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# BLUE BOOK



JULY, 1937

MAGAZINE

VOL. 65, NO. 3

## A Fascinating Novelette

With These Guns

*Illustrated by Grattan Condon*

By Leland Jamieson 4

## Eight Spirited Short Stories

Piping the Devil

*Illustrated by Austin E. Briggs*

By Kenneth Perkins 23

Warriors in Exile

*Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon*

By H. Bedford-Jones 34

Scarlet Fingers

*Illustrated by Austin E. Briggs*

By Thomas W. Duncan 46

Pete Was a Real Hero

*Illustrated by Henry Thiede*

By Thomas Topham 88

Ships and Men

*Illustrated by Yngve E. Soderberg and Alfred Simpkin*

By H. Bedford-Jones and Captain L. B. Williams 96

Men Once Stood on Their Own Feet

*Illustrated by George Avison*

By Warren Hastings Miller 106

One Against a Wilderness

*Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon*

By William L. Chester 114

Just Like Old Times

*Illustrated by Monte Crews*

By Robert R. Mill 124

## A Remarkable Novel

Gunpowder Gold

*Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff*

By Gordon Keyne 58

## Prize Stories of Real Experience

When Wolves Attack

This Arctic explorer was saved by his dogs.

By Jack O'Brien 133

The Butcher Poses

A news-photographer is forced to take desperate chances.

By Bob Dorman 136

Toll of the Deep

The tragic task that followed the sinking of the *Titanic*.

Captain W. D. Livingston 138

Tiger's Night

The strange experience of a professional hunter in Manchuria.

By N. Baikov 141

Cover Design

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## WITH

*Our pilot writer here offers a stirring novelette of army combat training.*

**N**OBODY had ever thought of Peter Duntin as a killer. He was as mild a youngster as ever went through the Advanced Flying School. You liked him—everyone liked him—because he was quiet and friendly in a shy sort of way, and not outstanding enough to arouse anyone's jealousy. You always thought of him as "little Pete Duntin," and you sometimes wondered how one so timid and sensitive could have made Pursuit at Kelly Field. Pursuiters were usually sanguine and loud, with more than a touch of swashbuckling. But Peter had none of this. The truth was that he had been put in Pursuit because he was too little to handle a bomber. He wasn't really the kind of pilot Pursuit needed, but he was too good to "wash out."

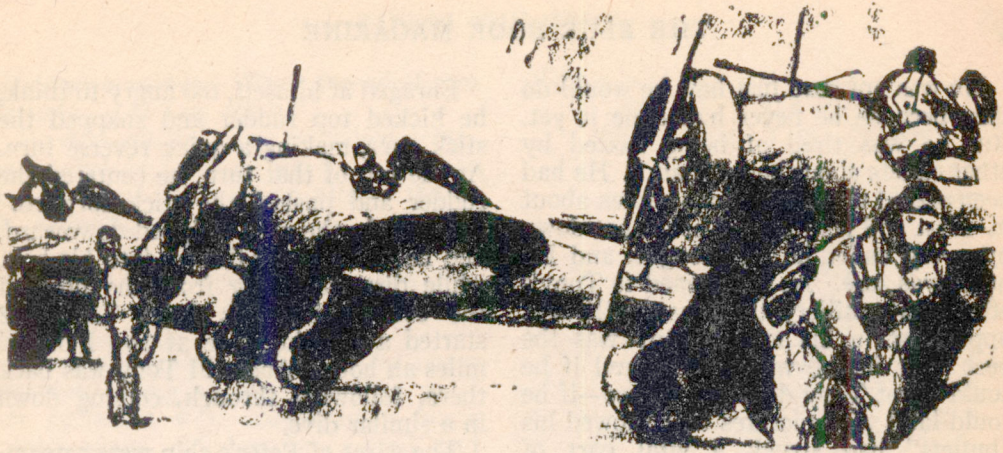
Perhaps you see what kind of a lad Peter was. And perhaps you can understand why you didn't hear more about him, in the newspapers. In the beginning, there was that one little item on the front page of the *San Antonio Blade*—then nothing more. Nothing about Peter himself, or why he cracked up—that is, the

real reason he cracked up; nothing about the complex Peter had. The reporters apparently thought he wasn't story material. He always got scared when he had to talk to more than three people at once, and he didn't make "copy." So after his crack-up, the papers forgot him. They missed the things that happened because of that crack-up. . . .

And it was a funny thing, too, that even when the trouble along the border exploded, most of the cadets who had known Peter in school didn't connect him at first with the reports that came filtering back. They just couldn't imagine Peter being a killer. It was impossible to think of him as killing one man, much less seventeen. But he did that; in one afternoon, Peter killed seventeen men—tough men, themselves professional killers.

We begin with this crack-up, however, because it is important. There was a definite reason it happened, as there is a definite reason all crack-ups happen. Its cause is important, but its aftermath infinitely more so, as you will see.

After breakfast, that morning, Peter and big Tony Standron, his flying partner, walked up the "line" to the Pursuit Stage, their parachutes over their shoulders. They were dressed in the faded khaki flying-suits they had worn through Randolph; their heads were helmeted in



# THESE GUNS

By LELAND JAMIESON

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

leather that had been oil-soaked from the spattering leaks of Whirlwinds and Wasps. This was Kelly Field, with its long line of hangars built during the war and still used, with its triumphs and tragedies blended by years into a proud woof of tradition that thrilled each cadet who touched foot to its soil.

Peter and Tony had walked this path day after day for more than three months; yet the scene never failed to stir Peter's soul. Always, ever since he could remember, his greatest ambition had been to earn his wings in the Army, to "come out of Kelly." In two weeks, he and Tony would stand in that line at the officers' club and be graduated. He and Tony! It did his heart good to think that for ten years he and Tony had planned toward that day, had dreamed of what it would mean. It was a source of gratitude that they had gone into Randolph together; together they had "boned" for their ground-school; together they had passed most of their checks in the air—together they would come out of Kelly. Tony Standron, six-three, a bluff, hearty giant—everything Peter wasn't—was Peter's best friend. Peter practically worshiped him.

ABOUT them, as they walked up the hill, Kelly Field was coming to life. Behind them, down by the bomb

dug-outs, six big lumbering Keystones were rolling into formation for take-off, their exhausts a distant, erratic snoring. Closer, on Observation Stage, crews of pilots and observers were climbing into their planes to go out for artillery fire-control problems at Camp Stanley in the northwestern hills. Here, on the right, they passed the Attack ships on the line, engines thundering as mechanics revved them up for the first morning missions. And ahead, gleaming in the bright sun, the P-12's of Pursuit were in a neat row, very small and sturdy and fine.

"Pursuit," Peter thought proudly, seeing them. And he remembered a phrase from the lips of an instructor in aerial warfare. "Pursuit is charged with defense against aerial invasion. It is charged with the protection, by convoy, of our own striking forces—Bombardment, Attack and Observation. With these guns of Pursuit rests the responsibility of knocking the enemy out of the sky."

That was what they were going to practice this morning—knocking the enemy out of the sky. They would have camera-guns on their ships instead of machine-guns; in a "fight," the cameras would take pictures of where real bullets would have been thrown if actually fired. And for once, Peter resolved grimly, he was going to shoot Tony down.

He was not sure just how he would do this, because he never had done it yet. But he was tired of being razzed by other cadets about being "bait." He had been razzed until he had a complex about it. First and last, he had been shot down by every cadet he had fought, and his pride was sore. As he listened to Tony's affectionate raillery, that was the thought uppermost in his mind: Tony was the best pilot in the whole class, and if he could shoot Tony down, just once—if he could land with pictures that showed his "bullets" had struck a vital part of Tony's P-12—he would gain the respect of his class. Nobody had ever shot Tony down, and this was the last day of combat.

SO, walking to his ship to take off, Peter was tense with his plans. He taxied out, feeling the throb of his engine and sensing its power; he waved to Tony and gunned into his take-off.

At six thousand feet, with Kelly a remote triangle through the dust haze, Peter leveled off. Tony flew alongside. Peter waved, and swung away, feeling a trembling excitement lifting his pulse. He knew how he was going to do this. After an interval, he turned back, and the two ships flashed past each other at a combined speed of nearly three hundred miles an hour—flashed past, and like two duelists parrying for openings, whipping into circling turns.

During that first minute, Peter could feel his heart beating. He saw Tony lay his plane into a tight spiral, climbing, fighting to get an advantage that would put him above and behind. Peter countered, climbing too. For a thousand feet, as the little ships spiraled into the thin cold of the upper air, neither one could bring his sights to bear for even a moment.

Then, by some innate superiority of flying technique, Tony tightened his turn, forcing Peter to do likewise. And in that position, banked steep, feeling almost dizzy from that steady circling, Peter let his P-12 stall slightly—and Tony leaped into an advantage of altitude.

For some reason, as Tony's sights swept over him, Peter felt a hot, unreasoning rage. He was inferior to Tony—at flying, at fighting, at everything. He had always been inferior; and during this moment while he knew Tony's sights were drilling him, the angry thought crossed his mind that unless he could beat Tony now, he would always be so.

Enraged at himself, too angry to think, he kicked top rudder and snapped the stick over, making a quick reverse turn. At the top of that turn, he centered the rudder and pushed the stick forward.

Instantly the nose whipped downward, and he felt himself thrown into his belt, while dirt was flung from the floor of the cockpit into his face. The P-12 started a hurtling dive at two hundred miles an hour. And still Tony was back there, following through, coming down in a similar dive.

The wires of Peter's ship were screaming now, and the whole plane was trembling with that swift and deadly acceleration. Prop snarling, the air-speed hit two hundred and fifty. The wind was trying to tear Peter's head off. But he fought the stick forward, and the nose gradually ducked farther under—and still under—so that the plane was almost on its back. When Peter horsed the stick farther, the nose started up once more, the plane on its back.

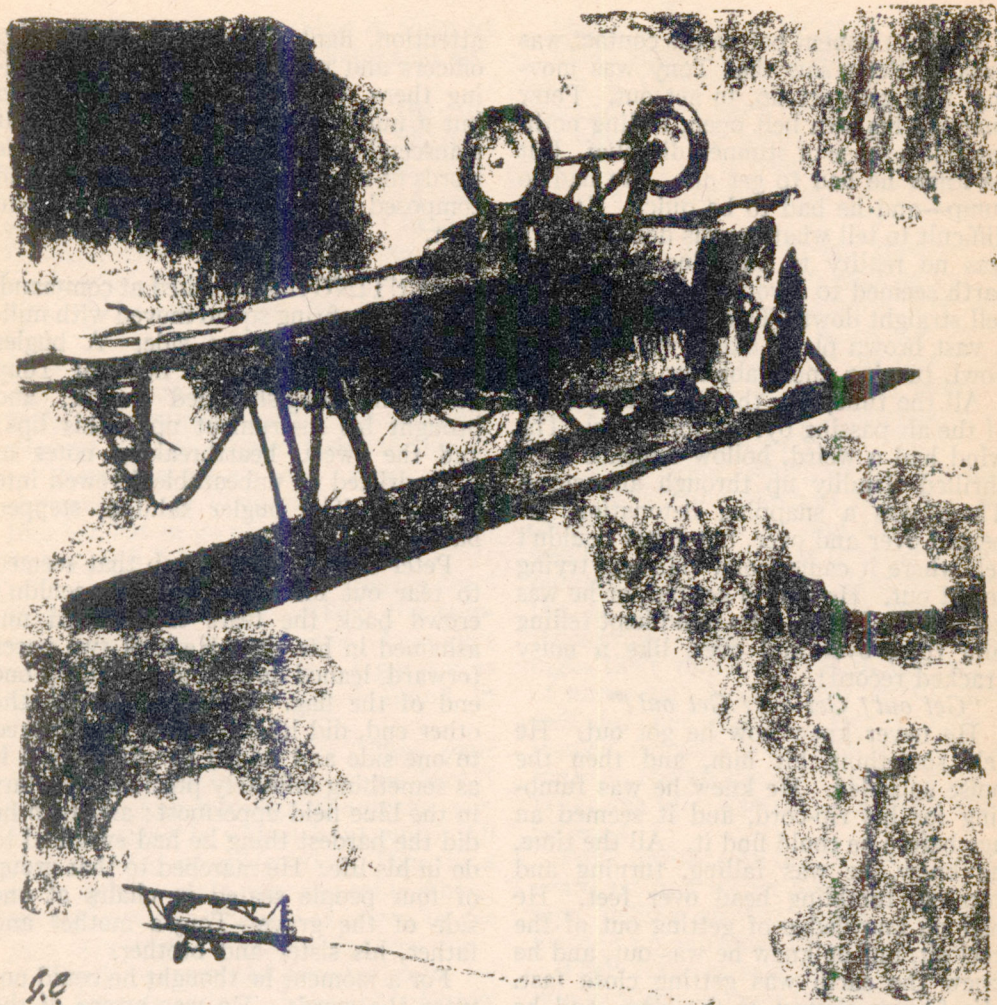
And through a tremendous slow arc, it came up and over again, while the screech of wind sloughed to a queer, hollow silence, and the controls beneath Peter's touch went empty and slack. The engine, dead through the bottom of that wild outside loop, coughed and spat viciously before taking hold. Flying level once more, Peter twisted his head to find Tony. He knew he had shaken him loose with that loop.

Exultantly, a moment later, he saw Tony two thousand feet below, leveled out after that futile dive, climbing. All caution abandoned, Peter went at him. Coolly he rolled his ship on its back and pulled the nose down. Diving vertically, he lined his sights, and waited until he got into range, and then squeezed the trigger. At the last dizzy second, he pulled up, zooming away out of danger.

AGAIN and again, seven times, while he had the advantage of speed and altitude, Peter got in his fire bursts. This was one day when he would bring home his pictures!

In the fury of this dog-fight, Tony was flying with uncanny skill. He was climbing, twisting, turning, making his ship a difficult target. And then, by some magic that baffled Peter, Tony shipped around and was once more on his tail! So, having escaped once before in an outside loop, Peter tried it again, still filled with that angry determination to shoot Tony out of the sky.





Again and again Peter got in his fire bursts. This day he would bring home pictures!

It was in that second loop that the crash came. Peter was trying to come up and over, and this time Tony was following through.

But this time, nose stuck straight into the air, Peter stalled.

His ship seemed to stop still for an instant, and then to slide back on its tail with an awful breath-taking *whoosh*—and then whip. The nose came down violently, and already the spin had begun. As it snapped over, heading toward earth, Peter saw Tony's plane dead ahead, under him.

He kicked desperately to stop the rotation. The spin stopped, but the P-12 was still in its dive, stalled—and it was too late. Head-on, one climbing up through a loop on its back, the other falling out of its loop and nosed down, the P-12's met wing-to-wing.

The impact threw Peter's face against his instrument panel. For a split second

while he knew it was coming, he tried to get one arm over his eyes to protect them, but somehow his muscles were frozen and he couldn't move fast enough. He felt his ship shudder and stop—it seemed to stop dead; and then, while there was a rending and tearing of metal and fabric and wood, utterly awful to hear, the wind began screaming again.

Queerly, now, everything was happening slowly. Somehow, Peter got his head up. He was groggy, and impressions seemed to smear over his mind. He looked out, and in a fragmentary glance he saw Tony's face covered with blood, in that other cockpit ten feet away—or was it a hundred? The wings were horribly crumpled together. Then, in a slow-motion illusion that had no reality, Peter saw those wings tear loose from the ships and float off together—while the ships drifted apart in a nightmarish medley of action and sound.

In that moment before the contact was broken, Peter saw that Tony was moving, trying to get up, to get out. Peter snapped his own belt open, feeling nothing but a sense of stunned disbelief. But he knew he had to get out. He had to jump—and he had to be quick. It was difficult to tell what he was doing. There was no reality to anything, now. The earth seemed to revolve, while the plane fell straight down. The earth looked like a vast brown plate, like a wooden salad bowl, turning and wobbling.

All the time, too, there was that noise of the air passing by. It was awful. The wind had a weird, hollow violence as it shrilled steadily up through an octave. There was a snapping detonation, repeated over and over, but Peter couldn't tell where it came from. He was trying to get out. He had to get out, or he was going to be killed. His mind kept telling him that, over and over, like a noisy cracked record:

*"Get out! Get out! Get out!"*

He never knew how he got out. He felt something hit him, and then the noise subsided. He knew he was fumbling for his rip-cord, and it seemed an age before he could find it. All the time, he knew, he was falling, turning and turning, tumbling head over feet. He had no knowledge of getting out of the cockpit, but he knew he was out, and he knew the earth was getting close fast. His fingers clawed at the ring—and he found it. Jerking it out of its sack, he felt weak, frantic, yet queerly detached from all feeling of fear. He wasn't afraid; he was in a great hurry.

Then some violent force seemed suddenly to jerk him to one side by the seat of his pants, while at the same instant there was a dull, heavy *blap* over his head. The white silk of the 'chute blossomed miraculously against the blue sky, and a sense of delicious quiet and rest came over him. The earth stopped its crazy gyrations, swung down where it belonged. Peter wondered where his ship was.

And with a stab of fright, he wondered where Tony was. He looked around, trying to see Tony's ship, trying to see Tony's 'chute in the air. Failing to find either one of them, he felt suddenly weak with a cold, dreadful fear.

**C**HILL, steady drizzle drenched the miserable earth, while under a canopy on a low hill near San Antonio, the Kelly Field Cadet Detachment stood at somber

attention, flanked on right and left by officers and men. Peter Duntin, standing there with the others, felt nothing but a numbness of body and brain that transcended all grief. He heard the words of an Army chaplain, subdued and composed, saying gently: "—and dust to dust."

**S**ALUTING rifles cracked at command, and the firing squad moved with military precision to one side. A bugler stepped smartly to the head of Tony Standron's flag-shrouded casket, and brought his instrument up to his lips; and the sweet, heartbreaking notes of Taps drifted an unbearable farewell into eternity. The bugler saluted, stepped back.

Peter choked down a sob that seemed to tear out his throat, but he couldn't crowd back the tears that welled unashamed in his eyes. He took two paces forward, leaned down and picked up one end of the flag. Cadet Martin, at the other end, did likewise, and they moved to one side and folded it. Peter held it as something infinitely precious, the stars in the blue field uppermost; and then he did the hardest thing he had ever had to do in his life: He marched to that group of four people seated in chairs at one side of the grave—Tony's mother and father, his sister and brother.

For a moment he thought he could not utter the words. He was aware of the numb, hopeless grief in this woman's sweet face. He felt the abject despair in the eyes of Mr. Standron. And he saw something else, but he didn't think of it then. Later he was to remember with a shock having seen, in a glance while Paul Standron's emotions were mirrored clear and honestly on his face, what Tony's brother was thinking.

