughed.

"Good morning, Quartermaster."

"Good morning, Miss Francy." He sprang up and sneezed again.

"I hope you're not catching cold."

"Never have 'em. Must be the tobacco that's been in this shack."

"Well, it kept away the mosquitoes."

"Miss Francy, there aint a skeeter within gunshot of this place. She's too well oiled."

"That sounds good. Let's hope the supply is inexhaustible."

"This fold in the ground is full of it. I'll rack out and see if I can find you some fruit fit to eat."

THE ponies were browsing and the lop-ear had acquired a banana-belly, like the native *bambinos*. Ricky foraged for some distance into the withered plantation which bordered the trail, from which it was screened by a fringe of bush. He came to a scrubby clearing where a low hillock offered a more extended view of the surroundings. From the top of this Ricky discovered that the marsh drained through a ravine into a bight of the shore that put in not far below. He could see a sand-spit that thrust out and sheltered a small lagoon of some depth, to judge from the deep blue of the water.

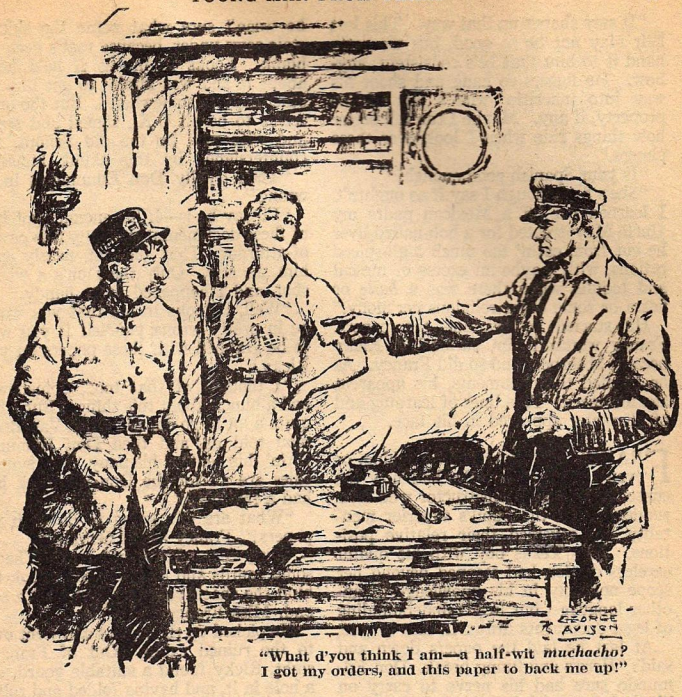
He was reflecting on this when there came a distant gunshot from the direction they had traveled the night before. Another seemed to answer it, and a few moments later a series of reports that sounded still nearer gave the impression of a running fight, approaching by the trail. Ricky ran down to the fringe of bushes that bordered it and peered out.

There was a scampering of hoofs, and two riders appeared round a bend about two hundred yards away. One of them halted at the turning and fired back, with a revolver, then urged his horse ahead.

Ricky ducked back into the bush; and as he did so there came a distant clamor of yells from the direction of La Bosta. A party was rapidly approaching from that side. One of the pair that had been carrying on the running fight dashed past, as if the horse were bolting. The other reined in a few yards beyond where Ricky was partly hidden, turned and fired. There was a shot like an echo. But it was not an echo. The rider close to Ricky leaped in the stirrups and made a curious headlong dive into the bushes that fringed the other side of the trail.

At the risk of discovery, Ricky looked out in time to see the khaki-clad figure of Don Edmundo as it disappeared round the bend. There was the sound of a troop riding hard from the opposite direction, and a moment later it swept past, in pursuit of Don Edmundo.

Ricky could not be sure whether or not the companion of the man just shot out



"What d'you think I am—a half-wit *muchacho*? I got my orders, and this paper to back me up!"

of the saddle had turned to join the pursuit. The riders had poured past in file and crowding as closely as the narrow trail permitted. Their yells came faintly from the distance. No mounted hunt of any quarry, from that of a fox to the chase of bison, has ever held the same savage thrill for the huntsman as that of another man; and this was apt to be a long one, Ricky thought. Back of it was not only the ardor of vengeance, but a desire that might amount to a necessity for removing a source of danger to these cattle-thieves. One both lethal and legal.

It seemed to Ricky a splendid chance to get on to the port without interruption. He was about to hurry back to Francy when, as he glanced toward the body that was motionless and almost hidden in the brush, he saw the end of a white packet of some sort projecting from the scrub. Again Ricky took a chance on being seen by any who might be following on. He darted out from cover, secured the packet and plunged back into the crackling foliage again.

This maneuver was performed barely in time. The man who had been with the one just killed rode up with his companion's handsome thoroughbred.

The man spied the body, halted and dismounted. He stooped and made a brief examination of what was very plainly a corpse. His consternation was also apparent. He rummaged about among the bushes, then shrugged and with some difficulty raised the body and secured it across the saddle, remounted and rode slowly back over the trail, scanning it closely on either side.

Ricky hurried back to Francy, and described what had happened.

"It aint so hard to guess who this dead *caballero* is, Miss Francy."

"The superintendent of the hacienda?"

"That's the guy. It looks like he mistrusted Don Edmundo was fixin' to make the home ranch unsafe for robbers, even if the boss one was kin to his dyin' mother."

"You think he was doing a get-away and Don Edmundo beat him to it?"

"It sure shapes up that way. This lost heir may not be so good, but we gotta hand it to him that he's consistent, anyhow. He figgers to hang and shoot his way into inheritin' what's left of the property, if any. Maybe I can tell better how things ride when I look over these papers."

"Is your Spanish good enough?"

"She's fine, though I say it as oughtn't. I learned her off a Mexican padre my Uncle Mav' treated for a hob-nailed liver he got from eatin' too much high-spiced rations, with maybe an excess of mescal and tequila when there was a *baile* or fiesta or some other religious cer'mony."

He started to examine the papers. Francy watched him curiously. Ricky became absorbed, and so did Francy. As he studied the documents, his apparent age increased. Fine lines of learning and of character appeared in his face.

FRANCY had never tried teaching, or even tutoring; but she had now the consciousness of the instructor who feels suddenly that the pupil's superior mentality has reversed their relative positions. This Texas boy with his quaint careless diction had stepped beyond her scope not only in his knowledge of another language, but in his understanding of legal documents drawn in that tongue.

At last he laid the papers down and said: "Here's one funny break. Don Edmundo sure had his nerve to carry on like he's been doin' while that old packrat of a superintendent was footloose, with this stuff in his possession."

"What's it all about, Ricky?"

"Well, if these papers was to fall into the hands of the authorities, Don Edmundo would stand to do a long hitch of prison, or worse. There's a power-of-attorney from his mother to the super'ntendent, and a couple of mortgages in his name as holder. And this!" He tapped a brief document that he had set aside from the others.

"What's that?"

"It's an order that authorizes the captain of that little steamer lyin' alongside the stone jetty here in La Bosta to load aboard a herd of cattle waitin' shipment in a savanna back of the port, and take 'em to that last place we stopped at comin' here, Puerto Cabando, and sell 'em and receipt for the money."

"And Don Edmundo hanged the captain!"

"Yes. But either this coyote of a super'ntendent got news of that, or else he wasn't sure what name the skipper stole cows under, because that's been left blank. Looks to me as if he'd heard about it and was aimin' to get him another captain somewheres. But the order seems to be all O.K., signed and sealed and witnessed by the old Señora, and countersigned by this skunk himself."

"Then legally Don Edmundo's in all wrong."

"I'll say he is—if his enemies got hold of these documents, 'specially this power-of-attorney. That old rat nearly gave him the slip. Only the Don's a wizard shot, and I happened to be handy."

"Well, it looks to me that you would be in pretty wrong yourself if you were to be grabbed with these papers on you, Ricky."

"I thought of that too. Somehow I had a hunch about this thing. But I had quite a lot to go on, what Mr. Van Beekman told us, and then Don Edmundo tiltin' this gent off his pony. My sympathies are all for the Don. I think he's had a raw deal."

"What are you going to do with the papers?" Francy asked nervously.

"Bury 'em. Here and now. There's some gourds and a busted cane hook behind the shack yonder. Just wait a second, Miss Francy."

He picked up the papers and went over to the ruined cabin. Out of Francy's sight, Ricky found a suitable gourd, cut a hole in it, and having folded and rolled the documents snugly, thrust them into the container—all but one, which he secreted carefully under the lining of his deck-shoe. Returning then to where Francy was waiting, he dug a hole of sufficient depth at the corner of the tobacco shed, and buried the gourd of which the contents stood between Don Edmundo, his freedom, fortune and possibly his life.

"Come on, Miss Francy. Let's saddle up and get back and aboard the yacht. I'm worried about the skipper. He must be nearly out of his mind."

The ponies had rested and browsed; and though unwatered, the dew on the sickly scrub had been heavy, so that like goats on a dry island they had managed to absorb enough moisture to avoid suffering. Perhaps the anticipation of a long drink made them more eager to travel.

PRESENTLY they came to an open space that commanded a view of the bay where the yacht had been lying. She was not there. Ricky had been dreading this complication. He said cheerfully:

"Just what I expected, Miss Francy. When the skipper found there was no more to be got out of that little bot-fly of a captain of the port than you can get truth out of a toad-snake, he hiked out for Puerto Cabando as fast as wind and gas could take him. It's only a twenty-four-hour run there and back, so we're likely to see her pokin' up over the skyline any hour."

They rode on for the port. The local natives, discreetly withdrawn from their makeshift shacks the day before, were back in them again. Babies, chickens and goats were cruising about as usual. The tradewind had not yet turned on its fan, so that quiet rested on the place. But as they rode along, the stillness became disturbed by a curious vibration.

This distant pulsation became a sound, or sounds. It was a deep diapason, a sort of sorrowful medley that contained high as well as low notes, but of which the chorus was deep of pitch. The quality was more hollow and at the same time fuller in volume than rises from a multitude of human vocal organs. Its moanings held a smothered melancholy.

"CATTLE," Ricky said. "Looks like they're all set to go, Miss Francy."

"Where? What is that beastly noise?"

"It's cattle, loaded aboard that little old can of a steamer. Sounds like the well-decks are full too."

"Poor Don Edmundo! His high hand failed to turn the trick."

"Miss Francy, it's plain what's happened. That bunch of thieves that rode past last night has been workin' overtime to load the stock, and figgered to get the ship away soon's the superintendent got here."

"He was probably beating it, himself."

"I reckon. He thought the hacienda wasn't healthy for him any more, and he thought right. He was a trifle late to get goin'."

"What will they do now?"

"I guess that's what's botherin' whoever was runnin' this end of the show. Ship's off'cers strung up. I'd say the big boss was overdue, and the gang got worried and saddled up and rode back to see what was keepin' him. They were a trifle late, too. About one minute."

"But they saw him, didn't they?"

"They must have seen his remains. But they saw Don Edmundo same time and took out after him. The supe was no good to them dead, so they prob'ly figgered the next best play was to put Don Edmundo out of the runnin'. They figgered that as long as he was footloose, their game wasn't so good."

"Do you think they'll get him, Ricky?"

"It's hard to say. He's liable to give 'em a long chase. They can't all rush him at once, and with a man that can shoot like he does, it's sure a bum bet for the fastest hounds in the pack."

"Some of them may be sent back to take the ship away."

"Well, for one thing, I don't believe they've got anybody comp'tent to take her; and for another, there's the orders. Nobody authorized to command the vessel and sell the cattle."

"Then he has stalled them, after all."

"I guess so; but he don't know that. He must be cussin' his rotten luck that he couldn't have collared the supe and choked the papers out of him, if he knew there were any papers."

Francy was staring at him hard. "Why are you excited—what's on your mind?"

He laughed. "To go into the oil business with Don Edmundo—without his knowin' it."

"What?"

"Oh, come on, Miss Francy. Let's ride down there and see what's goin' on, and who's runnin' this show. Not that it's any use, but just out of curiosity. If we had the money right now, we could shoot the oil over the top of the derrick, if we had the derrick."

Francy nodded. "I'm not so dumb, Ricky. I get you, now. If you had that order, you might take command of the ship and take her to Puerto Cabando and sell the cattle for Don Edmundo, if you could command a ship."

"Yeah—and that's only the half of it."

THEY rode on down the trail to the wretched little port. Except for the doleful clamor of the cattle, the place appeared to be sweltering in its habitual sloth. A group of peons in dirty white was lounging in the shade of the palms back of the beach. Ricky noticed that the little ship had steam and that she was deep. Besides the cattle crowded into her below, the well-deck was jammed with them. She was a small "three islander"—a steamer with a high forecastle, raised bridge and house amidships, and a short raised poop, so that when seen just over the horizon, the appearance of three small islands was presented.

As they rode up to the pierhead, the captain of the port rushed out of a small building; flinging his arms above his

head, he began to pour out a flood of felicitations, perplexities and questions.

He was rejoiced that they had escaped from that fine brigand Don Edmundo. The yacht had gone last evening to Puerto Cabando to report their abduction. Where was the Señor who had been kidnaped also? What was he, the captain of the port to do with a shipload of cattle that ought by this time to be well on its way to Puerto Cabando? What was he, Torres, to do in a case like this?

He paused for breath, and Ricky fired a series of concise questions at him, pausing only for their answers. How soon could the ship sail? Now, if she had a captain. Had she an engineer and firemen? Yes, there were men who could shovel coal and handle slice-bars. They had done so before. Two of them understood the engines well enough to keep her going for an eighteen-hour run. Was there food and water, a cook? Yes, and water enough to hose down the cattle. The main thing was to shove off, get going, or he would have to start unloading.

RICKY surreptitiously slipped off his shoe, thrust a paper at the dazed captain of the port and said imperatively: *"Bueno.* I am willing to help you out, since our yacht is at Puerto Cabando. There is no time for questions. Here is my authority. I have had to take a position as quartermaster, but I am a navigator. My master's papers are aboard the yacht. The party you ask about has gone on to the hacienda to seize this brigand Don Edmundo, and he is apt to make it unpleasant for you if you do not get the ship away, or if the cattle suffer. But of course, if you prefer to wait another day—"

"But how can I wait another day, señor? The cattle cannot remain stuffed into this hot iron box like canned beef. The ship should be halfway there by this time."

"Then the sooner we start the better," Ricky said impatiently. "Tell your engineer and firemen to stand by."

The little ship was lying head out, and Ricky had seen that except for bow and stern lines her warps were cast off. Since there was a head of steam, he had only to go. But the fat little captain of the port now had a semi-drunken inspiration.

"Bueño, Señor Capitán! You are sent from heaven. But I will go with you. There must be somebody who understands the business of selling these cattle that are of the finest breed."

"Very well. Who owns this ship?"

"She belongs to Señor Gonzales, the superintendent of the hacienda, who held a mortgage on her and foreclosed. Señor Da Silva is his head herdsman. He drives the cattle from the hacienda ranges. That is a matter of four or five days, by a longer but easier trail than the one—"

Ricky interrupted: "We had better start. The animals are already showing distress. It will be cooler at sea."

Francy had been listening intently, trying to understand what was being said. Ricky now said to her, cheerfully: "Come on, Miss Francy. Everything's okay so far, but I'm r'arin' to go before we're stopped."

"Go where?"

"I'm signin' up to pilot this meat-wagon to Puerto Cabando. Only a short hitch. That'll get you quicker aboard the yacht."

"But Ricky, can you?"

"I guess so. She must have some charts, and I'll sort of survey her down the coast. It's pretty weather for it."

They went up the gangplank and into the chart-room under the bridge. This also appeared to be the Captain's quarters, and were cool and comfortable. Ricky was relieved to see a regional chart spread out and secured by thumb-tacks, with dividers and parallel rules. He found also in a locker a clean white uniform that fitted well enough.

There was no difficulty about getting the little ship away. It was noon when Ricky ordered the lines cast off and rang the engine-room telegraph for dead slow ahead. There was plenty of water, and once clear and on her course under full headway, the vessel showed a normal speed for her size and load. The trade-wind came in abeam, and with windsails rigged to ventilate below decks, the moaning of the cattle gradually abated.

The coast was fairly well marked, and the piloting offered no difficulties to Ricky's seagoing experience. The captain of the port proved useful, taking the wheel while Ricky laid out his courses through a passage that had its dangers. Francy was assigned the Captain's quarters, and she slept.

A LITTLE after daylight Porto Cabando was sighted, and presently the yacht became visible. Ricky wondered why she had not already started back for La Bosta. As she was at anchor over against the shore and some distance out of his course as he came slowly

in, he did not try to signal her. There was a good wharf, but Ricky was saved the task of bringing the steamer alongside. A small launch with the local captain of the port, and a pilot, put off to them.

He discovered then that the yacht was under power, heading out. She was too far to signal, and the port captain's launch could not have overhauled her. Ricky let her go. Francy was still asleep. There had been no danger about this eighteen-hour voyage, and no particular discomfort, once one grew accustomed to the barnyard smell. It was Ricky's plan to unload cargo, take on another and smaller one, and head immediately back for La Bosta.

The captain of that shipless port now approached him on the bridge, followed by his confrère of Puerto Cabando and the pilot. Ricky had stopped the ship for them to come aboard. A Caribbean shore pilot frequently pays his official visit and collects his fee after the ship has made her berth, but this one, like the functionary with him, had no doubt found it worth while to speed the business of this ship. There was a ceremonious presentation, and the pilot took over the ship and her docking.

RELIEVED from duty, Ricky went into the chart-room where Francy was breakfasting on fruit, coffee and cassava cakes. She asked:

"Where's the yacht, Captain?"

"She went out as we were comin' in, Miss Francy. Too far away to hail."

"What are you up to, Ricky? Why are you taking such a chance, pretending to be the duly accredited agent of that superintendent?"

"I'm tryin' to keep Don Edmundo from gettin' robbed of the money paid over for this load of stock."

"Why?"

"So's he can finance drillin' a well on our location."

"Well, I guessed that. But there are too many catches in it."

"I figger I've got 'em pretty well coppered, Miss Francy. Suppose you run 'em through, and we'll check up."

"To start with, the cattle are not his, but his mother's."

"He must have squared that with the old lady, or he'd scarcely have sailed in to hold up the graft."

"Yes, and made himself an outlaw doing it: Hanging the three officers of this ship and then shooting the superintendent, and there's no telling how many others."

"He caught 'em in the act of running off his stock. A man's got a right to protect his dyin' mother's prop'ty."

"The overseer was legally authorized by her."

"Miss Francy, I'm bankin' on all the documentary proof bein' buried back there in that gourd. It was such a straight case of plunder that the old rat would never have dared put any copies on file, especially as he's been holdin' out the proceeds. He just needed these papers to get away with it."

"Well, of course the fact that he is dead may help quite a lot. But what if the Señora testifies that she had authorized him?"

"Then we lose. But I don't reckon the old lady is goin' to sell out her only son. I count on her havin' seen her mistake by this time. That's probably why Don Edmundo got so fatal."

"How do you know that he will back your oil game?"

"If he wants to buck it bad enough to take a chance on kidnapin' Van Beekman in the hope of interestin' him, he aint goin' to turn down a sure-thing bet."

"No," Francy said slowly, "especially when it's put up to him by a syndicate that can send him to jail at any time."

Ricky said slowly: "Let's strike that out of the cross-examination records, Miss Francy. It wasn't why I buried those papers."

"Well, why, then?"

"Because we've heard only Don Edmundo's side of it—what he told Van Beekman. We don't know yet for certain but what he may be no more'n an ornery crim'nal and killer."

"You seem to think of everything!"

"Well, I'm no blackmailer, but those papers might be handy later on if he should prove disappointin' about his business dealin's. If he shoots as straight in them as he does on the warpath, he's got nothin' to fear."

FRANCY laughed. "Not so dumb, Quarter—excuse me—Captain! But what makes you think that you can handle the cash paid for these cattle? Our fat little port captain hasn't come along entirely for the pleasure of the trip."

"Oh, I count on his puttin' up a holler. That little spiggoty has got one big surprise ahead of him. It may be a good one or a bad one, accordin' to how much sense he's got, which isn't a heap."

"Don't forget that we've got to go back after the cattle are unloaded and paid for, Ricky, and he's got the crew of the ship behind him, to say nothing of that crowd at La Bosta. Or do you plan to stay here until you can get in touch with Don Edmundo—if ever?"

"No, I count on startin' right back, Miss Francy."

A RAPPING came at the deck door. It was the port captain of La Bosta, and he entered burbling matutinal greetings to Francy. He had previously told her that he had learned English in his youth, when for some years he had held a position as clerk in an office of the United Fruit Companies. Like so many ignorant but natural linguists who are the envy and despair of scholars who lack that facility of tongue and ear for rhythm, he spoke volubly if faultily, and appeared to understand what was said with no difficulty.

"We come now alongside, *Capitán*," he said to Ricky, "and unload very queek. Thees man who buy the cow is on the dock. So you have no trouble, you can geeve the order and I get the money and sign receipts."

"Wait a minute, señor," Ricky said. "Have you heard anything about the yacht?"

"I hear plenty. It ees very funny. Your captain come ashore and make, what you say, a dam' beeg fuss. He say we are all brigand at La Bosta. Nobody believe him and he get very angry. At first they think he ees *borracio*, drunk, then they think he ees *loco*, crazy —he behave so wild. He ees like that at La Bosta."

Ricky understood. The anxiety and nervous tension had been too much for Captain Tibbetts. "What then, señor?"

"They send some *rurales*, police, aboard the yacht. The *teniente* spik English, and when he find there is something after all, they go to La Bosta to see what is about. So soon as we unload our cow and get pay, we go and report how it ees Don Edmundo make all zis troubles."

The ship was rubbing alongside the wharf. It would not take long to unload the cattle, as there were freight-ports fore and aft through which the bulk of them could be driven ashore on gangways. The drovers were waiting. It was evident that the draining of the great hacienda had become an efficiently conducted affair.

"All right, señor," Ricky said. "As soon as your man is ready to make the payment and get his receipt, let me know."

"But *Capitán*, I can arrange—"

"You can do nothin' of the sort, señor." Ricky took out his order. He had filled in the blank space left for the name of the captain of the steamer who was authorized to make the transaction, with his own. "You can't sign my name, can you? I am the responsible party here."

'But zees money, *Capitán*—"

"I'm responsible for that, too. Have you got any papers to show that you're authorized to deliver this bunch of cattle and receive payment and receipt for it? No? The man wouldn't take your receipt if he aint a fool. And where's your license to take charge of the money? I got mine. Signed by the Señora and her superintendent. What more d'ye want?"

THE pulpy little man grabbed at his head. "But Señor Da Silva, he leave me in charge. Of the cow, the ship—everyzing."

"What of it? You've done fine. Here's the ship and here's the cows, all fine and dandy. What more could he ask for?"

"Oh, damn! Ze money."

"What's his license to handle the money? Why should I turn over the money to you for you to turn over to Da Silva? What d'you think I am? A half-wit *muchacho?* I got my orders, and this paper to back me up. What has Da Silva got? What've you got?"

The port captain of La Bosta flung out his hands. "Zen who you pay zis money to?"

"To the owner of the hacienda. The owner of the cattle. The Señora."

"But she is dead!"

"What?"

"Si, señor. She die yesterday. . . . No. Ze day before."

"How do you know?"

"Da Silva tell me. When he chase Don Edmundo he meet some peons, some servant from the hacienda. They say she is dead, la Señora. For long time she been dyin'; now she is dead."

It was Ricky's turn to hold his head. What next?

This unusual story by the author of "Mile High" and "Sea Scamps" comes to a thrilling climax in the next, the June, issue.

"Astarte Sails to War" pictures the rise of the great Phœnician sea power in a vividly dramatic story.

SHIPS and MEN

By H. BEDFORD-JONES and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

IN even the best of weather, bizarre things can happen on Hollywood Boulevard. But given a foggy, misty night, you just never can tell. Here are some of the queerest people on earth, some of the most astonishing names and occupations ever gathered into one spot.

It was most devilish foggy on this evening, and I was cursing other drivers as I felt my slow and cautious way. I was far from the lights of Vine Street, and I was lost. That is, I had no idea just where I was, for every landmark was obliterated. Also my head was full of the odd story that had broken in the evening papers, about a Chinese woman who claimed lineal descent from "Chinese" Gordon, and who lived here. She was typical of the queer things that leak out from Hollywood's bypaths.

And then it happened, despite all my care and slow pace.

Something moved directly into my path. There was the flash of a white face, and then a quick shrill cry. I jammed on the brakes, tore open the door, and jumped out to extricate a man's figure, prostrate under the bumper. To my vast relief, he came to his feet.

"No, no, I guess I'm not hurt," he said. "I didn't see you coming. You didn't hit me; I slipped, trying to get out of the way. Good thing you stopped quick, though!"

Mindful of ambulance-chasers and damage-suits, I urged him into the car, offering to take him wherever he might be bound. He was clutching a bulky package, and after momentary protest, he climbed in.

"It's not far," he said; "I'm going to my workshop. Turn right next corner and go four blocks up the hill. Mighty decent of you to do this. You'd better come in with me, and we'll mix a hot toddy to keep out the cold."

"I could do with it," was my response. "What kind of a workshop is it?"

"Oh, I do models for studio sets," he said. "Right now we're working on ships for the naval spectacle that Colossal is doing. I come down evenings and lay out the work for my men to do next day."

"Are you the one who made St. Paul's Roman galley a two-master?" I asked with deep guile.

He emitted a snort. "Huh! Not likely. Just because a bunch of landlubbers translated a word wrong, I wouldn't put a mainsail where a spritsail should be. That's like the French word *misaine*—it means *foresail* or *foremast;* but most of these birds call it the 'mizzen' and think they've done something good. . . . Well, here we are: where the light's burning."

The man interested me by this time.

WE turned into a drive, left the car, and presently I found myself in an amazing room. My host (so nearly my victim) was a thin, wide-shouldered man of perhaps forty, a very pleasant fellow who gave his name as Keble.

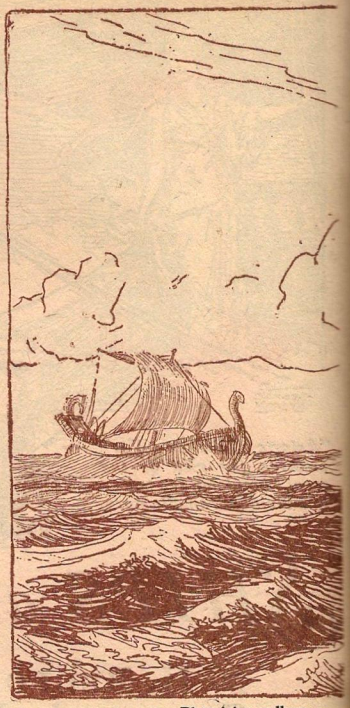
Around the place were miniature models of anything and everything, from the White House to a Chinese junk. Most of them dealt with ships, of every kind. As Keble said, the movie method of wrecking a miniature ship had given him a constant job, and he had built up a very good business. What was more, most of his ships were fitted with miniature figures, lifelike and beautifully made.

Keble mixed a hot drink, which was gratefully received, and then opened up the bulky parcel he had been carrying.

"You almost gummed up the works," he said with a smile, as he exposed the model of a long-decked ship with one mast. "This is Astarte's ship, one of the most important steps in the history of naval construction; and if you'd wiped out the lady and her Phœnician ship together, it'd have been a tragedy!"

"Phœnician?" I said, examining the model and the tiny figures aboard it. "But those ships had a ram in the bow—"

"Oh, you're thinking of the big Tyrian traders of a thousand years later," he broke in. "The ships that voyaged to the



Phœnician galleys—

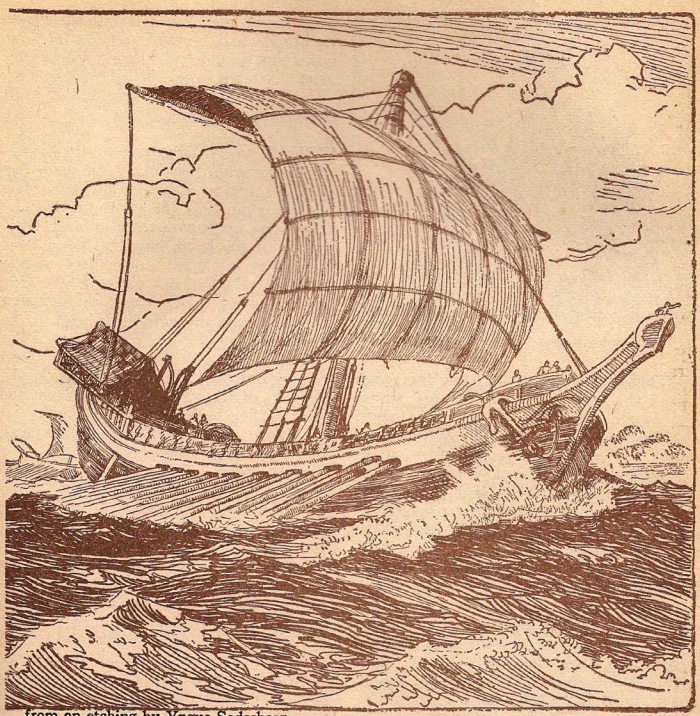
Tin Islands and out into the Atlantic! This is the vessel of the great Phœnician migration from the Persian Gulf, up through the Red Sea, and on across to the shores of Palestine."

"Where Astarte was certainly a goddess," I said.

"Sure. But these Phœnicians came from Assyria, and carried Assyrian gods along; then their great heroes became gods—people like Astarte and Melkarth. Maybe it would interest you to read the working script of this thing. It has a good deal of the dialogue in, too, and shows what this one studio is trying to do in their pictures."

He refilled the glasses, and handed me a bulky script.

With a grimace, I turned over the pages carelessly, until my eye was caught by a phrase, then by a scene. If you have witnessed that remarkable picture, which I believe was released sometime



from an etching by Yngve Soderberg.

since, you'll remember the scene: It was after the migrating host of the Phœnicians had got well on their way and had halted before reaching the Red Sea; the scene where the spies came in, the spies who had been sent a year ahead. You remember, no doubt, how the two ships bearing the spies came in among the fleet of the Phœnicians, and were brought up to the armed camp and received by the lordly old prophet Melkarth.

Here for months the migrating host had been camped, awaiting this news, repairing their old ships, building new ones. It was an impressive scene, as the old prophet and his daughter Astarte, who were rulers of this people, heard the stories of what lay ahead, while the throngs massed around their tent and the flare of countless torches picked up the sea of faces with keen highlights.

The first spy had come the longest way.

"Lord," he said, after saluting the prophet, "as you saw in a dream before I departed, so was the truth. I went to the end of the Red Sea, then by lakes across a desert land to a farther and greater sea. And there I came to the place revealed to you, the place called Sidon. It is a large island close to the coast and easily defended; some of our people are settled there now, and will welcome the host."

"Will it contain these thousands?" Melkarth gestured toward the throng.

"Easily, lord, and as many again. There is no lack of good water. From what I gathered by talk with Egyptians, a mighty city in this place would control the whole commerce of this farther sea. Our people already there say that these lands are not deserts, such as the lands hereabouts, but very fertile and thickly peopled. I have brought maps and all directions."

"We must begone," she said abruptly.

This report was good, but less good were the others. The Egyptians, whose ships controlled the Red Sea, had heard of this migratory wave approaching from the east, and were determined to halt it. They slew Phœnicians without mercy, wherever found. They had built many ships to stop the seaward passage. At this, Astarte spoke up and questioned the man.

"Ships of the same kind, or of new kinds?"

"Lady, there is but one kind of ship," said the man, wondering. He did not know what had been transpiring, here in the camp, since he had been long gone. "The same ships the Egyptians always use, and that we use."

Astarte, smiling a little, drew back behind the seat of her father Melkarth. She was a tall and stately woman, still very young, and of such beauty that men's hearts burned in them to look upon her; but she looked twice at none of them.

Here in the host of her people lay her heart. Men voyaging afar had brought back word of that farther sea beyond the sunset, a blue and lovely sea with islands and fertile lands, and freedom. So, by her doing, the prophet Melkarth had aroused his folk to escape from the Assyrian lash, to follow the sea which they knew and loved, to seek past Egypt for this farther sea and the mighty potential commerce it would afford. Old was Melkarth, indeed, but mighty in brain and in thew still, though guided largely by this beautiful young daughter of his, and by her vision.

This vision was one for all the Phœnician race, a vision of freedom and greatness; in it her whole heart and soul were bound up. And of this host, whose thousands had been picked for the first wave that would end in conquest or disaster, Astarte was the chosen leader. The captains obeyed her as they did Melkarth her father.

THAT same night one of these captains sought her out, as she made her nightly round to make certain the guards on the camp and the shore, where the ships were updrawn, were vigilant. Ithobal, he of the hawk nose and fierce bold eyes, was mightiest and oldest of the captains, though not yet forty. This was a young men's war; the prophet Melkarth was the only gray head in the entire host.

Ithobal joined Astarte as she stood looking out over the sea, and they spoke together of the various reports from the spies. Then he laughed softly.

"You're a shrewd woman, Astarte. You know that I love you?"

"What of it?" she replied. "I love no one."

"But you do—this host. I've watched your methods," Ithobal said quietly. "I know how for years you've talked with captains and pilots and strangers, how this dream of leading our people to a new free home has taken hold of you. I know how you've worked on your father, inspiring his visions and prophecies. I know how you talked with that wanderer who had been to the farther sea, and how his stories inspired your father's prophecy of a place called Sidon—"

"Be careful, Ithobal!" she struck in, menace in her throat.

Ithobal laughed again.

"Nonsense! I say, you're shrewd, and you're great! Your heart is bound up with our people and their migration. But now we're heading straight to destruction. The Egyptians will show no mercy. We have families, flocks, herds, goods, stores of food and water, loaded aboard our ships. Their fighting-ships will destroy us. And this notion you have of building new ships—well, it's no go. I've been looking at these new ships of yours."

"And what?" she demanded, as he paused.

"Death-traps for honest seamen. One of those solid Egyptian ships can smash 'em like paper," he said bluntly. "The first reverse will mean trouble for you. Already there's some talk about a man being needed to command this fleet, in case anything happens to Melkarth."

She laughed softly.

"I'm building twelve ships, Ithobal; and they're nearly done," said she. "And as you say, I've caused this migration of our people. When this host of ours has settled securely at Sidon, others of our people will come flocking, until we occupy all those coasts on the farther sea. These twelve ships of mine will be like this one chosen host—merely a beginning. I am busy with such things; and your petty brain is busy with desire for marriage. You can dream of nothing else."

Ithobal stifled an oath. "So you're dealing with great things, eh? And what about that yellow-haired Greek halfbreed you've made a ship-captain—that fellow Hiram? He's building your new ships; why? He's becoming a great man among us; why? Perhaps because he has a way with the women, eh? Even with a prophet's daughter."

"Poor Ithobal!" she said mockingly. "You think you can goad me to anger? Not a bit of it. You're a valuable man, a splendid captain; we need you. In fact, I'm making the morning to break camp and sail on into the Red Sea. But I'm not marrying you."

"Who knows?" he said, passion hoarse in his throat. "You may do worse than that, Astarte, ere you do better. By the god Bel, I'm going to have you for my wife if I must wreck the whole enterprise to get you!"

Her laughter mocked him again. "What? With two wives at home? No, no, Ithobal! Go and get your orders ready. The fleet breaks camp and sails in three days, and you command it. Get scout-ships out at dawn to cruise ahead. And we take no flocks and herds with us. We slaughter them before sailing."

She was gone, leaving him standing there in shocked amazement and dismay. Slaughter the flocks and herds? Why, the people would rebel at the very thought!

But they did not.

NOW, Astarte dealt thus with Ithobal by reason of her shrewdness and deep guile in all matters. She knew well that if she flew into anger against him, a large part of the host would acclaim him as leader, and she might be forced into marriage. This she did not want; therefore she made him leader of the whole host, loaded responsibility and trouble on his shoulders, and gave him hot and fast work to do. Also, she was looking ahead to the meeting with the Egyptians.

The captains took oaths to serve her.

To break camp and get all those two hundred ships loaded and off in three days, after camping here for long months, was a man's job. Ithobal managed it, working day and night at the task. The sheep and cattle and camels were slaughtered here, as the prophet Melkarth commanded; there were sacrifices to Bel the god; the ships were put into the water; and by the fourth morning the whole fleet was off into the Red Sea—all save Astarte and those who remained here with her.

Chief of them was Hiram, the half-Greek captain who was building her new ships. These were nearly finished; with them stayed their crews.

A strange man, this Hiram. Young, yellow of hair and blue of eyes, filled with a wild vital energy, a flaming eagerness. From the start he had grasped her idea in building these ships; and he had carried on the work with a fierce and unflagging enthusiasm that accomplished wonders.

Melkarth had gone with the host. Astarte, in the late morning, left her tent and came down to the shore, where the work was going forward, a scant fifteen hundred men left laboring, the crews of these twelve ships. They differed from all the other ships, which were of the standard model borrowed from the Egyptian. Most of them were already in the water and being rigged.

"The last two will be launched today!" cried Hiram, when Astarte came to where he directed the labor. Stripped to the waist, darkly bronzed by the Arabian sun, he was of a different type from these other red-skinned men—their very

name, indeed, came from their reddened skins. His blue eyes smote her like a sword of steel.

"Look, Astarte!" He swept one hand out at the floating craft. "Provisions and ballast going in; and tonight the new sails and rigging. And all your idea!"

"But your work," said she gently. Suddenly, as she met his gaze, the words of Ithobal returned to her mind. A trace of color mounted into her cheeks; her eyes warmed. Then she went on, more coldly than usual, as though to deny any personal feeling. "Have you tried the new sail?"

"No," said Hiram. "Too cursed busy, Lady Astarte. If we get these two last ships into the water today, we'll have to sweat blood; but we'll do it. And before sunset, if you like, we can try out one of the finished craft."

She nodded and passed on, to superintend the work of rigging the launched ships. For this rigging was her own idea.

Not hers alone, however. Many a long night had she spent in talk with grizzled sea-captains, listening to theories of rigging and oar-banks and hulls. And once, up the Tigris, she had experimented with just such a new type of sail on a small boat, and had found it worked admirably. Yet no one had listened to her. Only now, with the host on the move, was she free to do as she desired; the captains, men like Ithobal, were too busy with their own affairs to gainsay her wishes and her experiments.

Yet now and again, as she ordered the men who stepped masts and sent up the long yards, she turned and sent thoughtful glances at the yellow-haired man directing the work ashore. Something stirred within her. What a living flame he was! And in him was none of Ithobal's fierce guile. He was all seaman, all frank and open, able to do the work of ten; and the men, she noted, served him gladly, willingly.

ABRUPTLY it came to her how she had all along depended on this man Hiram, how he had encouraged and fed her dreams, how he had whipped them into substance and form. Until now, she had not realized his weight. She saw him for the first time as a personality, as a man; and the sight was startling.

Shielded by a canvas canopy from the white-hot sun, Astarte remained all day at the work, changing and correcting a hundred minor details. These vessels, hastily built, constructed out of old and worn-out ships, would serve the need; but some day, she thought, and the vision kindled in her brain, she would build entirely new ships, incorporating still further advances. Some day, when that far unknown land was won, and the town of Sidon became a city!

TWELVE ships here, ten captains, with Hiram and herself. When the sun verged toward the west, she called the ten and they went aboard the ship she had chosen for her own. A hundred men flocked aboard to handle ropes and oars. Hiram came, fresh-bathed and vigorous as though he had not labored since daybreak, and they drove out the ship, oars aflash. There was a light wind, so that presently the sail was loosed, and then the captains gasped.

All other ships they knew used the cumbersome Egyptian oblong sail with its enormous boom, curved up at the ends like the horns of an ox, and its spread of topping lifts. Here was no boom. Here was a yard, which could be swung, and a huge square sail that brailed upward to the yard when not in use. The sail could be handled with the yard, so that when it was braced aslant, the ship would head half into the wind's eye, which other ships would not do.

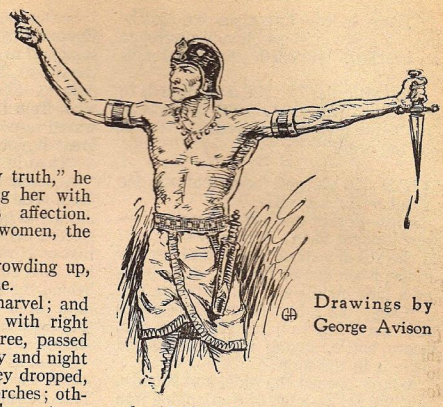
And how she tore through the water! Men stood stoutly at the two steering-oars,—one to either side the stern,—immense oars whose butts reached up ten feet above the deck, then came down in a forked prong, by which they could be manipulated easily. Under oars alone the ship was a marvel of speed and handling. When it was headed back, Hiram came into the high stern where Astarte stood.

"You've won, you've won the world!" he said with a rush of words. "It's past belief, Astarte! There's speed in length, as you argued. This long, shallow hull lifts easily, and answers to the oars or sail like a witch. Its very lightness is an aid, too. Marvelous! But if one of those heavy Egyptian craft ever smashes into us!"

"I don't intend that one shall," she replied, smiling.

"Then warn the captains well," said Hiram. "I was in some doubt about this new thin planking, nailed on instead of being heavily pegged to solid braces; but it certainly answers!"

He looked at the ship; then he turned and looked at her for a long moment.



"Lady!" said the messenger. "The captain Hiram was just now found in his tent. He had been stabbed, in the night, and is dead."

Drawings by George Avison

"You're a goddess in very truth," he said, his blue eyes regarding her with admiration and impetuous affection. "The most beautiful of all women, the wisest, the most wonderful!"

Then the captains came crowding up, and they were no longer alone.

These men had beheld a marvel; and seamen all, they took hold with right eager hearts. Two days, three, passed by, an inferno of labor by day and night shifts. Men worked until they dropped, under hot sun or by flaring torches; others took their place; the task went on.

Astarte, meanwhile, drilled her captains, seeing clearly that success or failure hung upon the handling of these ships. She devoted every spare moment to this; and the captains gained but little sleep, being responsible to her for the outfitting as well. The high bulwarks had to be fitted with shield-racks so that shields could be hung along the rails. Weapons and provisions had to be stowed. The tackle had to be adjusted, and men trained to the ropes. The hides of the slaughtered cattle had to be stretched along the upper sides of the ships and heavily greased. Signals had to be arranged and studied. The details were endless.

Then, suddenly, everything broke with a rush. One of the small dispatch-boats came tearing back from the fleet under all oars. The whole Egyptian force had been sighted—full fifty and more fighting-ships. Ithobal, halting the host, had made a four-day truce with them. It would expire before Astarte could possibly catch up with Ithobal.

She questioned the messengers there on the shore, while her captains listened.

"Did he do as I commanded—did he move all the women and families and bulky loads aboard half the ships, to leave the others free for fighting?"

"No, lady," replied the skipper of the dispatch-boat. "He ordered the women to arm with the men: if it came to fighting, all hands would thus do better."

"Fool, *fool!*" she cried out, in a white heat of anger. "In those crowded ships the Egyptians will raven like wolves in a sheepfold! Aboard, aboard, everyone! Blow the trumpets! Captains, remember the signals. To the ships!"

Trumpets sounded; cymbals clanged. Within half an hour the ships were moving out, following the lead of Astarte. And how they moved! There was a light following wind that filled the sails; but with a hundred and fifty men to each ship, the oars were manned likewise, with no lack of fresh shifts to take the ash from weary hands. In an hour's time the fast dispatch-boat, which had started with them, was hull-down astern. Such speed was a revelation.

The northeast monsoon was blowing, and the tremendous currents of water flowing into the Red Sea were on full force, greatly increasing their speed. With veteran pilots who knew all the far-flung coral reefs, Astarte had no fear of hidden dangers. When darkness drew down, instead of landing for the night as was the invariable rule, she drove on into the north.

MORNING dawned, and wore on until noon. The pilots stood incredulous; three days' sailing, they said, had already been covered. Astarte, on the high platform in the stern, suddenly leaped erect. Sails on the horizon! A trumpet from Hiram's ship confirmed the fact. The fleets were in sight!

A dispatch-boat came toiling down the sea, oars aflash in the sunlight. Astarte ran alongside and heard the news shouted out. It was enough to blanch her cheeks and make the men look at one another, aghast.

"Truce ended—Egyptians are attacking. A score of ships already destroyed or beached. Melkarth the prophet is dead—"

Melkarth dead! Astarte turned to her sailing-master. "Unfurl the canvas. Out oars—give way, together! Break out the arms."

THE ship plunged forward afresh, the others in her wake.

Arms—spears and arrows, no more—were brought forth. Armor was donned; in the stern, Astarte stood awaiting her armor, when one of the men came bearing a hide bundle and laid it before her.

"Lady," he said, "Hiram the captain bade me bring you this gift from him, before battle, saying that himself had made it in the forge."

Astarte opened the hide, and found a light but strong shirt of overlapping iron plates, each one curiously worked and highly polished; and with this, a glorious mantle dyed in the royal scarlet such as the Assyrian kings wore, a scarlet dye taken from shellfish in a secret manner. Then she remembered that Hiram was a cunning worker in metals; and that he had once told her he, and he alone, knew the secret of this shellfish dye. She put on the mail-coat, and over it the scarlet mantle, so that all her men let rise a wild shout of *admiration* and delight. Two men leaped up with their shields to guard her, and the ship drove on with foam under its forefoot.

But now all the battle lay outspread ahead, ships seeming to cover the whole sea and it was a bitter sight to Phœnician eyes. To the right lay the Arabian coast, mountains running up into the sky from a short reach of shore. All the host had broken and scattered. Some part of the ships had run ashore for shelter; others were huddled in groups; and like wolves indeed, the Egyptian ships ravaged among them.

Crowded, hampered by families and goods, the Phœnicians could neither fight nor run. The Egyptian ships smashed in among them and poured forth hordes of warriors who slew to repletion. Many and many a ship floated idly, red with blood; and seeing this, Astarte motioned to her trumpeters and told them what signal to give.

The brazen notes sounded. They were repeated and passed on from Hiram's ship, which lay close, and so to the others. Hearing the signal, the twelve vessels sheered off and broke into pairs.

Seeing these newcomers, certain of the Egyptian ships headed out from the slaughter to meet them. One, larger than the others, bore straight for the ship of Astarte. She waved her arm at Hiram, who, from his own high stern platform, waved response. The two headed for the great Egyptian.

"Take in sail!" shouted Astarte.

A dozen men clambered aloft to the yard. The sail was brailed up. The oars flashed to quicker stroke. The Egyptian steered between the ship of Astarte and that of Hiram; rather, they rushed upon her from either side, their men sheltered behind the shield-wall. Close and closer, until from the massed throngs aboard the Egyptian came arrows and stones, and the air was filled with death.

Then, as the Egyptian was all but between the two, Astarte gave the word. The bowmen leaped up. Into those massed warriors poured hail upon hail of shafts, from either side, as the two Phœnicians ran her length. They left her half crippled, her oars all in disorder, for the next two ships to finish; and, themselves scarce hurt, darted upon the next Egyptian.

Ship after ship of those wolves was disabled and left for other Phœnicians to grapple and clear. In vain did the Egyptians try to avoid the flashing stroke of those fast, new ships; they were too heavy and *clumsy*. *In* vain did they rain spears and arrows; they themselves were exposed and helpless, but Astarte's men had the shield-wall along either side for protection, and vast quantities of arrows.

They tried to ram. One succeeded, and the Phœnician was smashed like an eggshell; but one alone. The others maneuvered clear, and stayed clear, struck their deadly blow and flashed on. It was a new system of fighting, due wholly to the ships which carried it out; and now Ithobal burst forth from the fugitive huddle, and with what craft he could hastily muster, fell upon the rear of the Egyptians.

NO mercy was there, for Astarte dared risk no second encounter. When the Egyptians turned and fled, she was after them. More of their ships fell back, crippled, to be laid aboard by Ithobal and swept bare. Out of all their mighty fleet, scarce a dozen ships won clear across the horizon that night.

But Astarte came back to her people, where the host was drawn up on shore, and to the funeral pyre of the prophet Melkarth. And with her came Hiram.

It was a night of mourning, of flaming torches, of vast booty, of Egyptian ships captured and brought in. All these things Astarte left to her captains and remained secluded with her dead father, until he and the other dead were burned on the long pyres at sunrise.

Then, with her armor laid off, but still wearing that glorious cloak of royal scarlet, she called her captains together. All the people hailed her as their leader, in place of her father; but she passed into the council of the captains, and laid before them strips of parchment on which were drawn lines and markings.

"We must embark and begone," she said abruptly. "Now is the time, before the Egyptians can gather armies and fresh ships to stop us. Look! Here are maps, showing our course, which the pilots have prepared with me. We go to the head of this Red Sea, and on through salt lakes until the ships can go on no farther. Then we take these new ships of mine, which are light; they can be hauled across the sand on rollers until we reach the farther sea. The host must trudge afoot."

HEARING this, the captains burst into wild acclaim, and took oaths to serve her as they had served Melkarth the prophet. Lists of the dead, of the captives, of the plunder, were brought forward, but Astarte suddenly interrupted, her eyes gazing about the huge tent:

"I ordered all the captains to assemble. They are not all here. Where is Hiram?"

One looked at another; but Ithobal smiled darkly, and Astarte noted the smile, fleeting as it was. Men went to seek, and presently one came running, with a knife that was all red with blood. Pale as death, Astarte listened.

"Lady! The captain Hiram came ashore last night and was working at the Egyptian ships, clearing them of dead. He was just now found in his tent. He had been stabbed, in the night, and is dead."

Astarte took the knife—then dropped it suddenly so that it fell, and looked at the blood on her fingers. Then her eyes lifted, and met the gaze of Ithobal.

"Your doing, Ithobal!" she said in slow, still voice. "This is a knife that my father gave you before we left Assyria. You dare not lie!"

"Neither dare nor would," and Ithobal stepped out boldly. "Aye, lady, I slew him. And now listen to me, Astarte! I am not alone—"

Had she let him speak his will, matters would have been different, for he was deep in guile and had a multitude of the host to back his purposes. But none of his friends were here among the captains in the tent.

Swift as light, Astarte caught a spear from the ground and flung it, and the spear smote Ithobal where neck and arm come together; and he lay dead. She lifted her arms to the stupefied captains.

"You, who took oath to me! Am I your leader or not?"

"*You,* Astarte!" they cried, giving tongue swiftly. "*You,* Astarte!"

"Then depart and say that I have slain Ithobal, and tell why. And if there are any who like it not, seize them and bring them before me."

They looked upon her in her anguished wrath, and departed hastily to do her will. And as they went, another messenger came stumbling, panting out his swift words to her.

"Lady! He—Hiram—is not dead, as they thought—"

Then might have been seen a strange sight. Through the vast tumult of the camp a woman running, heedless and blazing-eyed, white-lipped, intent upon one sole aim—a woman after whom all stared in wild, startled recognition, a woman careless of the pealing shouts lifting her name from all quarters of the host. . . .

That was all.

I TOOK a deep breath and laid down the script, and met the quick eyes of my host. He read my expression and laughed softly.

"What an ending to it—eh? Suggests everything, leaves everything unsaid; yes, I like that ending! It sends you away with an upthrust, a lift. It's great! But I suppose some sap will put another end to it and show her holding the wounded Hiram in her arms for a fade-out."

Which, if you recall the picture, is exactly what some sap did. But nothing could spoil the vision of that woman, who became the hero-goddess of a people after her city of Sidon waxed great—Astarte!

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships, . . . And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" The next story of this brilliant series of "Ships and Men" (in our forthcoming June issue) introduces Helen of Troy herself.

The Heat of the

By
RICHARD WORMSER

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

Joe swung the sap and said: "What was it you wanted to know, Chief?"

THIS egg across the table struck me as probably the ugliest man I had ever seen. I said: "There are just two things wrong with your proposition: In the first place, five grand is too much for one week's work. In the second place, I want to die in bed when I do die. I'm in no hurry to celebrate the event."

He blinked his little brown eyes, and attempted a smile that added nothing to his looks. He told me: "There's nothing dangerous about the proposition."

"You can hire a messenger-boy, in that case, for a lot less than five thousand. So long!"

I got up and walked down the restaurant. I had gone to lunch with him. But it sounded too easy. People expect you to work for any five grand they give you.

Almost to the door of the restaurant were two city dicks, just finishing their lunch. They might have been there by coincidence, but the place was too expensive for me to use much. They were rolling dice for the check. I leaned over their table, picked up the check—which said four eighty-five—and said: "I'll pay it if I can't roll six." That was giving them six to five, but it was worth it to pump them.

The detective I knew best, Harry Denuth, looked at the other one, John Something-or-other, and nodded. "Five dollars against the check."

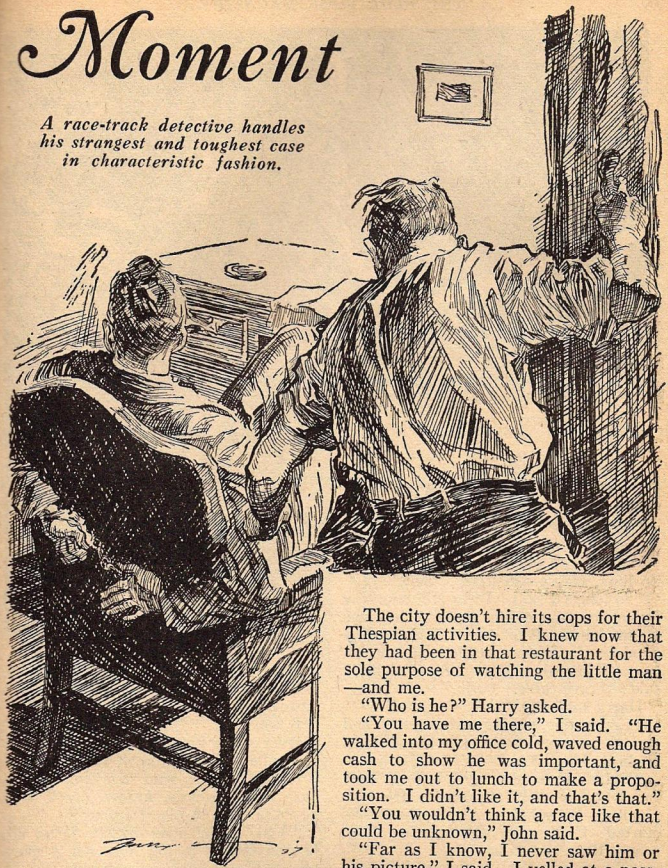
I grinned, because that evened the odds again, and rolled. The first die spun quickly, and subsided with a four showing; the other kept on turning for a second, and I said quickly: "Five to two I make it."

Harry yelled: "Taken." The die came up three.

I peeled ten bucks off my roll, and fluttered it to the table. I had lost, but that was just as well; now they had to ask me to sit down and have a beer. They did, and I did; with the foam

Moment

A race-track detective handles his strangest and toughest case in characteristic fashion.



still wet on my lip, I said: "You boys here on duty or pleasure?"

They looked at each other again, and then Harry said: "You got plenty of publicity this summer, Van. You ought to do well through the winter." I am chief cop of the Racing Commission during the season, and run a private agency through the year.

"So-so," I said. I was frankness itself. "As a matter of fact, the kind of publicity I get doesn't bring the kind of clients I like. Did you notice that little wart I was eating with?"

The city doesn't hire its cops for their Thespian activities. I knew now that they had been in that restaurant for the sole purpose of watching the little man —and me.

"Who is he?" Harry asked.

"You have me there," I said. "He walked into my office cold, waved enough cash to show he was important, and took me out to lunch to make a proposition. I didn't like it, and that's that."

"You wouldn't think a face like that could be unknown," John said.

"Far as I know, I never saw him or his picture," I said. I yelled at a passing bus-boy. He came over, carrying one of these three-partitioned trays. I said: "Harry, five bucks there's an odd number of knives in that tray." I was trying to delay the conversation enough to get them restive. That way they might pop out with some info' about the little man who was so free with his five-grand offers.

Harry twitched in his seat. "All right," he said indifferently. "You're the loser so far."

We sat there counting those silly knives while the little brown man got up

I saw a toothless face, and socked it.

and went by us. He stopped and said: "I'll call your office around five."

Once again I saw that look flash between the cops. The little man got out, and John said clumsily: "I have to run. So long, Harry—so long, Chief."

"So long," I said. I was still counting knives, but out of the corner of my eye I saw John trail off past the plate-glass window, shadowing my little brown fellow. When they were out of sight, I said: "Forty-three. I win."

Harry said: "O.K."

I gave the bus-boy a quarter, and picked up one of the five-dollar bills. "A beer, Harry?"

"No. You have one. I have to wait for a phone-call, anyway." He was about to be subtle; after a minute he started: "So you're only getting N.G. propositions these days?"

"Oh, now. We do some business. We get a big play from employers who want us to find out if their employees are gambling."

Harry laughed, and said: "You're a fine one to come to, for that."

A waiter came up, and bent over Harry solicitously. The cop got up, and hurried to a phone-booth. When he came back, I said: "Where did John say my little brown man holed up?"

Harry looked surprised, and then sheepish. Finally he said: "In an apartment-house on the North Side."

I didn't ask for the address. I said: "You wouldn't like to tell me the name?"

Harry said: "You know who he is. But if you want to be kittenish, it's Giuseppi Lamba."

I whistled. "So that's who he is! I never saw a picture of him, that I can remember. The King of the Fences!"

"Yeah," Harry said, reaching for his hat. "The richest known crook who never saw the inside of a pen'."

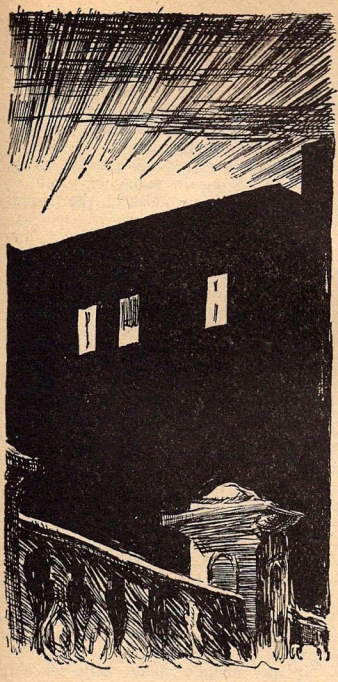
"Well," I defended myself, "after all, he's neither a racing man nor a gambler. They're the only people I'd be sure to know."

"That's right," Harry said. At the door, he added clumsily: "Good thing you didn't tie in with him. Er—just what was it he wanted?"

"You don't really think I'd tell you, Harry?"

"No, I didn't," he said sadly. He went on out, still looking sad.

I GOT up, and strolled down to the Palace Bar. Joe Lavery, my head assistant, was waiting in a booth there, studying form sheets. I sat down, and he said: "Who d'ya like in the fourth?"



"I don't like anybody at the winter tracks; but off-hand, Dandelion is about eighteen per cent better than any other pony in the race." I had two hundred on him.

Joe said: "O.K.," and signaled to Mike the Guinzer, at the end of the bar. The bookie came over, and Joe handed him ten bucks. "Dandelion across the board, Mike."

Mike made a note. I said: "Mike, did you know Seppi Lamba was in town?"

"Naw! What's he doin' here? I remember, the time he was on trial, I followed—"

I didn't listen. When Mike went away, Joe said: "Elizabeth said a horrid-lookin' little egg was in waving five grand. Was that Lamba?"

"Yeah."

"Want you to straighten a rap?"

"No," I said; and for the first time put his proposition in words to a third party. "All he wants me to do is go South with him and lay a lot of money as his agent on the Border Derby. He claims he has inside info', and could clean up, only he wants me to come along as a guaranty the bookies pay up. Says my reputation'd attend to that."

"Golly," Joe said, "that's an easy way to make five thousand."

"Too easy," I told him. "I turned him down."

"You're a sucker," Joe said.

"I'm a live sucker, anyway," I pointed out. "Joe, take the South Side, and nose around. I'll take the North. See if you can get any idea of why Lamba is here. I don't believe a word he says. And the city cops trailed him to an apartment, not a hotel. That means something—find out what."

"O.K., Chief. How long do I stay with it?"

"Till five. Meet me at the office then."

I started out. I talked to every bookie and stool-pigeon I knew on the North Side, and all I got was a pair of aching feet, and the stench of stale cigarette smoke on my clothes.

WHEN I got back to my office at about five-forty-five, Elizabeth, my secretary, was sitting in the outer office, and as always that tickled me just a little; she looked so out of place in a dick's plant. I said: "Hiya, Betty!"

She said: "My name is Elizabeth. You're to call North 9432."

"Any business while I was out?"

"Mr. Hiram Podaqualos of the Low Hi markets wanted to know was his cashier honest. She isn't; she's lost two hundred dollars with Japh Cohen in the last week."

"You know my methods, *Watson.* Send Mr. Low Hi the info', with a bill for fifty." I went into my own office, slipped off my shoes, and was reaching for the phone when it rang. Elizabeth said: "Here's the number you were supposed to call." I said: "Hello, this is G. T. Van Eyck. You call my office?"

A guttural voice said: "Yeah. I'm callin' for a friend. I don't know no more than I'm tellin' you: if you throw in with Lamba, you get the works. On account of my friend knows you don't scare easy, he'll put five hundred in your lap tomorrow."

I said: "Thanks. If you tell me who this is calling, it'll save the bother of tracing the call."

"I'm calling from a pool-room on the Nort' Side. Only I'll be out of here before you could get here. I'm just a transient, see?"

"I see." I rang off and chewed my lip. If this were three years ago, or some other city, it would look like the beginning of a gang war. But there was nothing like that in our town, no organized gangs—not the kind that could put out good cash for a whim, anyway.

Joe Lavery came in, and looked at my stocking-feet. "Me too, Van," he said, slipping his shoes. "I got nothing for you. The name gets just as much interest as any other tabloid hero."

"Yeah?"

Joe nodded. "I'm shot," he said moodily. "I'm getting too old to walk all over half a city in a day. Say, would Harry Denuth be on this thing?"

I sat up and stopped rubbing my feet. "He would. He trailed me when I went to lunch with Lamba. Why?"

"I saw his cruiser parked in front of a Chink laundry on South Park Boulevard, in the 1700 block. He was no place in sight; but when that John Edgelite that trails with him saw me, he streaked into the laundry and hunched over the counter so I wouldn't see him."

"I figured Lamba was on the South Side," I said, "because Denuth told me he was on the North."

THEN Elizabeth flashed the buzzer, and I had to dive for my shoes. Joe got out in his stocking-feet, carrying his shoes in his hands; I pulled the switch on the dictagraph for all hands to listen in, and then released the buzzer. The door opened, and Mr. Lamba entered.

He opened with: "You've changed your mind, Mr. Van Eyck?"

I said: "No. I still don't do things I don't understand."

"But I have been more than precise with you, Mr. Van Eyck. I wish to place a good deal of money on this outsider horse, Pomonok, in the Border Derby next week. I do not wish to have it known that I am putting the money down, lest the odds be disturbed. Therefore I must use an agent, a commissionaire. You are the ideal person for the job, because you are known to be a wild gambler, and your placing a thousand dollars on the nose of a long shot would not be considered unusual. Also, because no one in racing or gambling circles would dare welsh on the famous Chief Van Eyck."

"And by the same token," I said, "everything I do is gossiped about on the tracks. I may be a wild gambler, but I'm lucky. Also, I'm considered amusing, good news. All the people I bet with would talk about it. It would soon be apparent that I was laying down more dough than I could possibly have."

"That is my risk. The sum to be bet is fifty thousand dollars. I stand to win a million, at twenty to one."

"No sir," I said. "Not I. Sorry, old man; come back when you have something else to sell."

"But why, Mr. Van Eyck? Surely you could use five thousand dollars for—"

"Because you're lying, of course," I said. "And get out. I don't like fences!"

He slammed the door so hard that the glass nearly broke. Joe said through the office phone: "There goes five grand."

Through the same open switch, Elizabeth said: "And here go I. It's nearly six."

"How about supper with me?" I asked.

"I'm going out with a man who still has his figure," she said. Her switch snapped shut.

"Come out to the house with me," Joe said. "The Frau's having chicken and dumplings."

"O.K.," I said. "I'll be at the hotel in twenty minutes, Joe. I want to wash up and change my shirt." An afternoon of leaning against cigar-cases in pool-rooms had made me want a bath.

But halfway to the hotel I remembered that when I dressed that morning, I had put on my last shirt. I looked at the calendar, and it was Thursday, which meant that my fresh wash wouldn't be over from the Chinaman's till morning. So I parked the car, and walked up a side-street to Harry Leong's, who has done my washing for five years. . . .

It's luck that makes a good dick; I wouldn't hire an operative who wasn't a successful gambler. Here came a piece of Van Eyck luck, call it good or bad.

Because when I reached for the doorknob of Leong's laundry, a man sidled out of the shadows, and something hard bored into my left kidney. This mugg said: "We told you to lay off Lamba, Chief. Why commit suicide?"

I stood perfectly still, even leaning back against the gun a little, and said: "Who are you, the inquiring reporter?"

"You can't name what difference that makes, Chief," he said respectfully, "on account of, it's the gun that's calling the turn." The respect proved he was a local boy or a race-track one. My reputation is confined to those spheres.

I FOUND that when I moved my hips a little, the muzzle moved with them. So I started to say something like, "It's too bad—" or, "Why didn't you—" and made a complete turn, coming around to face him, and leaning against the gat till I was halfway around.

The gun was naturally thrown to one side, and the bullet even missed my coat-flap.

I saw a somewhat toothless face, and socked it on a chin whose stubble burnt my knuckles. The gun made a clattering noise some place in the dusk, and the mugg made a thudding one as he hit at my feet. I leaned down, rapped his head against the pavement, hit his chin again for luck, and then went over him for further weapons. There were none.

I skinned my hand worse in feeling around on the dirty paving for his gun, got it, and put it in my pocket. Then I held him up by his armpits, and used his grayish handkerchief to clean some blood from the corner of his mouth. Afterward I walked him back to my car, and left him handcuffed to the door-handle on the right side.

Then I wiped my knuckles on my own handkerchief, and went back to the laundry. Leong was behind the counter, and in the back room I could see his wife giving supper to their four children; a perfect picture of Oriental domesticity, if you'll pardon the language.

I said: "How're things going, Harry?"

"Pletty good, Chief. Hokay."

I made it sound like a joke. "Well, if you ever need a private detective, Harry, remember I'm your friend."

He took it like a joke. "That's light. Yessuh, I lemember." So I paid for my shirts and went back to the car. Alphonse Awfulface was just coming to. "You didn't have to hit me so hard, Chief," he complained.

"I wouldn't have had to hit you at all, pal, if you hadn't tried to hold me up." I didn't ask him any questions, but drove around to the street behind my apartment hotel. It's a nice building, with the garage in the cellar; I drove down the ramp.

"Get the freight elevator down here," I told the garage man. When it came, I unhitched Alphonse and took him up the back way to my room. No one saw us come up.

"O.K., pal, start talking," I said to Alphonse. "What's the idea?"

"Well, cheest, Chief, I hadn't had anything to eat in a couple of days, an' you looked like you had money, an'—"

I let him ramble on in that vein till he was out of breath. Then I said: "All right, start talking. Why did you stick me up?"

He looked a little bewildered and very tired. "You don't know how it is to be in a strange town and nothin' to eat. You—" He went all through a second time. When he stopped, I repeated my question.

The fourth time he just didn't have the ambition to go through with it again. I asked him, but he couldn't do it.

It was then that the doorbell rang. I said: "The manager must have sent for the cops." I knew it was Joe Lavery.

He said: "You gotta cover me up. You can't afford to let no cops in on this any more than we can."

I let Joe ring again, and asked: "Who's we?"

"We got plenty of money behind us. You should 'a' come in wit' us; these monkeys can lay the potatoes on the line for anything they want, and they want you." He was talking very fast.

I made a move toward the door. "What monkeys?"

WHILE he crouched in the chair and licked his lips, the doorbell rang again. I had my hand on the knob when he screeched: "The Chinkies. The tong!"

I grinned and let Joe in. I said: "Mr. Lavery of my staff, meet Alphonse Awfulface. He tried to hold me up. It seems his employers are Chinese."

Joe took one look at the mugg, and shucked his coat, keeping his hat on. He took a sap out of his hip pocket. "Want I should work on him, Van?"

"Why not? He talks real pretty when he wants to."

Joe told me later he got the technique he used, from a movie. First he pulled

down all the shades; then he picked up the phone, called his house, and told his wife we'd be busy about an hour, and not to hold supper. Then he went into the bathroom, turned on all the taps so the water made a lot of noise, and then he turned on the radio full blast. He took his own handcuffs out of his coat, which he had hung on a chair, and fastened Alphonse's ankles together.

Then he took a straight chair and set it in front of the easy chair the poor mugg was huddled in. He bent Alphonse's knees over the back of the chair, and took off the little egg's shoes. There was a hole in one of the socks.

Joe swung the sap near one of Alphonse's feet, and said: "What was it you wanted to know, Chief?"

"Who the tong is, and what the devil they want to kill me for."

Joe said: "O.K., you heard the Chief." He was so tough he almost scared me.

WE were shouting over the noise of the radio and the water. Alphonse screamed: "O.K., O.K., Mr. Lavery! O.K.!" I went into the bathroom, and grinned when I saw that Joe—who has his own home and has to buy coal—had only turned on the cold water. Joe switched off the radio, and the mugg said: "This guy Lamba's got the profits from the tong's gambling-game. They heard he hired you to bodyguard him, and they got me and some other guys to push you away."

"This tong's in New York?" I asked.

"Yeah. The Lee Chow Far Business Men's Association."

I nodded at Joe, and he went over and put his coat on. I unlocked my handcuffs and took them off; Joe took his off the ankles. I said: "I'm turning you loose. Go back and tell these China boys that I didn't throw in with Lamba. I'm a crook, but not that bad. Tell them to hire a good detective agency to get their dough back."

"Why not the cops?" Joe asked.

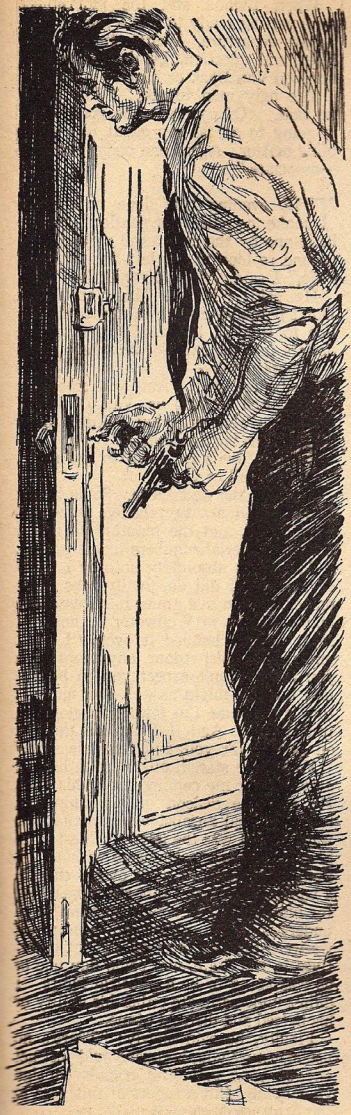
"Because the Chinese lottery is just as illegal as any other. All right, Al, scram."

He mumbled, "Cheest, Chief! Well —t'anks!" and broke the track record getting out of there. . . . The phone started ringing again.

I said: "I suppose the management wants to complain about the radio now."

But when I picked it up, Inspector Adam Wellwater of the police's homicide squad said: "Don't leave your

I asked who was there. The man's



voice sounded sick. "Joe," it said.

room, Van. John Edgelite was just shot and killed, and Harry Denuth is in City Hospital, maybe croaking. Before Harry passed out, he told the harness bull who found him, to see you."

"O.K. I'll wait here." I hung up the phone and said to Joe: "This is real trouble. We shouldn't have let that gunman go." I went over and sat down on the couch, feeling kind of sick. . . .

It sounds callous; but a half an hour later most of what I was thinking of while Wellwater questioned me was my dinner, which I had not had. We were not getting anywhere.

Wellwater did make one crack that had some sense to it, though. After I had told him about Lamba, and about the mugg, and about the Chinese, and after he had said he didn't believe me, he cracked: "Outside of traffic accidents and jealous wives, this town has about twenty homicides a year, Van Eyck. And you're connected one way or another with about half of them."

"I know it," I said. "The thing kind of snowballs on you, Adam. Like I was telling Harry Denuth today—the more publicity of this sort you get, the worse sort of people it attracts to your office."

Wellwater said: "Denuth!"

"All right," I said. "So I liked him, too. But I didn't shoot him. I suppose it's sacrilege for me to mention his name?"

"Don't shout at me," Adam said. "It isn't necessary."

I SAID something or other and went into the bathroom and sat on the edge of the tub. That was the only part of the apartment that wasn't crawling with cops.

After a while I calmed down enough to come out again. I was walking around the place looking for an unpoliced chair when the phone rang. Wellwater made a dive for it, and I growled at him and got there first. But it was for him.

He spat a series of *yesses* into the phone and hung up, rubbing his bony hands. "This is good," he said. "We've got Lamba. They're bringing him up here."

I turned to him, shoved out my hands. "Listen, Adam," I said. I was as serious as I've ever been. "You won't be able to hold Lamba. No cop ever has. He has a mouthpiece in every State of the Union. You guys clear out, will you, and let Joe and me take him? We're not cops; we don't have to be

strictly legal; and we can make him talk."

Adam just smiled in a superior sort of way, and didn't bother to answer.

"This isn't a gag," I said. "Honest. It's the short-cut to getting the guys who got Harry and Edgelite. Give yourself a break, Adam."

He shook his head, and lit one of the stogies he offends nostrils with.

I sat down, on the studio couch, shoving a lieutenant off the other end.

The "they" who had got Lamba turned out to be a pair of Dolly Sisters from the uniformed radio patrol. They shoved the little man into the room, and came to attention. "He was eatin' dinner at the Rockaway," one of them told Wellwater.

Adam pinched his nose, and looked wise, as though that meant something. The cops went away. That left only the whole detective bureau, Joe and me to handle Lamba. The ugly man hadn't opened his mouth yet.

Wellwater said: "Lamba, two of my best men were shot down tonight. One of them's dead; one's dying."

Lamba wrinkled up his face a little more. "That's too bad, Inspector." He put his hand in his pocket, and three second-grade detectives leaped forward. But he was only going for his wallet. "Allow me to contribute something to the purse for the widow."

Wellwater knocked the wallet out of the brown hand and went to tower over Lamba, his hands on his hips, his bony chest bent in two. "If you didn't have anything to do with it, Lamba," he grated, "you know who did. And you're going to tell us if we have to break every—"

Lamba laughed at him. "I'm sorry about your men, Inspector," he said; "but really, this is rather extra-legal. And—er—talking about legality, that's probably my lawyer outside now. You see, we were eating dinner together."

IT was his lawyer. And there was nothing Adam could do. The lawyer had followed Lamba to see where he was taken, and then got a judge away from a dinner-party to sign a *habeas corpus*. That's what's known as the majesty of the law.

I crept around the room, and said to Joe: "Get out and get downstairs. Follow Lamba and find out where he's living." Joe faded, and I went back to watch the signing of the papers.

When Lamba and the mouthpiece were getting ready to make their triumphant departure, Wellwater growled: "Just one question, Lamba: Have you retained Van Eyck or haven't you?"

The ugly man turned. "Why, yes," he said. "Of course. The good Chief is going to act as my agent in a gambling matter. Agent and bodyguard and —associate."

THE evening had done nothing to make me patient or gentle; I got the little ape by the collar and whirled him around to look at my left fist. "That's a lie," I said. "You dirty little—"

He said: "Please, Mr. Van Eyck. Don't be naïve enough to expect the police to think I left that five thousand dollars in your safe for storage."

"There's no five—"

Wellwater said: "And you were the guy wanted to help us, Van Eyck! I knew you were wild, but I didn't know you were as big a heel as—"

I said: "Let's go down to my office. Come on—all of you."

We skip the next scene. Some things I can't—well, anyway, the five grand was in my safe, and the mouthpiece had a list of the serial numbers in his pocket.

There was absolutely nothing I could say. What I did do, finally, was insist on sealing the five grand in an envelope and giving it to Wellwater to hold. I said, when I handed it over: "I don't understand this, Adam, any more than you do. I don't expect you to believe me; but you might as well hear me out: this is one case I'm taking for nothing, free, gratis. And if I can tie the can on Lamba for you, it'll be a pleasure."

Wellwater stared, all the hate he had ever felt for me coming out in his eyes. He was the deacon of his church, a teetotaler and an abstemious man in all ways; and I was the town's wildest gambler, used profane language without noticing it, and spent most of my time in a barroom because I thought it was good for business. You couldn't expect us to understand each other; and in addition, we were the two most prominent detectives in the State, and some day one of us was going to be a political figure. I didn't underestimate either his ability or his hatred and distrust of me.

Finally, he said slowly: "There's no use arresting you, because you'd just get one of your gambling friends to sign your bond. But a report of this goes to the Attorney General."

I shrugged, and said: "Good night, gentlemen." The dicks and cops with Adam were glad enough to leave; Adam followed them. He looked at Lamba, and said: "Let's leave Mr. Van Eyck alone with his clients, boys."

A smile answered that, and the door closed behind the police force. I got up, stretched, and beamed at Lamba's ugly, ugly face; then I went over and locked the door to the hall. He looked a little anxious, but I reassured him: "Seems like the time for a good chat."

"Yes, yes," he said. "Sure, so long you got the name, you might as well go through with it. You keep that five grand. I tell you, Seppi Lamba's a good guy; I give you some more if you—"

"A good chat," I said, "about what you mean, you dirty little fence, by dragging my name into your gutter-snipe activities!" I socked him on the side of his brown face with the palm of my hand, and knocked him into a steel filing-cabinet.

I went after him, and got most of his upper clothing into my left hand, lifted him off his feet. With my right fist I feinted at him. "Little louse," I said, "you are about to have a very busy day. You are going to return that money to those Chinese, and then you are going to get out of this town, and stay out. And if—"

The lawyer said: "Don't do that, Van Eyck. Please, I wouldn't."

"Why not?" I asked. "What's to stop me?" I shook Lamba a couple of times, and said: "I wouldn't mind breaking your neck, except that first—"

"Please don't," the lawyer said again. "Please set Mr. Lamba down. I'm—I'm not very used to firearms, and this thing may go—go off."