"On behalf of the United States Army Air Corps," Peter said, fighting to keep from sobbing and losing his voice, "I present you this flag."

That wasn't quite what he was supposed to say, or quite all. He was Tony's best friend; and not until now, not until this dreadful moment, had he ever realized how much he loved Tony. But now his heart was so full that he couldn't say anything more. His voice broke, and he bit at his lips until they were bleeding, trying to hold back his tears. The tears came anyhow, tears from a pain that was like nothing Peter had ever felt in his life, a pain that racked and tormented his soul.

Tony Standron was dead. . . . And over and over in Peter's agonized mind surged the thought that he, in a fit of blind jealousy, in a fit of blind anger, had killed him.

That was the part that the *Blade* reporters were never to know. The *Blade* reporters wrote the thing up as just another flying-school accident. The other cadets said it was "tough about Tony." And they liked Peter, and so they said roughly to him: "Hell, it wasn't your fault—get your chin up and forget it." But deep in his heart Peter knew that it was altogether his fault, and he knew he could never forget it; nor was there any possible way that he could ever atone.

That night he fought through a reckless combat with Tony again, and lived through the horror of that collision. He woke suddenly in a palsy of fear, a cold sweat pouring over him like a smothering fluid. He was not in his bed; he was standing beside it, trying to shout something to Tony. But evidently no sound had come out of his throat, for the cadet barracks was dark. At the end of the day, some one was snoring. Peter crawled back into bed; and he knew, suddenly, that he would be fighting this thing for the rest of his life.

He lay there for hours, trying desperately to calm the turbulent apprehensions which bubbled wildly within him, like sand-boils undermining a levee. And out of that sleeplessness was distilled a powerful yearning to go down tomorrow and put in his letter—his resignation from the cadet corps. The way lay open for him to do that; he could quit flying.

Yet as he turned the thought restlessly in his mind, he knew that he couldn't quit voluntarily. He didn't care what people might think; social opinion was no force to deter him. It was something stronger than that, something inside himself, a fiber of pride.

**T**HE big room in Headquarters had been cleared of the chairs normally used for officers' call, and the Kelly Field "Board" was in session. Lieutenant-Colonel Harkness was the Board's president, a gray-haired, kindly-faced man in his fifties. By his side, on the left, was Captain Dufrey, in charge of all student flying at Kelly Field; on Dufrey's left was Lieutenant Petree, the senior instructor of Pursuit aviation. And flanked to one side, near the door, were seated all the instructors who had ever flown with Peter Duntin, waiting to testify.



Colonel Harkness cleared his throat, and his bass voice ordered crisply: "We'll hear from you first, Lieutenant Petree." Petree, a tall, black-haired man with a leathery face, walked over and sat down in the chair facing the Board members.

He glanced down at a slip of paper in his right hand, and said quietly: "Of course, gentlemen, it is with regret that I recommend elimination for one of my own men. Cadet Duntin has worked hard, and he is a very high type of boy. But unfortunately, in my opinion he lacks the inherent flying ability so necessary in Pursuit. He has never been a very good pilot, although until now I have always considered him too good to be eliminated. Now my opinion has changed. In this last combat, with Standron, Duntin violated good judgment in trying to use an outside loop as a tactical maneuver; he violated good flying technique by losing control of his airplane in that outside loop. Loss of control of his plane—in other words, sloppy flying—caused the collision. It is my considered opinion that he is not suitable material to be an Army pilot; it is my recommendation that he be eliminated. If we graduate him, he might do the same thing again."

Colonel Harkness glanced around the big room. Petree sat waiting. "Any discussion?" Harkness asked.

Lieutenant Jahns, in the instructors' row, said: "I have something, but before I present it, I'd like to hear the boy's story. I know he did a dumb thing, but I want to see if he knows just how dumb it was. If he knows, if he appreciates fully what he has done—then I don't agree with Lieutenant Petree; I don't think he'll ever do the same thing again."

Harkness' ruddy face mirrored a faint surprise. He lighted a cigarette with deliberation. "Do you mean to imply," he demanded, "that there is doubt in your mind that Duntin ought to be washed out of the School?"

Jahns said: "Very decidedly, sir."

"That's a bit unusual, you know," Harkness declared. "Your senior instructor, Petree, is the Pursuit Stage commander, and—"

"But I was Cadet Duntin's instructor from the day he got to Kelly until this accident happened. Later on, I have some pertinent testimony that may be surprising."

PETREE, in the witness-chair, looked acutely annoyed. Harkness exhaled a blue cloud of smoke, and said: "Very well. But I won't have this session dragging out indefinitely. I'm supposed to play polo this afternoon—" He jerked his head at the sergeant who, at ramrod attention, was guarding the door. "Bring Cadet Duntin in."

Peter was standing at the Headquarters entrance when the sergeant found him. He heard his name called, saw the sergeant beckoning; and he followed mechanically. Normally he would have been frightened to a tremulous nervousness at the prospect of facing the austere ranking officers of the Advanced Flying School in a body. But now he felt nothing. He was dressed in his cadet blues, his small figure very trim and finely military; behind him, at the cadet barracks, he had left two dozen young men who had wished him luck, and tried to add a contingent sympathy against the lack of that luck. But he was not fortified by their sympathy, and now his face was a study in woe.

As he walked into that room he saw all those eyes peering at him with a curious yet impersonal interest, as if he were merely a specimen out of a laboratory being brought in for study. He saluted Colonel Harkness, and clicked his heels smartly, and sat down in the chair that Lieutenant Petree had vacated.

Colonel Harkness said in his low, kindly voice: "Duntin, of course you understand the purpose of this Board. But before we act, we would like to hear your version of this regrettable accident. You will tell us, then, in your own way, just what happened—just what you were thinking all the way through—and you may tell us anything else that you wish, or think ought to be known."

"Yes sir," Peter said. Sitting there, he felt very small and very alone. He thought about Tony, and wondered where Tony was now, and if Tony could see what was happening, and just how he himself felt. He said sadly: "It was my fault." And then, slowly at first, he told about Tony.

It was a boyish narrative, and not too coherent; yet the naïvely heroic pictures he painted of Tony held those hardened officers to sympathetic, rapt silence; and more than one of them knew just how he felt. And when he said, "So you see, I would rather be dead myself than to have had this happen," Colonel Harkness cleared his throat and blew his nose violently.

"What do you think you deserve, Duntin?" he asked.

Peter said gravely: "What I deserve is already happening to me. I never can get away from it. You see, it was my fault, and I can't ever forget it. So what the Board does to me doesn't make a whole lot of difference. I would like to stay in the Army, but if that isn't possible, I've got nobody to blame but myself."

Lieutenant Jahns asked gently: "Do you think you can fly?"

"Yes," Peter said. "I may not be as good as the rest of the class, but I think I'll get better. I never have learned things as quickly as most."

Jahns had a thin, narrow envelope in his hand. He tapped it edgewise on his thumb-nail, and said: "You were having a dog-fight with Standron. Did you shoot him down, or did he shoot you down?"

"I guess he shot me down," Peter said. "He always did. That's what caused all the trouble—I was trying too hard to win just one fight with him, before the end of the class."

JAHNS turned to Colonel Harkness, and a faint smile crossed his lips.

"Colonel," he said, "I have discovered a very extraordinary thing, here. I developed the pictures taken by Standron, and those taken by Duntin. The films weren't damaged. Standron had the reputation of being the best pilot in the Pursuit class. In this last fight, he was on Duntin's tail most of the time, and he got in so many shots that he used all his film. There isn't a hit in the whole series of pictures. He could fly, but he couldn't shoot. Yet Duntin, having only seven chances to shoot, would

have shot Standron down every time. I might say that Duntin, fighting a better man, set a record of marksmanship that has never been even approached by any other student who ever went through Kelly Field."

"Indeed!" Colonel Harkness said. He fastened his eyes on Peter in stern speculation. "Who taught you to shoot?"

"My father," Peter said. "He was a gun expert with an arms company. I guess I practically grew up with a gun in my hands."

Harkness glanced at Lieutenant Petree, at Jahns; his gaze traveled over the room and came back to Peter.

"You are excused," he said. "In due course you will be advised of this Board's decision."

Peter never knew what transpired behind those closed doors while the Board was in session, but his mail the next morning contained a curt notification that he was to continue his training.

AT first he couldn't believe it; the words seemed to stun him, to befuddle his already-harassed mind. But the thought that somebody had been kind to him, that some one had taken his part down there yesterday, brought a warm glow to his heart that touched some hidden spring of emotion. He swung his parachute over his shoulder, and with two other cadets, walked up the line to his Stage. Yet it didn't seem normal or right to be going up there without Tony; and he knew it would never seem right.

He reported to Lieutenant Petree; and Petree in turn sent him to the armament locker, where Lieutenant Jahns, with a gunnery sergeant, was inspecting a Browning machine-gun. Jahns was a small man with thin sandy hair and a pleasant round face. He looked up, when Peter came in, and said affably:

"Hello, Duntin. I want to see how you do this. I've been a gunnery officer for five years, and I never made any score like those you made last week. Nor have I seen such a thing." He turned to the sergeant, and ordered: "Take these guns out and mount them on my ship. Put a hundred rounds in each one. Duntin and I are going to have a little private shoot of our own." He swung back to Peter. "With these guns, and shooting like that, you could be the greatest ace this country had, in a war. You've got something. If we can figure out what it is, we'll give the Air Corps an art that is priceless!"

Peter smiled, feeling flustered. Gratitude, for him, was easily stimulated; he had always felt inferior, and few people had ever told him he was important.

"I just hold right," he said. "I wait until my sights get lined up, before I start firing. I quit firing as soon as the sights get off the target. It really is easy."

"Sure," Jahns said tartly. "It's probably easy as hell—but first you've got to learn how. We'll take my two-seater, and I'll ride in the rear and watch how you do it. Then you ride behind me, and watch me and tell me what I do wrong."

It seemed fantastic to Peter to try to tell an instructor what he did wrong. But he was immensely pleased, nevertheless. So, slightly bewildered—because to him shooting was as natural, almost, as eating, and because he didn't know how to tell anyone just how to do it—he climbed into the cockpit of Jahns' ship, and Jahns got into the rear, and Peter took off.

The butts were set up against the bluff at the southwestern edge of the field; and with traffic cleared for him, Peter came in toward his target in a low, shallow dive at half throttle. As the ship swooped down, he tensed his feet on the rudder, swinging the nose just a trifle to pull the sights over the bull's-eye. He lifted the nose with the merest pressure; and then, when the black of the target was in the right place, he squeezed the Bodin control on the stick. The gun answered musically with a hurried staccato.

IT took thirty minutes to fire the course, and then Peter went back and landed, and taxied up to the line. Jahns looked at him with envy and wonder.

"I see," he said, "where I can use a lot of instruction!"

Peter said: "I don't know what kind of a score I made. It may be pretty lousy."

Just then the gunnery sergeant drove up on a motorcycle. He handed Lieutenant Jahns a score-sheet, and grinned, and said: "Lieutenant, here it is, but still it aint possible!"

Jahns looked at the score, and a tone of awe and respect came into his voice. He said: "Are you sure you counted right?"

"Yes sir. Counted 'em twice."

Jahns whistled. "A score of fourteen hundred and four out of a possible two thousand!" He clapped Peter hard on the shoulder. "Come along!" he said

He never knew how he got out. . . .  
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ripcord, and the earth was getting  
close very fast.



excitedly. "We're going to see Lieutenant Petree. Then we're going down and see the Old Man. Duntin, the day after you graduate, you're going to be an instructor—you're going to teach Pursuit students how to fire these guns!"

SO Peter, the gold bars of a second lieutenant on his shoulders, stayed at Kelly Field, while his classmates went north to Selfridge, or east to Langley, or to the scattered posts over the country where Observations pilots were sent. And he was glad to stay; his contact with Lieutenant Jahns replaced, in a vague way that was unsatisfactory, his old feeling for Tony. He admired Bill Jahns, and if Jahns did not admire him personally, he at least admired his gunnery skill. It was essential to Peter that he know one person by whom he was accepted as an equal, if not a superior.

In a measure, as the months passed, he was happy. He wrote frequent letters to Tony's mother and father, not to

keep in communication with them, so much as because he hungered for repeated assurance that they did not blame him that Tony was gone. He never was perfectly sure that they didn't; they said they didn't, but sometimes to Peter it seemed that they weren't quite sincere.

He felt this with a sudden acute conviction, the day he learned that Paul Standron was graduating from Randolph Field. He had had no knowledge that Paul was in the cadet corps, and because of that ignorance, he felt accused, and slighted, and hurt. The thing stuck in his mind like a barb that Paul, Tony's brother, had been at Randolph eight months, and had never let Peter know.

Paul Standron was assigned to Pursuit. He was a robust, hearty lad, perhaps a year younger than Peter—who was then twenty-two. Paul resembled Tony in size and in coloring and in facial expression to an extent that was haunting to Peter, who, that first day, saw him in the group of cadets in the hangar

lean-to, and went over and held out his hand.

"How are you, Paul?" he said, and his voice sounded not like the firm voice of Pete Duntin, the flying instructor, but like that of young Peter Duntin, the little flying cadet who was always trying to be friendly.

Paul turned. For an instant his face was impassive, as if he might be recalling memories and weighing them in his mind. He held out his hand, yet without interest. "Fine, thanks," he said.

"Glad to see you," Peter said. "Glad you're here. If I can be any help, any time, let me know."

Paul's face didn't change. "Sure," he said. "But I expect I can take care of myself." He turned to look at Lieutenant Petree, who was just coming in.

PETER didn't say anything more. The way Paul had greeted him was humiliating; he had always been hypersensitive to other people's reactions, and he could feel Paul's dislike. It upset him. He went into the gunnery-room, and made the motions of inspecting the sear of a jamming machine-gun. But his mind wasn't on it. He kept seeing Tony, in that spot where Paul stood.

And as he fingered the cool blued steel of that gun, he wanted desperately for Paul Standron to understand how he felt. For he realized, with an unbearable hurt, that Paul still blamed him for having killed Tony, and that Tony's father and mother must do so too—that everyone else who knew what had happened, felt the same way. The realization was almost overwhelming.

So he set about to win Paul's friendship. He offered Paul the use of his car, one Sunday morning when they chanced to meet in the post-exchange building.

"You'll be wanting to get to town often," he said. "You'll be having dates, and will need transportation. I don't go around much. Any time you have use for a car, I'll be glad for you to take mine."

A stony look crossed Paul's face.

"Lieutenant Duntin," he said, "I supposed you would understand how I felt, and I hoped it wouldn't be necessary to tell you any of this. But apparently it is necessary, so I'm telling you: I don't want anything you've got, except civility—and I want damn' little of that!" He turned on his heel and walked out.

Peter went back to his bachelor quarters by the officers' club. He felt hot

and tense. The thought kept striking his mind with an impact: "The hell with him—the hell with him! It wasn't my fault that Tony ran into me—he shouldn't have tried to follow me through that loop, when he knew he wouldn't be able to see me because of his motor."

He lay down on his bed. In his mind was a mounting, furious anger. He burned with a savage desire to retaliate for this morning's humiliation. Friendship? The last thing he wanted was friendship. What he wanted now—and would get—was Paul Standron's respect!

So he settled into the routine of gunnery instruction with a cold, ruthless energy. Before this, he had always been sympathetic with students; but now he practiced a brittle intolerance. He ignored Paul Standron, except for mistakes; for these he summoned a verbiage of vitriol that surprised even himself.

Thus the routine of Kelly Field went on as usual, with Bombardment formations droning high overhead, and Attack swooping low over the drab reaches of Texas mesquite, and Observation doing its prosaic and detailed mission of being the eyes for the Army. In Pursuit, the class studied tactics, and flew formations, learning their aerial drill like good soldiers, learning to fulfill the high tradition demanded of them. At twelve thousand feet in the frigid, anemic blue of the sky, Peter flew with them, watching eighteen young men put their P-12's from one formation into another, into echelon right and echelon left, watching dog-fights and furious power dives in attacks on fictitious enemies. There was about him now a new self-assurance, and an impassive disdain; and inside him was a biting urge to injure Paul Standron.

IT was part of Peter's job as gunnery instructor to fight one combat with each student. He had learned a vast deal about flying, during this year; there weren't many tricks that he didn't know thoroughly. Sometimes he let a student "get on his tail;" but unless he deliberately chose to permit that, no one ever did.

So it was an unpleasant surprise to him, the day he "fought" Paul, to discover that Paul was on his tail as much as he was on Paul's. It enraged him. He had to exert the last ounce of cunning and technique he had, and still he couldn't shake Paul at will.

And when the pictures were finally developed, he got a great shock:

Paul had scored more hits than he.

Lieutenant Petree and Lieutenant Jahns saw the pictures. Greatly excited, they went down to see Colonel Harkness. When they came back, they called Peter in, and then Paul; and Lieutenant Petree said with ebullient enthusiasm:

"Kelly Field has never been represented adequately at the annual bombing and gunnery matches. But this year it will be. Colonel Harkness has sanctioned the plan to send Cadet Standron with you, Duntin, and the two of you will fire the courses at El Paso this year. We're getting new P-26's, and you'll both fly them instead of P-12's."

Peter saw a look of triumphant exultation flush Paul Standron's face. Restraining his irritation, he said, "Standron won't have graduated, by the time the matches take place."

Lieutenant Jahns exclaimed: "Anybody who can handle a gun like this lad—we'll graduate him right now, if we need to! Hell, Pete, he's as good or better than you are!" And he laughed and said: "You better bring home the high score from El Paso, or Petree will ship you to Selfridge and give Standron your job."

Peter, suddenly on the defensive, looked at Petree. He couldn't tell anything, from the other's expression.

"You aren't serious, of course," he said, his voice low.

"I'm afraid I am, Duntin. You understand, naturally, that we want the best instructor talent we can procure. Nothing personal about it, of course."

SO that was it, Peter thought bitterly. For a year he had worked, training students to shoot the guns of Pursuit—and as soon as somebody better than he came along, they started planning to shelve him. The thought of being displaced—and displaced by Standron—filled him with a cold, trembling rage, so that he dared not speak again, lest his voice betray how violently he was affected. For none of them—Jahns or Petree or Standron—knew what this job meant to him. None of them!

Well, he was not going to lose it. Petree did not like him, had never liked him since that Board meeting. Peter glanced quickly at Paul, seeing him through a kind of miasmatic haze of sheer hatred. So it was going to be a fight, was it? All right—he'd fight! For the first time in his life he wanted to fight; he welcomed it avidly.

PURPLE mist lay low over Mount Franklin to the west of El Paso, and dulled distance to the north and east, until Davis Mountain was only a vague, shadowy outline against the cerise sky at dawn. Fort Bliss, this morning, was the center of an activity which started robustly at reveille, with trucks rumbling away in the dust to the airport.

Peter went out with the first group of pilots. As the truck swung onto the field, he could see the long row of planes, and they were a sight worth remembering—fifty ships of the fighting Air Corps, lined up wing-to-wing—the P-26's of Pursuit; the new, low-wing bombers with their blue fuselages and odd bullet-proof-glass gunners' bays; the murderously armed new Attack jobs. Mechanics were crawling over them, dragging off engine-covers and cockpit tarpaulins.

It made Peter proud, as he watched. The Army, as such, never had had much appeal for him; the Air Corps, really, didn't seem to be a part of the same Army to which Fort Bliss belonged. He got out of the truck at the line, and walked down it to the P-26 that he had flown here from San Antonio.

His first impression, seeing it standing on the Pursuit Stage at Kelly, had been that it was going to be tricky and dangerous to fly. And his flight here had only confirmed that opinion.

Unlike the P-12, which was a biplane, this ship was a monoplane, a trim, sleek little thing with an incredibly short wing-spread, and a fixed landing-gear about which streamlining had been cunningly built to cut down head-resistance in flight. The dihedral of the wings, the way the landing-gear was cowed up, made the plane look like an eagle.

"Like an eagle with pants on his legs," Peter thought now, and considered whimsically that it was an eagle which would claw any pilot who got careless in landing it. The gear seemed to him too narrow, too far to the rear. The cockpit, being raised in the fuselage, enabled you to see out past the engine better than in most planes—but gave you no protection whatever in case you nosed over.

Looking at it now, Peter suddenly wished that the gunnery matches were to be flown with P-12's. He was used to a P-12; he felt comfortable, flying one. This ship, he believed, was too small and too viciously fast; you could make a fatal mistake altogether too easily.

But the matches were going to be flown with it. The first firing was to be



done this morning, in less than an hour. All around him, now, the other pilots were approaching their planes, lugging their parachutes over their shoulders. The sun was a blazing copper disk pushing up through the rim of mountains which outlined the horizon; the day was going to be warm. "Choppy air," Peter thought, and was worried. Diving a P-26 at a target, with bumps throwing your sights off every second or two, it was going to be hard to make a good score.

In Headquarters building, the other Pursuit contestants were gathering, now, grouping themselves around Captain Mandrews' desk, listening as Mandrews read the regulations formulated by the committee, which had been in session last night until midnight.

And to Peter Duntin, listening carefully too—listening, and watching these faces around him—there seemed to exist a vague, eerie tension in the very air of this room. You could feel it, and you could tell that everyone felt it. Sensing that, Peter remembered nervously that last year Lieutenant Blaine had crashed during an approach to his target—had flown into the ground and been killed. The year before last, a pilot had slipped out of position in his Lufberry circle, and had hit some one else; the ships had gone in from too low an altitude to let either one of the men use his 'chute. Danger lurked here. For today, out there over the dunes, somebody might make a simple mistake—the last mistake he ever would make; and who that man would be, and who he might take with him to death, there was no way of knowing.

"Be careful," Peter said to himself. "Keep your head on your shoulders!"

**T**HE best shots of the Air Corps were here for this meet—Lieutenant Brant, burned and leathery from his tour of duty in the hot, distant Philippines; Kinsley, from Selfridge, an ace during the war, whose face was marked by years of hard flying and equally hard living, and whose physique seemed indestructible; Carson, from San Diego, and Lathrop from March Field, and two or three others, besides Standron and Peter.

Captain Mandrews, his broad, beefy face soberly amiable, was stabbing his finger down on his desk to emphasize what he was saying. "You men watch your step! This year, we're not going to have any collisions, or anybody flying into the ground. And anybody who shoots while the red flag is up—by God,

he'll get a court-martial whether he happens to kill anybody or not!"

So, quickly, when the questions were over, these pilots went to their planes. Peter's mechanic had already loaded his gun, and had checked everything; Peter stood by the wing-tip as the mechanic revved up the engine and as the prop whirled into a bright silver disk. Then he climbed into the cockpit himself.

This ship was the latest thing built. The cockpit was small, and a man had to fit himself into it, and close up the cowling over his shoulders. Sitting there, Peter wondered how fast it would land, at this field elevation of thirty-nine hundred feet, after the air got really puffy and hot. He saw Lieutenant Kinsley pull away from the line, streak down the field and get off; saw three others follow; then he himself pulled away, and gunned into his take-off. As the prop knifed into the air, he felt himself thrown back into his seat.

**H**E had flown this ship several times, but he never got over a sensation of astonishment at its acceleration. It seemed to stand motionless on the ground at one instant—and at the next to be off the ground, climbing. Peter let the nose down cautiously, feeling out the controls.

Spiraling to the left, he passed over the old field that the Air Service's Model Airway had used in past years, and then over Fort Bliss. From here, El Paso lay on the right, with the mountains of Mexico blue in the lengthening distance beyond; and on one of those nearer mountains, even from here, his eyes could discern the huge white concrete sign that said "*Jimmy's Bar*." He turned northward, falling into line with the other ships up ahead—and seeing, over-shoulder, the remaining ones taking off.

Quickly those ten planes formed their circle, as Kinsley led them over the dunes to the butts. Down there in the yellow sand were ten targets. In front of the targets, paralleling them, were two lines of whitewash, the first five hundred feet from the butts, the second fifteen hundred. Those were the foul-lines; between them, all firing was supposed to be done.

But it wasn't as simple as that. Each man had his target, and he flew at right angles to it, directly over that fifteen-hundred-foot line, until he was ready to turn toward the target and fire. Then he whipped into his turn, and went into his dive, at once trying to line up his

sights for a bead. He had to fire before he crossed the five-hundred-foot line. If he fired a shot after he passed it, it was counted a foul.

And it was difficult to do all the things you had to do—fly your ship, and line your sights, and count those hurried shots from your gun—and know just where you were above the ground all the time, too. Once in a while you were bound to fire too long.

Kinsley swung wider; and all the others, like eagles wheeling over a kill, swung wider with him. Then he straightened out suddenly, and flew up the outer white line—and whipped into a turn. Peter, watching him with an eager excitement, heard no guns sound, but he knew Kinsley was firing. Then, in quick succession, the second ship followed, and the third; and then Peter was drawing a quick, steadying breath, and coming up fast himself, getting ready to go.

**H**IS mouth felt hot and dry, but his hands were firm on the stick. He stayed just within the outer white line, watching his target, judging the time to whip into his turn. He had his engine throttled back now, but not too far; he needed speed to make this turn safely. As the moment drew close, he reached up and yanked back the cocking-lever of his machine-gun, and kicked it off of its latch with the heel of his hand. Gun ready, he waited another instant, and then rolled his little ship into its turn.

Everything had to be coördinated to a degree of perfection, or he wouldn't have time to get in his shots. Three hundred feet of that thousand were used before he had his ship straightened out. Then his sights were creeping over the black of the target. He pressed the Bodin control, and the gun barked, while the pungent reek of burned powder eddied back into his nostrils. He fired five shots. He wanted to fire more than five shots, because he was holding nicely that time; but he was afraid to. He was afraid he had already crossed the inner white line. There were fifty shots to be fired, and he could take ten approaches to fire them.

Then, when he looked out, he saw that he could have fired for a second longer without passing the line. But it was too late then. He pulled up, getting back into the circle. Behind him, over his shoulder, he saw the next man coming in.

So, diving and zooming and wheeling away, those ten pilots got in their shots. There was no drama to it, unless you

knew what was happening. Just ten pilots diving at ten targets, hemmed in by rules that wouldn't hold good for an instant in war; ten pilots trying to excel one another. But from the cockpit, it was exciting. There were so many factors, so many things you could do poorly, or wrong. All the years you had flown, all the hours you had spent learning to shoot, were put to the test in a few tense, anxious minutes.

The gunnery sergeant read off the scores, after they landed. Peter listened, hearing a low score of 261, and then hearing his own name, with a 317. He felt good, then—until he heard the sergeant say: "Standron—384, and one foul."

Somebody whistled, and old Kinsley slapped Paul on the shoulder and cried: "Boy, I'll bet you had a B-B gun when you were a kid!" Paul smiled; and his bright, hard glance passed over Peter. There was a vindictive twist to his lips. But he shrugged off his victory, and said: "My brother and I used to go hunting down in Mexico when we were boys. Had an uncle there who was hell with a gun. I guess I picked up the knack."

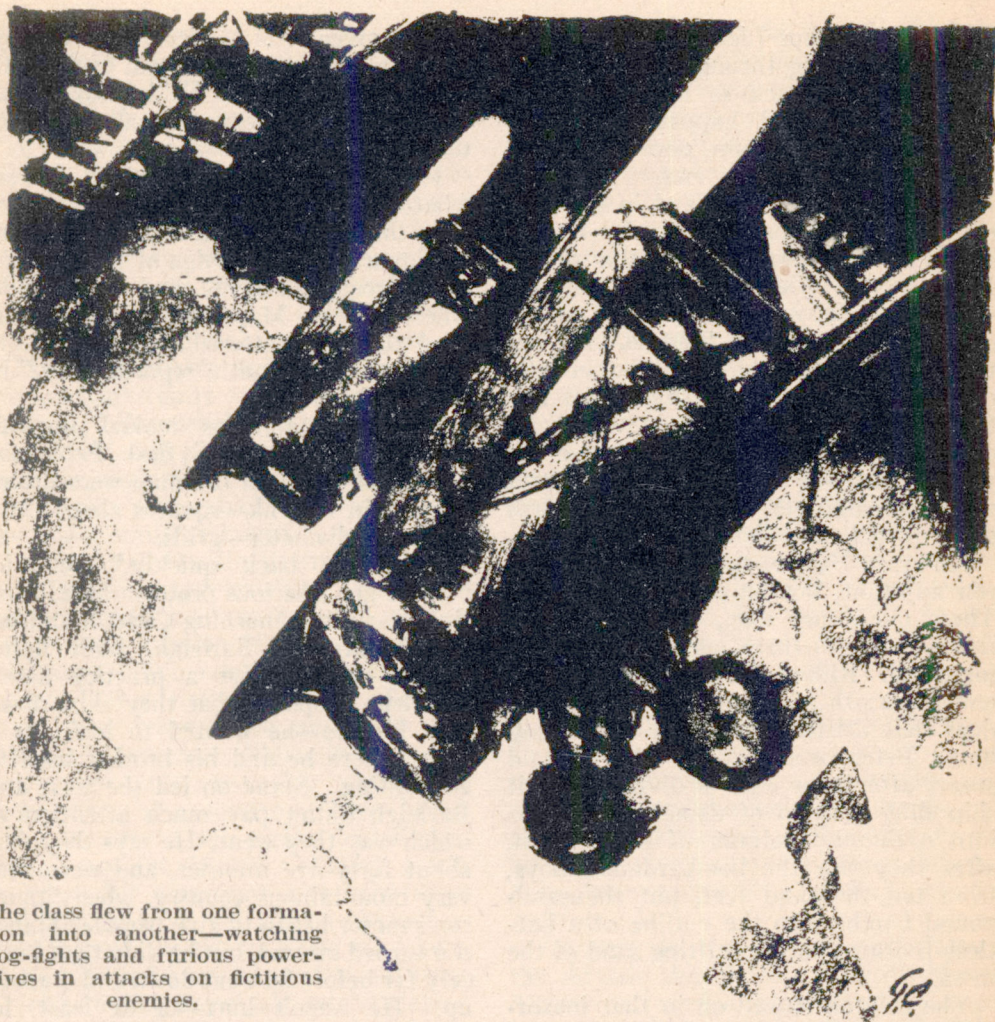
Peter said: "That's—certainly fine!"

But he didn't feel that it was fine. He felt angered, and baffled. He had done some good shooting on that first target. He'd known he was doing good shooting. And with Standron turning in a 384, what chance did he have? He knew the answer to that. He didn't have any. The thought made him sick.

And he felt worse, during the day. The Pursuit pilots fired their ninety-degree-right-turn-approaches, and Paul Standron came in with a 364 and one foul. Peter was second, but not a close second. He had a 346.

So it went, through the hundred-and-eighty-left-turn approaches, and the corresponding ones to the right. Paul turned in a 341, with one foul, and a 328 with one foul; Peter was second with 310 and a 307, with no fouls.

**P**ETER was already beaten; there was no way he could possibly win, even if he made a phenomenal score tomorrow on the Immelmann-turn approach, the only one left. He was licked, and he didn't understand how it had happened. Nobody else had ever shot the way Paul was shooting; nobody, in fact, so far as he knew, had ever shot the way he himself had been shooting. But he was still going to try; something might happen to give him a break tomorrow.



The class flew from one formation into another—watching dog-fights and furious powerdives in attacks on fictitious enemies.

But the next day he fell down miserably. The Immelmann-approach to the target was something which Mandrews and Kinsley had doped out between them, and it was a tricky, difficult thing. You came in over the target at high speed, the engine wide open; you came in low, in the opposite direction to which you would fire, and then, just inside that fifteen-hundred-foot line, you pulled up in the first half of a loop, and rolled out, nosing down—and nosing down, tried to line up your sights. If you made the loop too big, you had too much altitude to make a flat dive, and if you had to dive steeply, you were forced to waste distance in pulling up from the target.

Peter did poorly on that, and he knew he did poorly. He was trying too hard; he was desperate. He turned in a score of 208—and Paul came off high again with a 276. And one foul.

So it was over, and Peter had lost, and he was miserably heartsick. Yet somehow he forced himself to congrat-

ulate Paul. He said: "I've seen plenty of shooting, but never any like that! It was—it was wonderful!"

"Thanks," Paul said dryly. "You didn't do so badly, yourself."

Then Peter went back to his ship and found his mechanic. "Put fifty rounds in my gun the first thing in the morning. The Pursuit matches are over, but I'm going to go out tomorrow before the range is being used, and find out how Standron got this high score."

"Yes, Lieutenant," the mechanic said. He liked Peter, and added: "It don't seem possible, does it? I aint never seen anybody shoot better than you, before—and it just don't seem possible!"

Peter walked back to barracks. Stubbornness made him want to find out what trick Paul Standron had. Although, of course, finding out wouldn't make any difference; he was still beaten.

And defeat, in a peculiar, unfathomable way, had broken his spirit. It had broken the force of his hatred for Paul.

He thought about Lieutenant Petree, as he trudged along through the dust, and dreaded to go back to Kelly. For he knew what would happen, at Kelly. Petree did not like him, never had liked him. So this was the end.

Another day dawned, and in the chill of morning a column of cavalry trotted out past the airport into the dunes. Peter, astride a lean bay mare that was taller than he, rode at the head of the column beside Colonel Bledsoe. He was the squadron air officer, unexpectedly detailed for today to explain aerial tactics and methods to these cavalry officers. He hadn't been on a horse for years; and the dogged, infernal trot which Bledsoe set for the column was going to gall him before he got back.

He heard Bledsoe talking to his squadron adjutant, but he paid no attention. These old Army men, this Bledsoe as much as any of them, sneered at the flying corps. Riding there through the ripening warmth of the day, breathing the dust that drifted low ahead of the column, Peter wondered if they would sneer, after they saw a diving Pursuit ship fling a salvo of demolition bombs into a dummy column of cavalymen, after they saw the bombardment boys, from ten thousand feet, put thousand-pound bombs into the outline of a battleship drawn on the drifting sand of the mesa.

The column moved on in that inexorable trot, mile after mile through the dunes. And then, suddenly, Peter heard the burring snarl of an airplane prop, somewhere behind. Over his shoulder he saw a P-26 snaking down from the sky in a long power dive, headed straight for the head of the column. His horse pricked up her ears, and then, trembling, reared. Peter went off in a heap in the sand just as the ship caromed over and zoomed.

**B**UT he saw the streamer that the pilot hurled out, and a vague sense of uneasiness struck him. There should have been no message sent to this column; for the purpose of military tactics, the column was supposed to lose itself in the sand dunes of the mesa and thus thwart an attack from the air. Then he saw a soldier ride up and hand the streamer to Bledsoe; a moment later Bledsoe yelled Peter's name.

"They want you, back at the field," he said in his brisk, guttural tone. He turned the note over. . . . "Urgent. No

reason given. . . . Lieutenant Crosby, you guide Lieutenant Duntin back. He'd get lost, by himself. We'll follow. This says the maneuvers are called off for today."

Riding back, Peter tried to fathom what could have happened. He galloped past the airport, toward the temporary headquarters at one edge of it, where he gave Crosby his horse, and went inside, where Captain Mandrews was seated behind that old battered oak desk.

"Lieutenant Duntin reporting, sir," he said, and saluted.

Captain Mandrews looked up, his beefy face grim. On his desk, Peter saw, was a map, and on the map were drawn squares in red ink—squares about three inches in diameter—grids.

"You got back quickly," he said. "We've got a serious problem here, Duntin. Early this morning Cadet Standron, and Lieutenant Barleigh, both flying P-26's, took off for a practice flight. Standron proposed that they skirt down into Mexico—he wanted to look for a place where he and his brother used to go hunting. Standron led the way, and Barleigh didn't pay much attention to which way they went. He says they flew about forty-five minutes, and were over very mountainous country, when Standron's motor began to give trouble. Standron turned around, but he didn't get back very far before he went down and cracked up. He wasn't hurt—or at least, he crawled out of the wreck and waved at Barleigh, and Barleigh came home."

"What time was this?" Peter asked.

"Shortly after daylight. And the difficulty is that Barleigh had no map of that territory—had so little idea of the country that when he tried to find his way back here, he hit the Rio Grande seventy miles below El Paso and had to follow the river in. So all we know is that Standron is back in those mountains, somewhere. After we find him, if we do find him, I still don't know how we'll get him out. But finding him is the first problem. There are a lot of Mexican bandit bands in that locality. Only last year they picked up an American pilot who was lost, and murdered him because they couldn't collect ransom. This is bad business, Duntin!"

Mandrews paused, looking worried.

Peter said: "I heard about that case."

"Then you appreciate the need for action now. I've assigned each pilot a sector—as shown by the grid on his map. Stay in your sector—that way, if

you should go down, we'd know where to look for you. And if you spot Standron, or the ship, mark the space carefully on your map—and get back here fast!”

“Yes sir,” Peter said. “Anything else, sir?”

“Get going!”

Peter flew southward, climbing slowly, seeing El Paso fade into distance behind, and seeing those blue, shadowy mountains of Mexico take form out of distance ahead. On his map was a flight-line, drawn from Fort Bliss to that sector in red ink where he was to search.