I shot a look over my shoulder, and he was holding a gun in a shaking hand. He had taken the safety-catch off, too.

That is exactly the kind of gun I will not monkey with—the kind that is held by a scared amateur. A gunman won't shoot you if he doesn't have to; a man whose hand is shaking will shoot you without meaning to.

I dropped Lamba, and said: "Put that gun away, and get out of here. Get out!"

They got. I wiped my brow, and fished a can of beer from the water-cooler. When it was half down, I called the hotel. The desk-clerk said, first, that there had been no calls for me, which meant that Joe Lavery was still on the shadow. Then he said, in the supercilious tone that watching a hotel desk gives those chorus-boys: "There was a Chinaman here, though."

"What?" This was something like news.

"He said he was your laundryman. He said he'd given you the wrong shirts, and had to see you right away. At his shop." The ape giggled.

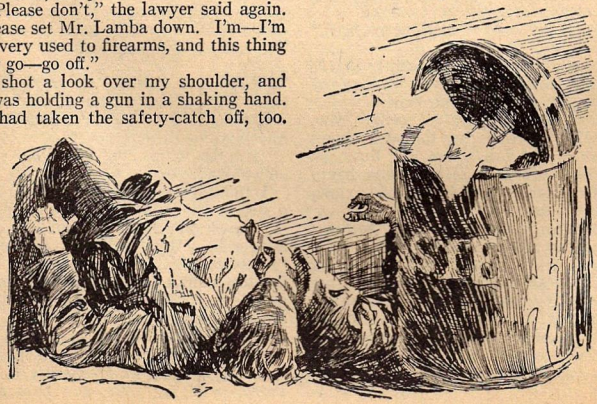
"Was his name Harry Leong?"

"That's right, Mr. Van Eyck. Isn't it curious how they take America first—"

I rang off and chewed my lip. I doubted very much if it was shirts that the Celestial wanted to see me about. I locked the office, and went down and caught a cab.

Harry was ironing away furiously when I came into his shop. In the back room I could see his wife, darning something, and rocking a cradle with her foot.

Harry said: "Yessuh, Mist' Van Eyck. Evelyt'ing ho-kay, like you say. Please to clome this way?"



I nodded, and he set the iron on its stove and led me into the back room. Mrs. Leong looked up and gave me a shy smile. The two middle kids were sleeping in a cot; the eldest was doing his homework; the baby, as I said, was in a cradle. Three Chinese gentlemen were standing in a corner, where they could not be seen from the street. Two of them were leaning on canes; one of them wore a silk hat. They bowed, politely, and the one without a cane said: "Chief Mr. Van Eyck, I trust?" His English was a lot better than mine.

I SAID: "Yes, gentlemen. You wanted to see me?"

The spokesman bowed again. "If you are not too inconvenienced. We wish to ask you a question, sir. Are you, or are you not, an associate of Mr. Lamba's?"

"I am not," I said. His polite voice put a polish on mine. "I would like to see Mr. Lamba subjected to the death of the thousand tortures—to give this an Oriental note."

"You are, sir, very likely to see that," the Chinese gentleman said. All this time Mrs. Leong did not look up, and the little boy went on with his homework. "Oh, quite likely, Mr. Van Eyck. You, sir, have an enviable reputation for veracity."

"It's my business," I said. "My racket. I couldn't get to first base if people didn't know I meant what I said. At that, there are doubters."

He leaned forward. "Sir, believe me, we are not among those doubters. I want to ask you again, are you in any way connected with Mr. Lamba?"

"I am not, and I have never been," I said.

"Would you take your oath to that?"

"It wouldn't mean any more than my word. I'm not a religious man."

He sighed. "Quite. I believe you. We, Mr. Van Eyck, are the lottery committee of the Lee Chow Far Businessmen's Association. Mr. Lamba has a good deal of money which our compatriots entrust to us."

"I know. I always thought the tongs were smart; I don't see how—"

"Please, Mr. Van Eyck," this fellow said, "we are not a tong. You do not mind? We are simply a business organization; our phase of the business, the work of my committee, corresponds precisely to that of an insurance company in the Occidental scheme of pecuniary affairs."

"You guys are smart," I said. "Why in the name of fate would you entrust money to a heel like Lamba?"

One of the other members of the committee asked a question in Chinese. The spokesman answered him, then turned back to me. "My elder compatriots do not understand English. Mr. Gow simply asked what you said. . . . In the conduct of our affairs, sir, it is often necessary to deal with people like Mr. Lamba. You see, sir, we have never got the lottery legalized. Really, sir, it is nothing but insurance; the buying of a ticket each week insures a man a coffin and a decent burial in China. But out of the profits of these tickets, instead of paying dividends, the way your stock insurance companies do, or rebates, as in the case of your mutual companies, we pay a large bonus in the form of lottery prizes weekly."

"Interesting," I said. "But while we're talking, Lamba is wandering around the city doing something strange and unholy. Where does he fit in?"

My pal interpreted what I said to the other two Orientals, then turned to me. "You see, sir, we consider your United States income-tax entirely too high. Therefore we have to invest our money extra-legally to avoid turning our books open. In the past we have delved into such things as gambling, which we could handle ourselves; the importation of our fellow-countrymen into this nation, which we also were able to maneuver without too much Occidental interference or coöperation; and so on. A mechanic who now works for Mr. Lamba once worked for us, on the airplanes we cross the border in; he turns up cars for Mr. Lamba. He suggested—"

"WAIT a minute," I said. "You were going to finance Mr. Lamba—if you want to call him that—in an inter-State hot-car racket?"

"If," he said, "by hot, you mean stolen, why, yes."

I think I must have staggered back a step or two. I counted on my fingers. All the elegant English I had put on to answer his, left me. "Wow!" I shrieked. "Inter-State cars! Tax-evasion! Using the mails to run a lottery! Smuggling! I— Mister, do you realize those are all Federal charges? Haven't you ever heard of the old man with the whiskers, Uncle Sam? Post Office inspectors, G-men, Secret Service, Border Patrol—well, by golly, you boys don't

"Little louse," I said, "you are about to have a very busy day! You are going to—" "Don't do that, Van Eyck," the lawyer said.

care what you do, do you? The only Federal offense you've left out is kidnaping, and pulling the Supreme Court's whiskers."

"But we intend," said my suave interlocutor, "to do a little kidnaping. We are going to catch Mr. Lamba, and conduct him to New York. We think he'll tell us there where our money is."

I gulped and said: "I was joking."

And the gent without the cane turned and translated that to the two gents with canes. They stared at me as though I were some new kind of bug.

"Of course," said the spokesman, "we should expect to pay you for your services."

"Oh, of course," I said. I raised my voice. "I wouldn't walk into a mess like—" I gulped, and stopped. I had forgotten that I was already in the mess—in it up to my ears! I had declared war on Lamba, who certainly didn't love me. The cops had declared war on Lamba and me. And the Chinese—well, they were out for Lamba, and they meant as much business as the rest of us.

It seemed that any combination of two in that mess was going to have the inside position.

I said: "Gentlemen, a decision given in the heat of the moment is often regretted in the cool of the grave."

The spokesman raised an eyebrow, and translated this. They all three bowed. "We are glad to see," said the spokesman, "that we are dealing with a philosopher. We shall call on you wherever you say tomorrow morning."

"Call me at my apartment before nine," I said, and got out of there, pretty well convinced that I'd got off an epigram. It made me feel better, but not for very long. When I got back to the hotel, Joe Lavery had not yet called.

I WALKED the carpet until it was nearly worn out. Joe and I have been partners for a long time. We were on the cops together, and he quit to work for me. If it hadn't been for me, he'd be toasting his shins before a radiator in some station-house now, instead of trotting around a city running my errands with a horde of top-hatted Chinese and armed gorillas and cops looking for the blood of any of Van Eyck's friends.

He had a wife. I'd never married, though that was not my fault; I'd asked Elizabeth often enough. But Joe had, and up to now that hadn't seemed wrong. Our profession is not as tough as it sounds. I get into trouble once in a while; but then, I'm the top man, and thus the target; and even so, I don't get into any mess that I don't think I can control.

But Joe—well, he was not very quick-witted. He had let me do the brain-work too long, while he was content to be the legs, the guy who tackled the hard details that I'm too lazy to take care of.

But tonight I had sent Joe out on an assignment that was loaded with a lot worse than dynamite. The odds were against his coming—

Just when my heavy feet had gone through the carpet to the floor, a rap came at the door; it was a commentary on the way I felt that I pulled my gun before I even asked who was there.

The man's voice through the door sounded a little sick. "Joe," it said.

I opened the door, and Lavery lurched in. I caught him just as he was about to fold up; I lugged him to the couch and laid him out. His collar was gone, ripped away; the buttons of his vest hung from one long strip of cloth. One sleeve was nearly off his coat.

But his face was the worst. It was dark brown with clotted blood.

He lay on the couch and mumbled: "Van, I'm sorry. You can fire me. I missed—"

"Shut up," I said, "and take it easy." I went and got a washcloth and some ice-water, and a drink of brandy out of the medicine-chest. I made him drink the brandy, and then I washed his face with the ice-water. It was only cut in two places, on the cheekbone and the forehead.

I lit a cigarette and put it in his mouth. I had to use three matches to do it; my hand was shaking, and not with fear, either. He puffed the cigarette, and tried to grin. "Florence Nightingale Van Eyck!" he said.

I growled: "Stop trying to steal my stuff. The boss makes the jokes."

"I played the sucker," he said bitterly. "I walked right into their trap."

"Lamba's boys?"

He said: "Yeah. They—they did this to me, and told me to take it back to you and see how you liked it."

"Yeah? Yeah?" I began walking around the room.

"They had me in a garage," Joe said. "They blindfolded me to take me there, but there was a phone there, and I saw the number—Independence 3668."

"Good!" I said. I couldn't stop walking around. Even when I picked up the phone, I kept pacing up and down as far as its wire would let me. A call to the phone company gave me the address, a South Side garage. I hung up the phone and got Joe another brandy.

HE coughed over it, and said: "I wouldn't be out yet, only that heel, the one you had up here, crashed the joint. They gunned him out, Van; and while they were worrying about that, I got away."

"Yeah?" I said. "Yeah?" I kept on walking, hitting my hands together. "You might as well know the score, Joe: What happened was, a bunch of Chinese gave Lamba a pile of dough to invest in a hot-car racket. They wanted something extra-legal, because it was the profits of a lottery. I don't think he had any hot-car racket: and as I figure it, he wanted me to lay the money for him down South, and then he could say: 'Van Eyck was in on it—he gambled your money away.' See, I have this weakness for gambling; everybody knows it. With Lamba's connections as an underworld banker, the bookies would probably have returned the money

to him as fast as I bet it. Then the horse would never start."

"And you'd be on the spot," Joe said. "Cheest, boss, cheest! What'll we do?"

"You'll go home," I said, "and try not to scare your wife to death with that face of yours." I saw him looking down at his vest, and I added: "Take that new tan tweed of mine, Joe. It's too tight for me, anyway."

He didn't want to, but he was used to taking orders from me. While he was messing around in the bedroom, I used the phone. Harry Leong answered.

"This is Chief Van Eyck," I said. "My laundry is all wrong."

"Yes sah, yes." Harry said. "Me no pleak Englis' velly well. You wait?" The next voice was that of the committee-man who did not carry a cane.

"May I assist you, sir?" he said.

"I need some clean shirts right away," I said. "I'll be in my car at the corner of Naples and Main in ten minutes. Could you send some one there?"

"Yes, certainly, Chief Van Eyck."

I hung up, and looked at my watch. It was two o'clock in the morning. I packed my pockets with enough guns to handle a squad, and added a set of brass knuckles and a blackjack for extras. Then I set out.

The committee-man had taken off his high hat and was wearing a battered old felt one that probably belonged to Harry Leong. When I slowed my car at Naples, he slid out of a shadow and hopped in. I speeded up, and went around a lot of corners fast, in case we were being followed.

When I finally slowed up, he said: "My, that was quite a ride, Chief Van Eyck. I presume you have a plan, sir? I did not bring my elder compatriots along; but I have their authority to act as you advise us. I must tell you, sir, you made a very favorable impression on them."

"That was my wise saying," I said.

He grinned a little, and told me: "Mr. Gow maintains that your remark is from the sayings of Confucius. Mr. Ch'aing says not."

"Tell them to look up the five-foot bookshelf of the wise President Lowell."

"Oh, now," he said, "you are attempting to josh me. It is not from there; I have read all the books in the collection, preliminary to attending Harvard, myself."

I gulped, and said: "No, I haven't a plan—to get back to business. I thought

I would tell you about—the heat of the moment. I sent my assistant out to follow Lamba. He was captured, and badly beaten. He might have been hurt worse, but a gunman who I believe works for you—I don't know his name—broke in. Lamba's men killed him."

The Chinese sighed. "Regrettable, but he was well paid. And he was so ugly."

"He certainly was. . . . Look, we are going to have a showdown with Lamba. This is on the verge of turning into a bad gang war. I don't want to mix into anything like that, and it wouldn't get your money back. I suggest a conference with him. Once we have your money back, and you out of the way, I'm going to do a little private revenge work; but I want you out of it."

"That shows a tremendous solicitude on your part," said the Harvard man.

"Not at all," I said, pushing the car around some more nice corners. "There's too much Federal heat on you. I want you out of town, and away from me, before I do anything to attract much attention. Now, my suggesion is, we call up Lamba, ask for a meeting. We'll compromise with him; he's to give back as much money as we can make him give, and you not to yell about his keeping the rest."

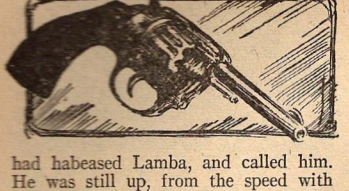
"Well, yes, that would be satisfactory. But really, I don't think he will agree to surrender any of the money at all. Why should he?"

"He takes me seriously. And I doubt very much if he knows just what would happen if the Federals heard about this. Anyway, let's try it."

"All right, sir. You should know best, Chief Van Eyck."

I parked outside an all-night drug-store, and went in. I had told the strict truth; I intended to make serious war on Lamba for what he had done to Joe Lavery; but I wanted the Chinese out first. I didn't want to get ticketed as helping them to break all those Federal laws.

My first call was to the night court. I found out the name of the lawyer who



had habeased Lamba, and called him. He was still up, from the speed with which he answered the phone. "Van Eyck," I said. . . . "Tell Lamba that I'm in with the Chinese. I've got them to agree to a compromise if he'll meet us tonight."

"Really, Chief, I don't—"

"Quit the stalling. You know where Lamba is, and you know what I'm talking about. The thing is, there has been too much publicity; Uncle Sam's boys have heard about it through stool-pigeons, and the town's filling with Treasury and Department of Justice men. Tell Lamba I said that if either he or I is to save our skin, we have to get the Chinese out of it tonight."

He did quit kidding. "I agree with you, Chief. This is a terrible load off my mind. I— The trouble is in getting Mr. Lamba to attend a conference."

"We'll put it in his territory. At his garage on the South Side. Tell him to call there and tell the boys to admit me and one Chinese in ten minutes. The number is Independence 3668, in case you've forgotten it."

"Hold the wire." I suppose he talked to Lamba. In a couple of minutes he said: "All right, Chief. We'll meet you at the place you said in ten minutes."

I went back and nodded to the Chinese. "Let me do the talking when we get there."

THERE was no great trouble finding the garage.

It was one of these open-all-night joints: I drove in and stopped on the floor. An attendant came up, looked at the Chinese, and said: "Chief Van Eyck? You're to come this way, please."

We left the car standing there, and went to a car-elevator that had an indicator on it showing that the car could go up two floors. Naturally, it went down when we got into it, the attendant disregarding the regular lever, and just pushing a button. The elevator let us out in a little room mostly filled by a furnace; a door behind the furnace led us to a hall with three or four doors. The boy knocked at one of them, and went away.

After a couple of minutes the door opened, and a thin fellow in a blue shirt and yellow necktie stared at us unhappily while a cigarette dribbled smoke into his right eye and made it water. Then he sighed and let us in. As I went by him, the ash on his cigarette got too long for gravity, and dropped; he jerked his head agilely, and the ash missed his fine blue shirt. He said, "Lamba aint here yet," and his eye kept on watering.

I looked at the thin boy, who had gone back to a game of solitaire in the corner, and said to my Chinese: "You see why the white race considers itself superior."

HE was too polite to laugh, but a muscle in his cheek jumped. I dragged a couple of chairs up to the table, and we sat down, and watched our host cheat himself by sneaking a queen from the bottom of the deck.

I explained: "He takes his coat off so he won't suspect himself of having the aces up his sleeve."

The thin boy did not look around, but he said: "Talkin' to keep your teeth from rattlin', Van Eyck?"

"Not particularly, pal," I told him. "It's warm enough in here."

He half turned his head. "So you're the tough Chief Van Eyck! Cheest, an' I've known real men afraid to play your tracks. Tough!"

"Anything tell you I wasn't?" I asked.

"You came around fast enough," he said.

That was what I wanted to know. He was one of the crew who had maced poor Joe up. I bit my lip to keep my real feelings from showing, and grinned. "Don't play it too hard, pal. Where's Lamba? We haven't got all night."

"He'll be along, son, he'll be along." The cigarette burned his lip, and he spat it out. It lay smoldering on the concrete floor—which was not so hot, considering that this was a garage, a business which entails a certain amount of gas.

The boy stole another card from down under, and then his game went faster. There was a knock at the door. He did not get up or look up, but turned over cards, rapidly. He slapped the last card down, and got up as the knock came a second time.

"It came out," he said. "It almost always comes out for me." He unlocked

the door, and let Lamba and the mouthpiece in.

The lawyer said good evening. Giuseppi Lamba said nothing at all.

I waited till they were seated. The thin boy had lit another cigarette and was starting a second game of solitaire. Finally, I said: "All right. We're here for the showdown, Lamba. I might as well tell you that I have been retained by the Lee Chow Far to regain some money they had given you to invest for them."

I waited, but Lamba said nothing. He just looked at me out of his ugly face.

"They have decided to invest it elsewhere," I said. I stopped. Nobody said anything. I took another breath. "Of course, you have been put to some trouble, and they are willing for you to take a commission, part of the money—"

Lamba spoke at last. "What money?" he asked. He asked it very simply.

I laughed. "Oh, swell!" I said. "Now I know what tone the interview's going to take. Pal, you're considered smart; the biggest financier of the underworld. O.K. Then you know just how hot Federal heat can get. Did you know, pal, that this money was being given to you to handle to avoid a Federal income-tax, that it was made by violating the Federal lottery laws? Or that it was being withdrawn from a fund set up to do a little smuggling?"

LAMBA said: "You're telling it, Van Eyck." His eyes reminded me that I had manhandled him earlier that evening. Evidently he didn't like me.

"I'm telling it," I agreed. "That's right. What is called G-heat," I said. "Though, technically, I don't think the Department of Justice men are in on it. But all the other Government employees are. Alcatraz, Lamba! I don't want to see it; neither do you. So here's what I'm selling! Give these boys back part of their money, and then all of you get out of my town."

"And the cop we—the cop that was killed?" Lamba asked.

"I'll handle that," I said. I meant it, too, but not the way they were supposed to think I did.

Lamba shrugged. "What does that get me? The Feds don't mind what town they're—"

"I told you this was the showdown, Lamba," I said. "Why keep kibitzing around? You know you were scared of what the hatchet-men or what-not would do to you. That is why you wanted me to go South with you—so I could be the fall-guy, with my gambling reputation. So the tong—though they don't like that name—would think I was the double-crosser, and not you."

The lawyer said something to Lamba.

Lamba shrugged, and said: "How much? And what guarantee the Chinkies will take it and leave me alone?"

I said: "Forty grand; and Mr.—"

"Lee," the Chinese said. "My name is Lee."

I took out my fountain-pen, shook it on the floor to make it write, and scribbled a written guarantee that the Lee Chow Far Company was satisfied.

"Mr. Lee's personal guarantee that he speaks for the whole committee. Right?"

"Quite correct," Lee said.

Lamba said: "Too much." And I knew I had him.

We bickered for fifteen minutes. Finally we arrived at thirty grand. I shook more ink into the pen, and Lee signed. Lamba turned to the blue shirt, and said:

The machine gunner let a dozen rounds go up the shaft, blind . . . and the boy named Tony came down fast.

"Go get me twenty-five G's, Tony. Van Eyck, there's five thousand in your safe."

"The cops have it," I said.

"You can get it."

I argued a few words to give the thing color, and finally nodded. "O.K. I take that as my fee. All right, Mr. Lee."

Lee was good. Oh, he was swell. He acted just reluctant enough, then let me talk him into it. And I had not rehearsed with him, at all; he had no idea what I was up to. But his elder colleagues, as he called them, had said to trust me.

TONY went out. I didn't think he'd be long; Lamba's racket depended on never being very far from plenty of ready cash. He was back in about five minutes. Lamba counted out the money and returned it. Lee and I were taken up to the street. I drove him back to Leong's. He never asked a question.

As I let him out, I said: "I really want you and your colleagues to get out of town. And remember this: you don't know me. We had no dealings. I think I'll be able to get the rest of your money for you, and of course, the five grand is yours too. That was just an act."

"Of course, sir. We have a car; we shall be outside your State within two hours. You know where to reach us."

I said I did. He got out of the car, and I drove around to think. When I had gone three blocks, I realized I was being followed. I made a sudden U-turn, and that brought me alongside Inspector Wellwater and his staff, sitting in a police sedan. I could not tell how long they had been following me.

Adam ranged his bony figure out of the car, and came over to me. Shiny metal dangling from his hand caught the light from a street lamp, and shone into my eyes, so that I blinked.

"Morris, drive this car," Wellwater said. His voice was absolutely dead, without inflection of any sort. "Van Eyck, you're under arrest. Put out your wrists, please."

I got out of the car, and said: "That isn't necessary, Adam. I'll give you my parole."

"And last night," he said, still in his dead voice, "I would have taken it. Your wrists, please, Van Eyck. I don't want to use force."

And then, suddenly, I got it. He was sorry; he was all broken up. For years he had disliked me, had done everything he could to curb me; but he had always believed I was on the level in my intent, if not in my methods. Now he didn't believe that any more, and it hurt him.

I said: "I don't blame you for nabbing me, Adam. The money in the safe, and some of the things I have done, some of the places I've been tonight. I don't think I can get clear in a court; but I want you to know this, Adam: I really am on the up-and-up."

He looked down at the pavement, and his voice was sulky. "I'd be a poor cop if I didn't pinch you and hold you; but if there's anything or any place that one of my men could—"

"You'd only involve the whole police force," I said. "The Federals are probably on our heels now."

Lieutenant Morris, who was in my car behind me, snapped his fingers. Wellwater looked at him, and Morris said, in an odd voice: "Van, has the contact been made? Are we blocking—"

Morris had always been on my side. In his efforts to think the best of me, he thought up an entirely new story. It began to clear.

"I hope so, Morris," I said. "The contact-man left me ten minutes ago." The old Van Eyck brain started turning over again, and I saw my way out. "Look, Adam," I said. "After all, compounding a felony isn't so awful. I'll take my rap if I have to, but I'm merely crazy with anxiety. May I make a phone call?"

Adam said: "I was a heel not to think of this before. Of course, Van, go ahead. Morris, drive him to a phone. —Your parole, Van?"

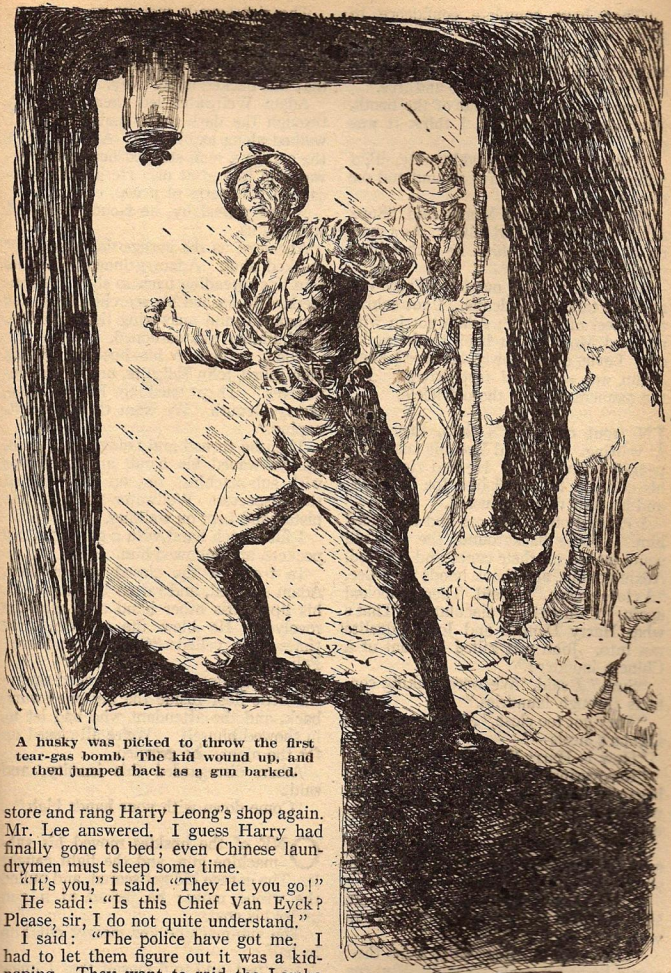
"I won't try to escape."

IF you don't understand what had happened, I don't blame you. I was a little mixed up myself. But look: the money in my safe could have been ransom money. Lamba's knowing the serial numbers could mean that there had been a slip-up at a bank or office some place, and he was telling us that his gang wouldn't accept listed money.

And all my slipping around and refusing to talk to the police could mean—a contact! Now do you see? The word "Federals" was what started Morris on that interpretation.

A kidnaping! I had been trying—according to the way Morris and Wellwater read my actions—to redeem a kidnaped person, and I couldn't talk to the cops for fear there would be a leak, and the hostage would be killed.

My hands were slippery with sweat as I grabbed a receiver in an all-night drug-



A husky was picked to throw the first tear-gas bomb. The kid wound up, and then jumped back as a gun barked.

store and rang Harry Leong's shop again. Mr. Lee answered. I guess Harry had finally gone to bed; even Chinese laundrymen must sleep some time.

"It's you," I said. "They let you go!"

He said: "Is this Chief Van Eyck? Please, sir, I do not quite understand."

I said: "The police have got me. I had to let them figure out it was a kidnaping. They want to raid the Lamba place, but first we had to be sure you were out."

Golly, I don't know whether all Chinese are as smart as that man, or only Harvard Chinese. Anyway, he was the quickest to catch on of anyone I've ever known. I'd found that out when we were dealing with Lamba.

He said: "Oh, yes, thank you; I am quite safe."

"That's fine," I said. I could see Morris grinning through the glass. "Are your uncles pleased?"

"Yes, they are very pleased," he said. "Of course, they mind losing the twenty thousand dollars."

"They have complete confidence in you, Chief."

"Wait there," I said. "The police may let me come around to see you. It'll do my eyes good to see you safe and free."

I rang off, and came out of the booth. Morris said: "I heard. I think it was swell."

"Do you think," I asked humbly, "that Adam would let me drive around and see this chap?"

"Sure," Lieutenant Morris said. "Sure. Adam's not such a bad fellow. As a matter of fact, Van, I think he rather likes you."

Adam was waiting outside. There was no more talk of handcuffs. I got behind the wheel of my car; Adam got in with me, and Morris went back to the police car. I even drove slowly, because I knew Adam was scared of fast driving. For the moment I loved the old icicle.

IN front of Harry's shop, they were waiting. Good old Lee, his suave appearance was gone! He had ripped up his coat till it looked like Joe Lavery's, and his hair was all mussed.

I jumped out of the car and embraced him. In the background, the two old gents leaned on their canes and beamed. Adam got out, and shook hands with Lee. "A close escape," he said. Then he looked again. "Chinese!" he ejaculated. "That's what Harry Denuth and John Edgelite ran into. John was killed in front of a Chinese laundry!"

"Sure," I said. "We were making contacts through laundries."

"They got too close," Adam spat. "And Lamba's heels—"

"How is Harry?" I cut in.

"Recovering. He'll be all right." Adam began rubbing his chin. "You know where this place is, Van? You can take us there?"

I nodded. Then Lee cut in. "Plizz," said the Harvard man, "me no lundehstan'. Whahffloh all this talkee?"

Adam said: "We'll explain later, sir. Van, do you think they want to come with us?"

"They gave their personal word there would be no reprisals," I said. "But me, Adam—I was careful not to give mine."

"Morris!" he barked. "Call Headquarters. I want two riot squads, and the reserves to throw a cordon around—what's the address, Van?"

I told him. Then I told the Chinese to go to my apartment and wait for me. Then we took off.

The riot squads met us at a corner. They were big huskies, uniformed. It didn't seem possible that all twelve of them had ridden in the patrol wagon that was backed up an alley.

Adam Wellwater led them, on foot, through the dark and silent streets. I walked along at his side. A block from the garage a man stepped out of a doorway and looked at us. He had the flat-capped silhouette of a cop.

As we passed by, he stood there and watched us.

Ahead of us the garage door suddenly creaked shut. Adam grinned, with his thin lips spreading back to show his eyeteeth. He flashed his searchlight on, for a moment, and answering lights told us the building was cordoned.

Adam turned to his huskies. "This mob killed John Edgelite, one of our detectives. They tried to kill another, Harry Denuth. We want them for kidnaping."

Then he turned and trudged on again. Morris waved his hand, and two cops with sub-machines ran up and flanked the Inspector. Wellwater took out his pistol, and kept on walking.

I filled each hand with a gun from my pockets, and followed him.

In front of the closed garage door, Adam stopped, and raised his whistle to his lips. His other hand still held the revolver. He blew the whistle three times, then yelled: "Open up in there! Police!"

Nothing happened. Adam yelled again; the little door inside the big one swung back, and the attendant who had let us in showed himself. "We're all closed up for the night," he growled.

Adam disregarded this inanity, and said:

"Come down with your hands high."

ONE of the huskies moved his sub-machine gun, and the light caught it. The garage kid got scared, and pulled the wrong move; he jerked at a gun under his coat.

The sub-machine gun nearly cut him in half.

I gulped, and told myself that I knew—though it could never be proved in a court of law—that these muggs had killed John Edgelite, a cop; that they had attempted to kill Harry Denuth; and that they'd beaten the tar out of Joe Lavery.

We stepped over the kid and went inside. There was nothing on the floor of the garage but two cars parked at the

back; no sign of life. Adam Wellwater said: "Easy, men. There may be some one inside those cars." His revolver put lead through a windshield. When there was no answer to this, we went forward some more.

NO one was in the cars, no one under them. Adam and Morris jerked up one of the hoods; there was a hand-grenade wired to the starter. I stopped feeling so bad about what was, after all, a frame-up.

I went over to the elevator, and tried to open the door. It wouldn't come.

Somebody pushed the button while I was still working, and there was the whine of the elevator motor coming to meet us.

The door came open suddenly in my hands, and everybody jumped back. Adam said: "Which floor, Van?"

"Down," I said. "There's a special button." We piled into the car, and pressed the button that had meant down before. There were about fifteen of us in the car.

The button still meant down. But fast. The car fell from under us, and we all landed on each other in a piled-up heap of men and guns and uniforms.

I shoved two cops off my chest and scrambled up, while some fool said: "They cut the cable." We were in a trap, like rats, like foolish mice that had smelt the cheese. At the bottom of an elevator well, with a tough gang above us, and one that owned hand-grenades!

I remember grabbing one of the machine-gunners, though terror had pretty well congealed my brain. I shoved him up, and shouted: "Cut that door open." I pointed at the door that led out of the shaft. Then I kicked away a couple of other cops who were in the line of fire, and the Tommy-gun cut loose.

Bullets went through that door as though it was paper. The gunner knew his business; he cut a neat hole where the lock should have been.

It all must have happened pretty quick, because most of us had piled into the little room where the furnace was before that grenade landed on the floor of the car.

Its blast caught one riot man's back and sent him hurtling into us, which was just as well, because he knocked us down, and the fragments of grenade and elevator car went over us, by and large.

We got up again. I remember seeing Morris bending over the cop who had taken the blast, but I went by them, back-tracking, and shoved my pistol hand up the shaft without looking and emptied the automatic. I dropped the gun then, and would have fired off the revolver in my other hand if my machine-gunner hadn't jerked me aside and let a dozen rounds go up the shaft, blind.

The boy named Tony who had cheated at solitaire came down the shaft, fast. He still had on the blue shirt and the yellow tie; red went nicely with the blue.

The other Tommy-man cut down the door to the little hall, and we went on, all except the boy who had been knocked over by the bomb. He leaned against the furnace, sitting on the concrete, and smoking a cigarette, while curses dribbled out of his lips with the smoke. It couldn't have been a very big or well-made grenade.

We broke in all the doors with our shoulders, and I fetched Adam into the room where we had had our conference with Lamba.

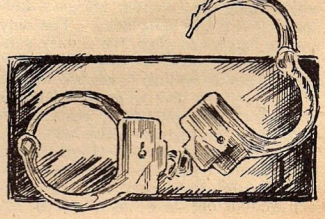
"This is where the money changed hands," I shouted, over the noise of the riot cops. "I made a puddle of ink on the floor with my pen, so the fellow who carried the dough away would leave a trail. He didn't take it far."

Adam looked at the mark my ink had made, and shouted back: "We can have the trail brought out later by chemists from the police lab. The ink will have dried into the wood."

"Yeah," I shouted back.

A cop roamed in, said, "They found a stiff down the hall, Inspector," and roamed out again.

We went down the hall. The corpse was Alphonse Awfulface; Joe had said he thought they'd gunned him out. Well, he was small loss; Adam looked at him, and said: "Moe Ginty, a safe-cracker. Nice work, whoever did it." We went out, and watched the cops break the last door. It did not lead upstairs, but to the back yard.



Adam held up his hand for silence, and said: "There's no use going on—"

Bullet noise behind us brought us all around. A mugg I had never seen before was crouching in the door that led from the furnace-room; he had a big riot-gun in his hands.

He didn't know how to use it, though, because he couldn't keep it down; the cop nearest him shot it out of his hands, sapped him with a pistol-butt, and slapped handcuffs on him.

"There's no use going on this way," Adam said. "They're above us. Let's get out of here and throw things on the roof till they come down."

Bullets peppered us as we ran across the courtyard, and two cops groaned. One of them had to be helped—a shot had cut a tendon in his thigh. Another was hit in the shoulder.

Adam said: "Let's try gas-bombs."

He picked out a husky who looked like Babe Ruth twenty years ago to throw the first tear-gas bomb. The kid stepped forward, wound up, and then jumped back, the bomb falling, as a gun barked upstairs. "They got me arm," the kid howled, and let go, holding his pistol in his left paw.

I guess he was mad enough to be lucky. There was a dull, thudding noise that turned my stomach, and a brief use of the flashlight showed me what was left of the lawyer.

I said: "I think that's all but Lamba."

At the same time the ugly man's voice screamed: "I give up, I give up."

A dozen flashlights picked him out, standing on the parapet of the roof. He was holding his hands high, and his twisted brown face was yellow with fear.

A parapet is no place to stand when you're shaking. He shook once too much, lurched, and—

THERE isn't much more to tell. With Adam wanting to believe our story, and Lee talking pidgin-English so that they couldn't trip him on details, the whole thing was written off as a kidnaping, with the gang dead. The only one we had taken alive, the clumsy gunner, was too scared to give a coherent story; he was willing to accuse Lamba of anything, so long as he could cop a minor plea. He got twenty years, later, which was less than he deserved.

My trick of shaking the fountain-pen helped, too. Because when the cops found a safeful of money, and the chemists showed that there was a trail of ink, from my fountain-pen—or of the same brand, to be legal—from the little room to the safe in the office, it showed I had been there.

And as the sole survivor who would talk English, my explanation went.

That night, though, when I went back to my apartment, I guess I looked pretty bad; I'd certainly fallen down often enough. A bullet had taken away one of my lapels, too, which was a freakish thing. I informed the three Chinese that their twenty thousand dollars had been recovered, along with some other money, and that the cops would transmit it to me to send to them as soon as possible.

Mr. Lee translated that to his elder colleagues. One of them whistled something in Chinese, and Lee said: "My elder colleague wishes to know, please, what is your fee, Chief Van Eyck?"

"I'm going to charge you a little more than I usually do," I said. "The work has been hard. Five hundred dollars. I have to buy two new suits out of that."

LEE translated that. The other old man grunted something, and Lee told me: "It is not enough. That small a fee would leave us indebted to you."

"All right. Five hundred and whatever the suits cost. And by the way, anybody want a beer?"

The oldest of the elder colleagues stopped leaning on his cane, and said: "If you have any light beer. I loathe dark beer, don't you, Gow?"

The other one said: "Yes, I have no use at all for dark beer. But before you get the beer, Chief—do you play poker?"

I gulped and said I did. And for the rest of the evening we played. They had to wait for their train, you see, and I didn't feel like going to bed at five in the morning.

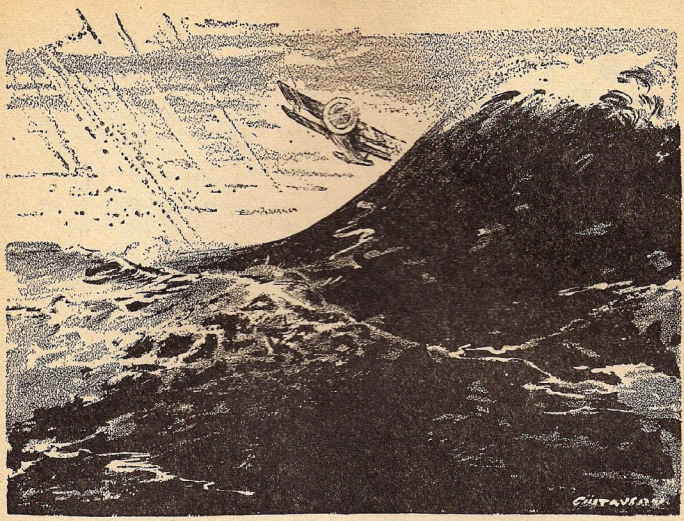
As a matter of fact, they won more than five hundred bucks from me. Don't ever let anyone tell you Chinese can't play poker.

So I was pretty surprised when my fee came a week later; it was five hundred one-dollar bills—and they were *encased in a solid gold box.*

There was a note in it: *"From the Lee Chow Far to Chief Van Eyck—Who Always Tells the Truth."*

I don't know whether they were kidding me or not. But from the time I met Lamba till the time the case was closed, I never told anyone a single lie.

If they chose to misunderstand the truth I handed them—that's their fault.



Hurricane Patrol

A stirring story of high hazard, written between flights by a busy pilot.

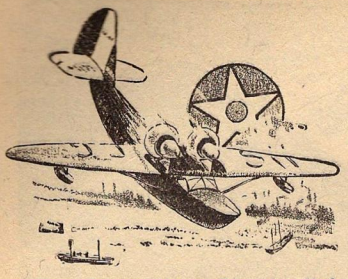
By LELAND JAMIESON

UNLESS some emergency arose to interrupt, Commander Newsom followed a regular routine each morning at the Dinner Key Coast Guard Base. At three minutes before nine o'clock he drove his car into the parking space at the north side of the hangar. Being a skeptic, he cranked up the car windows against sudden rain-squalls—although at nine o'clock in the morning Miami was usually basking under a brilliant blue sky and a fierce sun—and walked jauntily across the hangar ramp to his office.