IT seemed to Peter bitterly ironical that he should have to go out and try to find Standron, after what had happened, and knowing what was to happen. Paul had had no authority to fly into Mexico, had violated International Law in doing so. Yet he was in danger; Peter knew only too well how grave that danger was. And hating Paul, he still could not bring himself to wish the younger man any harm.

So he flew steadily, and the little P-26 put miles under it swiftly, the air-speed sitting on 170, and the wind screaming past the windshield. Stretched out, doing its stuff, this little plane was surprising; it wasn't much good for combat, for maneuvering, Peter thought, but it could cover distance amazingly. The mountains unfolded, and swept underneath, and lost themselves in the smoky blue, retreating horizon.

He found his sector, marking it by a river and by high mountain peaks to the west. Here the country was cut by gorges and bluffs and plateaus, with now and again a narrow valley in which were wild cattle in small herds that stampeded as Peter roared over. He dropped down, getting a sense of being hurled over the earth by his speed, his helmeted head thrust out in the slip-stream, his goggled eyes searching with tense haste.

Methodically, because method was for him a habit of mind, he started in at the west edge of his sector, traversing it in a sweeping line that turned him and brought him back northward, and then southward again. All over this area, he knew, other planes were doing the same thing, other pilots, each with his sector.

For thirty minutes Peter didn't see anything. He was out of the higher mountains now, over a valley, striding hurriedly up its narrow length, seeing a mountain barrier ahead which was higher than he was. He thundered over cattle

which broke in mad panic in all directions and then swung into a loose stampede toward high ground. Nowhere did he see a 'dobe hut; nowhere did he see any evidence of human habitation.

And then, perhaps a mile ahead, he saw a column of horsemen. He wasn't sure they were horsemen, at first; there was only a smudge of dust and a group of figures in movement. But within seconds that distance had shortened until he could distinguish the horsemen. He throttled back slowly, killing his speed, and went over them at a hundred miles an hour, flying at less than a hundred feet.

At that altitude, he could distinguish their faces—swarthy faces, set under wide *sombreros*, tilted back looking at him. And he saw the carbines that had been shifted suspiciously out of their slings, and the belts of cartridges over these men's broad shoulders. And he saw something else, a sight that set his scalp tingling.

He saw Paul Standron, mounted on a buckskin pinto, his hands tied, his helmet gone from his head. One of these Mexicans was riding beside him, a carbine aimed at his back.

The leader had halted the column now, and was waving, making motions to Peter to land. Peter pulled up, circling, looking down over the rim of the cockpit. He saw one of the men lift his carbine to fire at him; he saw another knock the gun down.

Watching all this, remembering Captain Mandrews' orders to return at once if he found Paul, Peter tried to sum up these factors so evident now. If he left this scene, with seventeen men taking Paul into these mountains, perhaps nobody could ever locate him again. He didn't know what had happened, or what was portending. But there was no mistaking the mood of these Mexicans.

NOTHING remotely resembling this problem had ever confronted Peter Duntin before. If he landed, he would disobey Mandrews' orders. If he landed, and anything happened to prevent his getting away, he might fall into the same plight with Paul, and they would drop out of sight and never be heard from again. Or maybe they would be heard from again, when a ransom was finally demanded. And maybe the ransom wouldn't be paid, and then—

He pursed his lips, thinking. He didn't want to land here. The valley



was smooth, the grass eaten short by these nomad cattle; he could land without difficulty or danger. But he was afraid. The hard, small, vindictive thought struck his mind like a blow that he had but to let Paul suffer whatever fate might be in store for him,—and Paul's fate looked plain,—and he himself could go back to Kelly and take up his duties where he had left them.

But he forgot that, and watched. As the leader down there continued his motions, Peter Duntin sensed the wind from the dust, swung wide, and came in and put his P-26 gently down on the ground.

HE left the engine running, and sat in the cockpit. If anyone started something, he had only to blast that Wasp and get out of here, unless one of these bandits put a slug through his head first. The column moved toward him; the leader swung his carbine over the crook of his arm, and suddenly stopped, and said something that Peter was, of course, unable to hear. A moment later two men detached themselves from the body, and with Paul Standron between them, and with the leader ahead of them, advanced cautiously toward the plane.

Peter's heart was pumping hot streams of blood into his temples, and his hands were moist and tense, fingering throttle and stick. Every instinct of self-preservation urged him to gun that engine and get away from here while he could. Yet moral strength held him steadfast.

The leader came up, shouting something that Peter could not understand. The leader was a square-faced, murderous-looking giant whose attitude seemed to reek violence. He spurred his horse cruelly until the animal came to Peter's

wing-tip, where it reared in a sudden frenzy at the steady cluck of the Wasp.

So after a moment, after a consultation between Paul and those three, Paul was yanked off his horse, and walked up to the cockpit; and behind him three carbines were trained on his back. His forehead was gashed, and blood had dried and darkened in the wound. His yellow hair was matted; he looked utterly exhausted. And the thing most noticeable now was that Paul Standron looked scared.

But he rallied himself to a tense jocularity. He stood there at the cockpit, his hands still tied behind his back, and tried to grin. The grin didn't come. He said unevenly: "Fancy meeting you here!"

"What happened?" Peter said quickly.

"Cracked up. Hell of a mess. These buzzards came along. They can't talk English, and I pretended not to talk Mexican. But I know what they're going to do. Listen, Duntin, I know you hate my guts, and you've every right to. But I'm in a hell of a jam. They've sent one of their men to the Border with a letter I wrote Captain Mandrews. They want twenty-five thousand dollars, and if they don't get it, they'll slit my throat like a pig's. I know. I used to live in this country." His tongue circled his swollen lips nervously, and he tried to give Peter a smile.

Somehow, standing there, he looked more like Tony than he ever had looked before. And in that moment, Peter made a discovery: he didn't hate Paul, really. He had only been hurt because Paul hated him, and he had been trying to avoid being hurt again after being hurt already so much. He said:



Peter was attacking in a cold fury.

"Keep your chin up, kid. Do you want me to go back for ransom? Will they let me take off?"

"If I can make 'em understand in English that you're going back for the ransom, they will. But you can't get a ransom inside of two or three days, with all the red tape. By that time, we'll be lost in these mountains. These birds are bandits, on the run from the *Federalistas*, Pete. They've got to keep on the move. So they'll take me with 'em—and if they get in a spot, or get cornered, they'll pig-stick me quick. Wait a second—"

He turned around and walked back to the leader, looked up at the man and said something in English, with motions of his head. The leader gestured angrily, then hesitated, then nodded—and with a sudden move poked Paul hard in the chest with his carbine-muzzle. Paul turned around and came back to the ship.

"Listen, Pete," he said tensely, "there's only one way out of this business. You go back to Bliss and load up your guns. You can fly there and back in two hours, and in that time we can't go more than ten miles. Then you come back here and find us again. They'll think you have the ransom, and they won't bother you. But you make a pass at us, and when you do, I'll throw myself off my horse, and you let 'em have it. Don't shoot the horses if you can help it. I know this country. With a horse I can get myself out—or you can send a two-seater in after me."

Peter shook his head. "I might hit you," he said.

With a shrug, Paul returned: "I'd rather get it that way than with a knife, Pete. I tell you, I *know* what they'll do! They're professional killers, and

they wouldn't think any more of cutting my throat than they would of swatting a horse-fly! You've got to do this!"

Feeling suddenly unnerved by the prospect, Peter said: "I've got fifty rounds in this gun, Paul. I was going to practice this morning on the targets to see how you made such a high score." He reached out and laid his hand on Paul's shoulder. "You get off that horse when the first bullet hits! I'll take off toward the south, and circle back as if I'm heading for the Border—and when I do, I'll let 'em have it. For God's sake, Paul, don't let me shoot you!"

Paul grinned; he could grin now. He said: "If you do, I won't blame you. It won't be your fault." He walked back to the trio, and one of them helped him back on his horse.

PETER took off, his throat tight. He had to battle himself to keep down his excitement. Fifty bullets—every one of them had to count. He had to get all of these men, and get them all fast—or they would get Paul. He had to attack, and keep on attacking—and if he ever shot straight in his life, he must do it now.

And it was not without danger to himself, this mission, he knew. Those men were fighters, and they had carbines, and knew how to use them.

The P-26 went off the ground smoothly, and Peter gained speed, flying away toward the south. Over his shoulder he gauged distance, estimated his altitude. At three hundred feet he turned back, keeping that moving column in view. He lined up, heading back toward them. He loaded his gun, and kicked up the cocking lever, putting the first cartridge into

the chamber. He had never realized that one could be so excited, so nervous, and yet be so calm. He lined his sights tentatively, and waited, reducing his speed. He couldn't risk sweeping that group with his fire; he might accidentally kill Paul. This was individual; a bullet, two bullets, for each man in the band.

A cold weight seemed to press in his stomach, when he got a bead on the first one. He squeezed the Bodin control; and both heard and felt his gun speak. Just twice—*pup-pup*. Then he eased rudder on and got another quick bead, and the gun spoke again—*pup-pup*. And again!

**D**OWN on the ground sheer pandemonium swept like wild-fire through the ranks of those horsemen. Peter saw three of them plunge off their mounts—the three he had shot. He saw Paul Stanton do a quick fall to the ground. And then, as he swept overhead, blasting his engine, climbing to make a quick turn to go back, he saw that column dissolve into individual horsemen who rode like mad in every direction. Some of them were trying to shoot as they rode. A bullet ripped through the fabric of the left wing, harmlessly. Peter whipped into a tight turn.

He could not attack effectively, now, because there was no group left. And he was being attacked himself. He picked out the leader, who was riding southward alone as if pursued by the devil. He dived, lining his sights, and squeezed that control on the stick. The pungent odor of powder stung his nostrils as the gun answered. The man slid off his horse, hit on his shoulder, rolled and lay still.

All the time Peter was being fired at. Bullets sliced through his wings, and he heard one *zin-n-ng!* viciously past his ear from a ricochet off some metal part of the plane. But he was attacking now in a cold fury. One at a time, hunting them down with relentless patience, he threw steel-jacketed bullets.

Until, quite to his surprise, there were no more horsemen riding desperately at the heads of drifting plumes of smoky dust, trying to escape. There were horses which had galloped riderless some distance away and then stopped. But so far as Peter could tell, there was no one left of that band.

So then he went back and landed, and saw Paul Standron get up from the ground. A queer warmth of emotion

touched him, as he saw Paul coming. For there were tears in Paul's eyes, and a look on his face that Peter would never forget. For a moment he stood there, and then he said: "Pete, I always wondered why Tony thought you were such a fine guy—and now maybe I know. I wish he could have been here to see this. I wouldn't have done what you just did—I wouldn't have dared."

Peter swallowed, and his throat felt tight. "I guess you'd have done it, all right," he said. "Hell, you're a better shot than I am."

A strange expression came into Paul's eyes, then. He said: "No, you're wrong about that."

"You won the matches."

"I won by taking a deliberate foul each time—by firing right down to the target on one burst—getting a string of hits all together. I never intended to tell you that, Pete. I wanted to beat you. But I didn't win fairly, so I didn't actually win."

Peter didn't say anything. There was something wrong with his throat, and the words in his mind just wouldn't come out. He was thinking that there was nothing in this world so fine as friendship, and he knew that always, now, he and Paul would be friends.

**S**UDDENLY it didn't make an difference what Lieutenant Petree did, when Peter got back to Kelly. He didn't care. He felt complete again, and light-hearted. It had been a long time, a very long time, since he had felt that way. He wondered what would happen because of this day's violence and death. There would be official hell raised, probably. But even that didn't have the power now to upset him. He felt wonderful. . . . He looked out at Paul, and said:

"Catch one of those horses and start riding north. I know there are no other bandits close enough to reach you before I get back—I've just scoured all the country around here. I'll get a two-seater plane and pick you up within a couple of hours."

Paul Standron smiled. He did look like Tony; he really was a lot like Tony. Especially the way he said gruffly:

"Well, hot-shot, how the hell do you expect me to catch a horse and get on him—with my hands tied?"

Peter grinned. He said: "Just a sissy!" Then he got out of his P-26 and untied Paul Standron's hands.

You may count upon another fine story by Leland Jamieson in an early issue.



# Piping the Devil

*A sailor's amazing adventure on the troubled seas of New York.*

Illustrated  
by Austin  
Briggs



By **KENNETH PERKINS**

**Z**EKE HAWKES got off the Second Avenue elevated and went underneath to a shop that sold gifts of brass. He asked the shopkeeper for something very unusual—something that would seem to have come from Bombay or Aden or any of the ports at which Zeke's ship had touched.

"Is it for a lady?" the shopkeeper asked.

This was a hard question to answer. It would ultimately fall into the hands of a palmist. But it was really intended

"Now, this is really something, Mister; this is Aladdin's lamp."

for a young girl who served coffee and anisette to the palmist's customers. If it had monetary value, it would be taken away from the girl and sold to a Levantine antique dealer on Morris Street. Hence it must be something that was inherently worth little, so that the girl could keep it for her own. A jewel from an idol's forehead, got with much adventure and death in Madras, say, would be all right—provided, of course, that it was not a real jewel. Whatever it was, it must appeal to the Oriental strain in one's imagination—that is to say, the strain which invests inanimate things with a soul.

Zeke Hawkes could not explain these specifications in very concise terms, for he was only a boatswain on a tramp freighter. But the shopkeeper was canny. He scratched his stained, curly beard, adjusted his glasses, and announced: "I have just the thing."

He went to that pile of merchandise which he had not yet prepared for display or shined up with whiting and aqua ammonia, and produced a lamp. It was a tarnished piece of old brass shaped like a dove's body, with a wick where the neck ought to be, and a tail that curved under in a ring so that it could serve as a handle.

"Now this is really something, Mister. This is Aladdin's lamp. I got a cousin who works for the Palestine Trading Company, and he brought this lamp to me as a special favor. Much trouble and bartering he did. It's yours. Seventy-five cents."

"Haven't you got something that glims a little? I'm going to marry the girl. She'd want something bright. We're setting up housekeeping."

AS a matter of fact, this was another good reason why Hawkes did not want to spend much for the gift. Two months' boatswain's pay, and channel money while the ship was in dry dock, was all they would have to live on. The price and the thing itself were satisfactory, but he said: "Can't you shine it like the rest of your works here?"

"What! Shine it! You mean *rub* Aladdin's lamp? If you only knew how funny you talk, Mister!"

"Sure, I know that yarn about the *original* lamp, but—"

"You think I sell you something isn't original? You tell her my cousin fought a lot of muezzins for it. Honest."

Hawkes was in a nervous hurry. And

this shopkeeper, he observed, could think up unanswerable arguments.

"I'll take it," Hawkes said.

WITH the lamp in his pocket, he went west on Rector Street toward the Hudson, where a small part of the Near East has been transplanted in New York. Lightning was playing below Governor's Island, and a snoring breeze choked to a vast gasp in the streets that led north from the Battery. Here the air was as still and dead as an Irishman's hurricane. It gave Hawkes a feeling of vague apprehension, although this might have been due to his certainty that something would happen when he saw that girl again.

When he reached Morris Street and entered the restaurant above which the girl lived, his reception was peculiar. The proprietor, Ali Jung, stared in astonishment, even though he must have known that Hawkes' ship was in.

Ali Jung was a chunky brown man with a nose that met his thick upper lip like a Punch, wooden, varnished and scaly. New York had worked upon his Mohammedan soul for forty years, but he was still a Turk. He was a tough one. The palmist upstairs was a relative he had imported with damasks and silks in more recent years. He was to her, as they say, a brother of the milk. One was as bad as the other.

He called up the dark stairway. "Hey, Lou! He's here!"

Zeke knew that he was anything but welcome. He had come to take a valuable asset of their establishment. Madam Lou's palmistry at a dollar a "reading" thrived because dockers, deckhands, ferryboat men, yes even mates of steam and sail, came more than once. They came because of this young girl who served them coffee and said a few words to them. The memory of her burned in their hearts. Her few words—only a few—were like seeds which afterward sprouted to strange flowers. Mariners came over and over again to have their rope-scarred palms read. Madam Lou built up a good practice—until a ragtag boatswain came along, and the girl fell in love with him.

Zeke confidently expected they would not let him go upstairs. But he would go up anyway. Who was to stop him? Perhaps, he reflected, those two men in the corner of the restaurant who were studying him, had been invited for just this contingency. They were big men,

and Ali Jung said something to them in a Turkish dialect while Madam Lou was lumbering down the stairs.

Madam Lou entered, parting the curtains at the kitchen doorway. She was enormous, a steaming shapeless mass hung with amulets, swathed in a pink wrapper. For a second her eyes fixed on Hawkes, silent and still. They were black eyes, with but a thread of indefinite whites—good eyes for her profession. They were unfathomable—except for a covert and smoldering look of murder. But that seemed quite natural to them. She started tapping her rag-soled slipper; then all of a sudden she smiled.

"Your ship got in early, seems like," she said. "My little girl was just getting her hat to go over and wait for you at the dock."

"I left the ship at quarantine," Hawkes said breezily. "Told the skipper I had a sick grandmother. I couldn't wait. Tell her I'm here. I got something for her, something I found in Aden."

Ali Jung asked tensely: "Then your shipmates don't know you came here?"

Madam Lou interrupted quickly, saying something in Chuvash, at which Ali Jung nodded complacently. Then in a voice as oily as his Assyrian table d'hôte, he said: "Our daughter is eager to see you. Go upstairs. Lou will show you."

Zeke Hawkes might have had some regard for this sudden change of attitude. But he had but the one thought and ecstasy—complicated, it must be added, by a flush of anger. He knew these precious rascals were laying for him. He was angered likewise by that term "our daughter." It carried the awful implication that Madam Lou was to be his mother-in-law. The girl was no relation to her. A Légionnaire had brought her, a babe in arms, to Madam Lou, and then had gone off to fight the Riffs. That was in Beirut. "Your daughter—ph-tht!" Zeke Hawkes muttered as he followed the fat palmist up the stairs.

HE had to stop behind her at the third landing, for there was no passing her enormous bulk. She stood puffing heavily, screening the doorway to a dim room. Hawkes waited in darkness that was like a cloud of incense. His heart pounded, for he heard a dulcet voice from the room:

"Here's another present, Lou. You'll like it. A gold bracelet, see? The new roomer gave it to me."

"Oh, so Ali rented the room?"

"He's some Turk works in a dime museum at Coney," the same sweet notes crooned. "He says the bed's too small for him, and he wants a box so he can put his feet on it when he goes to bed."

"Give me the bracelet."