This morning, which was a day in August, Newsom was in a particularly fine mood. Tonight he was starting on his annual month's leave, and he and his wife had booked reservations for a cruise to England. Today he would get through with his routine inspections by ten-thirty, turn the responsibility and burden of command over to young Lieutenant Robert Hurley, and clear out of this stifling humidity.

Jenkins, the downy-faced yeoman, already had the mail sorted. There was more than usual, Newsom observed, frowning at the stack of it on his desk. Well, he reflected, it was easy to see that if he bothered with details he was not going to get away from here by ten-thirty—or by noon. He made a guttural sound in his throat, and started whipping through the stack of letters. . . .

Washington was at him again about that affair near Homestead. Couldn't people who sat in offices in Washington understand that you couldn't land a seaplane in sixty-foot pine trees? That if a fugitive was escaping through the trees, you had to frighten him with bullets? Of course the gunner's mate hadn't been trying to kill the fugitive! And the gunner's mate most certainly hadn't been trying to kill that cow, either.



It was all like that—all routine, little details that were as much trouble as really important things. Red tape! Suddenly the Old Man tossed up his hands in a fit of irritation. Lieutenant Hurley was going to have to attend to these things anyhow, so he might as well start now. Newsom riffled through the letters again, to make sure nothing important was there. Then he put on his cap and went out into the hangar, where Bob Hurley was checking the propeller-setting of the new Grummen with the help of a machinist's mate.

For his own peace of mind, it was as well that Newsom had failed to see one letter there in his stack. It had been shoved into the clip of an engine-parts requisition by accident. Had he seen it, he probably would have postponed his leave. But he didn't see it. He said: "Bob, I'm clearing out. Nothing important, but you'll have a day's work at my desk. Take care of things. I'll see you in thirty days."

Hurley, standing on the snout of the Grummen float, a spirit protractor in hand, nodded, grinning. "Don't get seasick!" As the Old Man walked out to the hangar, Hurley turned back to checking the prop. He didn't mind holding down the Skipper's desk for a month, but he hated the paper-work. He decided that the routine stuff which had to go out today could be handled by Jenkins.

And that decision was a mistake.

IT was a mistake, because the next morning, when Hurley discovered the letter, Commander Newsom was already aboard the British cruise ship that was sailing direct from Miami to Liverpool, and was somewhere in the Gulf Stream. At Hurley's shout of alarm, Jenkins abruptly silenced his clattering typewriter.

"Are you sure the Commander saw this?" Hurley snapped, waving a letter that bore the blue head and seal of the Treasury Department.

"Oh, quite sure, sir," Jenkins declared.

"He couldn't have seen this!" Hurley barked. "It was stuck in a clip with a requisition! . . . Get me a weather report."

Jenkins nervously busied himself with a telephone. Hurley sat there, little vertical creases of worry forming between his bushy eyebrows. Outside, a moderate northeast wind whined gustily over the hangar eaves. The weather report came in. Even here, across Biscayne Bay from the Atlantic, the wind was twenty-four miles an hour, from the northeast. It was senseless, Hurley knew, to think of flying out and trying to bring Newsom back. The Gulf Stream would be kicking up too much to land a plane safely, much less to take off. He read the letter again.

Sir:

Because of the great loss of life recently suffered in the Keys of Florida as the result of an unheralded hurricane, and as the result of a second hurricane striking Miami two months later almost without warning, a Congressional Investigation has been launched into the functioning of the agencies charged with furnishing hurricane warning service.

Although the brunt of this will fall upon the weather bureau, you and your station will be included. Such questions as why you did not know of the storm, what steps you took when you learned of it, and why adequate warnings were not sent into the Keys, will be asked.

I readily appreciate your position in this situation, but unfortunately this is a very grave matter, and any dereliction of duty, by commission or omission, will be punished by disciplinary action.

It has occurred to me that you would be in a better position to defend your record if you had, prior to the investigation, already launched a program for devising a method of positively locating hurricane centers before they approach dangerously near the Florida coast—and that such a system, if found practicable, would reflect great credit upon the Coast Guard and upon you.

Toward this end, Mr. John Gilpin will this week report to you. Mr. Gilpin, a young scientist, is a close personal friend of the undersigned; his varied work has included several investigations of military

problems. For a number of years his hobby has been meteorology, and he proposes now to attack this problem for you. In addition to this activity he will, upon his return, prepare a report for me upon the organization, equipment and efficiency of your Base. Kindly give him all assistance.

Respectfully yours,
(Signed) *Gay Ogelthorpe*
Assistant Secretary

Swearing softly, Hurley laid the letter back on his desk. What did an amateur meteorologist know about locating a hurricane offshore—when the weather bureau was unable to find it? How could you locate a storm, if you couldn't get ship reports that gave you barometric pressures and wind-velocities and directions?

"Who the devil does he think he is?" Hurley muttered.

But no matter who Gilpin might think he was, he was dangerous. He was going to investigate the Base, make a report that would eventually fall into the hands of the Secretary of the Treasury himself. And no telling what that report might contain, because there was no telling how ignorant Gilpin was of the real problems involved.

The more Hurley probed at the possibilities, the more agitated he became. He had a responsibility here that was different from anything else in his experience, and he was not sure how to cope with it. If he antagonized Gilpin, the man would probably retaliate; if he gave the wrong kind of impression, he was likely to get Commander Newsom stabbed in the back—and he might suffer a few gashes himself.

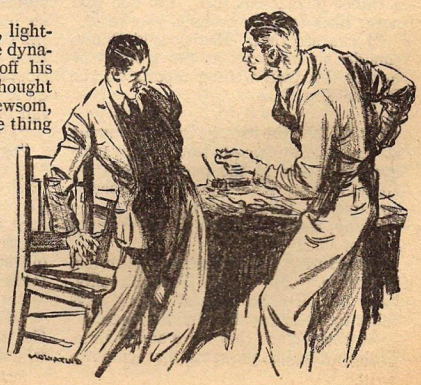
"Dynamite," he thought grimly, lighting a cigarette. "This thing can be dynamite that'll blow the Old Man off his command—maybe worse." He thought fleetingly of his affection for Newsom, of their years of association. "The thing I've got to do," he concluded, "is to impress Gilpin with the Coast Guard's efficiency. Make him see how hard a job we've got, and how well we do it." He spent several minutes considering ways and means.

But the longer he pondered this, the more difficult it seemed. What, he wondered dismally, was impressive around a Coast Guard Base? Not the few battered planes they had for flying equipment. Certainly not the men, working in dungarees and coveralls in the shops. The only thing was the work the planes did—the missions; and probably while Gilpin was here nothing would happen—not even a fifteen-foot sailboat would go aground on a sandbar.

In a quandary, Hurley called the two ensigns, Hinman and Laird, and explained what was happening. They could see that it was a predicament. They agreed with everything Hurley said. But beyond that they weren't any help.

At five-thirty the next morning, at the Thirty-sixth Street Airport, Hurley watched John Gilpin step from the Washington air liner. Gilpin was a young man of medium size who, as soon as he saw Hurley's khaki uniform and Coast Guard insignia, came forward and said in a brusque, reedy voice: "I'm Mr. Gilpin, from Washington. You're here to meet me?"

With more cordiality than he felt, Hurley introduced himself. Before he was finished, Gilpin said, more as an order than as a request: "If you'll look after my luggage—" He deposited a bulky brief-case, a raincoat, a small foreign camera in a case on a strap, and



"You're down here snooping around trying to get something on Newsom, aren't you? You want to 'get' him—the best man the Coast Guard has got!"

a roll of maps into Hurley's surprised hands, and turned back to the plane, from which the pilots were just now emerging.

Gilpin accosted the pilot: "I noticed you flew quite far inland most of the way traversing Florida."

The pilot said casually: "We came that way to save distance. The beacon line follows the coast. We came straight through."

Almost accusingly, it seemed to Hurley, Gilpin returned: "You were thirty or forty miles from the beacon line for a considerable distance."

The pilot was an exceptionally tall, sandy-haired man in his middle thirties. He looked sleepy, Hurley thought; and he seemed annoyed.

"What of it?" he said.

"Regulations require that you remain not more than twenty-five miles from the course. I'm sure you were more than twenty-five miles from those beacons, out over the Everglades, where a failure of both engines—"

A brightness had come into the pilot's eyes. Through tight lips his voice came silkily: "Are you sure enough about that, that you'd like to file a violation with the Department on me?" He had shifted his handbag to his left hand, and his right fist was clenched.

"No," Gilpin said quickly. "No, no! I was merely bringing the matter to your attention. No offense meant." With some haste he returned to Hurley, and the two went into the waiting-room. On the way, he observed: "If I were sure, I'd file that violation! But I couldn't swear it was more than twenty-five miles, being dark—and besides, the man seems a rather pugnacious sort. I'm one who never likes to make trouble, you know."

"I can see that," Hurley said thinly, shuddering inwardly at the thought of having this man writing reports on the Dinner Key Base.

STOWING the luggage into the rumble seat, Hurley drove to town, finally martyring himself to the point of inviting Gilpin to stay with him at his bachelor apartment. Gilpin said:

"Why, really, old man, that's very decent of you!"

And Hurley, tongue in cheek, returned, "Pleasure." He felt a little bit silly. "The old oil!" he thought. Well, anything to make friends with this man.

At nine o'clock they were at the Base. Gilpin walked to the ramp that led down into the Bay, and looked across the miles of shimmering water toward Cape Florida. The wind was strong from the northeast, so that it pasted his clothing against his thin body. For five minutes he drank in the scene, lifting his head now and again to gaze thoughtfully at clouds which raced low overhead, seeming suspended in a peculiar kind of milky haze that had turned the patches of clear sky a slate blue.

Suddenly he turned to Hurley and said: "This feels like hurricane weather, to me!"

Hurley smiled, leading the way into the office. "This is August. August and September are always hurricane months down here. But we've had no reports of a storm so far."

They moved into the protection of the hangar. "I had hoped to see a hurricane," Gilpin said. "I've a theory, you know, about locating them offshore in the absence of ship reports."

HURLEY nodded, trying to appear interested. And he was interested. He suddenly saw a glimmer of hope. If Gilpin was a nut on the meteorological phenomenon of tropical storms, maybe it would be possible to keep him so interested in them that he would not have time to think of much else. "I understand you are a competent meteorologist," Hurley said, settling in his chair and preparing for a long dissertation.

Gilpin smiled, looking pleased. "I understand," he said, "that down here you don't get ship reports very often on these storms. I've been told that a hurricane can sometimes be within fifty miles of Miami, and yet the weather bureau will be unable to tell much about its intensity or direction of movement. All that's known is that a storm is out there—whether it's a severe storm a considerable distance away, or a small storm quite close, remains in doubt until the full brunt of it strikes the coast."

"That's about right," Hurley agreed.

"So," Gilpin went on enthusiastically, "we must develop a positive method of finding the centers of these storms while they are some distance away—a hundred miles away. This method will require courage and initiative on the part of the Coast Guard, but it is entirely feasible."

"In what way?" Hurley asked.

"When the next hurricane comes, a Coast Guard plane is to fly out toward it, guiding constantly by wind-direction,

and pierce the center of the wind area—the 'eye.' Once inside, there will of course be ample ceiling and visibility. The plane, circling inside the eye, can remain an hour, sending radio messages at intervals, from which the shore stations, with direction-finders, can not only plot the exact position of the storm-center, but plot the speed and direction of its travel during one hour's time!"

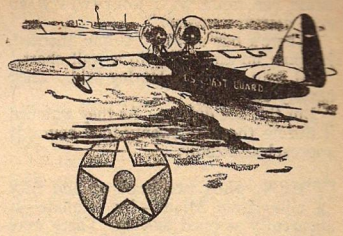
He paused, looking impressed with himself. Hurley, fighting a hot wave of anger, said: "You're not serious, of course."

"Oh, quite!" Gilpin returned glibly. "As a matter of fact, I have consulted some of the most experienced pilots in the country about this. They warn me that it is apt to be turbulent in the hurricane as one approaches the 'eye,' but that such a thing as turbulence, with modern planes having very high structural factors of safety, would be harmless. It will be a great thing for the prestige of the Coast Guard if you'll attempt it."

"No doubt," Hurley grated. "And the following week I'll get my name stuck up on a bronze tablet somewhere, with the nice phrase, *'Buried at sea.'* " He got up, stalked to the door. He had to get out of here. He had to get out of here now, before he blew up and told Gilpin a few things.

He took a quick turn through the engine-shop, the radio-building, and into the supply-room. All the time, through a haze of anger that gradually cleared, he considered Gilpin's proposal. Of course, the thing was entirely possible—a few years ago it would not have been, but it was now, because planes were a lot stronger structurally now; but there were a half-dozen elements of danger left. What if the engine drowned out in the torrential rain? What if he missed the "eye," and flying blind, ran out of gas over the sea?

But suddenly he saw a way out of this predicament, out of the entire one of Gilpin's presence. He was willing to make an attempt to fly into a hurricane, if it would save Newsom any real trouble. So until the next hurricane came within striking distance, he would occupy Gilpin's mind and time in preparations for this momentous flight, would deluge Gilpin with a thousand details that the man could oversee. In this way he could impress Gilpin with the Coast Guard's spirit of coöperation. And when it came time to fly into that storm, he



would make it clear that he expected Gilpin to accompany him. Of course, he thought, Gilpin would be hesitant about doing that; and so in the end perhaps he could retire gracefully by refusing to accept a risk that Gilpin thought was too great for himself. The thought occurred to him that Gilpin might actually want to go. But he didn't believe so. And they could leave that problem until the time came.

He retraced his steps to the office, where he found his guest frowning over a chart of hurricane-tracks of the last twenty years.

"Thinking it over," he said, "your plan does have some merit. Of course you understand that I'll have to burden you with most of the details of preparation. But we can prepare carefully, and when the time comes, if we've found no flaws, we can try it."

Gilpin, rubbing his hands together, beamed. "Fine, Lieutenant Hurley! That's fine! They told me in Washington that you people were stubborn to deal with. But somebody has been misinformed, I'm afraid."

FOR a week, life at the Base was a queerly feverish existence. Gilpin, Hurley learned, was a man of all work and no play. Studying the plan for this flight, he dug into all the meteorological data that could be found in the Miami area. He was forever under foot. Hurley, in his moments of relaxation, liked to fish, to sail. But although there was a fine wind now for this latter sport, he had no opportunity to indulge in it. Gilpin kept him in the office twelve hours a day.

So it was almost a relief, on the eighth day, when the radio operator brought in the ten o'clock weather advisory, which said: "TROPICAL DISTURBANCE OF HURRICANE INTENSITY CENTERED APPROXIMATELY FOUR HUNDRED MILES EAST SOUTHEAST OF MIAMI MOVING ABOUT TEN

MILES PER HOUR WEST NORTHWESTWARD STOP CAUTION ADVISED."

"There's our storm!" Gilpin shouted, jumping up and going to a wall chart.

"It may recurve," Hurley said. "They usually do."

But this one did not. As they watched it during the next twenty-four hours, it approached steadily.

THEN, when two hundred and fifty miles from Miami—by estimate—it apparently stopped moving. There were no ships in that vicinity; the Bahaman islands, though sparsely inhabited, had no radio facilities for sending reports.

The weather bureau issued optimistic bulletins; the storm was not yet within striking distance; there would be ample warning of the blow—if the blow came. There was the usual flurry of pessimistic preparation—housewives buying canned heat, canned beans and other staple foodstuffs. As the wind gradually grew stronger, some few merchants went to the precaution of boarding up large plate-glass windows. But as a whole nobody took the storm seriously. The wind still held steady out of the northeast. The bay was whipped by gusts that sent it boiling into foam at times; low clouds raced overhead, from which an intermittent fine white rain fell. But these people were storm-wise. Many of them spent the morning on the beach, watching the seas roll in laden with kelp. The birds, they pointed out, had not fled to the protection of the Everglades, and the squalls were not increasing steadily in fury and duration. So there was nothing to worry about.

The advisory at ten o'clock on the second morning said: "TROPICAL DISTURBANCE OF HURRICANE INTENSITY NOW CENTERED TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES SOUTHEAST OF MIAMI APPARENTLY STATIONARY AND MAY BE BLOWING ITSELF OUT."

Yet Hurley, reading this, was not reassured. He felt uneasy. To make sure that no one in the Keys was taken by surprise, at daylight the next morning he sent Laird and Hinman to drop messages on the isolated keys and at the back settlements. He felt nervous. Gilpin, his charts and instruments set up in the office, was vociferously disappointed that the storm had not approached within "striking range."

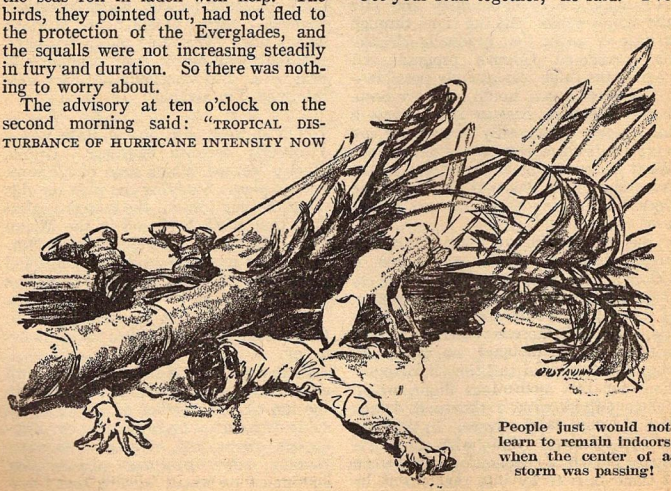
The morning advisory on the third day said: "TROPICAL DISTURBANCE OF UNKNOWN INTENSITY BELIEVED CENTERED ONE HUNDRED FIFTY OR TWO HUNDRED MILES SOUTHEAST OF MIAMI APPARENTLY MOVING VERY SLOWLY NORTHWARD CAUTION ADVISED."

"They aren't very definite," Gilpin said.

"How can they be definite, when they haven't had a ship report for two days?"

Gilpin said nothing. He went outside, and stood on the apron, scanning the sky. When he came back, he observed: "Funny how you feel, when one of these things is around. It—it does something to you—kind of a creepy feeling."

Hurley, frowning at a summary of wind and barometer reports from Key West to Titusville, abruptly got up. "Get your stuff together," he said. "I've



People just would not learn to remain indoors when the center of a storm was passing!

a hunch this thing is a lot closer than anybody reports. We're going to try out your idea. . . . Jenkins! Tell Grayson to get out the Grummen. Full tanks. Have him check everything twice—and tell him to put that rubber life-raft aboard."

Gilpin, swallowing hard, looked incredulous. "You—you mean you are expecting *me* to go with you?"

"Of course."

"But—but—"

Suddenly the whole thing seemed funny to Hurley. He said, "No, I was in hopes you'd go, but I didn't really expect it. I'm going. The idea may be screwy, but it may mean saving some lives in this area. The weather bureau can't tell anything. I'm going to try to. Maybe I'll get my name on that bronze tablet, after all. Your pal Ogelthorpe seems to think we don't do anything down here but lie around in the sunshine and spend taxpayers' money. Well, you might put it in your report that in that last Keys hurricane, I was flying, dropping messages to people to get out of danger. Commander Newsom was flying too, trying to save some people off a foundering boat. Didn't know that, did you?"

An unreasonable anger was rising within him now; he couldn't crowd back his words. "You're down here snooping around trying to get something on Newsom, aren't you? That's why you really are here. Somebody in Washington doesn't like him, apparently. Well, Newsom has been doing this kind of work for thirty years. A dozen times he's damn' near been killed, saving somebody's life. And now you want to make a report on him! You want to 'get' him—when he's the best man the Coast Guard has got. . . . Well, go on back and make your report, and the hell with you!"

He stalked out. He stood on the apron in the wind while a crew got the Grummen ready to go. Why, he wondered bitterly, did he have to blow off his lid to Gilpin? But he'd had to. He was no diplomat; he couldn't dissemble. When he thought something, he had to say it, and he'd thought ever since he'd laid eyes on Gilpin that the man was a trouble-maker. Dismally he thought: "And now I've *really* fixed Newsom! Gilpin won't take an insult like that without fighting back."

The engine of the Grummen roared, as Grayson revved it up. When it subsided, Hurley climbed into the cockpit, adjusted his helmet and goggles, and waved to the crew to pull the chocks out. Then, cautious of the side gusts that made the little ship want to weather-cock, he rolled down the ramp into the water, retracted the wheels, and took off.

In the air, skimming low over the foaming bay, it was incredibly rough. Not the long, heavy surges which one found in a thunderstorm, but sharp, snapping impacts that made the wings tremble, that came so closely spaced that for no period of over five seconds was the plane on an even keel. But he had expected this; boring into that welter of fine rain, seeing the cloud-fragments whip past, he gave himself as completely as possible to a study of the best way to get into the storm. He was not afraid, at least consciously. He was too busy to be afraid.

It was not easy to find the storm center; indeed, Hurley knew that no part of the flight was going to be easy. If he stayed in the clouds, he couldn't check frequently on the wind direction—and he had to fly perpendicular to the surface wind, or he wouldn't strike the center. So he couldn't fly blind very long; he had to keep watch on the water.

HE saw the dark strip of land that was Miami Beach hurtle under him. He was so close to the ground that he could see people's faces, white and curiously blank of expression, as they stared up at him. Then the land was gone, and he was over the ocean, over gray tumbling swells, over a vast reach of spume and spindrift that was lost to view beyond a ring of visibility which extended no more than two hundred yards. It seemed sometimes that the spindrift flew up and enveloped the plane. Once his heart leaped, as a gust threw him down and the float almost clipped into a comber.

The clouds were scraping the water, it seemed, without enough space between to permit a plane to slide through. But always he slid through. Always he went on, feeling the belt biting into his thighs, and feeling his spine buckling against the hammering shocks. He corrected his drift now and then, keeping check on the passage of time. It was queer how fast minutes passed, and out of those minutes no sense of reality remained. He would remember this flight—if he lived to remember it—as a

space of nightmare that was without details, a blank of numb tension.

It was surprising how soon thirty minutes had passed. The sea was wilder, below; the wind had trebled in force, so that the plane was tossed into every conceivable position. But always Hurley righted it before it was thrown into the water.

There came a time when he thought physical exhaustion would defeat him. He had to fly by instrument now, because visibility was cut to fifty feet on all sides. A torrent of warm rain flowed past in horizontal lines; he could see the wind-scored ocean only at intervals.

And there came a time, too, when he did not see how the plane could withstand the shocks. It seemed that the rain would cut the very fabric off the wings; it seemed that the rain would drown out the thundering engine and leave the plane to plummet into this terrible sea.

He could have turned back, of course, but somehow it never occurred to him to turn back. He went on, correcting his altimeter constantly against the falling barometer.

And then, abruptly, he struck a tremendous surge of wind that tossed the plane upward. The air-speed had long since gone out, with water in the pitot line; Hurley had no way of knowing what the acceleration was now. The rate-of-climb leaped to two thousand feet a minute, the engine snarled a new roar—and the altimeter needle swished around its dial to eight hundred feet.

Almost immediately after that, while Hurley was trying to feel his way downward to make that precarious visual contact with the water once more, the rain ceased. The air became smoother. The plane hurled itself out of the clouds into a vast cloud-walled room.

HE was in the storm center—and for a moment the sight almost took his breath.

For here was blue sky, with the sun shining serenely down through a peculiar yellow haze that hung in the air. Below, the ocean was a wild thing, its swells mounting to fifty feet, its troughs immense. But there was no wind here! A dead calm was imprisoned by these clouds and that circle of wind on all sides.

Hurley looked at his watch. He had been away from the Base thirty-eight minutes. He computed distance, and then sent a radio message, tapping it out on the key: "PIERCED STORM CENTER STOP ESTIMATE FULL HURRICANE NEAR CENTER STOP TAKE BEARING."

Static was bad, when he listened for the acknowledgment. But he got it. And then, cruising in a slow circle, he looked over his plane. The fabric was beaten white on the leading edge of each wing. The leading edges of stabilizer and vertical fin were battered and frayed. And a sudden realization came over him then. He knew that this ship would not stand another ordeal like that—even if he himself could; and he was not sure he could. The fabric would rip off the wings.

For an hour, circling steadily, he tried to think what to do. He sent messages at intervals. When the hour was up, he listened to the Base operator:

STORM CENTER NOW FIFTY MILES EAST SOUTHEAST MIAMI MOVING THIS WAY EIGHT MILES AN HOUR STOP HAVE NOTIFIED WEATHER BUREAU STOP WHEN ARE YOU RETURNING STOP BAY NOW TOO ROUGH TO PERMIT LANDING ADVISE GOING PALM BEACH OR NORTH THERE.

Hurley radioed back: "TROUBLE WITH WING FABRIC HEAVY RAIN MAY LOSE SOME STAND BY."

After that, in a slowly mounting apprehension, he tried to think of a way out of this situation. He was sure that piercing the storm again would be suicidal. Yet he could not remain here more than another hour and a half. The droll thought occurred to him that if the storm hit Miami, all he would need to do was to remain in the calm area, and he would be pushed over to Miami eventually. But long before that happened, he would be down. And once down—he looked at the churning seas, and his lips suddenly felt numb.

Finally, thinking of a possible chance, he started climbing. The yellow haze thinned, as he went up. The altimeter arced around the dial, added a thousand feet on each turn. A thin film of clouds lay under the sun now, and the walls of the wind seemed to draw the clouds inward, like the sides of a cone.

If he could go high enough, he thought, he might get on top of the clouds, where there would be no rain to whip off the fabric. But he did not know how high the clouds went. If they went too high, he was wasting time, wasting gasoline. But it was the only chance he saw, and he had to take it. If he didn't take it,

he was going to get that bronze tablet —no mistake about that.

At fifteen thousand feet there was not much power left in the engine. But the ship was still climbing, circling inside that wall of clouds. At eighteen thousand, Hurley figured he had two thousand feet of climb left. It didn't look very hopeful.

Then, at a little above nineteen thousand feet, he emerged above a rough plateau of white clouds. There were more clouds above, but these were broken. The ones below were the top of the storm. With a feeling of relief and exultance he turned northward.

ONLY then did he realize how cold it was, here. He was shivering. The temperature was below freezing, and the thought came to him that if he had to get into these clouds, his plane would become weighted with ice. So he forced it up still more, and then leveled out, flying by compass, expecting to strike the coastline eventually, and let down there.

An hour later he had not seen the coast. He had no definite idea of where he was. Clouds—lower clouds now—were still under him. But he knew he was away from the heaviest rain. He eased back on the throttle, and mushed down. The wings picked up a little ice for a few minutes, and then lost it in the warmer temperatures. The air was only moderately rough now. At two thousand feet he broke out. Below him was timber as far as he could see—timber, and swamp land, utterly uninhabited. He turned east, toward the coast, praying that his gas would hold out. The gauge showed zero, and there was no place to land, here.

It was five minutes later that the engine spat the first time. Hurley's heart leaped. Under him, as he craned his head over the rim of the cockpit, there was nothing but timber, and small lakes—lakes much too small to get the Grummen down safely.

Then, just ahead, he saw a large lake. He had no idea how far he was from the coast. For the last twenty minutes he had been trying to raise the Base by radio, but there was no answer. Static was too bad, he supposed.

So now, with nothing else left to do, he spiraled down and landed on the calm surface of that black water. He was miles from a house, from a telephone. His radio would not work long, on the plane's battery. He taxied to shore, and the blunt nose of the float snuggled gently into the soft mud. He rigged his antenna to a pine tree, and got back in the cockpit and intermittently called every Coast Guard Station between Galveston and Cape May. He could not tell whether he was heard.

Then, because mosquitoes were eating him, because his radio was dead and because darkness was coming, he cut up the life-raft and made a rubber cover for the cockpit. Under that cover, through the calm night, he slept fitfully. He wasn't particularly worried. It was just a matter of time till they found him. But he never realized before how annoying it was to be hungry. . . .

The next day, convoyed by three Coast Guard planes from St. Petersburg, Hurley landed at the Dinner Key Base. The hurricane, he saw, had done a good deal of damage. The papers were full of the story, of his own heroism and the fact that but for him Miami would have been caught unprepared, with a great loss of life. As it was, only three people had been killed, and they needlessly; people just would not learn to remain indoors when the calm center of a storm was passing.

GILPIN, it developed, had left on a morning train for Washington. Hurley dreaded to think what would happen when Gilpin had made his report.

He was surprised two days later, to get a cable from Newsom. The Old Man, his vacation disturbed, was evidently in a very bad humor.

WHO THE BLANK BLANK IS GILPIN AND WHAT GUFF HAVE YOU BEEN TELLING HIM ABOUT ME STOP WHY DO I GET CREDIT FOR SILLY FOOLISHNESS YOUR LOCATING HURRICANE WITH AIRPLANE STOP FINE MESS YOU ARE GETTING COMMAND OF BASE AND I AM BEING PROMOTED TO WASHINGTON STOP FIND OUT WHY STOP WHEN I RETURN WILL CONDUCT INVESTIGATION AND YOU WILL GET HELL

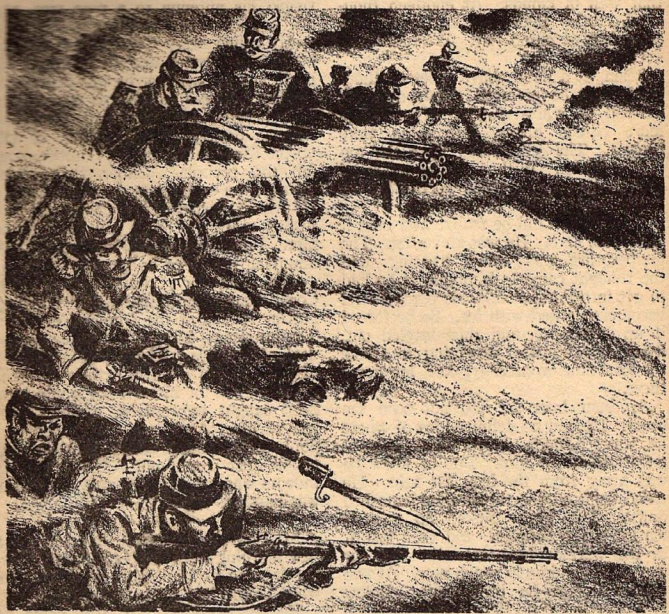
Hurley, grinning, wrote out a reply:

HAVE ALREADY HAD HELL NOW ITS YOUR TURN LOVE AND KISSES

He called Jenkins. "Take this down and get it off right away. And Jenkins —send it collect!"

Leland Jamieson has been flying a flood-relief job, but expects to finish another spirited and authentic story of air adventure for an early issue.

The CANNON



The amazing story of the all-too-secret weapon upon which Napoleon III depended to win the Franco-Prussian war. . . . One of the best of the Arms and Men series.

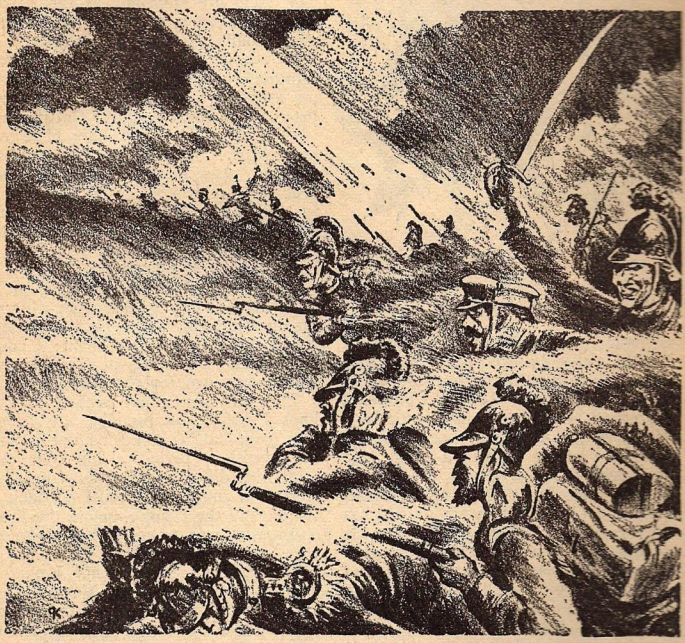
WHEN living in Paris, I became addicted to collecting the letters and miniature newspapers sent out by balloon post during the 1870 siege, which constituted the first actual air-mail. Many of these were of great interest; but being written on very thin paper in crabbed French hands, they were extremely difficult for me to decipher.

Nearly every afternoon I dropped into the café at the end of the Avenue Gabriel for the customary drink, and gained a nodding acquaintance with an old gentleman who was invariably there at the same hour, rain or shine, in the same corner. He was always clad in black, with a high choker collar and the rosette of a Commander of the Legion at his buttonhole. He was a thin, frail, erect old man, with one of those perfectly incredible beards which betray a lifetime of assiduous attention. One day he assisted me in deciphering a difficult letter. After that, I did not hesitate to ask his aid. He spoke beautiful and precise English. Such was his reserve that, despite his air of friendliness and his courtesy, we exchanged no personalities. . . .

On a bitter day when rain was freezing in the street and in the trees, I entered the café, found the old gentleman with his usual chocolate before him, and took my place at his side. After the customary greetings, I extended a thin tissue letter.

"Here," I said, "is a very remarkable

# of VICTORY



By **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

Lithographs by Peter Kuhlhoff

ballon monté, monsieur." (This is the French name for these missives that were sent by a balloon with aëronaut.) "It was written by a Captain Touchard, stationed in the fort of Mont Valerien. He gives his wife detailed plans of the fort; luckily, the letter did not fall into Prussian hands! But there's one sentence I can't make out—something about the cannon of victory, which seems absurd. I can't understand the words."

When I pointed out the passage in question, the faded eyes of the old gentleman lit up with a gleam of sharp interest. His slender, delicate fingers smoothed out the paper. He donned his golden *pince-nez* and scanned the crabbed writing of Touchard. Then he read the words, in a lingering murmur like a sigh.

"The cannon of victory have failed us completely. No one comprehends their use; and besides this, the ammunition for them did not come."

He lowered the letter, removed his glasses, and shook his head.

"The cannon of victory—ah, what a name! What frightful irony! Do you know that the heartbreak of a man and of a nation lay in those words?" He tapped the letter. "And here in these words, the heartbreak of despair. This Touchard, I have heard of him; later he became a general officer, and I think was killed in Africa."

"But what did he mean by the cannon of victory?" I questioned.

He was knocked prostrate in the mud.

The old gentleman still hesitated. He sipped his chocolate and deliberated with himself, fingering the curving drake's tail of his beautiful white beard. I proffered cigarettes; he accepted one graciously.

"You're an American," he observed. "One of a people without a cause. You may fight for democracy while your soldiers curse it; that is not a cause. Since the Civil War, your nation has never fought for its existence. You do not know what patriotism means, what the burning flame of defeat and crushing taxation means, what the high ideal of a deathless cause means. You have never been really threatened. Well, I am French. I know all these things you do not know."

No use arguing with him, of course; I kept quiet, scenting something big back of his apparent rambling.

"It is a good thing to have an old enemy to hate, as you people once had the British," he went on. "It gives a nation cohesion and prevents internal squabbles. We had, and still have, and shall have, the Germans to think about. The cannon of victory, you ask? Well, that was something that might have, that should have, changed history; and in fact, it did change history and broke a nation's heart; but not as was anticipated. Alas!"

He sipped his chocolate again; in his frail, beard-blurred features was rising a tinge of color, a hint of animation and decision. When I gently reminded him that all this was not conveying to me any exact information as to the mysterious cannon of victory, he nodded.

"You shall know. I alone can tell you everything, because I alone know the whole truth. How? As to that, my dear American, you must pardon my reticence. The facts are sufficient in themselves. The first cannon, as it was then called, was actually the first machine-gun."

I attempted to give him the correct information on this matter, but he waved me aside with a grand air. He would listen to no mention of the Gatling gun.

"No, no; this is definitely historical, my dear sir. Terror of it convulsed half Europe. Any history of artillery will bear out my words. You may find it in the Encyclopædia Britannica, for which I supplied the facts—but not the entire story. That was something I have never told anyone."

He looked out from his corner, out at the great sad elms of the avenue, whipped by the wind and lashed by the freezing rain. Winter was come again; I could almost sniff the slime of the subways, and their warm foul breath.

The old gentleman sighed. "Perhaps I spoke too proudly, my friend. Yes; your Gatling gun came first in point of invention, perhaps; but this was something different. You must hear the story and judge. We must go back to the days of the Empire, before the Franco-Prussian war, when the last Napoleon was supreme in France. He was a keen artillery student, this Emperor; and at the Chateau of Meudon, just outside Paris, he kept up a private arsenal from his own private purse, for artillery experiments. You have been to Meudon, no doubt? It is very different nowadays."

I nodded. He went on with his story.

MAJOR BEAUFORT commanded at Meudon; he was in absolute charge of the arsenal, responsible to the Emperor alone. A man of forty, erect, intelligent, an inventor, not married. Remember the point—not married.

Sometimes Napoleon, in an interval between attacks of his illness, would come and watch experiments, or himself work, at Meudon. A small man with goatee, his face drawn and lined, of scandalous private life but of great plans for France. His carriage would drive to the chateau; he would go into the workshop, and either watch what went on, or pore over designs or plans with Beaufort.

On one of these occasions he found the place idle and deserted. The guards

saluted as he entered. No workmen were about. He strode to the office of the commandant; the sentries saluted; he passed in. Beaufort was alone there. He rose and came to salute before the angry Emperor.

"WHAT does this mean, monsieur?" came the sharp question.

"Victory, Your Majesty." The proud, aquiline visage of Beaufort kindled. "A year ago and more, Your Majesty demanded of me a certain weapon."

Napoleon frowned in retrospect. "True. We've found shrapnel to be useless, thanks to the defects in time-fuses. I remember. I commanded you to invent a weapon which would take its place, which would be a superior weapon against artillery. The extreme limit of shrapnel use is thirteen hundred yards. We should, I figured, have a weapon effective against artillery at twice that distance. A weapon like the old machine-guns of the 16th and 17th centuries, which failed because they were muzzle-loaders. But this gun must be able to smash the Prussian artillery."

"Will Your Majesty accompany me?" said Beaufort.

Guards passed them on to a deserted workshop, under lock and key. Alone, the door again locked, Beaufort removed the tarpaulin cover from what appeared to be a field-gun. From a massive chest, also under lock, he removed a false breech for this gun, which he slipped into place.

"Here, Your Majesty, is the weapon," he said simply. "Certain points are not yet perfected; I am at work upon them. This is entirely my own work. Not a soul knows of it, or suspects."

The astonished Napoleon examined the gun, which contained a number of rifled barrels disposed about a common axis. He examined the false breech, the plans, the calculations, of Beaufort. When he had finished, he held his hand over his eyes for a moment, then turned to Beaufort and embraced him with unaffected agitation.

"My friend, France is supreme in Europe," he exclaimed, in a transport of joy. "Finish your work. You have revolutionized warfare. This remains a secret between us."

From this day, the attitude of Napoleon toward other nations became arrogant. He no longer feared the legions of Bismarck; instead, he awaited the time to smash them.