MADAM LOU went in; Hawkes followed. In the dim light he did not see the girl at first. She must have been lying down somewhere when she spoke. It was a barnlike loft on the third floor back, which was used as the palmist's sanctuary, and also as a storeroom for machine-made prayer rugs. There was but one window, which gave on a light well. The atmosphere of Stamboul was so pervasive in sight and smell that it was hard to believe that the tips of those buildings far above the light-well were the skyscrapers of Wall Street and Broadway. Against the cloudy black night their whiteness was of the marble of minarets. Madam had set the stage well for her clients. Her prophecies seemed to come from one who was attuned to the mystic East and its wisdom. What she said was thus the more easily believed.

Punk burned. An old man with a ratty beard sat in a corner gurgling at a water pipe, puffing scented smoke. He was a piece of human stage property, of course.

Then Hawkes saw her. She emerged in a gentle leap from the darkness where there were piles of rugs. She was a slim, nervous creature, whom Madam Lou evidently had taught many tricks of her trade. Like the nargile-smoker, she was a part of the setting. One touch of her fragile hand, as she served coffee to a client, would awake inner vibrations that would have been dead and still, for all the pressure of the palmist's fingers.

Hawkes' heart slugged with joy. He took her in his arms, and crushed her as he had done in dreams in rhythm with the monotonous throb of turbines. He dreamed always as his hammock dipped with the long lonely roll of the sea, that the girl was against his breast, imprisoned. But when he pressed her head back and looked at her face, he saw only a blank consternation.

She was gasping something to him.

The palmist let them alone for a moment, her interest sidetracked by the gift of the new roomer, which she bit and examined. She got a bottle of acid, rubbing the glass stick of its stopper on the gold.



"Don't start it!" she whimpered.  
"Can't you see they've got knives?"

The girl almost gibbered: "I wrote you—I warned you—you've come into a trap!"

Hawkes explained that if she had written to his ship, he would not get the letter until tomorrow at the owners'. "Get your hat and we'll haul out of here," he laughed.

Madam Lou interrupted suavely: "Don't go yet. There's a thunderstorm coming. Sit down, and we'll have coffee. You're taking my little daughter; you're breaking our hearts. I'll be honest with you, Mister: If we could stop this, we

would. But this isn't Beirut; it's New York. We can't put bars on the windows. Whatever we do, she'll slip out some night with a little bundle of clothes, same as when we came over from Ellis Island. She'll meet you wherever you say. We've lost her. So—" she shrugged her beefy shoulders—"don't rush away. You're tearing roots out of my life." A rich sob was in her voice. "Show her the gift you brought her."

HAWKES thought this a good suggestion; at least it would engage the palmist's attention for another moment. She was more interested in gifts than in the girl. He only wished that he had brought something that could be tested by a long and anxious assay. The thing he had brought could scarcely be expected to distract the woman's mind from the vital issue at hand.

The girl was standing with her hands clutching nervously at her throat. Her eyes darted from Madam Lou's face to the nargile-smoker in the corner, then toward the stairs, where footsteps were creaking. Ali Jung was coming, and evidently he was not alone. In a changed voice she said: "There's no hurry. We'll



sit down a minute. Show me what you brought. Let Lou see it."

Hawkes set the lamp on a low octagonal table in front of the girl. It was as if he had set it on an altar. He lit it. Outside, the air was hovering before the first clap of thunder, and no draft came. The flame went up small and soft, and a nimbus of tiny rays blossomed in the smoke-fogged room.

The girl's dark lids drooped for but a moment, giving a beautiful effect as if her eyelashes were shreds of a black moth's wings. Madam Lou stared, and her face lost shape as if all the muscles melted. Was this sailor playing a joke on them? "A funny thing to bring to a girl you want for a bride! What is it, a cigar-lighter?"

"It's a lamp," Hawkes said enthusiastically. "A bazaar-keeper in Aden had it for many generations. His tribe was rich—every member who'd had this thing



in the house. The bazaar man said he'd had it only a week, and his ways were prospering—that's the way he talked." He concluded simply: "I killed three men to get it."

The gurgling of the old man's water-pipe was silent, like some live breathing thing frightened. Madam Lou gulped. Three men! Three deaths! That was enough to invest the lamp with a certain intrinsic value. She even waddled over to look at it.

And it was at this moment that Ali Jung, and the two men Hawkes had seen

downstairs, came in. They entered casually, the restaurant-keeper carrying a jug and a tray.

"I have some wine and unleavened bread," he said to Hawkes. "I am entertaining my friends. These two gentlemen are seamen like you."

**H**AWKES knew that the two gentlemen were of Turkish extraction, although they looked like Greek wrestlers.

"What ship?" he asked.

"*Parimaribou*. Black gang," said one of the men, who had thick brows that joined together over the bridge of his nose. The other was heavy and squat, and must have come out of the stokehold quite recently. The dusky skins of both were streaked with sweat and coal. All three sat down at a table near the stairway, and Ali Jung passed a plate of taffy made of sesame seeds and honey.

Hawkes was sorry that they sat so near the door—right between him and the stairway. He felt the girl's hand grip his fiercely. He rather wished she would get out of the way. He realized that he was in a species of clip joint, and that he could not get out. If he were on the Barbary Coast,—an old haunt of his,—he would have known that he was elected for shanghai-ing. But this was New York; shanghai-ing was out of style. There were, however, other possibilities. In these days the dumping of a body in the East River or, as in this case, the West River, was not unheard of.

He noticed that Madam Lou had got out of the way so that the part of the room she had left seemed suddenly wide and bare. She sat down by the nargile-smoker, hunched like a toad, her head squashed into great folds of fat. There was a paper bag of candy—the stuff called Turkish paste—on a table near her, and she reached for it, munched, licked the sugar from her lips nervously. "Look what the sailor got his girl," she said. "A lamp that brings you luck."

Ali Jung gave a cursory glance out of the corner of his eye at the lamp. He said: "So it will bring you luck!" And he smiled softly.

"He killed three men for it," the girl said.

The restaurant-keeper burst into a smooth ripple of Levantine laughter. It was an astonishing, even shocking sound, coming high-pitched and feminine from such a thick chunky throat.

"Tell them how you killed the three men, lover," the girl crooned gently.

Hawkes took this cue. "Well, it was like this: The bazaar-keeper was being robbed when I luffed up into his joint. It was a joint just like this—dim and creepy, punk burning, and cold smoke puffed out of a bottle like that old snug's doing yonder. The bazaar man, he was hanging on to this lamp, because the robbers wanted it, see? I came aboard of one of 'em. The others stampeded for the street. The bazaar man thanks me, and says: 'The lamp's yours, mate! —sahib,' I guess he said. 'It's just what I been hunting for in every port between here and New York,' says I. But when I went out in the street, I got jumped. They sliced my neck and hurt me. When I was down, they tried to hack the lamp out of my hands. One lubber flensed me from elbow to wrist. I don't know how I got up, but I kind of remember a big black bozo with a turban got into it, somehow, and he must of been fighting on my side. Anyway, I got to my ship. And I kept it for my girl. It's yours!"

The girl's eyes glowed magnificently. They were looking at Hawkes—first at his neck, where there was a scar livid enough to be of fairly recent infliction, then at his lean bronzed hands. On one fist she saw another scar ripped through the blond fuzz, disappearing under the wool of his jacket. Everyone else noticed these same eloquent proofs of his recital. They might have believed, anyway—such was the atmosphere of mystery and distant places which Madam Lou herself had created.

"**L**ISTEN, Mister: I been in Aden," one of the stokers said. "Where was this bazaar at?"

"On the harbor-side, a mosque behind it a ways, and there's a bridge in front with awnings over the rail, and in back a kind of poop deck."

"And a bar next to it?"

"Sure, and a hootch dance booth—not far away from the P. and O. docks."

"I know the joint. And the son of two pigs was getting rich cheating customers."

"That's just what I said," Hawkes agreed. "He was getting rich suddenly because he owned this lamp. They even put him in jail!" He went on reciting vividly, tensely: "But he had this lamp inside his clothes—his burnous or whatever you call the rig. He said he rubbed the lamp. You got to do that before the charm works. Nothing happened. He figured it must be a fake—just an old

legend. His ancestors had got it away from the original owner, trading new lamps for old. That was his slogan: 'New Lamps for Old.'

"But what happened? What happened?" Madam Lou asked. The three men were now more than politely interested.

Hawkes talked fast, and in deadly earnest. His eyes blazed.

"The bazaar-keeper he told me he just sat there in jail thinking he'd been gypped. The lamp was only junk. Very old, like you see it there, but junk. He had rubbed it, and nothing happened. Then he noticed slowly that there was another man in the cell standing behind his mat. The bazaar guy was lying on a mat. The stranger was terribly big, and had to stoop way down so his head wouldn't rub against the bats that were hanging on the ceiling. Course the prisoner just thought he was a jail-keeper who'd breezed in. He hadn't heard him, because there was thunder just like the thunder out yonder—" He nodded to the high window and the buildings on Broadway.

"Who was he?" Madam Lou asked. She had stopped reaching for candy.

"Ah, that's it! He could of been anybody, it happened so natural. All the bazaar man remembered was he'd asked the real jail-keeper for some dates and goat's milk, and had given him some money, and this fellow had hove to instead. But he took a wild chance, and said: 'Break down this wall so's I can go home.'"

"And did he do it?" This time it was the old nargile-smoker who asked the question.

"They found the jail wall a pile of *chunam* and bricks the next morning—and the prisoner gone."

A dry cackle came from Ali Jung.

"The girl never believed these fo'castle yarns before," he said. "She's always laughed at anyone giving her presents. Why," he asked, turning to Madam Lou, "—why didn't she laugh at this one who's brought something to really laugh at?"

"Laugh!" the man sucking at the nargile exclaimed. He was very old, Hawkes noticed for the first time, and his eyes were rheumy, but with a far-away look. "I heard of that lamp in Beirut. I heard of it in Bagdad. They've been hunting for it for a long time. My father and my father's father knew of it."



The old man yelled:  
"He's there! He's going to kill us!"

This impressed five people of very widely differentiated points of view. The restaurant-keeper for the first time shuffled across the room toward Hawkes, and looked intently at the tarnished thing on the table. The big man with the single band of eyebrows also stood up, but he did not cross the room. The other stoker sat back, dumb, his thick lips parted, the tongue creeping out. The palmist's eyes were slits of light in folds of mascara-smirched flesh. Her slipper tapped slowly.

"Joke or no joke," she said, "I could



Hawkes, aghast, did not know what had happened until he found himself out in the rain with the girl, running.

use that thing in my business—if I could hand out your line, sailor.”

And there was a fifth who was impressed with the aged smoker's comment: the girl. Perhaps it was the psychological effect of the setting. She seemed to have stiffened. She arose, her eyes wild. Hawkes jumped up, thinking this was her cue to leave. But she turned her face, whispering, scarcely breathing: “I'll get help. Tell them more!” Then she slipped out of his clutch. She did it easily, like a cat. They scarcely noticed her, though she announced aloud: “I'll pack my things—and then we'll go.”

“The lamp's sure brought you luck, sailor,” Madam Lou said from her corner. “You've won what a lot of men tried to get.”

“Luck you call it! Listen!” Hawkes was inspired. He began to rant, except that he talked huskily, as if suppressing a terrific power:

“The bazaar-keeper was dying when he told me all this. That's why I knew he wasn't just an old sea-lawyer stoking me with lies. When a man's dying, you listen hard. He said one night he was walking through the streets, carrying money, and a friend had warned him a bunch of cutthroats would come aboard him on the landward reach of the street which was dark. It was so narrow you can touch the walls on both sides, and you have to steer your way through donkeys and camels.”

“Sure. I know that street,” the same stoker commented excitedly.

“He saw some men in the street watching him queer. He rubbed the lamp. Nothing happened. But his friend told him the next morning: ‘That was a pretty good stunt, having that big Bedouin following you last night. No wonder you didn't get jumped.’ The bazaar man said: ‘I didn't have any Bedouin following me.’ But then he remembered he'd rubbed the lamp, and it must of been the same giant he'd seen in the jailkhanna. Maybe it just happened that way. The Bedouin maybe was taking the same course through that street.”

“You mean every time you rub the lamp, a giant just comes out of the air?” Ali Jung laughed.

“Not out of the air. He just heaves to, sort of natural.”

“Let's see it work. Go ahead and rub it,” said Ali Jung.

The aged man dropped his coils of pipe and lifted palsied hands. “No, in



the name of Allah! It's a thing of the devil. Allah's the one God! Don't touch it!"

"We won't believe till we see it work," said the stoker with the brows. "Rub it. Who's afraid?"

"You won't get me to try it!" Hawkes said in a hollow voice.

"I thought so!" Ali Jung snorted.

It was at that moment that the girl came back, her face pale gold. She had a bundle just as the palmist had described. She must have had it ready before. And she wore a shabby caracul coat, and a toque over her black hair. She darted quick glances at every face in the room as Hawkes stepped to her. And then once again she stopped him before he came too close to the door.

"Not yet—we can't go yet," she stammered. "It's going to rain—hard. It's a thunderstorm. No use walking into it. Let's sit down a minute. Sit down here." She drew him back to the octagonal table. This was quite a distance from the door.

Hawkes knew perfectly well what she meant. He must kill more time. She sat at the table with him, her hand reaching for his. Her other hand rested on the table and moved, trembling slightly, toward the lamp. She touched it on the part which was made to represent a dove's body.

Everyone stopped talking suddenly and watched her. She snuggled up close to Hawkes, and her head was pressed on his shoulder.

"I can't get out to call the police," she whispered without moving her lips. "They've locked the door downstairs. Tell them about the lamp."

Hawkes wished he had brought a gun, or at least a sail knife. Knives were what these Turks would use.

**ALI JUNG** had got up and sauntered over to one side of Hawkes on the pretext of getting a closer look at the lamp. The two stokers he had left, spread out, scraping chairs.

Hawkes turned casually to Ali Jung. "You're the guy wanted to see if the lamp works—aye, mate?"

"Sure. That's what I came over here to see. Go ahead. It won't work."

Hawkes reflected that the mere fact that they wanted to see it tested indicated a slight element of belief as well as doubt. The palmist, for one, was suckled on luck and its material symbols; whether she was born at eight bells and could

see ghosts, Hawkes did not know. As for the two stokers, they had been to sea and could not despise superstitions entirely. At least they would never stick a knife in a mast, or bury a man at sea any way but feet first, or deny that a dying man on board will cause headwinds.

**T**HE restaurant-keeper was more of a skeptic. "Go ahead—rub it. Make it do its stuff."

The aged man in the corner began to wail again, but Hawkes stopped him by saying: "You think I'd take a chance rubbing that lamp just to show you lubbers? Listen! I did it once. But never again! It pipes up the devil. That's what happened when I tried it. Our anchor was afool. Weighing anchor's my job. I'm a bo'sun, in case you don't know. We were off Mombassa. The kedge bore nor'-east from the bower with three hawses on it, because of the strain from the land winds. The best bower was riding us from the monsoon. We had about a hundred fathoms on it. I got the kedge up. But when the bower was cock-billed, it stuck. Buried in *mud*!

"The Skipper gave me hell. The engine was on the bum. I tried man-power, the crew grunting and breaking their backs. But the windlass wouldn't budge. I told 'em: 'Avast heaving—I'll do it myself.' They stood back in a bunch, sweating and puffing. I stuck my hand in my pocket where I had this lamp, and rubbed it hard. There was a clap of thunder out of a clear hot sky. And then from the bunch of fo'castle heathen, a big lubber steps out. An Arab, he looked like; and what we figured was he'd come aboard wanting a berth. He says to me: 'What do you want me to do, master?'"

"Holy cripes!" one of the stokers gasped. Madam Lou munched like a rabbit. The old man moaned.

"I want you to weigh that hook," says I. And he lays to a windlass bar, and bends double, and the chain strains, and the links clank on the whelps, jumping and bucking. The chain starts rattling in the hawse-pipe. The bower—two thousand pounds of forged iron—comes up, stock, shank and flukes dripping black ooze."

"One man did it—not the engine?" a stoker said tensely.

"A man or a devil," Hawkes said, his blue eyes boring into every listener in

turn. "The skipper asks me when the big bozo lumbers off to the fo'castle with the others: 'Where'd you get that walrus?' I says: 'Guess he's a stowaway.' 'Whatever he is,' says the skipper, 'we'll take him to the Consular Officer at Suez and sign him up for the duration of the voyage.' But nobody ever saw him again. He dropped out of sight. Why? Because he'd gone back to his regular berth, pumping thunder out of hell!"

The two stokers moved their chairs up closer. The palmist gave a sudden suppressed cry like a gas-stove popping. But, catching the girl's attention, she beckoned frantically with a twinkling wiggle of all the fingers of one hand. She could not have signaled more clearly that the girl get over to one side and out of the way.

**B**UT the girl sat still as a frightened bird—all except her hand, which had recurrently reached toward the lamp, touching it and drawing away as if it were too hot. One of the stokers got up and took his chair near the table so that Ali Jung was on one side, the stoker on the other.

"Don't get too near this lamp, you yellow-bellied scuts!" Hawkes shouted. "Or there's not a mother's son of you will ever smell grass again!"

"Because why?" Ali Jung hooted. "Because you'll rub the lamp and call up a genie. Is that it?" He dropped his cigarette, screwing it out with his boot. "Go ahead and rub it. Call him. You'll need him!" he laughed; but he stopped laughing abruptly, for no one else seemed to have seen his joke.

Hawkes made a move to stand up, but the girl's hand checked him. He turned, facing Ali Jung. "You started laughing, didn't you, you sea-cook? Well, get this: When you laugh at what is God's truth, you're lower'n a sea-cook. You're a cockroach."

Everyone started. Here was certainly a taunt! The sailor must be crazy, not to see what he was in for. There were five against him, biding their time for a certain kill; and here he was actually provoking them to start!

"You seem to have much faith in that lamp, Mister Sailor," Ali Jung grinned.

"Faith! Who wouldn't have faith after what's been told about it in history and written about it in books! Why, you've missed the point of everything I been saying. I got to tell it to you clearer. This is the lamp that belonged

to—who do you think? *Aladdin!* That's who! Now maybe you'll laugh your guts out!"

"You mean, that there is the identical lamp of Aladdin hisself!" a stoker exclaimed.

"Aladdin's original lamp, so help me God!" Hawkes swore. "And it's turned up in the port of New York after thirty centuries!"

"Cockroach, he calls me!" Ali Jung muttered, smarting. He lowered his head and took a step forward.

"Wait, Ali, wait!" Madam Lou said huskily. She had kept back in the corner through it all, her eyes glued on the quiet flame, the brass, the girl's slim trembling hand. "I been looking at it hard." She spoke in a whisper, but she spoke to everyone in the long dim room nevertheless. "Didn't the rest of you see it! Every time she touches that lamp, the thunder comes."