Major Beaufort, on a tremendous tension, in absolute concentration, over a period of long months, could once more become human. His work was completed, was perfected. A private test on the heavily guarded firing-range, at which he and the Emperor alone took part, resulted in complete success. They conferred together afterward, and Beaufort checked over his results and plans.

"One hundred and twenty-five shots per minute, Your Majesty; effective range at three thousand yards. Further, a target can be ranged accurately almost at once. But—this weapon is not for infantry work, I warn you most solemnly! As such, it will fail. Its one purpose, its one aim, is to outrange and silence and destroy enemy artillery. Its work begins where that of the infantry rifle ceases. Its use comes at a great distance, and when in masses; then it is supreme."

"It is the cannon of victory, this *canon à balles* of yours!" cried the Emperor. "Marvelous! It is in your hands. Set to work; the money will be provided. But remember, secrecy is imperative—the greatest secrecy! The entire resources of the empire are at your command, both for manufacture and for secrecy."

Not even to his intimates, to his generals and marshals, would Napoleon breathe this secret; and yet the very fact that there was a secret could not but become known. War, the Emperor declared, was about to be revolutionized. And Europe began to writhe. A torment of uncertainty gripped chancelleries, diplomats, parliaments. Secret agents of some half a dozen nations concentrated on Paris.

And Major Beaufort, relaxing after this long grind, fell in love.

AT one of the gay balls which made the season of 1869 resplendent, Beaufort met Lola Champion, the young widow of an officer who had died in Algiers. Not over twenty, she was the most charming creature imaginable: witty, unutterably lovely, fascinating, and possessed of the rarest quality of human nature—an absolute loyalty. On this point, Major Beaufort was in complete agreement with Ned Hasbury the Englishman.

Rich, handsome, an artillery officer on leave, Hasbury was also devoted to Lola Champion. Rivals though they were, it was impossible for the two men not to respect and admire each other.

Meantime, Paris seethed with intrigue. The Emperor, with his incautious and boastful prophecies, had not only aroused the rest of Europe but had caught the public attention; France, convinced that the war office held a secret and invincible weapon of some sort, was at fever-heat.

Major Beaufort was in love, but he was also hard at work. Half a dozen artillery captains, each one picked by the Emperor in person, were brought to Meudon and there instructed in the mechanism of the cannon of victory, as it was unofficially named in those days. Half a dozen; no more. The firing range was kept under the most absolute guard during the tests.

The year rounded to its close; the new and more fateful year began, and there came the evening of the Tuileries Ball. For months the Emperor, worn down by attacks of the stone, had been worn and ill and wasted. Major Beaufort had scarcely seen him, but was to see him in private this night, and show him the final details of perfection in the new weapon: a heavy bullet which would break into three parts on discharge; the details of the false breech, the heart and soul of the gun; and those of the drawn-brass cartridge case which eliminated all jamming.

The evening arrived. Beaufort and Hasbury, their rivalry accentuated, each of them head over heels in love, were to accompany Lola Champion together. Hasbury came in his carriage to pick up his rival; he had a dashing team which he himself tooled with expert hand. To-night, however, he employed a driver.

IT was a rainy, disagreeable night, the streets heavy with mire, the wind howling dismally. Lola Champion lived in the Rue Vaugirard. They picked her up and started for the Tuileries. In his pocket Major Beaufort carried in one envelope his plans for the eye of Napoleon; in a second envelope was his last sketch of the false breech, with certain suggested improvements. He was never satisfied with his invention, this man.

The carriage swung around a corner. The yellow lamps of another carriage glimmered fitfully. There was a cry, a shout of anger, a terrific crash; the wheels of the two vehicles were locked; one of the horses was down. A foul barrage of Parisian *argot* was hurled at Hasbury's carriage. Beaufort, restraining the angry Briton, opened the carriage door.

"Let me handle this," he said. Then, by swift instinct of caution, he caught out the two envelopes and thrust them behind the cushions. He alighted from the carriage, and almost instantly was knocked prostrate in the mud by the blow of a heavy stick.

Two men hurled themselves upon him, caught him up, half dazed, and hustled him off into the darkness. He was hurled into a doorway; a door slammed. He brought up against a wall, found himself in a lighted room. He was in the presence of a masked man who sat at a table, holding a revolver, with two other men near by.

"One shout, and you die, Major Beaufort," said the masked man. "Put up your hands. Search him, gentlemen."

A slight accent told Beaufort that he was in the presence of a Prussian.

HE drew himself up and submitted in silence to the search. It was thorough, but revealed nothing. The man at the table spoke again.

"Well, monsieur? In half an hour you have an audience with the Emperor, to show him certain details of your invention. Where are they?"

Beaufort wiped the mud from his face, and smiled slightly.

"They preceded me to the Tuileries, monsieur," he said. "More than this, I refuse to say. But for this, I give you my word of honor."

"That is sufficient. We gambled and lost." The man at the table rose and bowed. "We should have looked after your orderly, eh? Very well. Allow me to blindfold you; then you will be led to the street and placed at liberty."

Ten minutes before the time of his appointment, Beaufort hastily strode into the Tuileries. He found Hasbury and Lola Champion talking together; they turned to him, and Hasbury chuckled.

"Upon my word! What became of you, Beaufort? We searched everywhere, and at last came along. Just arrived here—"

"Your carriage! Where is it?" Beaufort exclaimed in agitation. "I left two envelopes on the cushions. I must find them instantly! It means ruin, disgrace!"

Hasbury stared blankly at him; but Lola Champion, with a little laugh, drew an envelope from her handbag and extended it.

"I found it, my friend, and guessed you had dropped it."

Beaufort, with a cry of joy, seized the envelope; it was the one containing the plans for the eye of Napoleon. Then he glanced up.

"But the other—the other?"

Lola's lovely brows lifted. "There was no other! I assure you."

Sweat started on the brow of Beaufort. He caught the Englishman by the arm.

"My dear fellow, I've not a moment to waste. The Emperor is expecting me. Yet this is a matter of life and death; my whole career, my very life, hangs on it. Will you seek out your carriage now, instantly, and retrieve that other envelope for me?"

"With all my heart!" Hasbury agreed instantly. "Madame, you will excuse me?"

He departed. Beaufort went to his private audience. He dared not, must not, mention what had happened; it would all come out right, he hoped.

When he had finished and withdrawn to the grand salon again, he hurried to Hasbury, who had returned from his search.

"Not there, old chap," Hasbury said. "I searched the carriage. I've sent the coachman back to look in the street at that corner."

"*Mon Dieu!*" murmured Beaufort, and turned white as death. His eyes went to Lola Champion. "And you, madame—you saw but the one envelope?"

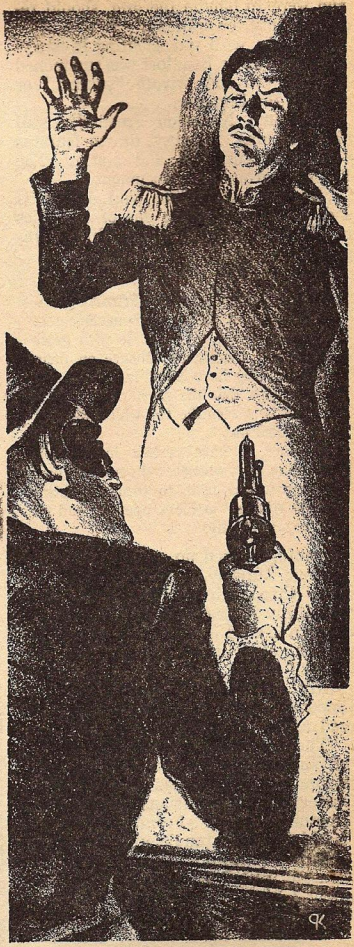
"There was only the one on the cushions," she answered. "What was in it? You can trust me. What was it?"

"The destiny of France," said Beaufort in a hollow voice.

WEEKS rolled on: the envelope had never been found. The one desperate hope of Beaufort was that his cloak had jerked it from the carriage cushions into the mud, and that it was forever lost to sight. And this, apparently, was what had happened.

He plucked up heart. Winter passed into spring, and the dark secret lessened and was made remote by the great joy that filled Beaufort's life. He loved, and was loved; Lola Champion had given him her heart, and with June was to give him her hand. Hasbury had lost like a gentleman, and with his handsome equipage posted off for Calais and London.

Beaufort did not hesitate to confide to his *fiancée* the full story of that dreadful evening, and what it was that he had lost. His confidence in her was most implicit. As no harm, apparently, had come of the matter, the incident was closed. . . .



"One shout, and you die, Major Beaufort," said the masked man.

Spring burgeoned into early summer. War was in the air. Napoleon turned a defiant face to Prussia. The *canon à balles* was still so profound a secret that only the little handful of artillery captains previously instructed in it, were aware of its possibilities. Orders were issued that the non-commissioned officers

who were to handle the gun, should report in July for training.

Suddenly, with war shouting in everyone's ear, Major Beaufort was summoned hurriedly to the private "cabinet" or office of the Emperor.

He found Napoleon dreadfully still and searching, the gray, drawn features alive with suspicion and alarm. The Emperor extended a document.

"Here, monsieur," he said dryly, "is a decoded report from one of our spies in Berlin. Read the two final paragraphs."

Beaufort read them:

> I have learned that the Prussian council was offered the Gatling machine-gun. They are about to reject it with great ostentation, placing all reliance on their artillery; they have issued instructions to their troops that the mysterious French weapon is a scientific toy which will fail in practical use.
>
> Further, I have certain information that they plan, whenever the new weapon appears in the field, to turn the entire weight of their artillery upon it, and so destroy it swiftly.

Beaufort looked up calmly.

"Your Majesty, I could ask nothing better than such a plan. I guarantee that, if my instructions are followed and this gun is used in masses as an artillery weapon, it will overwhelm their artillery."

"My generals of division," said the Emperor coldly, "say that it should be used as an infantry arm."

"Then you have told them?"

"Why not?" Napoleon broke out passionately. "There has been a leak! Obviously, the Prussians have learned something. How? From whom?"

Cold sweat stood on Beaufort's forehead.

"You have nothing to say?" the other went on. "Very well. Proceed with the work; I must have a thousand of these cannon in the field within two weeks!"

"You shall have them," murmured Beaufort.

He returned to Meudon. When he stepped into his own office, he found a man awaiting him there, one of the Emperor's secret police. The visitor was very polite.

"Monsieur le Commandant, permit me to recall to your memory the evening of the Tuileries Ball. Will you have the kindness to explain to me why you arrived at the palace that evening, for a private audience with the Emperor, in a uniform that was stained and spotted with mud?"

Beaufort perceived the gulf that was open before him. He had never reported this matter; it would have involved mentioning the loss of that other envelope, it would have ruined or damaged his entire career needlessly.

Still, even now, he refused to mention that envelope. He was not convinced that any knowledge of the "cannon of victory" had leaked out; far from it, indeed! But he was forced to recount what had taken place that evening.

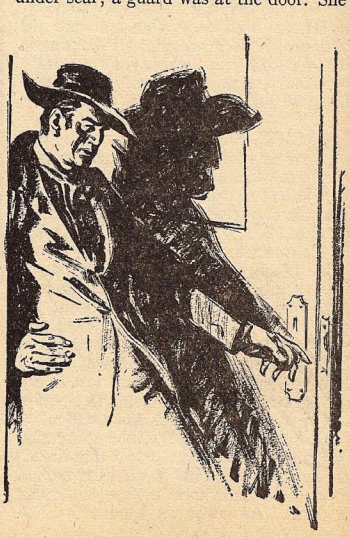
"And you did not report so vital a matter?" asked the secret agent.

"No. There was no harm done. I could not have found the place again. I thought it would only stir up trouble, for no good."

"I see. Will you have the goodness to turn over your keys to me, M. le Commandant? And to leave me in charge of everything here? You will resume your duties in the morning. Here is the warrant of His Majesty."

Beaufort understood. He was not suspect; but his correspondence, everything in his office, was to be examined. He bowed, laid down his keys, and departed to his own quarters.

That evening he drove into Paris to see Lola Champion. Her apartment was under seal; a guard was at the door. She



had disappeared. The secret police had acted; she was not the first.

Beaufort passed a night of frantic, desperate exertion. He pulled every wire, saw every influential man he knew, was refused admittance to the Emperor. In the morning, haggard, worn, anxious, he returned to his duties. And in the days that followed, he could get no slightest trace of the woman he loved.

July was approaching—the fateful July that was to bring war.

IN an underground prison chamber in the heart of Paris, Lola Champion was led before a little weary gray man, whose sharp eyes pierced her keenly. He shuffled the documents before him with uneasy hand; it was no easy matter for Napoleon, well or ill, to disregard beauty.

"Madame, have you nothing to add to the story you have told?" he said. "Come! I give you one final chance. You have here stated that Major Beaufort left the carriage, placing a certain envelope on the seat for greater safety. We already know what happened to him, and that this action did preserve the envelope and its contents. But there is more. You took care of this envelope. Sometime later, at the palace, you returned it to M. Beaufort. It was not sealed?"

The young woman flushed. The voice of Napoleon could express contemptible things.

"I do not know. I did not observe, at the time."

She spoke distinctly, a little angrily. Not for worlds would she mention any second envelope; not for life itself.

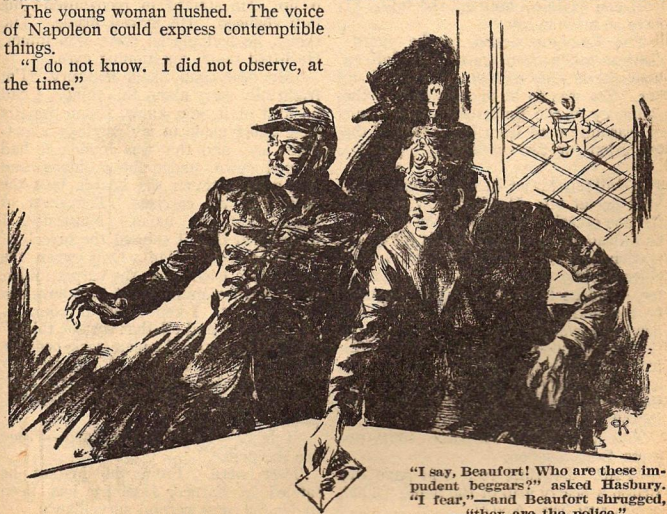
"Is it not true," went on the dry voice, "that you did open this envelope and inspect the contents?"

"It is not true," she returned quietly.

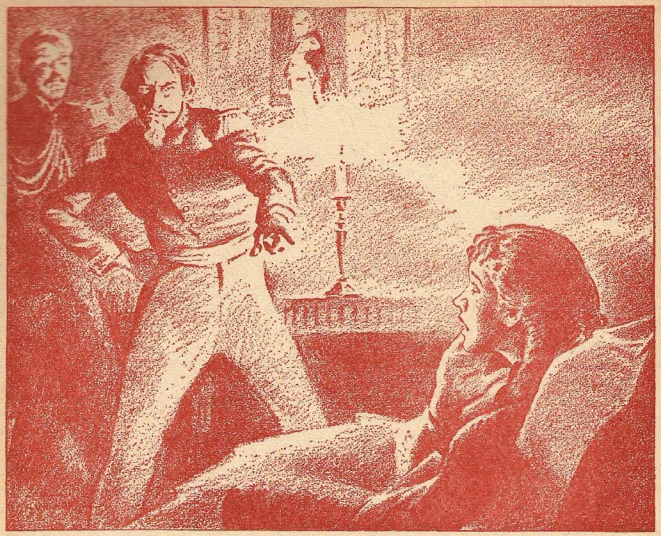
The gray brows flickered. Napoleon took up a blue-gray telegraph blank.

"Here is a message I have received from London. Major Hasbury, of the Royal Artillery, has been questioned by the English war office. He admits having knowledge, and detailed knowledge, of the weapon invented by M. Beaufort. He states that he feels in honor bound to keep this knowledge to himself. That is all that has transpired; but the implication is obvious, madame. Whether his feeling of honor"—and the dry voice held a sneer—"is for public purposes, or extends so far as to keep his own government in the dark, may be inferred. At all events, the secret is known. You and he had possession of that envelope, that evening. If this knowledge has been given to other governments, such as the Prussian—it could only have come through you."

She reeled a little, in desperate, baffled confusion. She could not comprehend what it meant. She knew only that if the existence of that second and



"I say, Beaufort! Who are these impudent beggars?" asked Hasbury. "I fear,"—and Beaufort shrugged, —"they are the police."



"If knowledge has been given to other governments, it could only have come through you!"

lost envelope were revealed, Beaufort would be a ruined man.

"I can explain nothing," she said. "I have no more to say."

The Emperor signed to the guard; she was taken from the room. Half an hour later, the sentence was read to her. She was to be shot as a spy; the clemency of the Emperor, and his hope of learning more from her, deferred the execution for two weeks.

OF all this Major Beaufort knew nothing at all. He did know, that on the one occasion he reached the Emperor and pleaded in agonized words for information about the woman he loved, Napoleon coldly refused to discuss the matter. And he knew, too, that everything he did and said was watched with the hawklike eyes of the secret police.

Then, with flames blowing on the frontiers, with France in feverish activity, with everyone expecting a declaration of war daily, a visitor walked into the office of Major Beaufort.

This visitor was Hasbury, come express from London.

"You!" Beaufort rose, and gave the Briton a hearty grip of the hand. "What brings you here, Ned?"

For reply, Hasbury laid on the desk a dirty, stained envelope. Beaufort picked it up. He started in recognition; his face changed. He looked inside. The sketch he had placed there was intact. He lifted mute, questioning eyes.

"My dear chap," said Hasbury, "I'm frightfully sorry about this thing. I had no idea of it, you know. Some repairs were being made to my carriage a fortnight ago, and this was found; it had slipped down, under the cushions, and had gone between the boards into the bottom of the carriage. The sheet of paper bears no name. Naturally, I understood that it showed the breech of a gun, a new design. Only when the War Office had me on the carpet, did it flash into my mind about that envelope you had lost. I kept quiet, of course—honor bound and all that sort of thing."

The door opened; men darkened the entrance. Hasbury turned, adjusted his eyeglass, and surveyed them.

"I say, Beaufort! Who are these impudent beggars?" he asked.

"I fear,"—Beaufort shrugged,—"they are the police."

They were. From the instant he landed in France, Hasbury had been under the most careful surveillance.

That evening, in the private "cabinet" of the Emperor, Napoleon looked at the three people who faced him; on the desk before him was that soiled, stained envelope. Into his lined features crept an unwonted relaxation; a thoughtful, almost melancholy tenderness.

"I cannot commend your silence in regard to this second envelope, M. Beaufort," he said slowly. "Yet it was most human; and in a sense you were right. —Major Hasbury, I salute you, sir, as a gentleman. But before you, my dear young lady,"—and he turned to Lola Champion,—"I am prostrate in admiration. One word from you would have cleared up this unfortunate matter, would have banished suspicion. Because you feared it might ruin the man you loved, you kept silent; even at the ultimate price, you would have kept silence."

The Emperor's chin sank on his breast. He stared at the papers on his desk as though he there saw some vision that tortured him; his breath came more quickly; a grayish pallor crept into his thin cheeks. Then he drew a deep breath and looked up.

"Loyalty," he murmured. "That is it: loyalty! Not in the moment of triumph, when the world is at one's feet, but in the moment of despair and death and ruin. Loyalty! I congratulate you. I congratulate the man whom you are about to marry. Come! On the day when peace is concluded with Prussia, on the day when your husband's talent has made France supreme in Europe, I shall create you a duchess, my dear, and your husband a peer of France."

Two days later, war was declared.

THE cannon of victory? The fatal secrecy flung about this weapon was its own undoing. It was taken into battle by men who had never seen it fired, who knew nothing of its mechanism. Swift and terrible disaster struck at the armies of France. Napoleon went to Sedan, to capture, to exile. Authority was destroyed.

Where these machine-guns were employed, the instructions of Beaufort were ignored.

We find him writing in agonized despair that they were being used "in a perfectly idiotic fashion. They are only good at a great distance and in masses, and they are being employed at close quarters like a rifle."

The story was ended. . . .

The lights in the Café Gabriel were lit. Outside, the early afternoon darkness was closing down with freezing rain and a sighing of wind in the trees. The old gentleman who had told me the story, paid for his chocolate, drew a heavy black cape about his shoulders, buckled it, and stood up. He shook hands heartily, in the pleasant French fashion, with me.

"Monsieur, I thank you for listening to an old man. *Au revoir!*"

HE was wrong; it was not *au revoir*, but *adieu*. When I dropped into the café a couple of days later, he was not there. Another two or three days, and I came in with some letters that I could not read. He was not here. I waited, expecting to see his frail, erect figure come in at any moment.

A procession was passing in the street outside—one of those French funerals that are really funerals, celebrated with the "funeral pomp" dear to French hearts: the mourners walking, it may be for miles; nodding black plumes on the hearse; men in the street, in taxicabs, uncovering in respect to the unknown dead.

Even here in the café, those seated near the windows removed their hats, and the waiters paused for a moment at the door, one of them furtively crossing himself.

I looked up as my own waiter approached, a moment later, and asked him what had become of the white-bearded old gentleman.

"He has just passed, m'sieur," said the waiter simply, and gestured to the street outside. "For the last time. Ah, what a gentleman! His father was a famous soldier under the Empire, m'sieur."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, shocked. "You mean—that was his funeral?"

"Yes, m'sieur. The last time he was here was when you were talking with him the other day. Pneumonia—*pouf!* Like that."

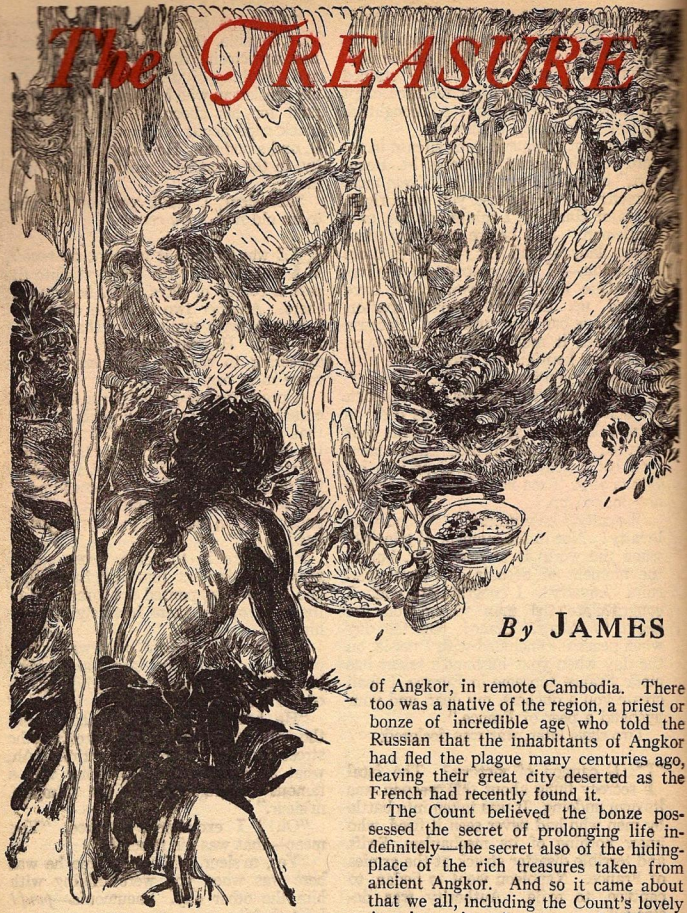
"Do you happen to know his name?"

"His name? But certainly! M'sieur did not know it? A pity. Yes. M. Beaufort was not wealthy, but he was one of the greatest gentlemen in Paris. Well, well, such weather kills off the old, eh?"

One of the greatest gentlemen in Paris! A fitting tribute, I thought, to the son of Lola Champion.

Watch for a new series of stories by this brilliant writer—in an early issue.

The TREASURE



By JAMES

The Story Thus Far:

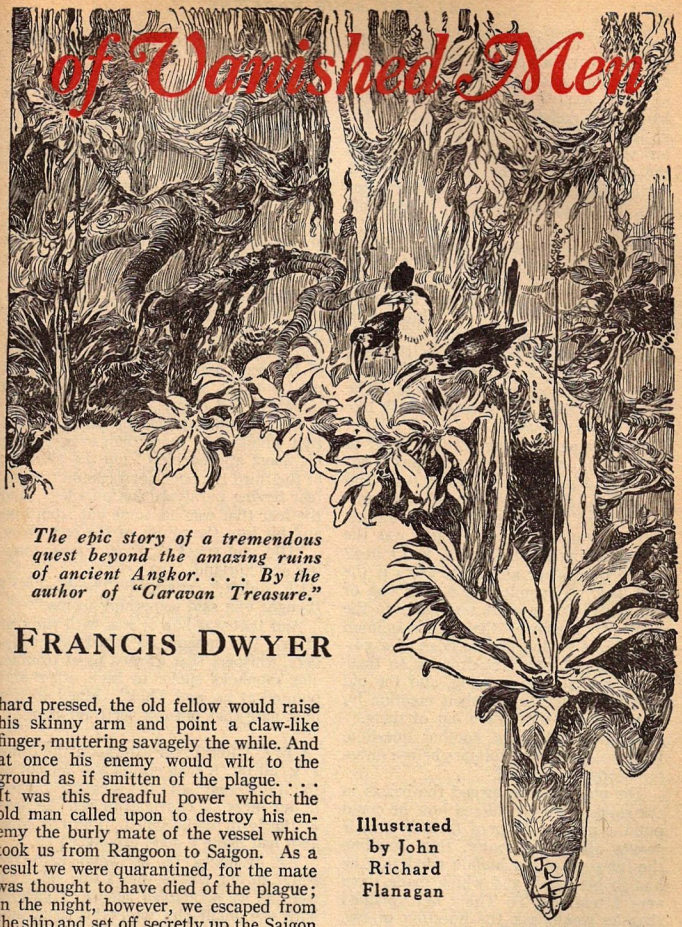
WILD hawks of trouble were my Irish uncles Flane and Thurland. And when the Russian count, who was looking for two able and daring men to risk with him a great adventure, made our acquaintance in Paris, he knew he had found the right men.

At the Paris exposition, it seems, had been an exhibit of the astounding ruins of Angkor, in remote Cambodia. There too was a native of the region, a priest or bonze of incredible age, who 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.

Almost at once our dangers 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. At Port Saïd, however, my uncles discovered a friend, the American John Martin, who proved a real help. Moreover the old bonze himself possessed a strange and dreadful power: for when

# of Vanished Men



The epic story of a tremendous quest beyond the amazing ruins of ancient Angkor. . . . By the author of "Caravan Treasure."

FRANCIS DWYER

Illustrated by John Richard Flanagan

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 and set off secretly up the Saigon River in a hired boat, manned by two Annamese—the owner, Thlôk, and his mate Két. It was a long journey, and strange hazards beset us daily, mystery and magic everywhere. Men knew of our coming before we arrived; the gods of the river had told them. . . . A life and an intelligence questioned our presence. The trees wondered why we were there; the rocks wondered; and the old pagodas hated us.

(The story continues in detail:)

WE came to a village where, in a green slimy pool, lived half a dozen crocodiles that had been there for years and years. And the natives consulted the crocodiles as the men of the Aran Isles in the days of old consulted the blind fish in St. Bride's Well. They put questions to the devils, and the manner in which they hopped gave the answers. It looked silly to us; but as Thurland

remarked, there's a lot of white folk who go to palmists and fortune-tellers, and swallow every word told to them.

Thlôk wanted to know if he would have a safe passage back to My-tho after he had parted with us; and the old fellow who fed the crocodiles agreed to put the questions. If the crocodile turned to the right after listening to the question, it was supposed to mean "Yes," and if he went to the left it was "No."

The old man gabbled the question about My-tho; and a listening croc lashed out with his tail and swam off to the left. Thlôk, whose face was the color of saffron, turned a pasty white when he saw the swimmer doing a crawl-stroke around the pool. Flane, thinking the boat-owner would tumble into the place, reached out and held him up. The crocodile's "No" had swatted Thlôk like a fist in the stomach.

The Count, scenting trouble, tried to pull Thlôk away from the tank; but Thlôk had given three bronze *cash*, and he wished to know the worst. His curiosity glued his feet to the slimy stones, and he wouldn't move. Where was the trouble going to strike him, and when?

The questioner asked the crocs if the bad luck was coming soon, and one of the brutes did a swift ten yards to the right which showed that in his opinion Thlôk was sitting on the edge of a volcano. Thlôk and Két dropped to their knees and started praying, and the old man was quick to use their emotion by getting a few more *cash* out of them.

Thlôk babbled out another question. How many days would pass before disaster dropped on him?

The old boy who owned the beasts in the slimy pond considered how he could put the query. Four of them had their snouts above the water, they smelling the lump of rotten buffalo meat that he had in his hand, and which made them very attentive. To Thlôk he explained that he would ask the question in two parts. He would ask first if it was more than four days, and if the question was answered with a "No," he would then ask the days to be reckoned by the number of crocodiles that would swim to the right.

He got a "No" on the first question, so it was only a question of how many days *under* four. Solemnly he put the query, and three crocodiles lashed out to the right, swimming swiftly; the other one sniffed at the stench that came from the buffalo meat. In three days Thlôk was going to step into a patch of bad luck!

Now, how that was done I don't know. Perhaps it was the manner in which the old fellow spoke that stirred the brutes to do this or that. But whatever the trick, it made a fine limp boatman out of Thlôk, and it made Thurland so mad that he wanted to throw the old questioner into the pool. For terror took hold of Thlôk and loosened the muscles of his legs so that he couldn't walk back to the launch; and when we got him there, he bawled like a baby. . . .

The first day passed with the ordinary troubles of the river: logs walloping into us, boatmen on downstream junks and pirogues screaming to us to get out of the way, and the monkeys jeering at us from the great trees of teak and tamarind and ebony.

The second day was the same, except that Thlôk wept more than ever, feeling his doom approaching. On the morning of the third the poor devil couldn't move, fear having paralyzed his muscles. And the fear that was his came out from him and bit into the minds of the rest of us.

"Did you speak?" asked Flane, looking at Thurland.

"I didn't," snapped Thurland. "I thought you said something to me."

And that was how it was with the rest of us. We thought we heard thin whispers, whispers that warned us of trouble. The monkeys spoke to each other and pointed at us, and Thlôk whined with a high note that put our teeth on edge.

ABOUT four in the afternoon, the thing hit us. A snag ripped the bottom of the *Ang-Duong*, and the Mekong spurted in our faces as Thurland turned the nose of the boat to the bank. The crocodile man had made a good prophecy!

We grounded on the mud with the water to our waists, and a fine sight we were as we scrambled ashore, Thurland with the small Om under his arm, and Flane carrying Joyeuse, and Thlôk and Két howling like banshees over the loss of the boat.

Tohsâroth was comforting. He informed the Count that as we were then approaching the first rapids, we would have had to leave the *Ang-Duong* and take to the pirogues, so the loss of the boat was a small matter. Tohsâroth had no sympathy for Thlôk.

The jungle steamed from the heat and the moisture. Great creepers hanging from the trees blocked any attempt we

might make to find a track; so we waited till an upstream junk should rescue us. Tohsâroth said that there was a village about five kilometers away, so we sat around a smudge and fought the big mosquitoes while Thlôk and Két howled in chorus.

Two pirogues came downstream as the night was closing in. Cunningly the *piroguiers* swung them into the bank, and with large grins of delight hailed us. They acted like a rescue-party, and we were puzzled.

"How the devil did they know we were here?" asked Martin.

The Count questioned them. Delightedly they grinned. Word had been sent to them by the owner of the crocodiles in the village where Thlôk had heard the prophecy! How was it sent? They laughed loudly, but they didn't explain.

"*They possibly* think it a foolish question," said Thurland, and it looked as if they did. In some mysterious manner they had heard that the crocodile man had prophesied disaster for the launch, and they had hurried downstream in the hope of salvage!

We climbed into the bamboo shelters of the pirogues. Two men stood on the front platform of each craft, and two stood on the rear. They pushed their iron-shod poles into the mud of the river, walking sternward as they did so, and the craft drove forward under the thrusts. They chanted softly, and the speed increased.

In the darkness we came to the village. Once again Tohsâroth was the center of attraction. The folk milled around him, shouting greetings; and in spite of the protests of the Count, they led him to a large hut, where some sort of game was in progress.

Thinking that the old bonze would get into trouble, we went along. A Chinese buyer of "paddy" was running a fan-tan party, hoping to win back from the simple villagers all the money he had paid them for their grain.

Fan-tan is a simple game. You place your money on one of the four corners of the mat; the Chinese dealer puts a bowl over a pile of *cash*, then draws the coins out in fours. The number left under the bowl at the last draw—that is one, two, or three—denotes the winner. If they come out even fours, then four wins.

Now, one of the welcomers of Tohsâroth had lost all his paddy money to the Chink. He placed the hands of the old bonze on his head and begged his help. Tohsâroth agreed; he told the fellow to borrow a little money and put it on three.

Three won. Tohsâroth ordered a shift to two. Two won. Another shift to one. Again the winner. Then the whole amount was pushed onto three. Three turned up obligingly.

The Chinaman glared at Tohsâroth; the local grain-growers were following the tip of the old bonze, and were scooping back their losses. The atmosphere of the place became hectic.

Tohsâroth was calm. He lifted two fingers as a signal to his friend to gamble on two; and as he did so, the temper of the Chinaman blew up. With the small hooked stick with which he drew the coins from beneath the bowl, he struck at the old man. Tohsâroth put up his hand to protect his face, but the tiny hook caught his wrinkled cheek and scratched it slightly.

The old man touched his cheek, regarded for an instant the smear of blood on the tip of his forefinger; then he looked at the Chinaman. A clammy silence was upon the place. The close-packed gamblers were looking from Tohsâroth to the Chink; the stakes on the fan-tan board were forgotten. Something had crept into the smoke-filled room—something that brought the chill of death with it.

Suddenly the Chinaman screamed. It was a horrible dry scream. He dropped the long bag in which he carried his *cash*, sprang from his seat and fled out into the darkness. . . .

The man who had won money on the tips given by Tohsâroth found us sleeping accommodation. He brought food and arranged with the *piroguiers* for an early start. He blessed Tohsâroth.

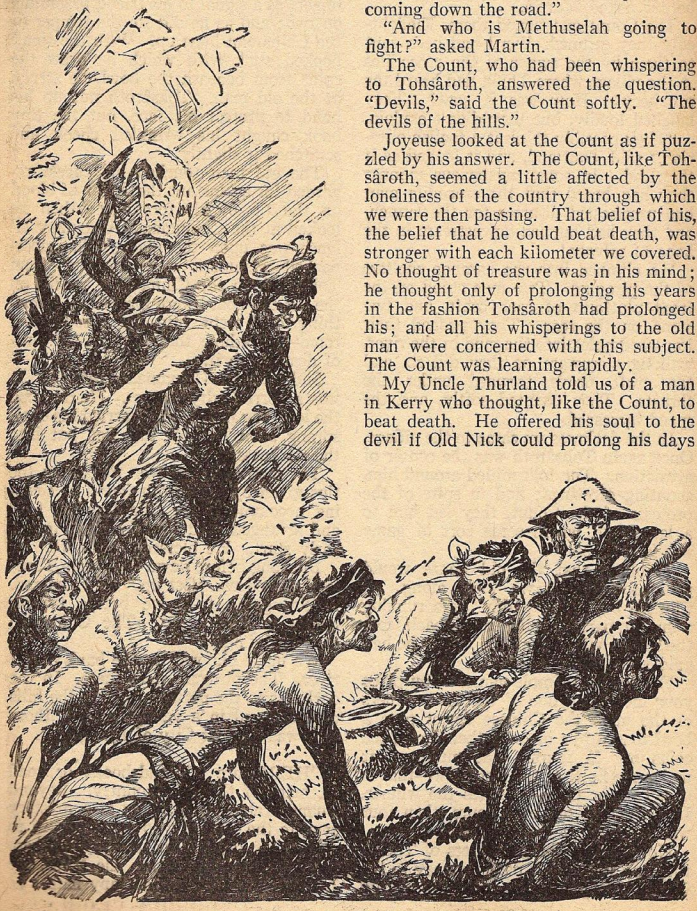
But long before dawn my Uncle Thurland roused us. "Get up," he whispered. "We're going to move before trouble breaks in this camp. The Chinaman died in the night."

We made our way to the bank of the river. The pirogues were there. In the darkness to the northward were the hills of Laos, and in a valley between those hills was the lost City of Klang-Nan.

THERE are no guidebooks or road maps of the Laos country. Beyond Luang-Prabang the region is a mystery even to the French who are supposed to control it. A fine fat mystery! There live the Tais, the Chams, the Méos, the Lolos, and others without any names at

all; and they live in the same manner as their forefathers did when Angkor-Thom was in all its glory.

Fine and free is their life, fishing and hunting; and the collector who comes around to collect head-taxes often loses his way on a jungle path or falls into a pit that has been dug to catch a tiger. For the folk in the hills of Laos are a bit like the Irish in their hatred of little men who come round to collect money for something that is called a government, and of which they know nothing at all.



And into this country we bored day after day. And with each league we traveled, a queer fever that had come upon Tohsâroth after leaving the village where the Chinaman died suddenly, seemed to grow greater.

Thurland, after watching the old man, told of a great fighter in Ireland who had the same complaint. "It would come on him when he was close to a fair," said Thurland. "He would get all hot and feverish with the thought of the battles he would have with the swaggering lads who didn't know that a champion was coming down the road."

"And who is Methuselah going to fight?" asked Martin.

The Count, who had been whispering to Tohsâroth, answered the question. "Devils," said the Count softly. "The devils of the hills."

Joyeuse looked at the Count as if puzzled by his answer. The Count, like Tohsâroth, seemed a little affected by the loneliness of the country through which we were then passing. That belief of his, the belief that he could beat death, was stronger with each kilometer we covered. No thought of treasure was in his mind; he thought only of prolonging his years in the fashion Tohsâroth had prolonged his; and all his whisperings to the old man were concerned with this subject. The Count was learning rapidly.

My Uncle Thurland told us of a man in Kerry who thought, like the Count, to beat death. He offered his soul to the devil if Old Nick could prolong his days

to two hundred years, and the devil agreed. On his two-hundredth birthday Satan arrived to collect, but the old man had grown cunning. "Have a drink before we leave," he said. "This is a drop of whisky that never paid a penny to a gauger."

The devil was in a good humor and sat down at the table to please the old man. "That's a great patch of potatoes I have there," said the old fellow; and when the devil turned his head to look at the spuds, the ancient poured holy water into the whisky in the devil's glass.

"May you never run short of coal!" said he to the devil, lifting his glass.

"That's a kind toast," said Old Nick; "and I thank you from the bottom of my heart." And when he said that, he took a big mouthful of the whisky and holy water.