"You don't mean *you* believe this flying jib," Ali Jung laughed. "It's been thundering outside for half an hour."

"But look at her! Look at her!" the palmist almost screamed.

They all looked. The girl had reached once again. It could not be coincidence. Her hand moved slowly. Even Hawkes stared intently, he who knew all of the magic properties of the thing—the true and the false; and his eyes glared madly. For when the girl touched it, the skies to the south rumbled and growled. Then her hand came away.

**W**ITH an inscrutable smile she looked up at the stokers, the restaurant-keeper, the shivering, gibbering old man in the corner. She looked at the palmist, and her eyes burned with a great triumph.

"Do it again!" Ali Jung said.

The girl lit a cigarette. She took her time, her eyes roved about the group. She closed them, trance-like. Madam Lou had taught her how to do that. She inhaled as if to calm herself, for her frail hand shook, wabbling at the thin bangled wrists. And this time her fingers reached out quickly. It made everyone jump.

Thunder distant and ominous shook the air.

"Well, for blasting the deadlights out of hell!" Hawkes exclaimed to himself.

"It's a trick!" Ali Jung shouted. "She's working you all over; and so is he, with his galley yarns! Come on, men! If

you sit here just listening to him, you'll all go crazy!"

The girl screamed, leaping up to her feet. "What're you going to do? You're a bunch of rats! You're killers—the whole gang of you! You dare touch him, and I'll do something to stop it!" She picked up the lamp, and with an abrupt change in her voice said to Hawkes: "We can go out now, lover. No one's going to touch us."

Hawkes got up, keeping his back to the wall. His eyes narrowed murderously as he measured Ali Jung. It would be very disappointing—he seemed to be saying with his eyes—if he had to leave without having it out with that one Turk, anyway.

"Sure, we're going out. But I want to trim this sea-cook first." He kicked the octagonal table out of the way.

Ali Jung backed up, getting the balance of his chunky frame. But Hawkes' rush was stopped by the girl throwing herself between them.

"Don't start it, for God's sake!" she whimpered. "Can't you see they've got knives!"

Knives gleamed. Madam Lou and the old man cringed in a heap. Ali Jung swept the girl aside with his thick arm, and the two men crashed together.

The stokers sprang up from their chairs. But the girl whirled on them. She held the lamp up high above her head and rubbed it, giving a strange croon that rose to a screech. Old Madam Lou had taught her that trick well, for it curdled the blood.

Thunder cracked. The palmist gave a scream like an echo. The bearded old man staggered to his feet, fell, yelled like a madman.

"He's there! He came! He's going to kill us! *La ilaha illa-ilaha!*"

The restaurant-keeper had sunk to his knees with Hawkes' first blow, timed neatly and with comparative quiet, except for the crunch of bone.

THE two men with knives stopped in their tracks, crouching. For they saw a great form at the staircase—a giant figure with fanged teeth and rings in his ears. They saw him turn to the girl and the lamp. And they heard him say in a very low voice:

"What can I do for you, kid?"

The men dropped to their knees like Ali Jung, wringing their hands, knives sliding to the floor. And the girl too

was on her knees searching Ali Jung's pockets. She found a key, arose like a bird taking wing. She snatched at Hawkes' hand, for he too was standing aghast. He did not know what had happened until the girl had unlocked the street door, and he found himself out in the rain with her, running.

HE still shivered at the memory of that terrible presence when he was on the subway with his girl snuggled against him. He was in a daze partly ecstatic, partly dumfounded.

"The damned thing came true right before my eyes!" he was muttering. "I never believed the bazaar-keeper. And that yarn about the best bower I made up myself. But so help me God, it came true!"

"I believed it when you first set it on the table," the girl said firmly. "And I made old Lou believe it. She's tricked a lot of sailors into believing things. She had the stage set for it, so we'll all believe anything. I used her own tricks."

Hawkes studied her eyes. "You called that big bozo in—just at the right minute! Is that what you mean?"

"I told him to wait till he saw me rub the lamp. Nobody else saw him rent that back room today except Ali Jung, and he didn't count because you knocked him out. It's Lou that counted. She'd have used a gun on you before she'd let you get out. It's a good lamp. It works."

"Sure. Everything was natural—except that thunder!" Hawkes shivered.

"Lou likes thunder when she's palm reading. But the way she uses it, it's always a toss-up whether it'll come at the right minute."

"It came on the dot every time you touched that lamp!"

"I didn't touch it till I saw the lightning. Everyone had their backs to the window but me. I figured the lightning a few counts away." Before Hawkes had a chance to magnify her name, she said: "Where *did* you get those scars, lover?"

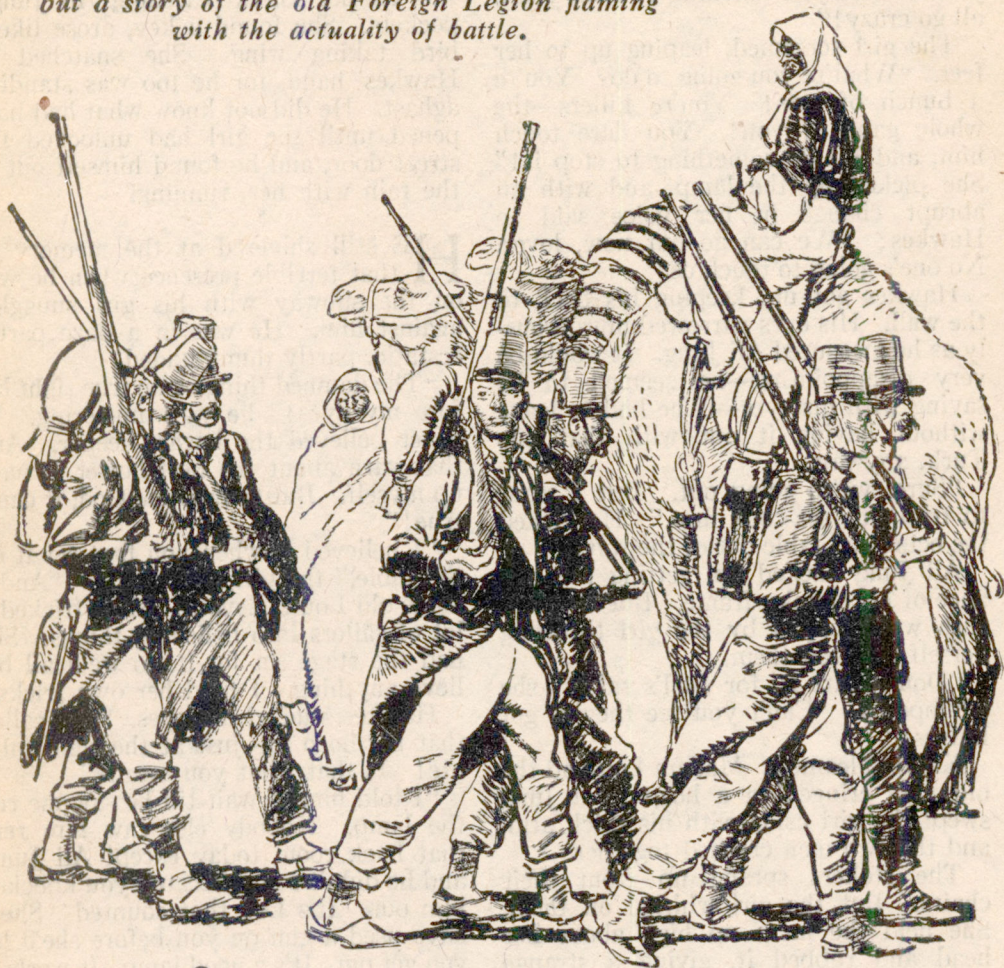
"In Aden. It's a tough town." He saw her eyes. The wonder had ebbed out of them, and they were sympathetic and wide and wise. "It wasn't a bazaar," he admitted quickly. "It was a bar. I got in a brawl—not over any lamp."

"Don't tell me the rest. Let's believe it's true."

His arm crushed her against his. "God, little kid, we're starting out right! You made me believe my own yarn!"

Another colorful story by Kenneth Perkins will appear in an early issue.

*"A TOUCH OF SUN" is not literal history,  
but a story of the old Foreign Legion flaming  
with the actuality of battle.*



# WARRIORS in

I RAN into a queer birthday party the other evening; it was the birthday of the Foreign Legion.

My three cronies had added a fourth to their number for the occasion. Red-haired, hot-tongued Casey, the saturnine Kramer, and the dark Alsatian Porson gravely introduced me to a new arrival named Falkenheim. He was a sad-eyed, inconspicuous-looking man, but it turned out that he had served through the campaigns of Morocco, Madagascar and the Sahara; he was older than the others.

"Falkenheim has picked up the most devilish interesting thing you ever saw," said Kramer. "However, we'll come to that later. *Anciens* of the Legion, attention! This is the ninth day of March. I shall read you the decree of Louis

Philippe, King of the French, issued in the year 1831—"

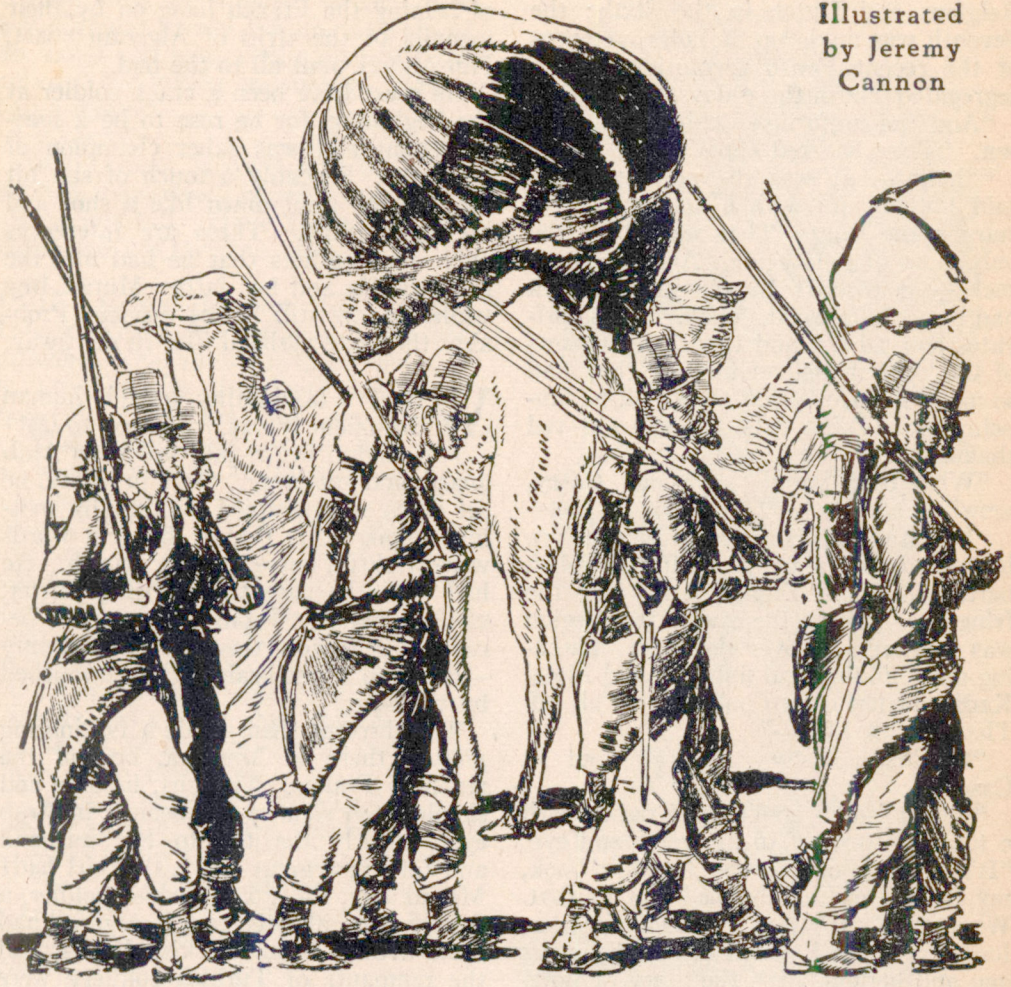
Although not a *Légionnaire*, I came to my feet as the others stood stiffly at attention. Kramer, in a dry parade voice, read off the decree which had organized the corps which for over a hundred years has been rather loosely termed the Foreign Legion:

"We have ordered and ordained as follows: First, a legion composed of foreigners will be formed. This legion will take the name of Foreign Legion—"

When Kramer had ceased reading, he reached down to his glass and lifted it.

"My friends! I give you the corps whom we respect, whose traditions we have upheld, whose name we have been proud to bear!"

Illustrated  
by Jeremy  
Cannon



# EXILE

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

The glasses clinked. All four men spoke out as one:

*"Vive la Légion!"*

We dropped into our chairs, relaxed and made merry, with a welter of talk. Our new friend, Falkenheim, had plenty on the ball; he proved to be some sort of nobleman, but nobody asked any questions, and he volunteered little about himself.

"That old original Legion," spoke up Casey, "must have been a hell of a corps, from all I've heard! They tell some queer stories about it, back at headquarters."

"They may well!" And Falkenheim grinned. "When the battalion disembarked at Algiers, thirty-five men deserted the first day. A few days later an

entire company got drunk and mutinied. They court-martialed two and put the rest of the company in jail. It was something to see!"

"You talk as though you'd been there," Kramer observed.

"I was."

Casey stared at him, wide-eyed.

"What are you, the Wandering Jew or something? You're nuts!"

"A touch of sun, *cafard*, the madhouse blues!" Falkenheim chuckled. "Maybe. Anyhow, the Legion back in those days would have made us blink, I can tell you! There were seven battalions. The First had mostly Swiss veterans; the Second and Third had Swiss and Germans. Spanish were in the Fourth, guerilla fighters. Italians in the Fifth, and

Belgians and Dutch in the Sixth; the Seventh was made up of Poles, veterans of the recent Polish revolution. They segregated 'em in those days."

"And the uniforms!" chipped in Porson. "They had red képis a foot high."

"Shako—that was the name for it," said Falkenheim with a nod. "With a star on the front. That was about the only mark of the Legion. And the knapsacks—good Lord! In column, they even had to pack firewood. The first-class privates had sabers, and they had muskets of the 1822 model. However, they had so much sunstroke that they took to sun-helmets, and the rats ate the old red shakos."

"Who told you?" shot out Casey, scowling at him.

"Pan Andrei. He used to be a prince in Poland, but he ended up in the Polish battalion. The French held just the fringe of Algeria then, and the Legion was scattered all over the place, marching and building and fighting, and Abdel Kadir started out to polish them all off. That was in 1835—"

"Is this a history lecture?" put in Casey.

"No, it isn't," spoke up Kramer with a touch of reproof in his voice and eye. "It's a story out of the Legion's book, my friend; an unpublished one, at that. What do you think Falkenheim has found? He got it down in Algeria years ago and kept it. It's the diary or notebook of this fellow Pan Andrei of the original Legion!"

"Is it about the Legion?" questioned Porson.

"No, it's not—that is, it's got a reverse English twist to it," Kramer said. "But I'm going to ask Falkenheim to read the thing to us. I tell you, it's remarkable! This Pole brings the old days to life; he's vivid. Open it up, Falkenheim, and don't pay any attention to these rascals—"

There was a warm exchange of compliments in the slang of the Legion, under cover of which Falkenheim dragged into sight a fat bundle of spotty Arabic paper sheets, covered with hen-tracks. Polish writing, he said; he could read it, and he did.

PAN ANDREI was the name this prince had taken, probably his own name. As our friend translated, it was plain to be seen that Pan Andrei was no hero of romance. His Polish battalion was stationed at Oran; and after two years

of helping the French hang on by their toenails to the strip of Algerian coast, Pan Andrei went all to the bad.

He must have been a crack soldier at the beginning, for he rose to be a *sous-lieutenant* and was saber champion of the corps. Probably a touch of sun hit him, for he went down like a shot and hit the bottom. These are inferences only. One gathers that he had met the girl Khatifa and her father Murad Bey while he was still in the service. Probably they had assisted him to get away.

WHAT a fascinating, terrible human document it was, from first to last!

Pan Andrei broke jail, killed an Arab guard, and got away. Once in safety, he sat down and occupied his time by writing, among other things; his first words were frightful curses on the French. He had come to hate them with a bitter, virulent hatred. From a deserter, he became a renegade, then a mortal enemy—this man whose brain had been touched by the sun.

The three of them made a fascinating picture there in Mascara, beyond the reach of France. The girl, lissome and slender, too slender for beauty in Arab eyes, utterly devoted to her husband and father; a great heart, this girl had! Murad Bey, the stout Turkish soldier, a fighter like all his race. Algeria had been wrested from Turkish hands, and the remnants of Turkish soldiery were scattered among the Arabs, helping their determined resistance to French rule. Murad Bey, a strapping fellow with keen eyes and handsome features, looked at his new son-in-law and smiled.

"So you have no regrets that life begins all over for you?"

Pan Andrei shook his head, glanced at his wife, and his wild gray eyes softened. He was lean and hard, mustached, sun-burned to Arab hue. He spoke Arabic fluently. With his thin curved nostrils, his harshly handsome features, he even looked like an Arab.

"It is my third life, Murad," he said quietly. "Far away in Poland, I lost everything, thanks to Russia. I began again in Algeria; there, under the French, I lost everything once more. Now I've begun afresh. With Khatifa's love, I've found a new life that shall endure."

The girl placed a lump of charcoal on the bowl of a water-pipe, handed one of the tubes to her father, gave the other to Pan Andrei. He had taken an Arabic name, that of El Mohdi, the Well-con-



His way was blocked, an officer halting him. "You're the trader who just arrived?" said the officer briskly. "You're wanted at headquarters at once." El Mohdi shrugged. "Who am I, to understand the speech of infidels?"



"To the east is a defile through the hills—"

ducted; but it was only used by the Arabs.

"More than love," she said, a flash in her liquid eyes. "We're friends, comrades, soldiers! With war all around us, with rapine and destruction everywhere, I'm not sitting at home and watching what happens. Father, Andrei says I may join his squadron."

Murad Bey pulled at the pipestem.

"The event is in the hand of Allah," he observed. "Women of the Osmanli race can fight. These Arabs do not like to see their women in the field. I do not like to see you, my daughter, trying to fight like a man. But it is as your husband says."

"I drop the *alif* from my name, and become Khatif," she replied. "I serve Andrei as an aide. And in the garb of a man. Who will know the truth?"

"If he has agreed, it is settled," said Murad Bey. "After all, should husband and wife be separated?"

Pan Andrei smiled at the girl, a lean hawk-smile, wonderful to see. She was part of his own terrible hatred of the French, she and all these people around. And he, in his snow-white burnouse, was about to bear witness with the sword to this hatred.

Under the ancient crumbled walls of Mascara, Abdel Kadir's capital, Pan Andrei wheeled with his desert horsemen. He taught them drill and saber play; and because no two men could stand before that glittering saber of his, they feared and respected him. At his side was always the aide, Khatif, clad in Touareg burnouse and wearing a black Touareg *litham* or face-cloth.

The Arab chieftains came and saw, and marveled. Frequently the fierce, impetuous Abdel Kadir himself, hope of the whole Arab race, watched the drill. If any suspected the identity of Khatif, as some must have suspected, no word was said. After all, she was the daughter of a Turk; it was none of their business. And in these days of death and raids and rapine, women fought here and there with the men.

Raids everywhere, as French fingers crept out across the land, along the coast, into the valleys. With spring, the name of El Mohdi began to be noised abroad. His mobile squadron struck, and struck again, and was gone. Parties of French workers, road-builders, soldiers, felt his saber. His squadron met a company of Arabs in the French service and slew the last man of them. The French began to curse his very name, but none of them knew that he was Andrei, the deserter from the Legion.

As a soldier, he was superb. As a husband, he was devoted; his love for Khatifa was an absorbing, perfect thing. But as a man—the Arab sun in touching his brain had made of him an Arab. He aided Murad Bey in training a force of twelve hundred infantry. Abdel Kadir was gathering an army; the French were to be destroyed. This lean, hard man who radiated vigor and energy was the life and soul of the Arabs. He showed Abdel Kadir how to strike the detached garrisons and move on Algiers. The Turkish engineers supported his words. The plan of campaign was perfected. Murad Bey's regiment, composed largely of Turks, became a deadly instrument.

"Attack Oran first, cut it off, then move along the coast!" said El Mohdi. So it was agreed. Some one must go into Oran, learn the dispositions there. Spies? Few could be trusted. French gold was everywhere.

"I'll go." Bearded to the lips, gray eyes grim, El Mohdi spoke up. "By Allah, French gold cannot burn my fingers! Also, I speak French."



He was the ideal person; but he did not go alone. By his side rode Khatifa, now in woman's garb. They took the brown road into Oran with a caravan of camels, laden with trading-goods from the south. Every man was picked for his fidelity.

They came into the city, where the hills run down into the sea, and the long harbor opened. El Mohdi's papers were all in order, taken from other traders detained in Mascara. He passed the French outposts without a hitch. Ahead, in the street, a file of men were approaching, a column. He threw up his hand, halted his men, his camels, his wife. He sat his saddle, staring at the files swinging down at him.

Grenadiers of the Legion, as the scarlet epaulets testified; queer stuffed-looking figures, with their cummerbunds or cholera-belts carefully inside their trousers, being considered in those days as underwear. Knapsacks piled high and topped with the enormous tent that would shelter two men. Tin canteens a-swing, muskets at the carry.

The hawk-face of El Mohdi tensed and hardened. No need to look for the number of the battalion. A Polish marching song reached him, voices lilting roughly under the hot sun. The Polish battalion! He knew every one of those approaching men. He sat his saddle, gray eyes shrouded under the hood of his white *jellab*. They looked up at him, looked at Khatifa on her camel, sang out hearty greetings and gay jests, and marched on past. Not one of them dreamed that this bearded Arab was the Pan Andrei they had known.

El Mohdi gestured, and led his little caravan on to the great *suk*, the market-place for caravans.

Leaving his men to unload and park the animals, he swung off through the streets with Khatifa following just behind him like a dutiful desert wife, shrouded to the eyes. His brain was busy with thoughts of that Polish battalion marching out—whither? As he drifted about the streets, he was aware of bugles lilting, of other battalions on the move. The entire Fifth of the Legion, the Italians, French regiments as well.

His way was blocked. An officer, two Arabs in the French service, halting him.

"You're the trader who just arrived? We've been looking for you," said the officer briskly. "You're wanted at headquarters at once."



"Pan Andrei!" A gasp broke from Lébert.

El Mohdi—who was not using this too-well known name—shrugged and looked at the two Arabs.

"As God liveth, who am I to understand the speech of the infidels? What does the man say?"

The Arabs explained. Upon learning that a trader had just arrived, the general wanted to question him personally about the roads and other matters. El Mohdi gave Khatifa a curt order.

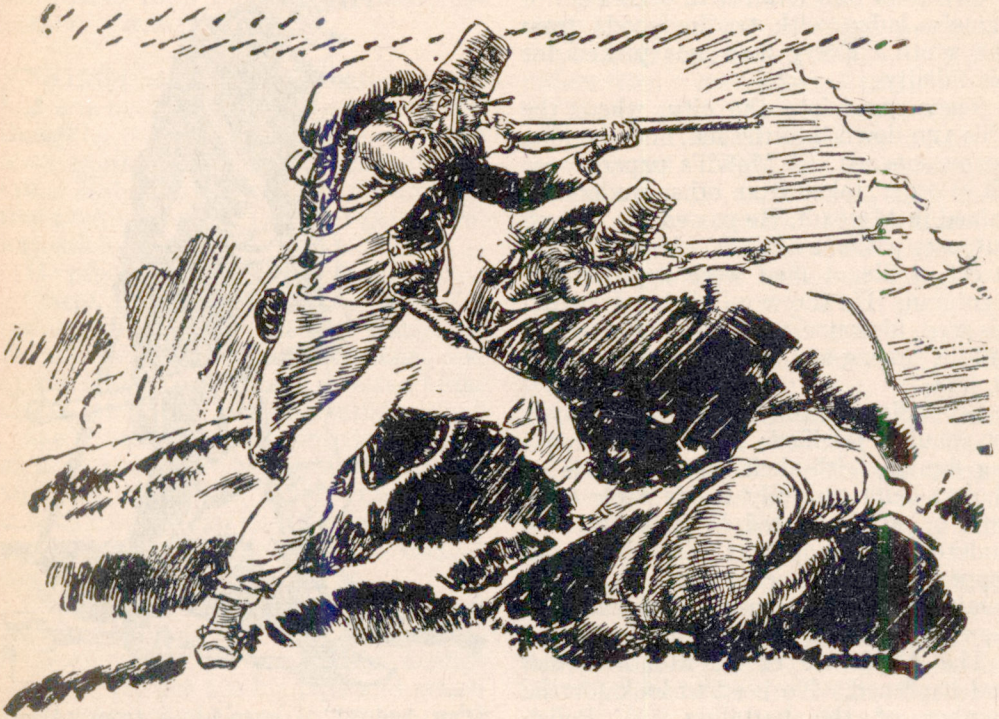
"Go back. Tell the men not to unpack, for we leave ere sunset. There is no market for the goods here; I shall go on to Mostaganem."

He nodded to the two Arabs and fell in behind the officer. They led him through the hot town and on up to the Kasbah—that great castle which the Spaniards had built above the city, when they sojourned here. Impassive, veiling his knowledge of French speech and ways, El Mohdi strode along silent; but his gray eyes probed everywhere.

Something was up—something big. Troops in movement, aides dashing about, officers in campaign kit. He was conducted past the sentinels and on into the pleasant old courtyard, where fountains and orange-trees lightened the heat of early June.

The Arab horsemen broke and rode off. Another charge  
—to bring up against bayonets, this time.

*Ed. 1907*



At one side a gay group of officers and ladies were talking. He was led to the far end, where General Trezel and a number of his staff were conferring about a table loaded with maps. They looked up, eying him sharply. He remained impassive, eyes downcast. He could have named each one of those officers. Trezel was an old army man, a stubborn fighter, but not at all overequipped with brains.

ONE of the officers who spoke fluent Arabic, took him in charge.

"You came here from the south, from Mascara?"

"From the Sahara, effendi. I passed through Mascara."

"By which road?" said the officer in French. El Mohdi's face remained blank. There was a smile; naturally, the fellow spoke no French and had not fallen into the trap. The officer repeated his query in Arabic. El Mohdi replied at once, described the condition of the roads, and made frank answers to all questions. Then a shock reached him as General Trezel, turning to speak with an aide, gave brusque directions.

"The artillery are ready? Then give the orders. Remember, we're supposed to be marching for Arzew. I'll follow

with the cavalry. We'll march at dawn and catch up with the army by noon."

El Mohdi with difficulty paid attention to the interpreter. Marching for Arzew, yes! Then a swift face-about, and down the other leg of the triangle for Mascara. It was a forced march, an attack on Abdel Kadir—

"You came through Mascara," the officer was demanding. "How many men has Abdel Kadir there? Are they in the city or camped outside?"

"Outside, effendi." El Mohdi, by this question, knew he had hit upon the truth. He lied, swiftly and promptly, underestimating the force of Abdel Kadir by a third. "He has less than eight thousand men in all."

"Their condition?"

"It is not good, effendi. Many of his chiefs are leaving him. He has very little powder. The Berber troops are going home to get in their spring crops."

When this was translated, the general emitted a snort.

"So? With twenty-five hundred men, I'll guarantee to wipe the rascal out. Ask him about that fellow El Mohdi—Wait! Here come the ladies. Hold him."

El Mohdi stood aside, as the ladies and officers bore down on the general.



Fine ladies, one or two of them just from France; and one among them not from France at all.

Upon the impassive El Mohdi, dark bearded features shielded under his white wool hood, fell a touch of wizardry; he wandered in the aisles of dream, standing as though paralyzed. So indeed he was. Her face, her face! And her voice, as she stood in talk with the general. Not six feet from him! Yes, she was real. And now Trezel was bowing to her, speaking to her, solicitude in his manner.

"Madame la Princesse, I am deeply grieved that we can give no news of your husband. The report has just reached me—"

"You mean, he is dead?" asked the Princess calmly.

"We do not know. He escaped from prison and disappeared. He must, of course, be dead. He was known only as Andrei, or Pan Andrei. I regret to say that it is believed he was affected by the sun—"

By the sun! El Mohdi strangled a wild and insane impulse to break out laughing. His wife, his princess, coming here in search of him! And they had told him she was dead. Those Russians who wounded and captured him and exiled him!

"Perhaps," she was saying quietly, "if the word is published that the Czar has granted him a pardon and restored his estates, it would reach him. I have, as you know, seen the King in Paris, and have obtained his discharge from the French service. But I must remain here until I'm certain whether he's dead or alive."

General Trezel bowed again, murmuring compliments on the devotion of this splendid wife. But El Mohdi could not restrain the smile that curved his grim lips—a smile sardonic, thin, disillusioned. She had let out the secret with those words. Not for love of him, as the French thought; no, he knew better! This cold, proud woman had no heart, no

love: merely ambition. If he was dead, the estates were hers. If he was not dead—

"I shall exert every effort, Your Highness," said the general earnestly. "I am leaving at dawn to crush this rebel Abdel Kadir, push our conquest to the south, and so master the trade and caravan routes. However, I shall this evening issue orders, and the moment any news of your husband the prince is obtained, it shall be imparted to you. Meantime, you will allow me the honor of placing suitable quarters at your disposal—"

She was very lovely, very cool, very calm. The general himself escorted her to the farther doorway. As they passed, her rather haughty glance fell upon the figure of El Mohdi, crossed with his gray-slitted eyes, swept on without recognition.

HE relaxed; a slow, deep breath escaped him. Pardoned by the Czar, his estates restored, his rank of prince—

He laughed a little in his beard, and the dream passed. What of all that? It was gone; it was another life that had ended years ago. Prince Andrei had died, back there; this cold, haughty, cruel wife of his was not seeking him for love, but for knowledge of his fate and her own future. Probably in love with Orloff still, eh? Well, Orloff was welcome to her. Pan Andrei, the Legionnaire, was dead also.

Allah! What a contrast between that woman, a princess, and this Turkish girl who loved him, rode with him, was going to bear him a child within a few more months! Here was life—warfare, hard riding, privation, and love that sweetened it all. Here was the proper destiny for a man; not back there on the estates of a prince.

The general returned. The interpreter officer beckoned El Mohdi.

"Tell us about the leader of the rebels called El Mohdi. Where is he?"

"With Abdel Kadir, effendi."

"How many men are with him?"

"He has three squadrons of cavalry, effendi. They do not like him; they nearly killed him two weeks ago. I saw him as I came through the camp. He was badly hurt."

"Who is he? Where from?"

An officer had come into the courtyard, had saluted, was waiting. El Mohdi knew him, started slightly. Captain Lébert, of his own old company, the First of the Polish battalion. He responded almost mechanically to the questions.

"They say, effendi, that this man is a Turk from Egypt who has trained these squadrons with hard discipline. That is why they do not like him."

"Ah, at last we're learning something about the fellow!" exclaimed the general. "So, Captain Lébert! My messenger caught you!"

Lébert saluted. "Just beyond the gates, my general. I returned at once."

"A curious thing, Lébert. About this fellow they called Pan Andrei, of your company. You remember him?"

"Very well, my general."

"His wife is here. Madame la Princesse—the man was a prince in Russia, you comprehend? I thought you might have picked up something about him."

"I heard of her arrival just before we marched, this afternoon." Captain Lébert glanced at El Mohdi, and the glance was like a swordstroke. "May I inquire, my general, whether the man Andrei is still wanted as a deserter?"

"No. His Majesty has been pleased to grant his discharge and cancel his record," said the general. He turned to the interpreter. "By the way! Ask this fellow if he heard anything of such a man among the rebels. Describe Andrei."

El Mohdi listened impassively to a good deal of talk about Pan Andrei, and shook his head.

"There is no such man in the rebel camp, or I would have seen him."

CAPTAIN LEBERT spoke. "Who is this Arab?"

"A trader who just came up from the south. We've gained quite a bit of information about him," said the general. "That's all, I think; let the fellow go."

"With your permission," said Lébert, "I'd like to ask him a few questions about the water-holes beyond Arzew, my general. I can speak quite a bit of Arabic, and if I accompany him, might worm some information from him. He speaks no French?"

"Not a word." Trezel laughed. "Go ahead, by all means, and luck to you! Now, Colonel Oudinot, you'll command the cavalry when we leave—"

El Mohdi and Captain Lébert walked out together, passed the Kasbah gate and the sentinels in silence, and looked down over the deep, narrow valley stretching below the walls and around the town.

"Well, *mon ami*?" said Lébert quietly. "It appears there's nothing against you, and a princely title waiting for you back in Russia. It wasn't my place to say

anything in the face of your private desires—"

El Mohdi laughed harshly. "No, damn you! I will say for you that you're a gentleman, Lébert. Until today I've hated you bitterly. You rode the devil out of me when I was under you. However—let it pass. I thank you for keeping silence."

Lébert inspected him keenly.

"I'm not so sure I did right; but let it pass. I rode you, did I? Yes, and there was a devil in you. That damned touch of sun! It turned you from the finest soldier in the outfit, to the worst damned botch of a man I ever saw."

"Perhaps," said El Mohdi. "At all events, I'm happy."

"Your destiny is your own to choose," said Lébert, and turned away.

**E**L MOHDI slapped his way down to the town and the market place, his slippers raising the dust; he hitched the *jellab* over his shoulders as he walked, in true Arab style. So Madame la Princesse waited for news of him, eh?

Let her wait and be hanged, then; she'd get none! Pan Andrei was dead, but she'd get no confirmation of his death. Better still, in another fortnight he might send her a letter as visible proof that he was alive. How that would burn her cold treacherous heart! Bah—let the woman alone. Let the past go. Let the dead bury their dead. He was El Mohdi now; he had everything in the world Pan Andrei lacked. So be satisfied with it! And now to glut his hatred of the French, follow his new destiny behind Abdel Kadir, sweep them out of Algeria!

It was close to sunset when he came to where Khatifa and his men waited. Good! The animals still loaded, waiting; no one missing. An eager light in his eyes, he joined her, beckoned the chief of his men, and spoke rapidly.

"We must leave at once. I've learned everything. Trezel marches against the chief—he has only twenty-five hundred in all. Get off! Once outside town, abandon the camels, take the horses and push on at all speed."

They pushed out into the sunset, out into the starry spaces, out past the olive groves and the marching files of the French battalions. . . . Presently, safely away, the camels were abandoned to the care of one man, and El Mohdi pushed the horses on, with Khatifa spurring at his side, and a wild eagerness flaming in his heart.

They thundered on and on, pushing the foam-lathered horses past the salt lakes, on toward Mascara. Almost a triangle, those three towns—Oran and Arzew on the seacoast, Mascara south in the Berber country. Behind, the stroke was being launched; but now it would fail. . . .

A patrol of Arab cavalry in the dawn. A quick exchange of horses. El Mohdi and Khatifa spurred on for Mascara.

There he poured out his tidings to Abdel Kadir and Murad Bey and the other chiefs. His words set a spark to them all.

"Twenty-five hundred men, no more. Meet them at tomorrow's dawn, destroy them! Oran is left defenseless. Take the city. Turn and sweep for Algiers—and destiny is yours!"

"If Allah wills," said Abdel Kadir piously; but he was in a glow. "Rest for an hour, then lead your squadrons. Ride north to the forest called the Forest of Mulai Ismail; occupy it. I follow with the cavalry. Murad Bey, march with the infantry as soon as the sun goes down a little—"

An hour's rest. Khatifa lay faint and weak, exhausted by that pounding ride. El Mohdi looked into the eyes of Murad Bey.

"She must remain here; in her condition—well, I can take no chances. You agree? Good. She has done too much already. During these next months, she must rest, she must think only of the child."

One last embrace they exchanged; then he was gone. . . .

The squadrons, his squadrons, swept out and spurred hard. Behind, more slowly, came the infantry, slogging along beneath the June sun. Night found El Mohdi posted along the fringe of trees, his scouts out. Toward morning two of them rode in. The French were coming, were making short halts, forced marches.

The infantry came in and dropped exhausted. Abdel Kadir, with his cloud of Arab horsemen, arrived. With the dawn, El Mohdi rode out, led his squadrons along the road, cut up a few advance posts of French cavalry, and drew back.

**S**UNRISE found the French army at hand. Trezel did not hesitate, but sent Oudinot with the cavalry ahead to clear the road. The main force of Abdel Kadir remained out of sight. El Mohdi, his

white burnous thrown aside, his saber flashing, held his men in leash until the dragoons and hussars were in among the trees—then he launched them.

"Allah!"

WITH the yell, they struck. Carbines banged out; the French cavalry, unable to maneuver in this forest, wheeled vainly. The first squadron struck that glittering mass. The second hit it from the flank. El Mohdi led his third squadron in at the gallop. "Allah!" they cried. And the French lines crumpled.