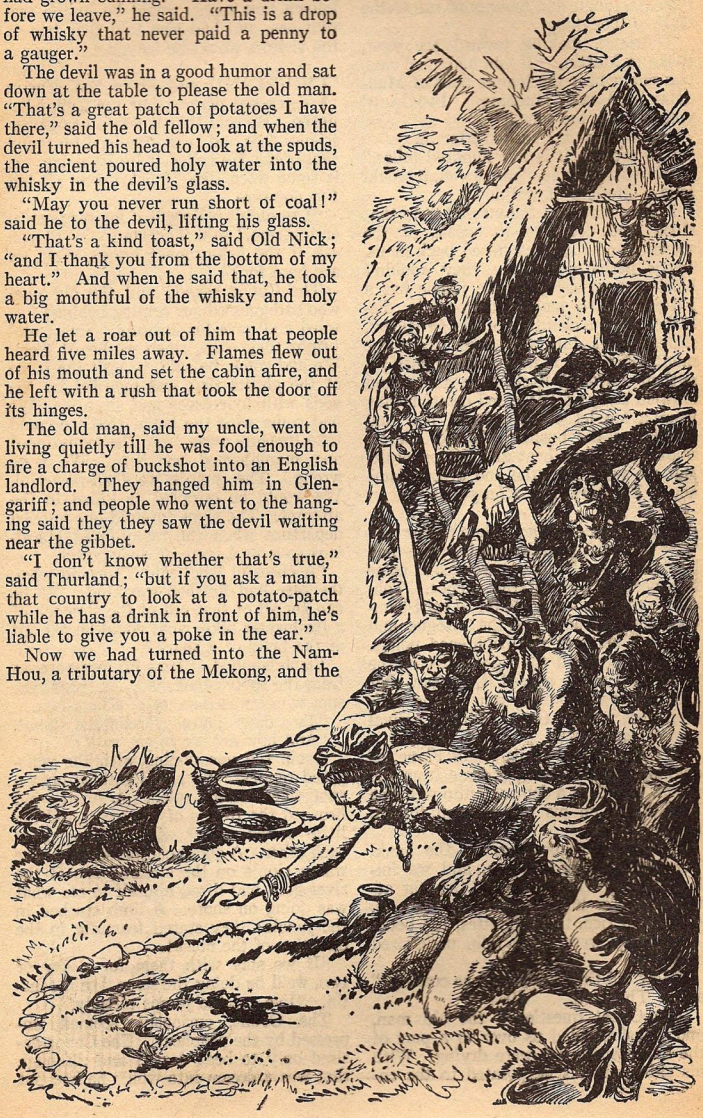
He let a roar out of him that people heard five miles away. Flames flew out of his mouth and set the cabin afire, and he left with a rush that took the door off its hinges.

The old man, said my uncle, went on living quietly till he was fool enough to fire a charge of buckshot into an English landlord. They hanged him in Glengariff; and people who went to the hanging said they saw the devil waiting near the gibbet.

"I don't know whether that's true," said Thurland; "but if you ask a man in that country to look at a potato-patch while he has a drink in front of him, he's liable to give you a poke in the ear."

Now we had turned into the Nam-Hou, a tributary of the Mekong, and the

A yelp of wonder came from the squatting fish-prophet. . . . "Somewhere down the river are two other white men, in a swift pirogue. They are not friends."



loneliness was an iron hand that pressed down upon us. Somewhere far above us was the Chinese state of Yunnan; away to the west lay Siam and Burma; and to the east, jungle and mountains ran to the Gulf of Tongking.

Thurland, looking toward the west, spoke to Martin. "If you had good ears, you might hear the temple bells of Mandalay," he said, laughing. "I've heard you bawling the song."

"How far is it?" asked Martin.

"To a crow, it is five hundred miles," answered my uncle, "but to you, it would take a lifetime of walking."

Martin stared at the massed trees that stood knee-deep, so to speak, in the stream; and the trees stared back at us, angry perhaps, because they couldn't block our passage, for the jungle has a hatred toward man. A crocodile, disturbed by the chanting of the *piroguiers*, slipped back into the water from the mudbank where it was sunning itself; a python unwound itself from a tree and crawled away; a flat-nosed dwarf fishing from a log let out a yelp of fear and dived into the bushes. And the forest smoked with the heat and the moisture. But we were near the end of our journey! *We were near Klang-Nan!*

ON a hot noon there came to our ears that thin, wailing music we had heard on two previous occasions. It came like needles through the silence. Tohsâroth rose from the shelter of split bamboos in the center of the pirogue and waved a hand to the frightened polers. We drove toward the right bank of the river; and as we neared it, we saw that a little crowd of men, women and children were waiting there, as if our arrival was expected.

"They've heard of us," said Flane, as doglike yelps of greeting came from the group. "Or is it a deputation to welcome Methuselah on his return from foreign parts?"

The two pirogues reached the bank. Tohsâroth stepped ashore, and we followed him. Tohsâroth was the star attraction. For him the fruit, the flowers, the boiled rice, the cigarettes, the betel. The people were Méos folk, undersized and ugly.

"How did they know he was coming?" asked Thurland.

The Count questioned the old man, and Tohsâroth led us over to a part of the bank where fish were drying. With his skinny hands he pointed to the entrails of fish spread on the ground. His arrival, so he asserted, had been made plain to the local sorcerer by the condition of the entrails! The diviner had known how many would be in the two pirogues, and had also told that two of the visitors would be females!

THURLAND and Flane and Martin expressed doubts, but the Count believed. He said that it was a recognized science that had been practiced for many centuries. He called it by its name. It is some word like *"Ichthyomancy,"* but I'm not sure.

"I wouldn't believe it if my own mother told me," said Thurland. "Will you ask if the fish-prophet knows what we are here for?"

The Count asked; and the old man who had guessed our coming hobbled forward and gave his answers. Smart and bright they were, when we heard them. We had come, he said, to visit the place of the ghosts that was guarded by the gods with four faces and six arms. We had come with the belief that we could take treasure away from the many-faced and many-armed watchers. We were wrong. The guards were all-powerful. We would be crippled or killed in the attempt. The signs foretold our hurried departure when the many-faced guardians gave us a taste of their power.

"A cheerful lad," said Thurland when the seer had finished speaking. "If he can get all of that out of the stomach of a freshwater pike, what could he get out of the belly of a shark?"

Flane laughed. "How far away are we from the spot?" he asked. "I mean, the spot where was the city of Klang-Nan?"

"Two days' journey," said the Count.

"And how are we to get to it?"

Again the questioning with the whispered replies. We had stumbled onto a spot where terror ruled. A small wind brushed the fronds of the trees, and the little crowd gazed with wide eyes at each other. A ghost had passed! There was a ripple on the stream; one of the river gods had lifted himself to see what was doing on shore. A limb crashed in the jungle; they stared fearfully in the direction of the noise!

"If we stay with them for a day or two, we'll be doing the same," said Martin. "I've got the jumps already."

The Count, curiously, seemed impressed by the prophecy. The Count desired only to beat death; and although that was a dream into which he had put

effort and money, it didn't bring to him the recklessness and the contempt for danger that the visions of treasure brought to my uncles and Martin. Before the eyes of Thurland and Flane and Martin danced continuously the rose-colored pearls, the emeralds, the big rubies that were thought to be the eyes of snakes. Their reward would be tangible, something that they could feel with their big hands; that made them indifferent to the croakings of the soothsayer.

"To the devil with him and his chattering!" said Thurland.

"But he prophesies death," said the Count, "death for some of us!"

"The priest of Glengariff prophesied that I would be hanged before I was eighteen," snapped Thurland. "And he got it off the stars, and not from the belly of a fish!"

"But Joyeuse," muttered the Count, "—this trail up the mountain will be too hard for her."

"I'm going," said Joyeuse. She stood by Flane as she spoke; and Flane smiled as she voiced her decision.

While this talk was in progress, a large fish had been caught by a boy, and the soothsayer was called to make an examination of the entrails. The crowd ran with him, and in silence we watched them, their stunted bodies bent down to hear what the squatting fish-prophet would say.

A yelp of wonder came from the soothsayer. The crowd split apart. Their flat faces turned in our direction; their slitted eyes and misshapen mouths told us that the finding concerned us.

Tohsâroth and the prophet led the rush back to us. Tohsâroth explained: and what he told the Count didn't please us at all.

"The Méo," said the Count, "finds that we are not the only visitors. Somewhere down the river are two other white men in a swift pirogue."

"The hell!" cried Thurland.

Tohsâroth spoke again. "He thinks they are not friends of ours," translated the Count. "He thinks we should move away before they arrive."

"Does he know how far off they are?" asked Thurland.

"A day's journey," said the Count.

NOW, such a story might have seemed ridiculous to us if told in another part of the world; but on the banks of the Nam-Hou, with the listening jungle around us, the words were like drops of acid that destroyed the suspicion that one tried to turn on them. The thought that Tohsâroth had told the seer of Schiemann and Bruden came to all of us; but the ancient assured the Count he had said nothing. The Méo had picked the information out of the fish, and the fellow stood up before us with his purple *sampot* and his big hat of rice-straw and defied contradiction. We, he proclaimed to the crowd, were followed by two enemies, and the crowd whined with sympathy.

"Now," said Thurland, "we've got to move. Whether the fish-prophet's story is true or not, we've come too far to worry about it. Let's go!"

CHAPTER XXVI

We Climb an Enchanted Mountain

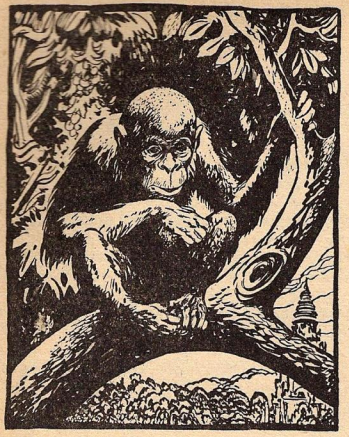
HIDDEN in the jungle was a small village, a place of thirty miserable bamboo huts with straw roofs sitting on rickety poles, ladders leading up to the little wooden landings. And the spirit of despair was upon those thirty huts. It seemed to us, as we entered the place, that the terror in the minds of the Méos folk had entered into the little dwellings built beneath the big trees from which hung great creepers like green serpents, the flowers on them resembling scarlet eyes in the gloom of the place. It was the home of fear—a fear that had a million hands, wet, cold hands that came out and throttled one.

The head-man was old—and suspicious. When we told him we wished rice and dried fish, and guides to hack a way up the mountain to the place of the ghosts that was guarded by the gods with four faces and six arms, he was appalled.

He shrieked a refusal. No men of the village would be allowed to go near the place of ghosts. It was death to venture close to the four-faced guards. He, in his young days, had climbed the mountains and looked down on the valley where the ruins of Klang-Nan were to be seen. He had seen strange shapes; he had seen were-wolves; he had seen gigantic cobras crawling in battalions amongst the stones. The city had died and should not be disturbed.

The Count, through Tohsâroth, offered money. The old man shook his head. The lives of his people could not be bought with paper piasters.

"We've run up against a snag," said Thurland.



Now, Joyeuse had a fish made out of blue enamel that Flane had bought for her at Port Saïd—a little thing of Chinese workmanship, every tiny scale of it movable, so that the slightest touch made it seem alive. When we had stepped from the pirogues, the Méos people had noticed it and pointed it out to each other, she wearing it pinned to her breast; and their interest in it never faltered in the march to the village. Even the old head-man was attracted to it, his bleary eyes being fixed on it when he was listening to our demands.

In the silence Joyeuse took the fish from her breast and whispered a word to Flane. Flane smiled, took the little ornament, stepped toward the landing on which the head-man sat, poked the old fellow with his forefinger; and then, when he opened his eyes, my uncle wiggled the fish before him.

The head-man was intrigued by the moving scales. He stretched out his dirty paw and clutched it. He held it on the palm of his right hand and shook it gently. He laughed, and the villagers laughed with him. Cautiously he inquired if it was a gift. Tohsâroth answered that it was. The old fellow continued to wriggle his paw; guffaws came from the crowd. Fear was forgotten for the moment, brushed away by the childish joy of the head-man.

Suddenly the old fellow sat up and shouted orders. He named the men who were to go with us to hack the underbrush from our path and guide us to the ruins. He ordered out his own miserable and filthy palanquin for Joyeuse; but after a glance at the strip of dirty canvas slung to a pole, she refused his offer; and with a little shudder of fear she declined his suggestion to stay in the village till we returned.

"Let us get off before he gets tired of playing with that toy," cried Thurland. "Hurry now! *Hurry!*"

THE nearness to Klang-Nan and the treasure it contained brought a sort of madness to my uncles and Martin. The long trek was over, and they were within reach of the wonderful things that had filled their dreams for weeks. The taste of plunder was in their mouths, producing a queer insanity.

They snatched parangs from the natives as we attacked the slope of the mountain. The track, if there had ever been a track, was overgrown with devilish creepers that made obstructions more troublesome than barbed wire. At these the three big men at the head of the squad of Méos slashed with fury, yelling and screaming to the frightened natives when the latter paused for a moment in the attack.

My uncles and Martin forgot Joyeuse, the Count, Tohsâroth, Om and me; they were in the lead, stripped to the waist, hacking like madmen; and the mountain echoed their shouts of encouragement. For the first hundred yards after we left the village we were accompanied by a few curious old men and children, but the yells of my uncles terrified them, and they rushed back to their little huts.

The darkness came down on us, and the work was halted. A piece of ground was cleared, and fires were built to scare off beasts. Thurland, fearful that the Méos would desert in the night and rush back to the village, gathered the men into the center of the cleared space and set a watch. He would take the first four hours, Flane the second, and Martin the third. . . .

From the jungle came sounds that were frightening: howls, grunts, snarls, a mad caterwauling, hoots, screeches, and above all that terrifying flutelike noise that we had heard before, and which the Laos folk asserted was made by a crystal snake that no one had ever seen.

I couldn't sleep; neither could Joyeuse nor the Count. I heard them whispering at times, the Count trying to assure her all was well. Once, long after midnight, there came the cry of a leopard

from the brush quite close to us, and an answering cry came from some one in the circle of sleepers. Short and sharp it went up in answer to the call of the beast.

Flane, who was on guard, asked a question, and Thurland roused himself. I saw the two of them in the light of the fires. They stood up huge and shadowy.

"Some one answered the yelp of that big cat," said Flane in a whisper.

"I heard," said Thurland. "Was it one of the natives?"

"It didn't come from them."

The call of the leopard came again, quite close this time; then, from somewhere to the right of me, rose the answer. Clear and distinct, a perfect imitation of the cry that came from the jungle.

"Tohsâroth!" growled Thurland.

My two uncles walked to the spot where the old man was lying. The Count and Joyeuse were sitting up; and a half dozen of the Méos had been roused. My thoughts went racing back to that morning in the Jardin Zoölogique at Marseilles, when Tohsâroth had fondled the leopard whose keeper thought him the most dangerous cat in the garden.

Flane spoke to the Count; and the Count questioned the ancient. His replies, when translated, made my flesh creep. Tohsâroth asserted that he knew the leopard in the same manner as he knew the beast in Marseilles. They were friendly. The big cat spoke to him, and he had answered. There was no reason for us to get frightened.

He rose from the ground and unloosed another cry. The leopard answered; then Tohsâroth stepped gingerly over the figures of the natives and went toward the spot whence the sound had come.

"Stop the old fool!" cried Thurland.

Flane tried to hold the old man, but he shook off my uncle's hands and stepped into the thick brush beyond the light of the fires. Gurgles of horror came from the Méos folk. They huddled together, piling wood upon the fires, arming themselves with flaming sticks to stop the expected rush of the beast.

OPEN-MOUTHED, we listened to the sounds that came from the darkness into which Tohsâroth had stepped.

Our ears gathered in the crackling of underbrush, the soft swish of disturbed leaves; then with dry throats and hair a-prickle, we heard the deep purrs of a beast expressing its pleasure, and the voice of Tohsâroth, soft and soothing. The voice came to us as if he were reciting a story to the purring cat. It was not the tongue in which he conversed with the Count; it was more fluid, more musical. Wonder choked us.

AFTER some fifteen minutes the old man returned, entirely composed. He walked to the place he had left, and laid himself down. He spoke a few words to the Count, and the Count translated. Tohsâroth wished us to know that we could sleep quietly. The leopard was quite close to us, and would see that we were not disturbed!

The Méos folk showed little faith in the statement. They sat in a circle, their fire-sticks like flaming spears turned to the wall of darkness that surrounded us. And although I had seen Tohsâroth perform miracles, I held the same opinion as the little brown men. . . .

Before dawn Thurland ordered the advance. The strokes of the parangs blended with the chattering of monkeys and the twitterings of a million birds that welcomed the day. Somewhere above us in the blue mists was Klang-Nan—Klang-Nan, and the pearls that had been soaked in the milk of white mares! Klang-Nan, and the great emeralds that kept women faithful! Klang-Nan, and the rubies that were thought to be the eyes of dead snakes!

Steeper the path now, steeper and more slippery. Up and up! Away below us when the sun rose we saw the white ribbon that was the Nam-Hou, up which we had come; and for an instant we thought of the prophecy of the seer in the purple *sampot* who studied the entrails of fishes. Two men were coming up the river in pursuit! Two white men!

"We'll be on our way back when they get here," growled Flane, sensing the thought that was in the minds of the rest of us. "They've been a jump behind us since we started."

The big trees watched the squad of hacking men. An elderly Méo dropped exhausted. Thurland handed his parang to me. Every stroke helped.

In the early part of the morning the Méos showed symptoms of fear. They whispered to themselves, and watched the jungle. At times they "pulled" a stroke, and held their parangs ready.

"What's the trouble?" asked Martin.

For a moment the attack on the jungle halted. We became one great listening ear that strained the fear-producing sounds from the packed trees.

We looked at each other to check what we had heard—what we had heard for many minutes before, but which we were afraid to admit. Padding close to us, unseen but within earshot, were beasts!

Thurland glanced at Tohsâroth. The old man was the only calm person amongst us. There was a look of quiet dignity upon his thin face.

"What the devil is he pulling on us?" cried Flane; and as he spoke, he drew a revolver from his pocket and stepped towards the spot from which came snuffles and soft purring noises.

Tohsâroth became suddenly alert. He sprang forward and seized the arm of my uncle. Rapidly he spoke to the Count. We, so the Count explained, were not to be afraid. Close to us were a score of big cats who were friends of the old bonze! They would not attack us if we left them alone! On the contrary, they would protect us from other beasts!

Doubt was on the faces of our little party; dismay on the faces of the Méos. The natives, understanding in a way what the old man had said, showed an inclination to stampede. Thurland and Martin saw the signs of flight, and got behind them.

Tohsâroth, in the same musical voice of the night, addressed the unseen animals. There came from the undergrowth the contented purrings we had heard before. The old man turned to Thurland, and smiled like a conjuror who has pulled off a difficult trick.

There was nothing to do but go forward. My uncles and Martin waved the gang to the attack. Parangs were swung in rhythm; but now and then the sound of padding feet slipped into the *thuck* of steel on wood—slipped in to tell us that the unseen escort was with us!

UPWARD we went. We came to a small clearing where stood a statue of the Buddha, the face pitted by the centuries. At the foot of the stone throne were a bunch of withered flowers, a handful of rice and some cardamom seeds!

Thurland picked up the flowers and looked at the Count. "Who put these here?" he demanded.

The Count questioned Tohsâroth. The old man shook his head and turned to the Méos. They answered in chorus, and their response was relayed to us. Ghosts had placed the flowers and the rice and cardamom seeds before the holy one! Ghosts from the ruins of the city toward which we were fighting our way.

THE rim of the mountain was above us when the night came down. Bare and rocky, it was. In the dusk the line of it seemed to move with a wavelike motion which startled us till we found that a troop of monkeys had gathered to peer at us.

Again Thurland arranged the watch. The Méos were in a state of great fear. Squatting on their haunches in the circle of fires, they seemed fabulous persons that the mind of a small boy would build from the pages of a story-book written in the days when the world was a world of wonder. Alas, there are no books of that kind written today, the earth being a shopworn place with few spots like that mountain up which we climbed to the city of Klang-Nan.

There was no sleep for any of us. Sitting upright, we dozed, waking with a start when there came an extra-loud yelp from some beast that had crept close to the fires. Waking up and rubbing our eyes, to stare at the squatting Méos and convince ourselves that they were real. And the fat, thick night rolled around us, an animal in its own way, the rough tongue of it licking the backs of our necks and putting the devil's own fear into our souls.

AT the first whisper of day Tohsâroth arose, turned his face to the mountain-top, and chanted softly. And the blessed angels in heaven were the only ones who knew what he said. For the Count didn't understand, and the terrified Méos folk didn't understand; but whatever it was, it had a quality that none of us had ever listened to before. . . . There are, so Thurland told me, strange words in the ancient tongue of Ireland—the tongue that was spoken by the *Tuatha Dé Danann,* the tribes of the god Danu, who came to Ireland from Greece—words that when uttered, go out into the world and become forces that produce accidents and suicides and murders, they being full of queer wickedness. Now the words of Tohsâroth made me think of what my uncle had told me.

On and on went the flow of words, the essence of terror dripping from them. A sturdy Méo got to his feet and made a rush for home. Flane dropped him with a punch under the ear. Another bolted, and he went down from a clip handed out by Martin. Thurland caught a pair of them by the throats and tossed them back into the circle, where they struggled with each other, clawing them-

selves to their feet, to be knocked down again by my uncles.

But the devil himself couldn't have stopped the stampede; the poor wretches couldn't stand the terror that the words made in their minds. In a flood they rushed my uncles and Martin. A chop with the flat of a parang sent Thurland to the ground; Martin got a butt in the stomach that put him out of action; and Flane was lifted up and carried twenty yards down the hillside on the backs of the mob that he tried to halt. Inside of five minutes we were alone, our ears gathering up the noises of the Méos crashing through the bushes, screaming to each other as they fled down the mountain to their wretched village.

Thurland, rubbing the side of his head, glared at Tohsâroth; but the bonze didn't see Thurland for the fine ecstasy that possessed him.

The small Om shrieked and turned to follow the Méos; but Martin grabbed her. Joyeuse placed the palms of her hands over her ears and stepped close to Flane.

Then, suddenly, as if a cap had been put onto the hose from which the ancient was squirting the words, his chant ended. The silence ran in on us like a flood. The birds and the monkeys hadn't a whimper out of them. The mist lifted; the rim of the mountain was plain to us, so plain that we saw on the rocks immediately above us slight movements that startled us—wrigglings and twistings that were as a quicklime of horror to our throats.

FOR long minutes no one spoke. Tohsâroth, head thrown back, was regarding the rocks, as if waiting for a sign.

The writhing and wriggling grew less. The unclean things slipped away; the rocks lay bare and naked as the sun struck them. Slowly Tohsâroth came out of the trance-like state which had come upon him when he started to chant. He spoke to the Count.

"He says we can go forward," translated the Count. "We have, according to his words, been accepted."

"By whom?" asked Flane; and although my uncle made an effort to be flippant when he put the question, he failed. For our eyes still held the picture of the wriggling mass on the rocks.

The Count moistened his lips and looked around fearfully. "The gods of the place," he whispered.

"There's a mob of them," said Flane; and as he spoke, he weighed the parang that he held in his hand.

Tohsâroth turned and regarded my two uncles and Martin. He seemed displeased. He spoke rapidly to the Count.

"You are to be told this," said the Count impressively. "There must be no violence. Nothing will attack you. The things that you have seen live in the ruins; and to Tohsâroth they are sacred. The place was the place of Nāga; these are the servants of Nāga."

"I don't like them," said Thurland stubbornly.

"Neither do I," said the Count. "But we have come for certain things, and we must do as the old man wishes. I have come for wisdom, you for treasure. As for the Méos, the ancient thinks it is better for us that they bolted."

"And better for themselves," muttered Flane.

"Do we go on?" asked the Count.

"Of course," answered Thurland. He swung his parang; and we moved slowly upward toward the lip of the mountain —toward it and the servants of Nāga. I felt sick at the stomach with the dread that was on me.

It was Tohsâroth who stepped first upon the flat rocky plateau—Tohsâroth, shoulders lowered, hands clasped in an attitude of adoration. He had pushed himself quickly forward when the last yard of brush had been cut away.

Thurland stepped up beside the old man, and the rest of us followed.

No one spoke. No one wished to speak. In my own case, and I think in the case of the others, words would have been difficult to utter at that moment; for our eyes brought to us horror pictures which produced a sort of mental paralysis.

Broken pedestals and upturned statues ran in a long line that whipped across the mountain-top and swooped into the valley. Carvings of gods and demons, of animals and monsters; and every one of the chunks of stone was alive! A slithering, slippery, hissing life that came from hundreds and hundreds of cobras!

CHAPTER XXVII

We Enter Klang-Nan

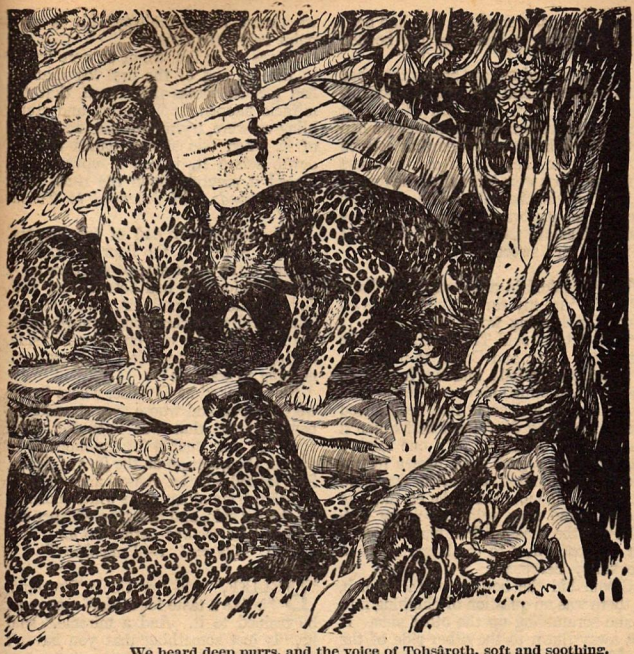
JOYEUSE screamed; her cry whipped the movements of the cobras and increased the noise that rose from them. Theirs was a little orchestra from hell with the hissing and the dry rustling sound made by their bodies moving over the stones, and they didn't like interruptions.

My Uncle Thurland said something in Gaelic; whether it was a curse or a prayer I know not. The hand of Flane tightened its grip on the big parang he carried. The Count and Martin seemed hypnotized. Om crept into the shadow of Tohsâroth, peeping fearfully from behind the robe of her old relative.

Tohsâroth spoke again. He seemed to be pleading with the devils, his voice soft and low; and as he spoke, the hissing died down, and their movements grew more sluggish. Softly, ever so softly his words flowed over them, something like the droning of a great bee; and after a little while they were quiet. And the biggest of them slipped into holes and niches in the rocks.

The paralysis left us gradually, and we found that we could turn our eyes from the crawling things and look at each other. The faces of the three big men, Thurland, Flane, and Martin, were tense like the faces of men who had seen death but were not afraid, there being no looseness of the jaws that shows the coward. The Count looked startled, his eyes, that were always bright, having the spark of fear in them. Om had screwed up her features so that her snub nose, black eyes and mouth were in a curious heap in the center; and upon the face of Joyeuse was the soft pallor and the sweet fear that you see on the baby moon when it is sent out to wander across the sky.

Tohsâroth was calm. He turned and spoke in an undertone to the Count, and the Count moistened his dry lips and translated to us. "This," said the Count, "is the entrance to the city of Klang-Nan. The old one says that it, being the city of Nāga, is in charge of those that



We heard deep purrs, and the voice of Tohsâroth, soft and soothing.

you have seen. It belongs to them, and we can only advance with their permission. If one is killed by any of us, we will never get back alive. That's flat and final. He wishes me to make you understand before we move on."

Thurland shrugged his big shoulders. "I never heard that the word of a snake had any value," he said.

"It's the law," asserted the Count. "We must believe in it or go back."

Flane looked at Joyeuse as if trying to plumb the courage behind the face on which still clung the wash of fear. In silence we stood there, knowing well that if Joyeuse wished to turn back, Flane would kill the passion for treasure that was in his heart and go with her. For a great love had sprung up between the two, a love that could throttle the hope of gain if the girl wished to lift her little finger.

Joyeuse nodded, and Thurland and Martin gave a joint sigh of relief. Before their eyes were the ruins of Klang-Nan; and although death was in every nook of the crumbling ruins, there also were the treasures that had troubled their dreams.

Tohsâroth, droning softly, led the way: in Chinaman file we followed. The avenue had been flagged with great broad stones like those on the principal façade at Angkor-Vat, but here and there strong trees had shot up between the crevices of the paving stones, and had thrust the great slabs upright or overturned them completely. The same trees had overturned the statues of gods and monsters, using their thick roots as levers to upset them; and at places the lianas had twisted themselves around the neck of a god like the rope of a hangman and pulled him off his pedestal, making us think that the Almighty had got mad with the paganism of the place, and had used His trees to smash and destroy the idols that foolish men worshiped.

Gingerly, and with the cold paw of fear on our hearts we walked, for danger

was close to us, every stone that had been displaced being a home for the hooded death.

The sun basted us; our brains throbbed with the heat; and the wicked enchantment of the place was upon us, so that we thought we heard sounds that we had never heard before—sounds that seemed to come from the gods of old, whispers in tongues that were older than the tongue of the Goidels, *the wild devils who* were the first conquerors of Ireland, and whose male babies ate their food off the point of the father's sword.

FLANE asked in a low voice of Thurland: "Are my ears playing tricks on me? I'm hearing words."

"And I too," said Thurland; "but the words are Latin and Greek to me."

Tohsâroth halted; and we looked to see what had pulled him up. The avenue by which we had come had been sliced neatly as if the dear Lord had taken a league-long sword and with one mighty slash had left a gash some fifteen feet in width, and running, as far as we could see across the mountain. An earthquake had at some time split the rocky hillside, and the chasm it had made blocked our approach now to the larger ruins in the valley below us.

Gloom hid the bottom of the trench, so there was no question of climbing into it and scrambling up the other side. It ran away down to the other side of the world; and to us, as we stood and stared into *its depths, it looked as if* the Almighty had placed it there as a holy moat to keep persons from invading Klang-Nan on the other side.

Thurland examined the trench. "A few trees could be pushed across it to make a bridge," he said. "Let's get to it."

There were trees aplenty. Thurland, Flane and Martin set to work to drag them to the edge of the trench, the Count and I giving what help we could in the matter. Tohsâroth, Joyeuse and Om sat in the shade and waited. There was a frightening stillness upon the place.

We pulled half a dozen logs to the edge of the trench, but the question of getting their ends to the opposite bank troubled us. We tried upending them and letting them fall forward, but this was a failure; and we tried pushing them forward, but the weight of the logs and the lack of man-power made this difficult. For the farther bank was higher than the one we were on, and the end of the log that we thrust forward always hit it at a *point below the edge.*

It was while the five of us were trying to lift the end of the first log that we had pushed across the trench, that the miracle happened. Sweating and stumbling we were, trying to raise the far end of it, when two skinny hands reached down, seized it, jerked it upward and placed it securely upon the rim! *Two skinny hands that belonged to Tohsâroth!*

We lowered our end of the log and stared. Stared at the figure of the old bonze on the other side of the trench. A minute before, he had been sitting with Joyeuse and the small Om. We had seen him placidly watching our struggles with the log. Now he was on the other side, having crossed fifteen feet of space with nothing to walk on!

Flane looked at Joyeuse, whose hands were clasped and whose eyes showed the bewilderment that was upon her. All agog she was, unable for the moment to answer the question on the face of Flane. She looked at the chasm and then at Tohsâroth standing in the white sunshine on the far side, and in a thin whisper she spoke. *"He walked across on air!"* she gasped. *"On air! I—I saw him!"*

"BELIEF," said my Uncle Thurland, "is like a taste for cáviar—one must be trained to it. And a miracle," said he, "is just something that you haven't seen before."

We hadn't seen Tohsâroth cross the trench, but Joyeuse and Om had seen him passing over. And there he was in front of us, motioning us to push over another log, so that he could help us place it beside the first. And feeling stunned and a little sick, we did so, pushing over half a dozen till we had a bridge on which one could safely walk; and when that was made, the old bonze returned to our side, nothing about his manner suggesting that he had done anything remarkable.

In silence we stared at Tohsâroth—Tohsâroth who knew the city of Klang-Nan when it throbbed with life. Tohsâroth, to whom the centuries had brought a knowledge that frightened us. And we felt small and weak like little children.

And all the fears of the millions that had gone before us crept into our brains out of the little cells in which, God help us, they are hidden! The fears of a million fathers and a million mothers. For there was no science to explain to our ancestors that this and that—storm and

thunder and lightning and swift death—were nothing extraordinary and were just to be taken in the stride of life. And there was none to prove that vampires and goblins and warlocks didn't exist, for the clever boys that laugh at those things today were not around in far-off times, so the fears were born and stored—born and stored to come out into the every-day brain when something unexplainable happened.

Martin turned and looked back along the crazy avenue by which we had come to the trench. "That fellow that read the future from the guts of fishes might be right," he said. "I've got a crawly feeling in my spine."

"We all have," said Thurland; "but as the herring said when he found himself in the shark's stomach, 'It's a tough place, but he might get seasick.'"

The Count was silent as he watched Tohsâroth. The Count was impressed. We spoke of the explanation of the rope trick, the supposed mass hypnotism of the watchers; but Tohsâroth, while he was on the other side of the chasm, had used muscular force in helping us place the ends of the logs on the far side!

"If we had only seen him there, we might have thought he fooled our eyes," said Flane; "but he helped to make the bridge while he was there."

"Let's forget it," said Thurland. "We're not here to inquire into this and that like nosy policemen with their notebooks and pencils. We're here to get stuff that will make us richer than Cairbre of the Cat's Head, who had seven castles and a wife in each. Come on!"

Flane carried Joyeuse across the bridge, holding her face against his shoulder so that she wouldn't look at the depths. And Thurland took the small Om in his arms and carried her over, returning then to lead me by the hand lest a giddiness should come upon me while crossing.

Tohsâroth lifted up his arms and cried a greeting to the ruins that were scattered across the valley. We were in Klang-Nan, the city of the snake-god.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Count Receives a Lesson

THE ruins of Angkor-Thom, although much more extensive than those of Klang-Nan, lacked the fine quality of evil that came from those about us when we crossed the trench—the quality of malicious hatred that seemed to flow out from the great stones and direct itself against us, brought terror. The place loathed us; every stone, whether still in place or overturned, showed, so we thought, a hatred of our presence.

Joyeuse, taken with a sudden weakness, wished to sit down. Flane led her to a large flat stone, but he sprang back from it with a short curse. The stone was a battleground. Upon it, engaged in a fight to the death, were a scorpion of tremendous size, and a hairy spider with great green eyes, who stood upon legs that lifted him a full inch from the stone.

IT was strange that the fighting pair held us at that moment, but they did. When Flane muttered the sharp curse-word, we gathered round and watched the battle. The scorpion, his long flexible tail hoisted up over his back, tried to maneuver the spider into position for a death-thrust, racing round and round, while the spider wheeled swiftly to confront him.

The spider was fooled by a feint of the scorpion. He swung to the right thinking the jet-black horror was attacking from that point. The mistake was fatal. The scorpion rushed in, grabbed the thorax of the spider with his pincers and brought his tail over in a quick death-stroke. The spider quivered; his long legs gave way and he collapsed.

We moved slowly forward, Tohsâroth in the lead, searching, searching, his black glittering eyes examining every toppling ruin that we passed.

"What's the idea?" asked Thurland. "Joyeuse is all in."

The Count spoke to Tohsâroth, and the old man explained excitedly. He was, so the Count translated, seeking a place where we could pass the night without fear.

"Is there such a place?" grinned Flane.

Again there were questions and answers between the old bonze and the Count. We understood dimly that there was, somewhere in the ruins, a place of sanctuary, a place that Nāga had graciously given from his territory, and where the wretch who offended the laws of the snake-god could find protection till he had been judged or had made penance for what he had done.

The news, unbelievable as it seemed, thrilled us. That there was a corner of that terrible stretch of ruins that would be safe during the hours of darkness brought a blessed peace to our minds

Tohsâroth's black eyes were blazing now.

We tagged after the old man with strength born of his statement. The fear of the coming night had been growing as the shadows lengthened. The hooded death went hunting in the night.

"But we've done no harm to living thing," said Thurland.

"He says that we have in our hearts the desire to do harm," translated the Count.

"And he's mighty near the mark in saying that," snapped Flane.

Tohsâroth broke into a jog-trot. We ran at his heels. In the dusk ahead there loomed up a building that was a little larger than the ruins around it. The front had fallen outward, the big stones blocking our path as we got nearer; but the two sides and the rear wall were standing. Of roof there was none; no peasant hut in County Kerry was as bare and forlorn as the inside of that place. And in the whole of Ireland there wasn't a tenth of the cold loneliness that was between those walls. No, nor a hundredth part of it.

"Can we make a fire?" asked Flane.

Tohsâroth had no objections, so we built a fire on the big stones with which the place was paved. The flames bit into the darkness that had come swiftly upon the ruins; and there we stood, puzzled and silent, looking out through the opening where the front wall had collapsed; and as we stood there, the night chorus came to our ears—the snarls and yelps and screams of the hunters and the hunted.

Tohsâroth seemed worried, and the Count talked with him. The collapse of the front made the old bonze doubtful about the safety of the place, he fearing that it had lost its right of sanctuary by the fall of the wall. He squatted there, watchful of the world beyond the firelight, and the Count sat with him.

Joyeuse slept, her head against the shoulder of Flane. Little Om curled herself up in a bundle near the fire and forgot her troubles. The rest of us dozed, waking with starts of terror when the sights of the day crept into our feverish dreams.

Each time when I awoke, I heard the whispering of Tohsâroth and the Count—their tense, excited whispering. For the Count, on that night in the sanctuary of Klang-Nan, was learning a lot of the old man's secrets. The promises Tohsâroth had made were being fulfilled.

Thurland whispered to Flane. "The old fellow is showing his tricks," he said. "Do you hear?"

"I've been listening," answered Flane. "The devil is telling his secrets about beating death. It sounds uncanny. I'm praying for daylight."

Martin was awake then. The four of us listened to the two who squatted near the door. The Count was then repeating words that Tohsâroth uttered—repeating them the way a little child would whisper the words of a prayer. But it wasn't a prayer. Mother o' me! No! It was the litany of the devil himself that the old man was mumbling!

"Our Father who art in heaven!" cried Thurland; and although there was fear in his voice, it sounded clean and wholesome against the green trickle that came from the lips of Tohsâroth—the green trickle of paganism that had super-strength in that long-deserted city of the snake-god.

Martin joined his voice to Thurland's, stumbling over the words that I'll wager he hadn't said for many a day; and the sweet whisper of Joyeuse threaded itself in with them. For myself I couldn't utter a syllable, my throat feeling as if it had a band of iron around it, and my tongue withered by the devil's rune that came from the bonze.

Flane spoke to the Count, damning him for taking part in something that we knew was unclean; but the Russian took no notice of the curses and insults that Flane flung at him. He was beside himself with the hunger to learn all that Tohsâroth knew, the hunger that had been with him for months, and which was being relieved at last. For this he had come, and now at Satan's trough he was gorging himself.

Toward the dawn the whispering died down. It stopped altogether, and the only sound was the sobbing of Joyeuse and the words that Flane whispered to her in an effort to comfort her. From beyond came the yelps and screams, the rustling of bodies dragged through the long grass, the hiss of the hooded hunters.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Chamber of Great Mystery

IN the gray light we looked at the Count and Tohsâroth. The Muscovite had changed. Whatever he had heard during the long night had produced a curious excitement, a queer nervousness, so that his features as well as his manner had altered. And his voice had a tremor in it when he spoke.

He surprised my uncles and Martin by his first remark. "We should get away as quickly as possible," he said. "At once! There is no time to lose! All around us are dangers of which we know nothing! Terrible dangers!"

"We're ready to go when we've got what we came for," said Thurland.

"I—I don't think it's possible," stammered the Count. "I think we had—we had better go away."

"Is it that you have got what you came for and would like to clear out?" asked Thurland.

"I have been told things," answered the Russian.

"The devil's tricks," snarled Thurland. "But what you have learned is no use to us. We made a bargain with you, and to that bargain we'll keep."

THE Count whispered to Tohsâroth. Now, so it seemed to us, those two had come closer together during the night. They had agreed upon a course of action. Both wished to retreat as quickly as possible from the ruins of Klang-Nan!

Thurland got to his feet. He crossed to where the Muscovite and Tohsâroth were sitting, and he spoke. "We'll start back the moment we have the treasure," he said. "Let's get busy."

"He is afraid to tell," stammered the Count.

"Why?" asked Thurland.

"He fears the vengeance of Nāga."

"He should have thought of that before. It's too late to back out now. Tell him!"

The Count did so, although the old bonze, watching my uncle, guessed at what Thurland had said. Over the withered face of the ancient swept fear—a gray fear that brought a sort of palsy upon his features, and left him for a minute speechless.

He spoke at last, and the Russian translated. Tohsâroth, so we were told, was certain that death would come to both himself and us if he revealed the hiding-place of the treasure. The whispers of the night had convinced him that we were lost if we raided the hiding-place of Nāga. On the day now opening before us, we should make our escape. If we stayed another night, the place of sanctuary would be invaded by the servants of the god—the hooded servants that we feared.

"We needn't stay another night," said Thurland. "We'll get the stuff and bolt."

"But he won't tell where it is!" cried the Count.

"He had better tell," said Thurland.

The Russian spoke softly to my uncle. He spoke of the powers of the old bonze, the powers that we had seen exercised on three different occasions. He urged Thurland to be careful, lest he annoy the ancient.

Flane came and stood beside Thurland; then Martin rose and stood beside Flane. Big, bold men, the three of them, frantic for the treasure that had brought them there.

"If the old man does any finger-snapping at one of us, he'll be in eternity in five seconds, in spite of all the devil tricks he knows," said Thurland. "You can tell him that. This hasn't been a pleasure-trip; and Nāga or no Nāga, we're not going without the plunder."

"That is so," said Flane.

"Same here," added Martin.

Nervously the Count put the decision of the three before the old man. And the eyes of my uncles and Martin were watchful. They had seen three men who had offended the bonze die hurriedly, and they were taking no chances. How he did his killing they didn't know, but they were ready. . . .

The skinny hands of Tohsâroth writhed around each other as he listened to the translated words of Thurland. His eyes, that were like bits of black opal with curious glinting lights in their depths, glowed as we had seen them glow when he had struck down the brutal mate of the *Kelantan* on the voyage to Saigon. I saw the hand of Thurland tighten on something within his pocket. If the bonze lifted his arm to make the death-gesture, it would be the last movement he would ever make.

IN silence we awaited the old man's decision. There came a soft rustling from the dry grass without. A hooded hunter was returning from his night prowl. A bearded monkey swung from the branch of a stunted tree, peered within the sanctuary, showed his surprise at seeing us, and called loudly to his mates to come and take a look at us. Far off, a leopard screamed.

Tohsâroth lifted himself from his cross-legged position. He stood before Thurland, the East before the West; and for long minutes they stared at each other, the brave blue eyes of Thurland looking into the black vicious eyes of the other. The eyes of a Christian fighting the eyes of a pagan, so it seemed to us who watched.

Thurland won. The bonze pulled his yellow robe around him, turned and pattered out of the sanctuary. In single file we followed him, Thurland treading on his heels, the right hand of my uncle still thrust in the pocket of his jacket. Thurland had lost faith in the ancient.

WE stepped out into silence and sunshine—sunshine that was like a glaze on the ruins. And the quiet was a quiet that followed us, eating up the rustling noises made by our feet in the dry grass. Bleary-eyed gods, looking like punch-drunk fighters under the wallops of the centuries, stared at us as we passed—stared and grinned; at least, we thought they grinned, as our passing shadows twisted their chipped features. Klang-Nan was watching us; Klang-Nan was laughing at us. For the City of Cobras knew what was in the heart of Tohsâroth, the black heart of him; and the old ruins were thinking that we were going to our execution. . . .

Over the fallen stones, slipping and stumbling, not a word uttered—in a silence broken only by an occasional hiss as a sleeping serpent uncoiled and slid angrily out of the path of the bonze. We followed a sort of tunnel that ran between walls less than four feet apart. We came to the blind end of it and halted. We were facing a carving of Buddha. He was seated on the coiled folds of the seven-headed cobra, the heads reaching up behind him and forming a sort of protective covering. A bad old gentleman he looked to us.

Tohsâroth flung himself down before the statue. He whispered excitedly to the Count.

"He says we should all kneel!" cried the Russian.

"Well, we won't!" snapped Thurland.

Tohsâroth spoke again. There was temper in his voice. The Count dropped to his knees and spoke to Thurland.

"It won't hurt you," said the Count. "He says it's a necessary part of the performance he must go through to get this door to open."

"He'll do it without my help," said Thurland. "The old stone chap will understand that we're not of his religion."

Tohsâroth, Om and the Count prostrated themselves while the rest of us stood and stared at the figure of the Buddha. And the figure stared back at us, the sly smile of it widening in that

sneering grin that you connect with the East, the grin of conceited folk who think they know everything. You see it on the faces of the little Japs and the Chinese, and the Hindoos and the Siamese; and why it is there the good Lord only knows. But there it is.

Now, how Tohsâroth did what he did was a puzzle to us then, and is a puzzle to some of us still. For while he had his forehead on the ground, mumbling some mumbo-jumbo stuff, the figure started to move back from us. The snake and the old gentleman! Noiselessly they moved back, as if some one had withdrawn the coiled snake the way a butler in the great houses would take the chair of his mistress when she was rising from the table. For a distance of a full yard the stone statue slid away from us; and to the right of the figure was an opening. Dank and frightening, lit up by a faint spectral light that came from a slit in the roof of the chamber it led into.

Tohsâroth rose slowly. He turned, looked at Thurland and made a motion with his skinny hand.

Thurland made the same motion back to the bonze. "After you," said my uncle. "The only thing left to the Irish is their politeness."

The bonze didn't understand the words, but he understood the gesture. He stepped forward and turned into the opening. Thurland followed him, and behind Thurland came the Count and Flane and the rest of us.

THE chamber into which we stepped was lighted by a thin slit some three feet in length high in the arched roof. The light from this opening struck down on a curious figure in the center of the bare room—the lifelike figure of a nude dancing-girl. Her two hands were thrust forward, with palms held in the proper praying gesture of the Buddhists, but each finger and thumb were of unusual length, and were separated in such a manner that the tips were a matter of four inches apart.

The figure was of limestone, and the moisture that had come in through the opening in the roof had produced curious stains here and there that at first, in the poor light, looked like splotches of blood. They were on her neck and breast, so that I thought in that first moment that she had been stabbed to death and then turned into stone by some strange power possessed by the priests of Nāga. The place bred mad thoughts of that order.

Thurland whispered to Martin; and Martin dropped back to the door of the chamber. Little faith had my uncle in the old man that led us; and the manner in which the stone door had slid away made him cautious about our safety. So Martin stood near the opening while the rest of us moved fearfully toward the dancing figure with the strange deformed hands.

Tohsâroth bowed to it, bending low, his hands touching the stone floor of the place. Again and again he lowered himself; and each bow he made seemed to increase the silence of the chamber.

SUDDENLY he straightened and stepped close to the figure. He put his skinny right hand out toward the upturned stone fingers of the dancer. Softly with his first finger he touched, in turn, the outspread fingers of the right hand; then in the same halting fashion he touched the fingers of the left.

He paused, his head cocked sideways, as if listening. And we listened with him—listened with our ears and with every inch of our skin. We didn't know for what, we not having the slightest idea of what the old devil was waiting for. But the silence told us that sound of some sort was coming—coming from somewhere beyond our ken.

Again, slowly, ever so slowly, his skinny paw went out. And our eyes followed it. It touched two fingers of the right hand of the figure, two of the left, then swiftly, so swiftly that we could not follow, it moved between the two like the hand of a pianist striking the keys that held the thread of melody. Backward and forward, from one stone hand to the other, faster, faster, the beams of light striking it at times and making it impossible for us to register the touches, dazzling us with the swiftness of it. . . .

It came to an end. Tohsâroth stepped back from the figure. He brought an arm across his eyes as if to shield them from some terrifying sight, and in that position he listened again. And we listened. And Klang-Nan listened. And the whole of the Laos country from the borders of Yunnan to the sea listened. That is what we thought. Listened with a monstrous cupped ear. For what?

It came. A slight splintery sound. A faint tinkle as if a piece of glass had been rolled along a stone floor; yet it

had the effect of an explosion upon our taut nerves. Our faces were turned to the soft gloom beyond the figure from which the sound had come, our necks craned forward. We were breathless.

CHAPTER XXX

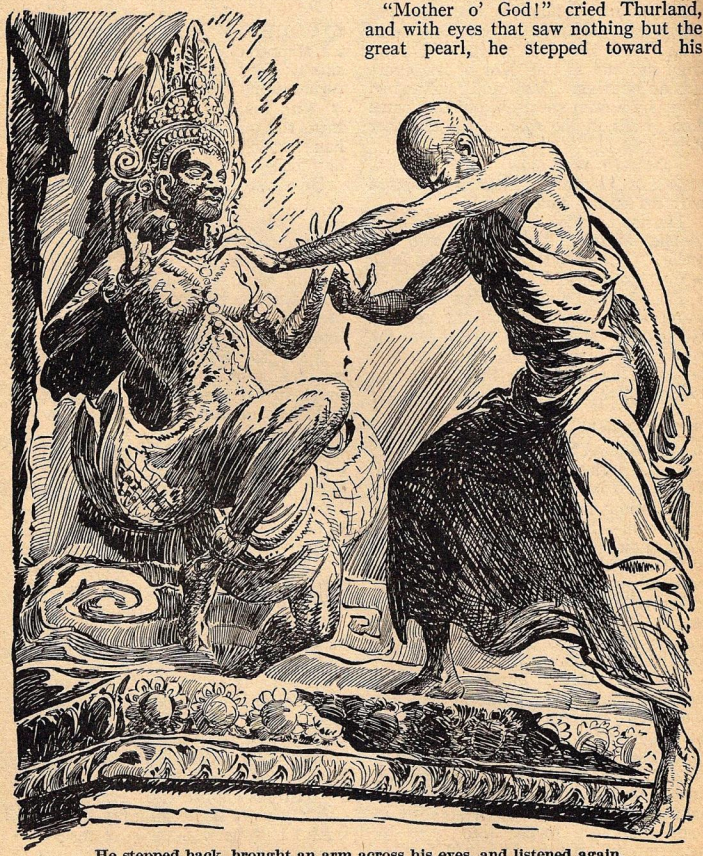
Tohsâroth Turns on Us

THURLAND spoke to Flane in a whisper. "Go and look," said Thurland; and Flane stepped around the figure and stooped to peer at the shadows. Tohsâroth held his position, the right arm crooked before his eyes.

My Uncle Flane made a soft choking noise as if the sight of something extraordinary had pinched his throat. His shoes crunched on the floor as he wheeled swiftly and came back to us. His big right hand was outstretched, and in the broad palm of it sat the brother to the great rose-colored pearl we had seen in the golden statue at Kompong-chnang!

Wonderful indeed it was as the light fell upon it: a thing that glowed like the dawn, the soft tints appearing to move like colored clouds beneath the lustrous "skin." And the reflection of it showed upon the palm of my uncle, bringing to his hand a sort of miraculous illumination that startled us.

"Mother o' God!" cried Thurland, and with eyes that saw nothing but the great pearl, he stepped toward his



He stepped back, brought an arm across his eyes, and listened again.

brother. And the rest of us drew in, the glory of the thing dragging us forward.

Tohsâroth moved. He slipped from the side of Thurland, turned, and made for the door of the chamber.

"Look out!" cried Flane. "Stop him, Martin! *Stop him!*"

The old bonze sprang at the opening, but Martin was alert. He flung out his right hand, seized the robe of the old man, and with a quick jerk brought him to his knees.

Tohsâroth cried out in anger; then as Martin stood over him, that skinny claw that carried the dreadful power forged in hell was uplifted. Palm outward, it flashed before the face of Martin; the fingers made a quick snapping motion as if they had seized upon something invisible. Martin staggered backward and dropped to the floor.

The Count, who was the nearest to Tohsâroth, sprang forward with the idea of helping the old man to his feet. That was what my uncles thought later, and I have no doubt they were right; but the bonze was now as poisonous and as vicious as one of the hooded things that guarded Klang-Nan. He thought that the Russian, like Martin, had the intention of blocking his escape. Again the damnable claw was uplifted; the Count reeled and fell.

Tohsâroth was on his feet. A horrid squeal of rage came from his lips. The black eyes were blazing now. He was Tohsâroth the Killer! Tohsâroth the Death-giver!

Between him and the door was Joyeuse! And between Joyeuse and death

was the swift hand of my Uncle Thurland! The claw was moving upward under the flying cloak of the bonze as Thurland fired. Tohsâroth screamed; for an instant he seemed to lift himself clear from the stone floor; then he flung out his arms and fell face downward. . . .

Flane grasped the fainting Joyeuse and cried out questions to her. Was she

hurt? Did she feel any pain? Was she certain? A man beside himself was Flane. He took the girl up in his arms and carried her out into the air.

Joyeuse was unharmed; but the Russian Count and Martin were no more. The lean body of Tohsâroth writhed like a wounded snake trying to gather strength to turn and kill again. But at last all movement ceased.

EIGHT of us had gone into that chamber, and five had come out alive. In a little group we stood in the sunlight, stunned and speechless. Joyeuse had a protecting arm around the shoulders of the small Om, who seemed unable to understand what had happened. And the Buddha on the entrance door grinned at us.

"If you hadn't got him," said Flane, looking at the Buddha, "he'd have closed the door on us, and we'd be sealed up there till Judgment Day."

"That's what I thought," said Thurland. "We're lucky to be alive. But I grieve indeed for Martin and the Count."

For a long while no one spoke. I think my two uncles were waiting for Joyeuse to feel like herself again after the shock. Of their own immediate plans they were agreed without speaking at all. For the death-chamber dragged their heads toward it, and now and then they licked their lips in expectation.

When Joyeuse said nothing, Flane took the great pearl from his pocket and held it again on the palm of his hand. A little shamefaced he appeared to be as he drew it forth, but when he saw the fierce wild beauty of it, he forgot the dead, forgetting also that one of the men within the chamber was the uncle of the girl—forgetting it entirely. For the great rose-colored pearl had a power like that of a drug, so that when we stared at it, the terrible happenings that had taken place but a few minutes before were wiped out.

Now my Uncle Thurland knew much about pearls. He had spent a lot of time at Lingah in the Bahrein Islands, and he had wandered in the Sulu Sea and down around Torres Strait where the Malays and Japs scrape up the gold-lip and black-lip shell, the shadows of the big "gray-nurse" sharks above them as they toil with bursting lungs in ten fathoms of water.

He had seen the great pearls of the world, and had handled many of them. "La Pelligrina," the "Southern Cross," "La Coralita," and that strange double pearl joined by a ligature of nacre which was called "The Dancing Houris," and which disappeared when the Czar of all the Russias was pushed off his throne. But Thurland had seen no pearl like the one that Flane held on the palm of his big hand.

"Have you ever seen one like it?" asked Flane, and his voice was deep and husky with the emotion that gripped him.

"Never!" answered Thurland. "Nor no other white man in the world has seen such a thing before this day!" Like a mother putting out trembling fingers to touch her new-born babe he reached for the pearl; and Flane let him have it with a soft sigh as if he were giving away his own soul. And Thurland stroked it, and whispered to it, calling it *"avourneen"* in soft Gaelic, his eyes bright with the love he had for it.

Flane roused himself from the fine stupor that came with the possession of the pearl. He looked at Joyeuse, and the terror on her face made him put a question. "What is it?" he asked.

"Let us—let us go away!" gasped Joyeuse. "Now! Now at once!"

Flane seemed surprised. He looked at Thurland, and Thurland seemed as astonished as his brother. Just as much and more if anything.

"Go away?" muttered Thurland. *"Go away?"* He swallowed fiercely and glanced toward the door of the chamber. "In there," he cried, "there may be a hundred like this beauty that I've got in my hand! A thousand, maybe! Who can tell? And there are emeralds as big as hen's eggs! And rubies and diamonds! Go away, is it? Now that the blessed Lord in heaven has heard our prayers!"

Flane tried to soothe Joyeuse, whose terror had increased as she listened to the throaty words of Thurland. He took her little hands in his and spoke softly to her. We would go in a little while—in an hour perhaps. He and his brother would make a quick survey of the chamber; then we would start with all speed for the Méos village on the banks of the Nam-Hou.

A LITTLE scream from Om interrupted the soft words of my uncle. The finger of the girl pointed to some shattered pillars to the right of us. Across the smooth surface of one ran a glistening length of death.

Now my Uncle Thurland was beside himself at that moment. In his left hand was the great pearl; and as the thing on the stone stared at him, his right hand went to the pocket into which he had thrust the automatic.

Thurland fired at the wicked weaving head. The bullet nicked the neck of the thing, breaking the spinal cord. But the crack of Thurland's revolver had been followed by another explosion that came from the direction of the avenue by which we had entered Klang-Nan!

"Was that an echo?" asked Flane.

We listened. There came to us the sound of a second shot, a third, then a little volley that brought echoes from all the shattered ruins around us. Our thoughts sprang back to the prophet in the purple *sampot* who read the future from the entrails of fishes. Had the two men who were pursuing us up the river arrived at Klang-Nan?

CHAPTER XXXI

The Night Hunt

NO single shots followed the volley. The fat silence rolled in again. Flane and Thurland looked at each other; then, with deliberate steps they started toward the door of the death-chamber. If the firing announced the arrival of Schiemann and Bruden, there was no time to lose.

Joyeuse, Om and I followed the two men to the door. I peered within, but Joyeuse and the little girl could not force themselves to look. Flane and Thurland had disappeared in the gloom. I saw their stooped figures as they searched the floor at the point where Flane had picked up the pearl. The minutes crawled by on feet of lead. There were no sounds but the crunching of the shoes of my two uncles.

Thurland came and stood in front of the figure of the dancing-girl. Scratching his head, he studied the outstretched hands. There lay the secret: Tohsâroth, by playing swiftly upon the deformed fingers, had unloosed the door of some secret pocket in the wall, and from that pocket had dropped the extraordinary pearl.

Flane came and stood beside his brother. They whispered together; then Thurland's fingers touched the stone fingers of the statue. Like a clumsy boy endeavoring to produce a tune that he has seen played by a teacher, his strong fingers struck here and there, first on one stone hand and then on the other.

Flane tried, then Thurland again. With the treasure madness upon them, they struck with fury, struck till the hands of Thurland left blood upon the fingers of the dancing-girl.

At last, cursing softly, they gave up the effort. The finger-combination had been lost to us by the death of the old bonze. It was too intricate to remember.

"The only thing is to sound every stone in the place," growled Thurland. "If one is hollow, it's the hiding-place."

Flane nodded. I went back to the door where Joyeuse and Om were waiting.

"Are we going away?" asked Joyeuse; and the evil of the place had leached into her so that she was nearly hysterical.

"Not yet," I answered. "My uncles are searching."

Om made a grimace to show that she was hungry. I gave her a handful of rice from my own small share, and went back to my uncles.

Thurland and Flane had drawn a line on the wall up from the point where Flane had found the great pearl, and they were tapping the stones on each side of this line, tapping them one after the other, their ears laid to the wall in an effort to find out if one was hollow. They had forgotten the crawling devils that guarded the place. They had forgotten the misery and terror that clutched Joyeuse.

"We have very little food," I said, when Flane, straightening his back, gave me an opportunity to speak.

"To hell with food!" he snapped. "What time is it?"

"About noon," I answered.

"Go out and get all the dry wood you can gather up and bring it in here," he ordered. "We'll want it for the night if we stay on."

"Stay on?" I repeated.

"Yes!" shouted Flane. "Get the wood! And don't pick up any sticks that have heads on them!"

I WENT back to the door of the chamber. I was terrified. My uncles, unless they discovered the cache, intended to stay the night in the chamber of death!

Gargling with dread of the night, I acquainted Joyeuse of their intention. I thought she would collapse. With eyes wide with fear, she turned and surveyed the ruins. And the chipped gods leered at her. Klang-Nan had trapped us by putting the poison of desire into the minds of Thurland and Flane.

I gathered up piles of dry wood for the night, gathered them fearfully. "Don't pick up any sticks that have heads on them," Flane had said; it was sound advice.

ALL through the silent afternoon my uncles tapped without stopping, dragging in rocks from the outside to make scaffolds to reach the higher course, and tirelessly striking at the stones, hoping one would prove to be hollow. Ceaselessly they tapped and listened, but the walls kept their secret.

There had been no further sounds of firing from the direction of the avenue.

The night fell. Thurland ordered me to light a fire in the chamber, and to bring Joyeuse and Om inside.

Joyeuse balked at the door of the place. The bodies lay as they had fallen, and the girl couldn't face them. She wept softly over the death of the Count.

I went and told Flane. He climbed down from a pile of stones and walked to the door. Softly he spoke to Joyeuse, pleading with her, begging her to come within the chamber. A clever tongue had Flane, and well he used it at that minute. Cunningly he argued with her. It was too late to leave Klang-Nan, the night being on us and a thousand dangers around us, but he promised her that at sunup we would start. He put his arm around her waist, then shielding her from the sight of the dead, he led her to a corner of the chamber where the statue blocked her view of the bodies.

"And you shall guard this pearl while we search," he whispered, and saying that, he placed the great pearl in her hands.

"We have the night before us," he muttered, as he went back to his tapping. "Keep the fire going, Jimmy! Have you plenty of wood?"

"Plenty," I answered, and I was glad then that I had dragged in the piles of branches during the afternoon. For the night came to the door of the place and made faces at us. And the devils in Klang-Nan awoke with the darkness and made noises that chilled my blood. Cries and screams, and mad caterwauling, and with these came the rustling of dry grass that told of the passing of hooded hunters.

But my two uncles were not disturbed by the sounds that came from without. Stripped to the waist, their bodies covered with the lime and dust that their blows dislodged, they kept up the search.

It was after midnight when Om shrieked. I had just thrown a bundle of wood upon the fire, and the cloud of smoke curling up to the slit in the roof of the chamber blinded me so that for an instant I could not see what had frightened her.

I saw Flane turn from the wall and look toward the door; then he sprang from the makeshift scaffold and made a quick rush forward. I caught a glimpse of a nightmare-breeding coil on which the light from the fire flickered, of a threatening head with red points of fire as eyes; then the parang in the hand of Flane swung in an arc of light, and the head left the coil. . . . It was a mighty blow.

Without a tremor in his voice, my Uncle Flane spoke to me as he turned back to the wall. "You should keep an eye on the door," he said. "Better still if you would put some live coals there. Don't step on that thing."

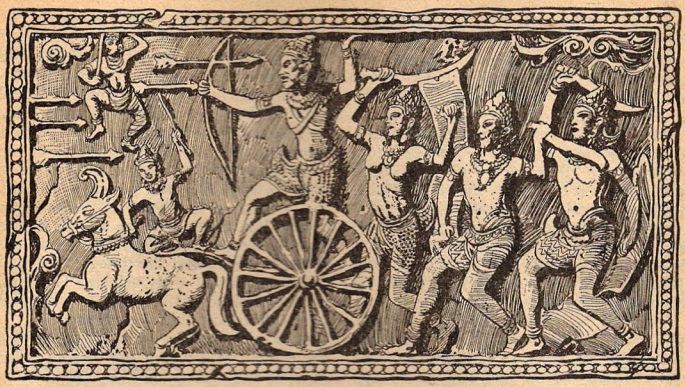
My Uncle Thurland hadn't stopped tapping. I doubt if he saw anything of the affair. My two uncles were insane with the desire for plunder. Fear of devils, beasts, or serpents was thrust out of their minds by the longing for the things of which they had dreamed during the weeks of the voyage.

NEAR daylight my two uncles decided to overthrow the statue in the hope that they would find some clue of the cache. Fearlessly in the dim light they went outside and found two great limbs that they could use as levers. They built up a fulcrum with flat stones, chipped out two holes at the base of the statue and thrust the poles into them.

Two strange beings were my uncles as they gripped the ends of the poles and swung their weight upon them. Bleary-eyed, with little sweat runnels on their dust-covered bodies, their hair white with lime, their great muscles showing, they brought a thrill to me as I watched them. *There's a mad bravery in the Irish, a* courage that makes one weep.

The statue refused to budge. I made a movement to touch the pole but Flane ordered me away. "Stand clear!" he cried. It was their battle, and they would have no interference.

Their muscles cracked in the heavy silence. They uttered Gaelic war-cries. They heaved and pulled. Then, as the first beam of light came down through the roof on the head of the dancing-girl, the levers won out. The figure rocked on its base, moved sideways, steadied itself; then, as Thurland shouted wildly, it went



crashing to the floor, the dust filling the chamber, blinding us as we crouched against the wall.

Flane and Thurland stepped over the shattered pieces. They stooped over the stone that had formed the base. The fingers of Flane picked up what looked to be a folded sheet of paper. He straightened himself and unrolled it. I was close enough to have a fleeting glimpse of the page. Upon it I distinctly saw a mass of Cambodian characters, the strange twisted script that we had seen carved on the statues of gods; but as I looked, the letters disappeared! Disappeared before our eyes! Like ghost symbols they fled, the faint light from the roof fading them till the sheet was white and blank with never a trace of what had been written upon it!

Flane, looking puzzled and helpless, turned the paper over. He found nothing. He looked around the chamber as if he thought the characters that had skipped from the page might be in hiding in the corners.

Thurland examined the shattered pieces of the upended statue. There was nothing to explain how Tohsâroth had worked the miracle. Nothing to tell us how he, by striking the deformed fingers of the dancing-girl, had caused some secret cache in the wall to open and drop the great pearl on the floor. There were no wires, no rods, no machinery. The figure was solid. . . .

The light increased. Flane stared at the piteous face of Joyeuse. Her eyes were upon him, and in the soft silence they seemed to dispel the madness that had been evident during the night. He crossed the chamber and took her two hands in his.

"I swore by the bones of my father that we would leave at sunup this morning," he said, "and I'll keep my word." He turned and spoke to his brother: "We're on our way, Thurl. The curse of Almighty God is on this place, and I wish to get out of it."

CHAPTER XXXII

The Battle on the Avenue

THE sun was up when we stepped from the chamber. My two uncles examined the stone door on which was carved the leering Buddha, but they could not find the hidden spring that operated it.

"We might block the opening with stones," said Flane. "It won't take us long. It wouldn't be right to leave the place open."

Hurriedly we collected stones from the ruins near by and piled them up in front of the grinning Buddha. We were filling in the last course when Thurland gave a yell of warning and sprang clear. The Buddha was moving! Moving forward against the stones that we had piled up before him!

Open-mouthed, we watched. With the same slow movement by which he had retired he now came forward, pressing with such force against the wall we had built that the heavy stones were thrust outward, toppling over and leaving the figure of the god in full view! There was a sharp click of hidden machinery, and the chamber was closed—forever.

"It's easy to explain," said Thurland. "The weight of the rocks we piled up operated the hidden lever that the old bonze pushed down when he knelt before the door. But all the same it's enough to scare the soul out of a man."

For long minutes we stared at the figure, then we turned and moved forward in the direction of the sanctuary where we had passed the first night. From that point we could pick up the route to the chasm that we had crossed on the bridge of logs. Thurland, parang in hand, walked first, followed by Joyeuse, Om, and me. Flane brought up the rear.

IT was a still, watchful morning. Klang-Nan seemed to know that we were leaving. Now and then there was a rustling in the grass, and here and there on the shattered walls we saw the disappearing length of a serpent. Monkeys, whose tails made fringes to the boughs on which they sat, discussed us as we passed.

We found the place of sanctuary, and Thurland called a halt. He spoke to Flane. "On the other side of the bridge we'll have trouble," he said. "We had better map out some way of dealing with it. The old bonze is not here to soft-soap the foul crawling devils that are waiting there to say good-by to us. Let's think."

"I've been thinking," said Flane. He pointed to a tree that we had noticed on our arrival in the ruined city. A strange tree. It grew to the height of some fifteen feet, the top being a bushy mass of spines. Devilish spines. They stood up like the quills of a porcupine, their duty being, as far as we could see, to protect a mass of green fruit from the raiding monkeys. And right well they did it. Now and then we saw an adventurous monkey hanging from the limb of a tree that grew close to the prickly ones, trying hard to reach the fruit hidden in the spines, yowling frightfully as the barbs pricked him.

Flane explained his plan. "Revolvers are no good," he said; "and the parangs are no better if we are attacked by any great number of them; but a couple of these trees used as street-sweepers use brooms would make a fine path for us. You and Jimmy can push in front, Joyeuse and Om will follow, and I'll act as a rearguard. If the spikes on them keep the monkeys off, they'll trouble the squirming things on the avenue."

"It's a good idea," said Thurland.

We chose a couple of young trees and hacked them down with the parangs. We trimmed off the lower branches till nothing was left but the great bunched head with its thousand and one spines. They were formidable weapons. Flane put Thurland and me in line, the tops of the trees upon the ground, and ordered us to walk forward in a trial march to see how they would work. There were no serpents about, but courage came to us as we pushed, the terrible spines tearing up the ground. We blessed the thought that had come to Flane. My Uncle Thurland gurgled with joy as he thrust the spiteful yardwide broom in front of him.

"It's the devil's own brush," cried Thurland. "I'll wager the blessed Saint Patrick had something like this when he swept the snakes out of Ireland! You could beat a lion with a tool like this."

Like pikes we carried the prickly trees on our shoulders as we made for the bridge. An occasional cobra lifted his head and hissed as we went by, but there was no attempt made to attack us. Twice we lost our bearings and had to retrace our steps. The silence was broken only by the chattering of half a dozen old monkeys who ran after us, skipping from wall to wall and shouting to friends who were too lazy to follow. Yet the watchfulness of the place was plain to us.

The courage that came with the possession of the spiked saplings received a shock as we came near to the bridge across the chasm. Thurland, in the lead, put out a hand and halted us. A clear slope led down to the great trench, and on this slope a battle had taken place.

FOR a minute or more we stared at the obstruction, then stepping softly we approached. Seated back to back, and holding a pose that made us think at first that they were still alive, were Bruden and Schiemann! Both hands of each man grasped automatics; they had died fighting. Around them were the ant-covered bodies of the crawling things they had fought and killed—seven of them! Joyeuse and Om were speechless with terror, and I was in a condition little better.

My two uncles, if they were upset by the sight, kept their feelings under control. In lowered voices they talked, their glances turning often to the piles of fallen masonry that were all around us. The prickly saplings were on the ground now. We were on guard.

"Lord have mercy on their souls!" said Thurland. "Let's hope that we—" He paused and watched a black streak slip with sickening speed over the statue of a dethroned god.

"Let's move," said Flane. "You and Jimmy to the front with the sweepers the moment we cross the bridge! Joyeuse and Om close as they can follow you. I'll keep my face to the rear. Now, in the name of God, let us go!"

We crossed the bridge, Flane holding the hand of Joyeuse, Thurland leading the small Om. The terror that we were to face on the far side made the bridge less frightening. I crossed without help.

BEYOND there was quiet. Nothing stirred; sullen heat was upon the place. Silently we placed the prickly heads of the saplings on the big flat stones that paved the avenue. My teeth chattered; I recalled a special prayer that Father Hannigan had taught us and which was to be used when great danger threatened. I mumbled it softly.

Flane spoke to Joyeuse. He asked her to be brave. "Just keep your head and follow Thurland," he said.

"But—but there mightn't be any danger," whispered Joyeuse. "They mightn't touch us."

Flane smiled. "Unless they know what we are taking away," he said. "If they know about the pearl they might get mad."

Joyeuse placed her hand on her bosom where the great pearl rested. She tried to speak but no sound came from her lips.

"Ready?" asked Thurland.

"All ready," answered Flane.

"Keep together," cautioned Thurland. "We're off."

The prickly trees made a harsh rustling noise as we pushed them over the flat stones. In that first twenty yards I wondered if we had done wisely in making the racket that would announce our going. I thought our chances would have been greater if we had tiptoed along the avenue, but that belief left me as Thurland called a warning.

A black, whip-like thing shot out from a heap of masonry. Head erect, hood expanded, it coiled in the path of the spiny broom that Thurland was pushing. Coiled and hissed a warning at the bristling brush that came straight at it.

The serpent struck blindly at the broom, and the damnable spines impaled it as it struck. With eyes glazed with terror I saw it. Pierced in a dozen places it rode the terrible sweep, striking again and again in its death agony at the frightful bayonets which nature had given the tree to protect its fruit from marauding monkeys.

My Uncle Thurland made a gurgling noise to show his pleasure at the success of the sweeps. Flane from the rear shouted a warning, and then it was my turn. A brownish-black length slid with frightening swiftness before my broom. I saw the terrifying head rise above the spikes as I thrust forward with all my strength, and then I too had a passenger. A furious fighting passenger that was skewered on the terrible bristles.

I heard the slash of Flane's parang, heard him speak a word of encouragement to Joyeuse. Joyeuse was sobbing. Our march was a nightmare!

Another victim for Thurland. . . . Another for me. . . . Two more for Thurland. . . . One dodged the spines and started to move swiftly up the ten-foot handle between me and the brushy end. I tried to drop the tree, but I couldn't. I tried to cry out, but my tongue was of ash; then Thurland fired. The head was blown off the thing, but it rode coiled on the sapling.

JOYEUSE shrieked. Thurland turned his head, clutched my shoulder and halted. Flane, holding off a rear attack, had slipped and lost his footing. I saw him, on his knees, his great arms wielding two parangs as he struck here and there. The hissing devils seemed to understand that they had him at a disadvantage.

My Uncle Thurland, with tremendous strength, swung his brush in a half-circle to the rear, and as he did that, I looked at Joyeuse—Joyeuse, insane with fear lest Flane should be struck by one of the darting heads. I saw her thrust her hand into her bosom. Saw her as she clutched something, lifted it high and hurled it back along the avenue. My eyes saw the sun strike it as it fell and rolled along the flat stones.

Flane was on his feet now. The brush of Thurland had swept away the danger. "Keep going!" yelled Flane. "Keep going. We're nearly there!"

As I thrust madly forward, I wondered what Joyeuse had thrown when she had seen the terrible danger that threatened Flane. Her action puzzled me.

Then suddenly I knew—I knew, and the knowledge killed the horror of those

last few yards that we traveled. Killed it by trying to picture the astonishment and anger of my two uncles when they were told. Joyeuse, crazed with terror, and thinking of the words of Flane when he spoke of the serpents attacking because we were stealing something from Klang-Nan, had in her madness thrown back to them the great pearl she carried in her bosom! . . .

We reached the lip of the mountain from which point we had first viewed the guardians of the snake-god. We were clear. Flane picked the fainting Joyeuse up in his arms and rushed down the path that we had cut previously. Om ran at his heels, I followed, Thurland brought up the rear. Far away we saw the silver strip of the Nam-Hou. . . .

The descent of the mountain was easier than the climb up. And our feet were light. We wished to make the Méos village before nightfall, so at a trot we went forward.

It was in the noonday halt that Joyeuse whispered to Flane of what she had done at the moment he lost his footing on the avenue of death. I was watching them as they sat apart. Joyeuse had her lips close to the ear of my uncle, and as she made what I knew to be her confession, I saw Flane's face change in a manner that was startling.

He tried to believe, but he couldn't. The words that she whispered stuck in his mental gullet and choked him. Amazement twisted his features out of line, gave a queer turn to his mouth and put a look of indescribable bewilderment in his eyes. With a great effort he moved his lips. I knew that he had uttered two words. *"The pearl!"*

Joyeuse nodded her head. Minutes went by, Flane fighting to recover from the blow. Then, suddenly, his face cleared. He put his big arms around the girl, drew her to him and kissed her. Flane understood. The pearl had been thrown back because of a love that in the mad moment of extreme danger, had thought only of him.

IT was nightfall when we stumbled into the little Méos village in the great trees. My Uncle Flane, singing loudly, led us into the place.

It was difficult to get the little folk out of their huts, but at last they understood that we were not devils from the jungle and they brought us food and arranged sleeping quarters for us. The soothsayer in the purple *sampot* counted us and asked by signs about the missing three. Thurland, by gestures, explained that they would never return, and the prophet blew out his chest and addressed the villagers. We surmised that he was screaming out the Méos equivalent for: "I told you so! Give me the entrails of a fish and I'll make the future as plain as the nose on your face!" He was still talking as we fell asleep.

WE were a month and three days descending the Mekong to My-tho. We rode from there to Saigon, and as we dismounted from a battered car in front of the Hôtel des Nations on the Boulevard Bonnard, a small policeman stepped up and asked our names and our business.

My Uncle Thurland grinned. "I," said he, "am the Lord of Damnation and Sorrow. My brother here is the Prince of Disappointment. Here is the Lady of Romance, the little thing is the Button of Pure Affection, and the boy is Sancho Panza. And are you satisfied now, my little man or will I tell you more?"

The policeman stared for a few moments at Thurland; then he walked swiftly away.

A boat of the Chargeurs-Réunis was leaving that very evening for Marseilles, and Thurland booked passages on her. He also arranged with the agent to look after the small Om.

"Where did you get the money?" asked Flane.

"I took the wallet from the pocket of the old Count as we were leaving that stone chamber," answered Thurland. "It was a pity to leave good money in there."

We went aboard in the late afternoon. Flane had told Thurland of the loss of the great pearl, but Thurland did not seem cast down. He led us to the bar and called for drinks.

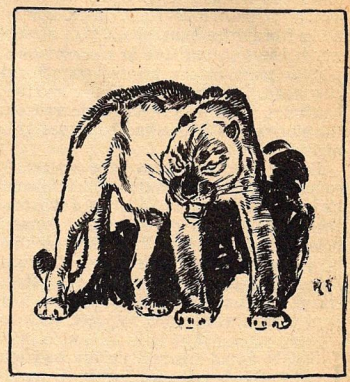
"And if you put ice in my drink before I see how much whisky is in the glass, I'll toss you overboard," he said to the barman. "If a waiter in Paris hadn't spoiled a good drink, I wouldn't have poured it down the back of a crook and by that same trick got myself into this wild-goose chase from which I'm returning."

He looked around to see what Flane thought of his statement, but Flane hadn't heard. He was standing with his arm around the waist of Joyeuse, watching the lights of the Quai Francis Garnier slip into the soft dusk as we moved down the Saigon River.

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES

In this department your fellow-readers tell of the most exciting events of their lives. (For details of this Real Experience contest, see page 3.) First a famous hunter tells of a mountain lion who was also well known.



Old Brigham

By JACK TOOKER

I STOOD at the very rim of the world's greatest scenic wonder, and the natural home of the American lion—the Grand Cañon of the Colorado River, and looked down at a huge lion-track in the snow. My dogs were milling about the cañon rim, voicing disappointment in no uncertain terms. They couldn't follow that big cat over the sheer hundred-foot wall, where the story of his descent was plainly written in the snow. Tall spruce trees grew on the ledge below. One thrust its towering steepled tip almost to the top of the ledge, and about twenty feet away from the wall. Brigham had evidently sprung out into this tree and gone down where man and dogs could not follow.

I called that cat Old Brigham because of his polygamous habits. He had five wives that I had located. Other male lions in the vicinity were all trying to cut in on Old Brigham when he wasn't home, which was often, since the five females lived in separate dens several miles apart, and Brigham could not occupy all his love-nests at the same time. The ambitious suitors would meet and fight over Brigham's mates while he was away; but when he returned, there was a concerted scatteration, for Brigham was undisputed king when it came to jousts for the favors of a lady lioness.

The fact that all the females were not courting at the same time helped Old Brigham immensely in preserving fidelity among his wives. Again, when a lioness has small cubs, she will not allow any male lion near them. Lions are considered dumb brutes; yet they can foresee competition in the mating battle if young male cubs are allowed to grow up; a male will kill his competition when it is too young to resist, and a mother lioness knows this. She uses the respect that grown males have for her, in defense of her young, until they are able to take care of themselves.

On this particular morning I had picked up Brigham's trail in the snow about three miles from the rim of Grand Cañon. The tracks were fresh and the dogs had overtaken him several times. Each time he had fought them off, instead of climbing a tree as most lions will do when overtaken by dogs.

For nearly three years I had been trying to catch Old Brigham, and it always ended as it had this morning. Now he had eluded me again by jumping into the top of that tree from the cañon rim.

I called the dogs and rode east along the rim to a point about two miles opposite the place where I knew a female lion had a den. I could get her any time I wished, but was preserving her for bait to catch Old Brigham, whose tracks I was sure I had seen leading to her den.

As I expected, I found Brigham's tracks leaving the female's den. I fol-

lowed the trail just to see what he had been up to during the night. For two miles the tracks ran straight, then began to maneuver here and there, where he had begun to hunt. To a man of the woods the signs written in the snow are just as plain as the printed page to a city man. Brigham's tracks were the headlines, and in between were written the stories of all that had happened the night before.

Before I realized what he was after, I could tell by the tracks that Old Brigham had located game, and I discerned from the signs that it was a herd of horses belonging to Martin Brigglin. In the herd I was following as I trailed Brigham, fourteen colts had been foaled that spring; and when I had last seen the herd there was but one colt left.

I SOON found where Brigham had located the horses, feeding in a small clearing. The lion had circled to get the wind in his favor. He had stalked and made a charge, but something had happened. Instead of catching the colt, it had run away. The snow was all torn up where there had been a fight. At first I thought the mother had fought in defense of her young, but I soon learned that it was the stallion who had done the fighting—a big chestnut of steel-dust breed, weighing twelve hundred pounds. He was a magnificent animal, and the story written in the snow told of a terrific struggle. If the horse could have landed one solid blow or secured a hold on the big cat's body with his powerful jaws, it would have been followed with a barrage of hoofs that not even Brigham could have survived. The horse had charged many times in a vain effort to catch the lion, but the cat had been too quick; the striking hoofs had spent themselves in thin air.

As I followed the signs of the fight, I soon discovered how it had ended. That stallion had made a grave mistake. He probably had wheeled to kick with hind legs; and when he did that, the lion had leaped to his back and buried his fangs just back of the ears, puncturing the spinal cord. The horse had died instantly, and Brigham had dragged that great hulk downhill some fifty feet, under a cedar tree. He had sucked the blood, but had eaten none of the flesh. His kill was covered with pine needles and snow.

Examining the carcass more closely, I discovered that the great killer fangs had been driven with such force between the neck joints as to dislocate the spine. The stallion had been killed in the usual lion fashion: Heavy-based fangs, tapering to needle points, driven through the skin of the neck. Those deadly holes were so small that after the skin closed upon their withdrawal, they could scarcely be seen. With no traces of blood where the death-wound was made, it isn't strange that much stock-killing is a mystery to anyone who doesn't know lions. Brigham had killed that big stallion much as a cowboy bulldogs a steer, except that he broke the neck instead of merely twisting it.

Almost all my efforts to catch the elusive killer had been confined to hunting with dogs. I had tried to trap him on one occasion. Locating one of his kills, a fine saddle-horse, I took eight traps and boiled them in sage to kill the iron smell. I used new gloves in making the sets, covering them with hair plucked from the dead horse, and then a layer of fine dust. I backed away from the sets, brushing out my tracks as I went with a green branch.

That afternoon about four inches of snow fell, making conditions ideal. I felt sure of success, for the horse had been still warm when I found him, and as the lion had sucked the blood and eaten no flesh, I knew that he would return.

Next morning I took only my six-shooter, which I considered good enough to kill any animal in a trap. But I found another story written in the snow. Old Brigham had come straight to the carcass, making great strides, but for some reason he had stopped short about twelve feet from it, circled and gone off to hunt and make a fresh kill. I was disappointed and puzzled, for I couldn't then, and never have, figured out just how Brigham discovered those traps. Four coyotes, a wolf, two lynx and three fox were trapped at this carcass; and all these animals are supposed to have keener scent than a lion.

I had no dogs or rifle that day, but I took Brigham's trail and followed it out onto a rocky point, knowing that the lion had gone out there to look for game in the valley below. I sat down and with a powerful pair of glasses began to survey the scene below. The valley was large, and at the lower end of it I sighted a small herd of deer, does and fawns. Nearer the center was a large herd of wild horses. I was wondering which herd Brigham would stalk, when I observed near the edge of the timber seven ante-

lope. They were the easiest to approach, and I guessed the antelope would be his meat.

They were near enough so I could see them with the naked eye quite plainly, while with the glasses I could almost see their eyes. I watched them intently, and finally detected a movement in the scattered sage-brush between the antelope and the timber. It was Brigham, stalking his kill.

When he had reached a point about forty yards from his prey, they winded him and were off with a snort. Anyone knows how fleet an antelope is, how quickly he can get under way. But even so, the lion was swifter. Like a tawny streak he overtook them, leaped to the back of a fine specimen while in full flight and punctured the spinal cord.

I was trying to think of some way to catch that lion which hadn't been tried before, and my plans simmered down to his never-failing port of refuge, the Grand Cañon. The Grand Cañon is now and always has been the breeding-ground of many lions, and their haven of safety when close pressed. Jump a lion ten miles from the Cañon rim, and he will invariably try to reach the Cañon. If I could go over the walls on a rope, I might get somewhere in hunting Old Brigham.

I had often rescued my dogs with my saddle rope when they had gone down over cliffs and ledges and couldn't get back. Why not use a much longer rope and scale the Cañon walls? It didn't even look easy in the thinking, but I was willing to take long chances with my reputation as a lion-hunter at stake.

In an hour I was back at the spot where Old Brigham had used the tree to escape into the Cañon. With a hundred and twenty-five feet of three-quarter inch manila rope (I chose the large rope because it was easier to grip), I tied one end to a cedar tree that grew in the rim, threw the coil over the wall and watched it unroll on the way down. With a stone I smoothed out the sharp edges of the surface ledge where the rope made contact with the rock, took off my gun and belt, swung my rifle over my shoulder with a sling, and slid over the wall on the rope.

I went down slowly. It was my first trip on a rope of this length. My hands began to smart, and an empty feeling expanded in the pit of my stomach. I began to feel for footholds with my swinging feet. A longing to look down, to assure myself that there was a bottom —possessed me. I wasn't particularly afraid of high places, and so I looked.

It wasn't the height of my giddy suspension that bathed me in cold chill as I looked down. At the base of the spruce tree, watching every move I made, was Old Brigham, as calm and collected as you please!

I couldn't hang there on that rope forever; nor could I let go with one hand and shoot him with the rifle. A one-handed rifle shot would be uncertain at best, and I was tired. The big cat seemed to sense my helplessness. His eyes all but told me what was going on in his mind. I forgot about being tired and began to climb as I never had climbed before. Nor did I stop until I had reached the top.

No doubt the lion had been as much surprised as I by my monkey leave-taking on that dangling rope, but I didn't wait to see. I reasoned that with the six-shooter I could have wrapped my legs around the rope, held on with one hand and shot the big cat. It was a chance.

I tied knots at intervals of about sixteen inches to assist my grip on the rope and went over the rim again with the six-shooter instead of the rifle. But there was no lion waiting to be shot when I looked down this time.

Tying the knots in the rope had shortened it, until it lacked several feet of reaching bottom. But I could touch the ground with my feet by hanging at arm's length, and knew that I could get back to my sailor's ladder by jumping for the end of it.

I dropped down, drew my gun and began a search for Brigham. He had done a lot of moving. His tracks were everywhere, and it was impossible to tell which were made last. It was seventy-five or a hundred feet from the base of the first wall to the top of the second wall. The ledge on which I stood was about a quarter-mile long, the ends running out to nothing. It was something like a terrace garden. Pine and spruce grew there, with many small cedars and brush. I searched for nearly an hour before I decided I would need a dog to locate my game.

CLIMBING back to the top, I made a rope sling for my lead dog, Red. We had been pals for several years, and he had confidence in me, while I knew he was dependable. Red didn't object when I fastened him securely in the sling, tied the other end to the big rope to make

it long enough to reach the ledge, and then swung him out over the edge, lowering him down and following hand over hand.

Red was waiting for me patiently. I freed him and said, "Get him, Red!"

It took the dog about ten minutes to do what I had failed to do in an hour. He was baying at the extreme west end of the ledge where it came up against a sheer wall, when the sound faded out. I hurried to where I last had heard the hound. He was around a turn in the rock wall. The only way to get there was by a narrow ledge that extended not more than eighteen inches from the main wall. And a crevice separated me from the ledge by at least seven feet.

I PUT my six-shooter in the holster, and with two or three steps for a start, jumped and made it. I clawed at the wall with my hands, trying to find something to grasp. There was nothing to hang to, but luckily I got my balance without need of handholds, and then looked down.

The great white and red walls of the cañon came together at this point, making a sheer drop of a thousand feet. Had I known this at first, I doubt that I would have ever made that jump. I know that I would never do it again for all the lions on earth. But I was out there with a straight wall above me and plenty of space below, and I might as well see what was around the corner.

Leaning against the wall, I walked a foot at a time, and was watching very carefully where I placed my feet, when I almost bumped into Red. He was lying down with one paw hanging over the edge, and not eight feet from him, at the extreme end of that shelf of rock, lay Old Brigham.

He was facing us. And what a face! A huge head with massive jaws. A head almost black clear back to his shoulders. A black stripe ran down his back to the tip of his tail, which was adorned with a large black brush. That brush was moving nervously. He was forking his hind-feet just as a house-cat works its hind-feet in getting set to spring for a bird or a mouse. He kept sheathing and unsheathing his front claws, and a deep growl rumbled in his throat. The eyes were like huge balls of green fire.

He must have known that to spring on us would carry all three of us from the shelf to smashing destruction on the rocks below. But it seemed he intended to spring whatever it cost, and take us with him.

I drew the six-shooter, took careful aim at his right eye and squeezed the trigger. His head dropped on his paws, he gave a shoving kick with his hind-feet and slid off the shelf. It seemed fully a minute before he struck bottom.

That was the end of the worst horse-killer that ever invaded Arizona. It looked like the end of me too, as well as of Red, for we had to get turned around and off that narrow shelf. I knew Red could get back if he didn't try to help me. But he'd be sure to get tangled if I lost balance or failed to jump that fissure at the end of the ledge.

With my back to the wall, I worked the left foot around and finally managed to make the turn, working along to where I must make that seven-foot jump. Now, seven feet is not much of a standing jump for an athletic man; but when your life depends on it, and a slip means that you join Old Brigham far below, it looks more like seventy feet.

I made it with plenty to spare, and Red followed easily. No doubt he was as much relieved as I, for dogs know when their master is worried. . . . Back at the rope, I adjusted the sling to Red's body, climbed to the rim and then pulled up my dog. . .

I have killed lions from Guatemala to British Columbia, but the largest lions are found in Arizona; and Old Brigham was among the biggest. Ramsay Patterson killed one near Prescott, Arizona, which weighed one hundred and seventy-six pounds. T. J., better known as Uncle Jim Owens, killed one in the Kaibab forest that weighed more than three hundred pounds.

BRIGHAM was, I am sure, the largest lion I ever killed, and would have weighed around three hundred pounds. He was not more than eight feet long, but he was built stocky, more like a jaguar than a lion. I was disappointed in not being able to reach him. If I had, there would have been nothing of value to bring out after a fall of that distance. I was content to watch the eagles and crows feast upon him.

Examining the tree that Brigham had used in going down to the ledge, I found claw-marks so old that I would say it had been used by the lion for years.

This was the first lion I ever killed by going over the rim on a rope, but not the last. It was only the beginning.

The Marines Ride

A noted fighting-man recalls some quaint and exciting episodes.

By GENERAL SMEDLEY BUTLER

THE scene is Nicaragua; the date September, 1912.

A train consisting of a narrow-gauge wood-burning locomotive, two creaky flat-cars and a box-car. The flat-cars first, the locomotive in the center, the box-car bringing up the rear. A Marine at the throttle; Marines as firemen, brakemen, switchmen; fifty Marines as passengers. It is raining a little, and the rails are slippery. We are at the top of the divide between Léon and Managua.

We start down. The road is beautiful, scenically, but very crooked. In places the grade is very steep. The right-of-way runs around the rim of a crater lake which lies one thousand feet below and straight down.

We are going faster and faster. The cars sway wildly from side to side. Our locomotive has no headlight, no whistle and no bell. The stillness of the night is broken only by the wild cheering of the Marines. As we shoot faster and faster around sharp curves and through narrow cuts in the rocky mountain-side, there is a chorus of shouts to the engineer to slow down. Word is passed back that all the brakes on the train are set—but with the exception of an ineffective hand affair, they are not working.

The only light we have is a lantern in the hands of a sergeant on the corner of the leading flat-car. He holds it low to look for possible breaks in the track—hardly a useful precaution at sixty miles an hour.

Finally, we strike something. It's a cow. Fortunately, nothing but the lantern and the sergeant's corner of the flat-car hit the animal, and we do not leave the rails. However, we have lost our only light—now we are in complete darkness. Only for a few moments, though; for shortly after, the spark-arrester on the funnel-shaped smokestack of our engine blows off, and a column of sparks spouts fifty feet high. Now we are dashing through the night like a column of fire. The Marines cheer more lustily.

The down-grade lasts all the way into Managua, and as we shoot through the government outpost line, these worthies take us for a Rebel raiding-party and merrily blaze away at us. However, we are going too fast for their aim, and the bullets pass over and by us harmlessly. We present an awe-inspiring sight, with the column of fire and the terrific cheering, and the spectacle might well frighten steadier troops.

As we approach the railroad station in Managua, we see that the gates designed to keep cows out of the station are closed. But that is nothing to us. With a loud crash and a cheer we burst noisily through the gates and speed by the platform, where we catch a glimpse of the President of Nicaragua and the American Minister, down to welcome us back from a trip to the seaport.

On we go—smash the gates on the other side of the station and along the track until a slight up-grade finally brings us to a stop, and we slowly drift back to the astonished but warm welcome of our reception committee.

The next day we learn that even the backs, or frames of the flat-cars are broken. Why they didn't collapse during the wild ride is a mystery. . . .

There are not many jobs that Marines have not been called upon to under-

take at some time or other. You hardly would expect a gang of Marines, on whose individual necks you could strike matches, to land on foreign soil and take over and run a railroad system. But consider the incident related. . . . Consider that it covered but the last fifteen or twenty miles of the journey from Corinto, the Pacific seaport of Nicaragua, to Managua, inland city and capital. The entire distance is but eighty-five miles by rail. Consider that it required seven days and seven nights to make it—an average of about a mile every two hours.

Join us on this eighty-five-mile ride and see why it takes so long.

I was stationed at Managua with a battalion of four hundred men. With a detail of fifty men and the little work-train, we rode for three days to get into Corinto to meet the Pacific fleet and to acquaint Admiral Sutherland with the details of the so-called war then in progress in that Central American country.

The Admiral landed his Marines and a detail of blue-jackets—about six hundred men in all—and we made up two trains for their transportation into the interior.

I have already described our train. The other two consisted of flat- and box-cars, and were drawn by heavier locomotives, one named the Bluefields and the other the Rama—after towns in Nicaragua—even as our little engine was named Masaya. All three trains were operated by Marines—most of whose only previous knowledge of railroads was in riding in day coaches or possibly "blind baggage."

I left Corinto with my fifty Marines and the little train at five A. M. the next day, about two hours ahead of the other two trains carrying the six hundred men. We went first in order to repair probable breaks in the tracks. It is an old Rebel custom to rip up rails and throw them in the undergrowth.

We had gone about ten miles when we began to find signs of bandit activity—culverts torn out; rails piled up. But these were only slight inconveniences for our railroaders, and were overcome most easily. Two miles farther on, in the town of Amaya, we came to a stream which, three days before when we went down to the coast, had been spanned by a steel bridge fifty feet long.

Now there existed absolutely no sign of the bridge, and we learned afterward it had been broken up by the Rebels and hauled away completely. This was quite a problem to our amateur railroaders.

But our orders were to go on to the interior, so—

Further down the stream we found two old stone piers that, before the right of way had been straightened out, had carried a bridge. These piers were but thirty feet apart, and as the seventy-pound rails were thirty-three feet long, we tore up a near-by siding and built a solid floor of rails, bound together with telephone wire.

Of course we had to relay our main track line in order to cross this bridge, and as we had no instruments, we guessed at the curvature. This job took seventy-two hours, during which time none of us had any sleep.

While we were working, a number of bluejackets brought into camp a native they had captured. They charged him with being a bandit and having in his possession a bag of dynamite.

We investigated, and found a bag containing a white substance. It turned out to be ordinary native cheese, much to the disgust of the would-be executioners and to the merriment of the Marines.

FINALLY our little train passed safely over the bridge while the Marines cheered loudly. However, the first locomotive on one of the two trains we were "convoying" being larger than our own little Masaya, was too long for the curve and jumped the track.

Before we left Corinto, some merchants, posing as philanthropists, had come to our admiral, a wonderful old man and a great sailor, and had spun him a yarn about the starving poor of Léon. They persuaded him finally to instruct us to take three carloads of flour to Léon to relieve the suffering. Well, we put the three cars of flour in the middle of one of the trains, but every time we started, the couplings would break. Finally we tied them together with chains. Then, when we reached Leon and sent for the starving to come and be fed, we found the cars were loaded with cement, which brought an immediate and highly profitable sale, some work having been held up due to the embargo on freight from the coast.

Late that night the commander of our forces in the town—my senior in rank—sent word that he wanted my locomotive, a poor little thing at best. However, orders are orders and I sent it on into town.

We had two flat-cars and a box-car now, but no engine; so, while in the town and surrounded by a curious and not too friendly mob, we decided to try our luck at persuading the Rebels to give us one of their engines. When the revolution broke out, each side had grabbed all the rolling stock it could get, and was using it for movement of troops.

We finally found an Englishman who offered to interpret.

I explained to the Rebel leaders the sad plight we were in—three cars and no engine and fifty miles to go. I explained that we were absolutely neutral and did not care which side won; simply were interested in keeping the railroad open. I persuaded them that a well-run railroad would be an asset to whichever side won the war, and thus, they finally agreed to let us have one.

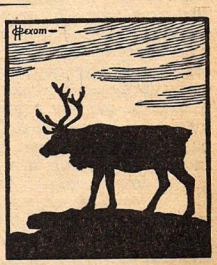
They led the Englishman and me to the roundhouse, where six or seven engines were stored—partially dismantled—and told me to take my choice. While I was trying to pick out the least damaged one—it was rather dark in the roundhouse—I noticed a soldier near me say something to one next to him, and then both of them cocked their rifles.

I did not know what they said, but I guessed it was something affecting my future, and it was my turn to do something, so I pulled out a poor cigar I had been carrying and stuck it into the mouth of the first soldier. He sputtered, put his gun on the ground and stared at me. I smiled—then he smiled.

Looking around for my English friend, I found he had gone. I did not see him again for a month or so, when I happened to be passing through Léon again. Asking him why he had deserted me, he told me that one of the soldiers had said to another: "This man is causing a lot of trouble. If we shoot him here in the dark, we can say it was an accident and we will have no more trouble."

The two other trains eventually came back from their position down the road, and of course, my senior immediately took the big locomotive I had got from the Rebels and gave back our little Masaya. However, a little engine is better than none, and shortly after noon we again started for Managua. The going was slow; we did not reach the top of the mountains between Léon and Managua until after dark. Our wild ride down the mountainside followed!

A Bad Shot



Hunting deer in Mongolia for their horns (prized by Chinese doctors), he deals with a native hi-jacker.

By N. BAIKOV

I WAS stalking roe-deer on the western slopes of the Djan-guan-tsailin Mountains. It was early summer, the season of the year when the horns of deer are in the velvet. They are then soft and full of blood and bring high prices. The powder from dried and crushed young horns is an important ingredient in the medicines concocted by Asiatic doctors.

It was to secure horns at this particular stage that I had come to these mountains. My old friend Afanasenko was with me—a good companion, resourceful and humorous.

Our hunting was done during the night. In the daytime we rested at Afanasenko's hut built at the foot of the mountains and at nightfall we parted to take positions at our respective posts.

I reached my post after a two-hours' walk, settled myself behind a screen of bushes and prepared for a long vigil. Gnats and mosquitoes, refreshed by their day's rest while I was away, came back in multitudes. I had to hold myself in check: noise of any sort might scare away an approaching deer. All I could do was to crush, gently but firmly, those demanding a meal off my face.

The Taiga was silent, a silence accentuated by the singing of my blood-sucking persecutors. Four hours passed. My hands and legs had become numb;

my eyes, owing to the strain of peering into the darkness, were aching; and now a daring mosquito, exploring inside my nostril, nearly sent me wild with rage.

This unbalanced frame of mind was quite out of place in a huntsman, I knew. I was trying to ignore the pain in my nose and to keep myself calm when I heard a slight noise of broken twigs. I sat very still: an animal was approaching. I couldn't see him; the only forms I could see from my shelter of bushes were two ghostly birch trees, the white trunks vaguely outlined against the soft darkness.

I kept my eyes on the tree-trunks. The deer should stop near them to lick the salt which I had spread on the ground between the two birches. The deer came up and stood sniffing. I could not see him; but the light wind, blowing from his side, brought me the unmistakable smell of his body. I held my rifle and waited for the moment until he should move to a position between me and the birch trees—a distance of thirty paces.

The deer, unconscious of my presence, was quietly licking the salt and sniffing from time to time. I heard him stepping on little twigs, and I guessed him to be approaching one of my white marks—the birch tree. After he had satisfied himself with a long licking of the salt, an unexpected luxury for him, the deer resumed his journey; and presently I saw a dark mass screening the birch tree. It was the moment to press the trigger. The noise of my shot broke into the night silence, and went echoing far, far, through the folding hills.

The deer flopped to the ground; but almost instantly he was up again and pushing his way through the bushes. He had gone. I knew it was useless to pursue him in the darkness. I ran to the spot where he had fallen, and with the light of a candle, examined the ground. The remaining salt and the soft earth were impregnated with blood, and a trail of blood led toward the bushes where the deer had vanished. It was probably only a matter of hours until he would be dead. "We will certainly find him in the daylight," I told myself.

The following morning Afanasenko, who'd had no luck at all from his post, came to see me, and we went off to look for the deer. We found him in a ravine, lying dead. His beautiful horns, to my satisfaction, had not been damaged.

Immediately, Afanasenko and I set to work to skin and horn the deer. Afanasenko's job was to skin the animal, and mine to cut off the horns. The latter operation is not difficult, but it requires a certain amount of hard effort and a firm hand, as the horns must be detached from the skull at their extreme bases. Our work engrossed us, and we paid little attention to anything beyond it. We were even indifferent, for the time being, to the swarms of irritating gadflies who had come to join the mosquitoes.

WE had nearly finished our messy work when, to our surprise, a gunshot rang out, and a bullet whizzed over our heads and struck the oak-tree branching above us. We were performing our operation underneath the tree. The shot came to us literally like a bolt from the blue. Nothing around us indicated a hint of imminent danger. It was a serene bright morning; the only spectators of our occupation, so far as we knew, were the ravens sitting on neighboring trees, waiting expectantly for their share of the carcass. At the noise of the shot the birds left their perches and flew away.

Before we had time to investigate the meaning of the first shot, a second report rang out, and another bullet lodged in the same tree branching above our heads. We dropped to the ground at full length. "Take cover behind the deer," Afanasenko called.

Bullets kept coming at regular intervals and lodging in the same tree.

The man who was shooting at us—we believed that there was only one attacker—was probably firing at random, for our figures could not have been discernible to him through the dense growth; he had aimed toward the sound of our voices.

"Remain where you are." Afanasenko had crawled toward me as he issued his order. "I will try to find out who the fellow is. I'll teach him how to shoot!" My friend was in command, so I did as he told me and lay still.

He crept behind the tree, slid across to some thick bushes and disappeared. I did as I'd been told, and lay close to the deer's body.

No more shots disturbed the silence, and I pushed myself farther off from the deer's glassy, accusing eyes.

The ravens came back to their observation posts and looked at me resentfully. The thought struck me that our adversary, if he could see the birds keeping watch, would understand that the man he had shot at was still alive. The

birds, sitting motionless on the trees, would give him warning. Was that good or bad for me? I didn't know. I had to wait patiently, gun ready at hand should the man come within sight. Who was he? A Russian, or a Chinese? Brigands of both nationalities are practiced stalkers of deer-hunters.

This type of "sportsman" will follow a hunter for days; and then when he decides that the hunter's bag is sufficiently valuable, he will shoot the hunter. Horns "in the velvet" are an especially good prize. Undoubtedly the startling shots whizzing over our head had been fired by a bandit making a bid for our deer horns.

What was happening? Why didn't Afanasenko return? Or why hadn't he given me a shot-signal? There was no sound of firing anywhere. For nearly an hour I waited under cover, and then I crawled out from behind the deer. I was positively coated with flies. The continued silence made me uneasy: Had Afanasenko been ambushed and murdered by a bandit's knife thrust into his back? Why had I let him go alone? "If he doesn't appear within the next half-hour," I said to myself, "I shall go in search of him."

Just then I thought I heard a shot fired very far away. The wave of sound died out—and again came silence, enlivened only by twittering birds and a busy woodpecker, tapping methodically, somewhere on the tree-top.

One shot only! What did it mean? Afanasenko knew how to use his rifle, but the bandits are also experienced in using their Mausers. I cursed myself for having stayed behind, and ran in the direction of the distant shooting.

Hot, sultry weather, and the rocky ground hampered me; my progress was slow, and I was a long time in reaching the bend of the hill where I knew there was a fairly clear track. I had scarcely turned into the track when I saw two figures coming in my direction. They steadily ascended the hill, and as they came nearer, I could see that the man walking in front was a young Khunghuz, his hands tied behind his back. Afanasenko, pipe in mouth, and carrying two guns, was close behind the man. They came up to me, and Afanasenko threw the two guns on the ground. "Ugh, it's hot!" he said, and stretched himself beside the guns. The bandit stood looking on; his pallid Mongolian face expressing fright and hatred.

Afanasenko made a grimace at me. He pointed to the Khunghuz. "Look at him! A proper young wolf, isn't he? He didn't expect to be attacked from the rear! I walked round the hill. He saw me coming through the bushes and took to his heels. He can run, that young beast! But he didn't run fast enough! I could have shot him down—only I didn't want to. So we had a nice long race, until I'd had enough of it. Then I fired above his silly head, just to give him a friendly warning; and that stopped his hurrying legs. He dropped his gun at once and waited for me! And here he is. Look at him! Frightened to death, and expecting to be strung up to the nearest tree! Shall we hang the wolf, or shoot him?" Afanasenko rolled over on the grass to get a better view of his captive. He looked hard at the bandit and shouted at him: "You are an idiot—if you know what that means! And worse than that, you are a bad shot!"

Afanasenko sat up, lifted the man's gun and brandished it in the air in front of the frightened Chinese. I could see that Afanasenko was enjoying himself. He shouted still more loudly at the terrified victim: "You are no good at this! You can't use a gun properly." He sprang up from the grass and turned to me.

"What shall we do with the fellow?" I asked. We both knew that it would mean certain death for this Khunghuz if we handed him over to the chief of the Chinese regular troops; and if we let him go, he might summon a band of his own friends, who would hardly wait to give us a lecture on good shooting!

THE young bandit guessed that we were talking about him, and his body trembled violently: he was in real terror. "Here!" Afanasenko rolled a thick cigarette and thrust it into the man's mouth. "Come on! Stop your chattering teeth and have a smoke!" he said. The bandit's face was a study in perplexity: this was behavior he didn't understand at all. Probably he came to the conclusion that we had postponed his execution, for his teeth ceased chattering, and he looked a little less terrified as he walked between me and Afanasenko toward the spot where we had been surprised by his shots in the morning.

"Now you can watch us finish our work," Afanasenko scowled. "Making us waste our time like this!"

It didn't take us long to finish our interrupted job and to pack what we wanted of the deer into three loads. We strapped the heaviest load to the bandit's shoulders and ordered him to a quick march. We wanted to get back to our cabin. Clouds were gathering, presaging a thunderstorm, and we reached home to the tune of distant thunder.

Our captive sat on the ground outside the cabin, watching our movements as we prepared a meal. His face had resumed the imperturbability of a true son of the East. He was no longer trembling.

When we gave him bread and meat, his eyes were full of delight and thankfulness, and he ate the food with the appetite of a young animal. After he had emptied one large mug of tea, he placed the mug back near the kettle, not daring to ask for more, but licking his lips tellingly.

"The rascal wants to go to the Great Beyond with a full stomach, I see!" Afanasenko made a growling sound at the man—and poured him out another mug of tea. "Drink! Hurry up, or we shall have to kick you out!" The Chinese blinked. He didn't understand a word of Russian, and he thought the words were an order to get up and prepare himself for execution.

He stood up obediently, again becoming a piteous figure of despair.

"Fool! I don't mean that!" bellowed Afanasenko. "We want you to go away—away!" He whistled and pointed a finger meaningly toward the forest.

The bandit didn't grasp his meaning. He stood bewildered, his eyes on Afanasenko, who was collecting a big chunk of meat and some bread from the table. These were handed out to the Khunghuz and another command given:

"Take this—and go away!" Afanasenko waved his arm, forcefully, in the direction of the mountains.

The bandit's yellow face turned a pale mahogany tint, and his eyes became glittering slits of delight. He had grasped the meaning of the pointing finger, the waving arm, and realized that he was being set free. He stepped forward and bowed, gratefully, to Afanasenko, nearly touching the ground with the crown of his head.

Then he bowed to me, and mumbling unintelligibly, moved a few steps backward. He looked at us uncertainly. We didn't move. He made another deep obeisance, and turning alertly, strode off and was soon out of sight.

A

AS the wife of a wandering soldier of fortune I have visited strange lands and lived in the midst of weird adventures. On only one occasion, however, have I been an eye-witness of a war, and watched my husband fighting in a battle.

When the Madero revolution broke out in Mexico soon after Christmas, 1910, we were homesteading on some school land in west Texas. My husband, Tex O'Reilly, who can always find a war even before it really starts, had been in the confidence of the insurgent junta, and knew when and where the fighting was to start.

As he was a veteran newspaper man as well as a soldier, he succeeded in convincing one of the big news services that trouble was sure to start, and had been employed to cover the story. It meant that I would be left alone in camp, just two tents to live in, with our two small boys, the oldest only four years of age.

I was a young woman, raised in the West, accustomed to ranch life, and had no fears. Perhaps I did not have sense enough to be afraid. The fact that I would be alone fifteen miles from the nearest town, in a country where rattlesnakes, coyotes and skunks would be my daily tormentors, did not alarm me.

We decided that the money we could save from the weekly salary would make things much easier for us when the war was over, and pay for needed improvements. After a gay celebration on the ranch, Tex left for Mexico on December 26, 1910. Within a week I heard that he had been in the first battle and been shot in the leg, but luckily it was only a slight wound.

Camp life may seem simple and easy, but I found work enough to keep me busy. Aside from the routine housework, or rather tent-work, preparing meals and doing the laundry, I had to haul our drinking-water three miles from the nearest well. Occasionally I hunted quail for fresh meat. Twice a week I rode horseback five miles to the mail-box,

Wife Goes to War

She watched while her famous soldier-of-fortune husband fought a battle.

By DIXIE O'REILLY

with one baby behind the saddle and the other held in front of me.

The night was not so easy. The boys were put to bed early. The only light possible in the open was an old-fashioned lantern, so I would read for hours until my eyes grew tired, then sleep until daylight came. There was no sleeping after that. The birds were too busy singing, and the small creatures too noisy. . . .

Soon the Mexican battle-front shifted to Ojinaga, just across the Rio Grande opposite Presidio, Texas. By this time Tex was not only writing the story, but taking an active part in the fighting. It was not the first time that he had started with a typewriter and wound up with a machine-gun. I knew it would be impossible for him to keep out of it.

One day I received a letter from him, telling me to pick up the boys, go to Sanderson, the nearest town, and take a train for Marfa, and the stage-coach to Presidio. He had secured a room for two weeks over a Mexican store, and I could visit him and see some fighting.

It took me a very short time to get ready for the trip. Riding-clothes would be the only wardrobe I needed for such an expedition. We had gone to the country in the summer, and I had no winter hat. When I arrived in town, I asked for a millinery shop and was told that the postmaster was the only one who sold ladies' hats. It was a fearful and wonderful bonnet I bought to wear to war!

The old-fashioned hack used as a stage-coach was drawn by four small mules. I noticed the driver collecting small rocks and piling them in the front seat. I had lived long enough in the West not to ask questions, but I soon found out what they were for. It was easier for the driver to throw rocks at the lead mules than it was to use the long whip to keep them moving.

It was a seventy-mile ride from Marfa to Presidio through the wildest section of the United States. At noon we stopped at Shafter, the site of a famous silver mine. Here I had my first experience with the type of woman who runs a mining boarding house. The dining-room was closed, and I explained that I had two small hungry children. The woman refused to sell me as much as a bowl of bread and milk for the boys. Finally I appealed to a Mexican woman, who prepared what she had and did not want to accept pay for it.

Tex rode out a few miles from Presidio to meet us, gave a Mexican his horse to lead, and climbed into the coach with us. It was a happy reunion. In Presidio we made ourselves comfortable in the long bare room, and had our meals in a restaurant run by an old slave negro who had been on the border since 1866.

Each day Tex rode across the Rio Grande to join the rebels. They were gathering a few miles below Ojinaga, preparing for an attack. He did not use the regular crossing, not wanting to embarrass the river guards or American soldiers, or himself by getting arrested for violating the neutrality law.

ONE day I rode to the river with him and crossed to the insurgent camp. They were a wild-looking lot, wearing leather chaps, big hats, and were festooned with cartridge belts; but I was never treated with more courtly politeness in my life. My husband introduced me to the rebel leaders, Colonels José de la Cruz Sanchez and Toribio Ortega. I also met a noted bandit Emilio Salgado, who shook hands gravely with the boys, and gave them each a silk handkerchief.

That evening we returned to Presidio. My visit to the insurrecto army had not added to my peace of mind. War is not a nice game, even when waged on a small scale. You get a different viewpoint when you have a harum-scarum husband on the firing-line. He had been in several battles. I knew that each day the campaign went on, there was constant danger—and the days were long.

A few days after my little filibustering trip, the advance on Ojinaga started. The

rebels were driving in on the town, pushing the federal cavalry outposts back. Early in the morning I could hear the sound of firing, and knew that Tex was in the fight.

Captain Williams of the U. S. Cavalry asked if I would like to go to the roof of the only two-story house in town and watch the battle across the river. It was like watching a melodrama in the theater. We were only a few hundred yards from the actual firing-line, and the whole field of action stretched before our eyes.

The rebels were stretched in a long half-moon-shaped line, all mounted, and steadily advancing on the town, which perched on a hill. The federal cavalry were retiring to a line of trenches under the hill winding down to a small adobe customhouse near the ford. A strong force of infantry occupied the trenches.

Captain Williams gave me his field glasses for a clearer view. Suddenly I saw a troop of insurgents gallop over a hill and along the river-bank, trying to cut off the federal rear guard. Through the glasses they seemed not a block away.

Then I gave a gasp, as into the field of vision I saw a rider on a sorrel horse leading the charge, a rifle in his hand. It was that reckless husband of mine.

JUST at that time the federals opened up with two cannon from the hill. It seemed as if the shrapnel were breaking right in the ranks of the rebels, but still they came on. The federal cavalry galloped to cover around the hill, and the infantry went into action. Volley after volley poured into the rebels. I could hear the chatter of a machine-gun. Men and horses were falling.

It was not until then that Tex swung his troop back to the shelter of a range of low hills and dismounted. The rebels formed a line along the crest of the hill; the sound of firing increased to a roar. For hours the lines shifted. The insurrectos were advancing in groups, pressing closer, trying to take advantage of every bit of cover. One company would charge on the run, then seem to disappear in an arroyo, or mesquite brush. Then from another part of the line there would come another charge.

There I sat like a spectator in a moving-picture show, watching the changing tide of battle, seeing the shells explode, and at times getting a glimpse of a limp figure being carried to the rear. Again and again I could pick out my husband, at times riding back and forth along the line, at other times on foot advancing with the Mexicans.

IT almost seemed as if he was trying to catch my attention, like a small boy trying to show off. Or perhaps it was because I watched him more closely. When the smoke of a shell obscured the view, I held my breath until I was again able to see his tall figure and gray sombrero.

Captain Williams watched me nervously, probably expecting that he would soon have a hysterical woman on his hands.

As the hours passed, it became ever harder to control my emotions—fear or anger, I did not know which. The Captain finally got excited himself.

"Don't you worry," he said. "I have known that blanked fool since before you were married. Fought with him in the Philippines. I don't believe the bullet has been made that can hit him."

I laughed until the tears rolled down my cheeks. The tension was broken, and afterward we calmly discussed the battle as a military problem.

Late in the afternoon the fighting seemed to slow up across the Rio Grande. Both sides were digging in for a siege. I realized that I was desperately tired. The excitement had been too much for me. I also knew the children would want their supper, regardless of how many battles their foolhardy father might be mixed in.

Wearily I climbed down the stairs to the ground floor. I tried hard not to wonder if the head of the house would come safely home. It seemed queer to be waiting supper until a battle should be over!

After dark when the children were in bed, I sat waiting by an open window. In the distance I could hear an occasional shot as the sentries exchanged compliments. Suddenly I heard a horse loping down the trail. I held my breath. Would it be bad news? Then out of the darkness I heard the familiar hail: *"Hoo-hoo!"* A moment later I heard his voice at the corral gate:

"Is there anything to eat in the house?"

And then his running feet were on the stairs. Once more peace descended upon my soul. For that day at least the battle was over, and all was well. But what would tomorrow bring? Well, I could only wait.

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