Colonel Oudinot vainly strove to rally his men. El Mohdi sought him out, found him, crossed sabers with him; Oudinot died there. That flashing saber brought death through the French ranks. The crumpled ranks took to flight.

Artillery opened. Trezel flung forward his brigades, covered the retreat of his cavalry, and under a hail of grape the charge of the Arabs ceased. Murad Bey brought his infantry forward, but already Trezel bugles were blowing the retreat. The French had carried no provisions on this forced march, had anticipated no pitched battle; and suddenly finding themselves so vastly outnumbered, they partook of discretion.

El Mohdi sought out the green banner of Abdel Kadir, flung himself from his steaming horse, spoke swiftly to the chief. Bare-headed, splashed with blood, he was a figure of savage energy.

"They must retreat through the defiles at Macta—send me there! I can ride around them, reach the defiles first.

Every horse will carry double. You follow; I'll guarantee to hold them until you come up and strike."

"Allah aid you! Go!"

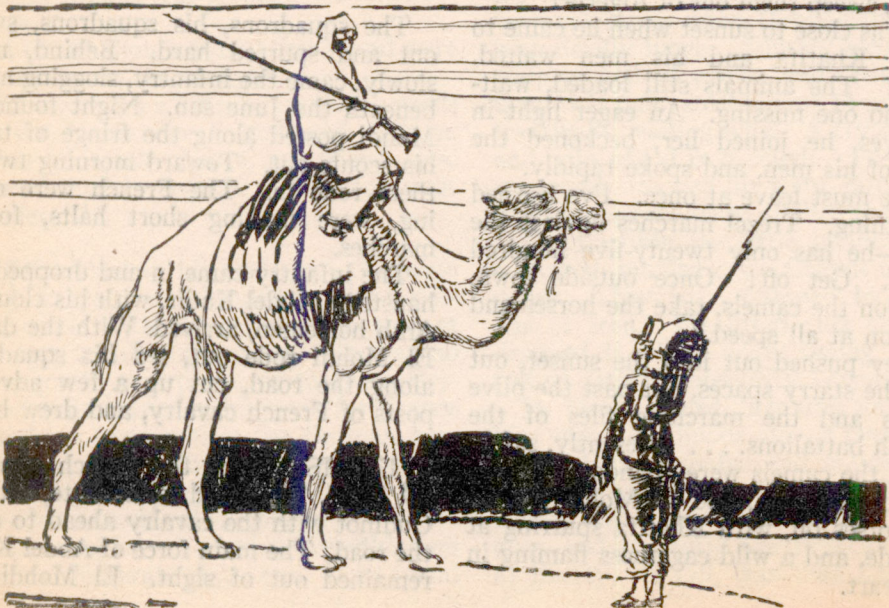
There was fast mounting and riding. Those Arabs knew every foot of ground. The horses carrying double, El Mohdi skirted the retreating French column, encumbered by their train of baggage and their wounded in wagons. He came ere noon to the higher ground, where the road wound through deep defiles toward Arzew, and took post. If the French were silly enough to follow the road, instead of taking some other way, they were lost.

His scouts brought in the word; they were coming. He waited grimly, his men disposed among the trees, along the heights. The heat was terrific, but he paid no heed. Giddiness seized him. Some one would have given him a burnous, to shield him from the sun, but he refused curtly. The columns were coming—walking straight into the trap!

They came; and the fierce hatred of El Mohdi was assuaged in blood as powder-smoke ringed the upper ground. A company of infantry came charging up to clear the way, and fell back shattered.

Then hell broke loose in those defiles. Abdel Kadir and his horsemen came up, burst upon the rear ranks, smashed them, captured the wagons, massacred the wounded.

The unhappy column reeled back from those defiles of death. The artillery at last came into action. The Arab horse-



men, unable to stand against the guns, broke and rode off. Another charge and another—to bring up against bayonets this time. The companies of the Legion, the Italians and the Poles, stood like living walls to keep Arab sabers from the disorganized mass that had been an army. They, and the guns, broke those charges.

The Arabs drew off and waited. Night would finish it surely and certainly. The disorganized huddle of troops dared not attempt the defiles again, and did not know any other way to go. The guides had fled. Only those two battalions of the Legion stood like a wall, waiting. Abdel Kadir drew back his men, until night should come down.

EL MOHDI sat up and blinked at the afternoon sunlight. He had failed there on the hillside. Slowly he came to his feet and examined himself. No hurt; but his head ached intolerably, he was dizzy and weak. Ah! The sun, of course. He passed a hand over his head, shaven in Arab fashion except for one long lock of hair.

He was alone; his men had retired. He had not been missed, or else he was thought dead. No matter.

Below was the French camp. Order was coming out of chaos. The lines nearest him were forming a bivouac, throwing up an earthwork. He stared incredulously; the fools were stopping here! The minute night came, the Arabs would be upon them. The artillery would be useless then—

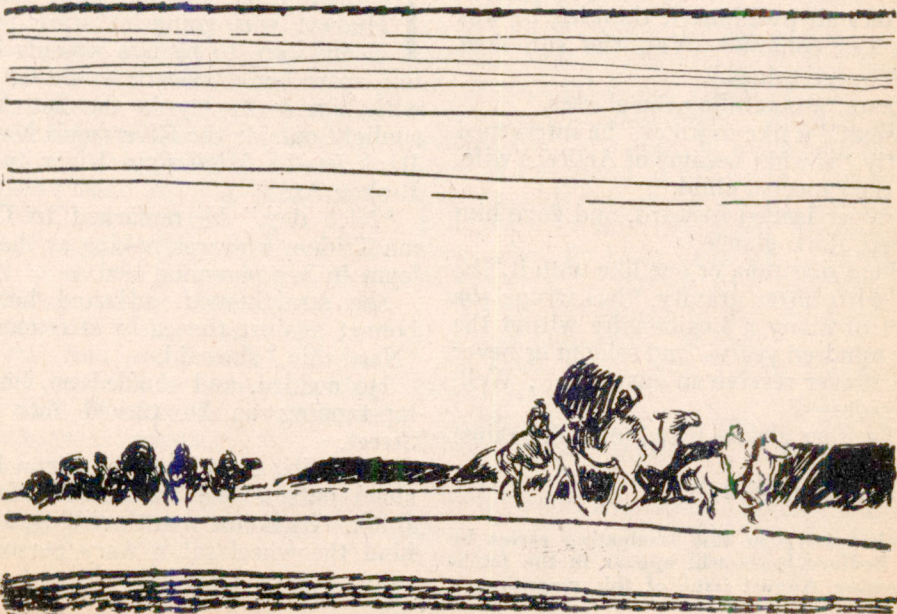
A sound of singing pierced into his brain, and he stood as though frozen. Polish voices, Polish songs—the songs he himself had sung with these veterans, during the pitiful and hopeless revolution, years ago! Those bitter days of struggling, of fighting through utter cruel disaster, all swept back on him in an instant.

He was Pan Andrei again, of a sudden—the impulsive, sentimental, illogical Polish spirit in him leaped to life. The army of France was nothing; the new life and future he had carved out, was forgotten. There before him were faces of men he knew, Poles with whom he had fought far in the north, comrades who had sought liberty in vain beside him. Brothers in exile. They mattered; nothing else did.

Scarcely aware of what he did, he found himself staggering toward those lines. The Polish voices, the simple old folk-songs he had learned as a child, were ringing through his brain. Those country-men of his must not die. . . .

The voices fell into silence at sight of this figure reeling toward the lines, this blood-splashed Arab. An officer stepped out with curt demand. Pan Andrei halted, and a queer, hoarse laugh broke from him.

"*Mon capitaine!*" He stiffened in salute. "Pan Andrei—reporting. Two miles to the east, *mon capitaine*, is a wide defile through the hills. The enemy have not occupied it. The cavalry may advance and seize it. You can march at once and reach it before sunset—"



"Pan Andrei!"

A gasp of recognition broke from Captain Lébert; a joyous eager shout went rippling up from the men of the Polish battalion.

But Pan Andrei heard it not.

He heard nothing at all, for he had quietly crumpled up and fallen on his face. And what was left of the army, went on to safety. . . .

There ended the story as Falkenheim read it off to us. With a gesture of finality, he shoved away the bundle of papers, and reached for his glass, and drank. We sat staring at him, wrapped up in the scenes he had painted with the brilliant sunlit colors of Algeria, until Porson spoke up.

"Yes, I've heard something about that disaster. The French don't play it up, of course—"

"Hey! Look here!" Casey, who had been scratching his red thatch and frowning, suddenly exploded in words. "How could that guy Andrei put all that stuff into his diary, will you tell me? About how he died, and all?"

Falkenheim regarded him with a quiet, shrewd smile.

"Perhaps I put that in myself, *mon ami*. At all events, that's what happened. A touch of sun—it does queer things."

"Right you are," Kramer assented, with a curt nod. "A damned human touch to it, there. Remember how that Swiss chap deserted from the Second Regiment in the Saharan campaign, got sunstroke, and came marching into headquarters all by himself, thinking he was with the column? Yes, the sun does some queer things."

Porson was refilling the glasses.

"What I'd like to know," he intervened quietly, "is what became of Andrei's wife, and the expected child."

Kramer leaned forward, and gave him a deep, dark glance.

"That question, or one like unto it," he said with bitter gravity, "has wrung the heart of many a Legionnaire within the past hundred years—and seldom or never does it ever receive an answer. . . . Well, comrades—"

The other glasses lifted to clink against his.

"*Vive la Légion!*"

Another story in this fascinating series by Mr. Bedford-Jones will appear in the forthcoming August issue of this magazine.



## Scarlet

*The sheriff of a Mississippi River county handles a difficult and dangerous case—by the author of "My Corpse Hangs in the Barn."*

IN about three minutes, now, old Silas Hudson was going to start to die. There were to be five wounds in his tall, spare body. Death would catch up with him as he lay in the hot August sunlight outside the Rivermen's National Bank in the Mississippi River town of Broken Ax.

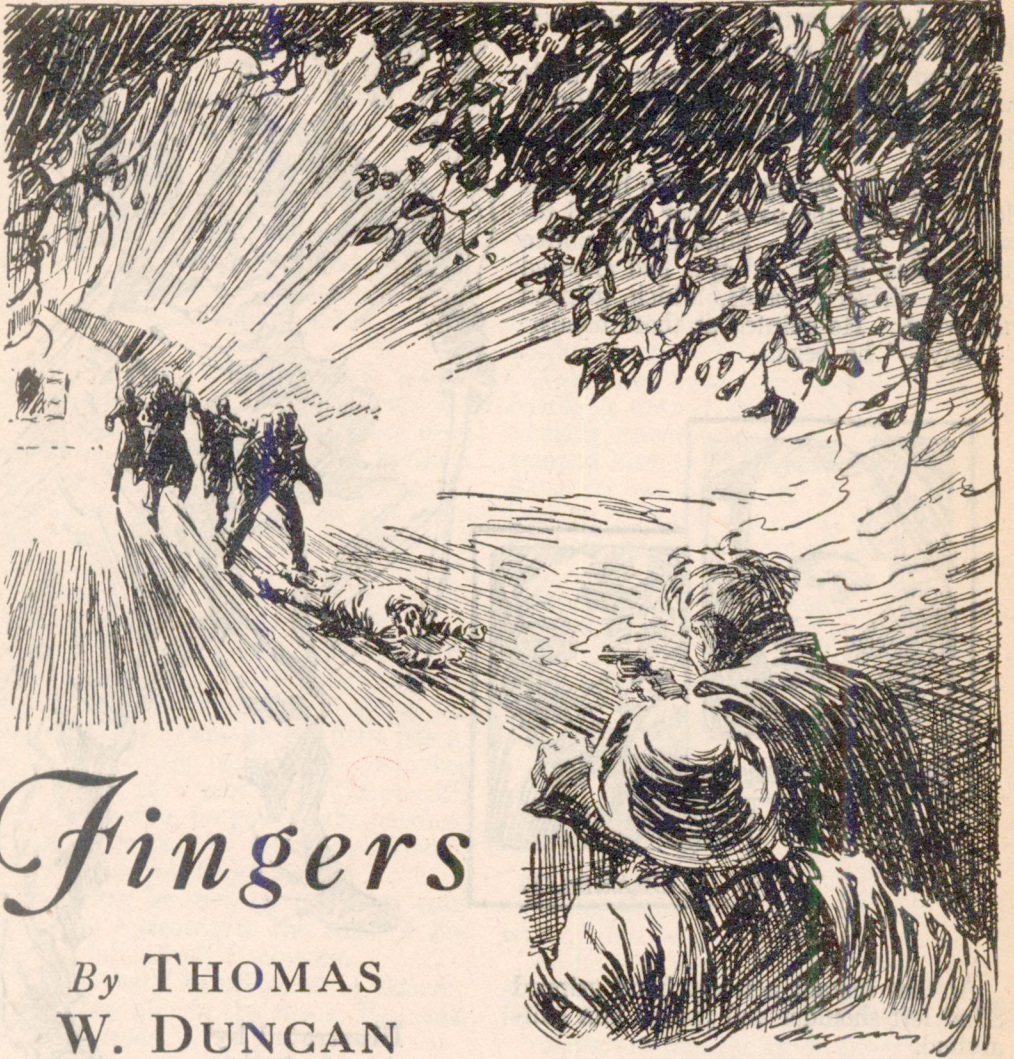
"Nice day," he remarked to Grandma Tridon, who was poking at the loose loam in her perennial bed.

She straightened, adjusted her sunbonnet against the early afternoon sun. "Need rain," she said.

He nodded, and shuffled on, his cane tap-tapping as he turned into Main Street.

A touring-car with a Michigan license stood outside the Rivermen's National Bank. Its motor was throbbing, and behind the wheel sat a wary person who wore a gray cap, horn-rimmed glasses





# Fingers

By THOMAS  
W. DUNCAN

and a narrow mustache. Lounging by the bank door was another person, and beneath his nonchalance he too was wary. The brim of his hat flared low over his forehead; his eyes kept sweeping the street; his hands were thrust in his jacket pockets.

Inside the bank were two more persons—strangers. They were men who made a great deal of money in a very short time. This afternoon, in about five minutes' actual work, they were to acquire forty-seven thousand dollars' worth of negotiable bonds and seventeen thousand dollars in currency.

"Michigan license—I do believe," Silas remarked half-aloud. He decided to have a little visit with these folks from Michigan. Old Silas had been born in Michigan; he had lots of kinfolk back there; it was possible that these men knew some of his relatives.

He angled across Main Street. It was practically deserted; most of the stores had already closed; virtually everybody had gone to the dedication ceremony. A half-mile north, a lean new bridge spanned the river. The governors of two States were there, the mayors of three towns. And Sheriff Jim Laurel of Broken Ax was there with all his deputies—they would be needed to handle the crowd. Old Silas had not gone because he was angry at the bridge. A bridge was pure foolishness—the ferry was good enough.

Old Silas' cane tap-tapped to a halt by the touring-car.

"Well," he cackled, "you're a long way from home."

The driver gave him a swift glance, then turned attention to the bank door.

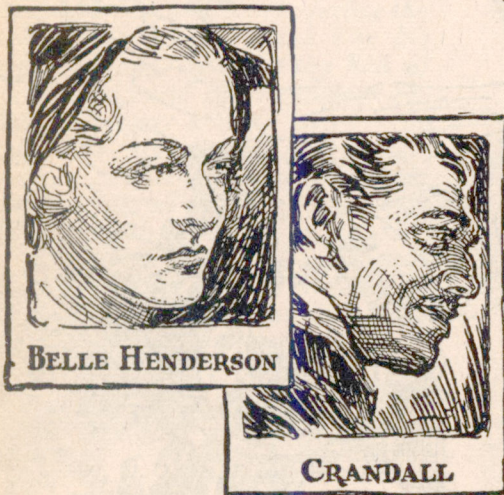
"What part of Michigan you hail from?" queried Silas Hudson.

The driver's mouth twitched nervously, but he made no reply.

"Born and bred in the town of Dellville, myself," Silas continued. "But I got kinfolks scattered over the whole State—"

The slender young man who had been lounging near the bank door started toward the intruder. Silas didn't notice him; Silas' bright old eyes had chanced on the driver's hands, which gripped the wheel. He pointed at those hands.

"Say—" he began.



BELLE HENDERSON

CRANDALL

At that instant a steely hand gripped Silas' left shoulder and jostled him half-around.

Silas glared at the slender young man. "Young feller," he shrilled, "I'll thank ye to keep your hands off me."

"Listen, you old hyena! Pipe down!"

And the slender young man gave Silas a shove.

Silas Hudson possessed a temper. Also, in his day, young men had treated their elders with respect.

"Why, you young upstart!" he cried.

And astonishingly, he swiftly cracked the head of his cane against the head of the young man.

The young man, his eyes blinded by pain, gave an agonized: "*Ow-w-o-o-ou!*" Clapping a hand to his head, he doubled up and sank to the street.

"Well, now, didn't mean to hit you so hard—" Silas began.

But he said no more. The young man whipped out a .38. A shot shattered the still hot air. Silas Hudson's cane clattered to the pavement and his left hand clutched his right forearm. The second



Illustrated by  
Austin Briggs

bullet entered his body a half-inch below his heart; the third ripped his liver; the fourth whirled hotly through his lower bowels; the fifth freakishly shattered his left kneecap.

**B**ELLE HENDERSON, day-operator for the Broken Ax Mutual Telephone Company, was at her switchboard in the exchange above Anderson's furniture-store when the .38 first spattered.

"I ran to the window," she told Sheriff Jim Laurel later. "That young fellow was getting to his feet, shooting into old Silas. . . . After he stopped shooting, he kind of staggered to the car and flopped into the back seat. A couple of men came tearing out of the bank, carrying satchels. Just as they jumped inside the car, it started. . . . It made a fast turn and headed west up into the bluffs on the

Chippewa Center road. I saw Charley Baker come running out of the bank. He stopped for a second by old Silas, and then ran to his roadster, jumped in, and started north to get you. I hustled back to the switchboard. I called Chippewa Center and Harvey Falls and every town between here and Port Fergus. Then I called the police at Port Fergus. I gave a general ring on all our country lines, too, and told what happened.

"Then I ran down to the street. . . . Poor old Silas! He was almost unconscious, I think. All he said was: 'Driver—blood on—fingers.'

"I sure felt sorry for the old fellow."

"JIM," said Charley Baker, assistant cashier of the Rivermen's National Bank, "your speedometer says fifty-three."

"Too slow," grunted Sheriff Jim Laurel, and pressed the gas harder.

Rocketing south toward Broken Ax, the Sheriff's light sedan left the dedication crowd gaping. Within five minutes Laurel's deputies were to marshal that crowd into several posses.



SHERIFF LAUREL

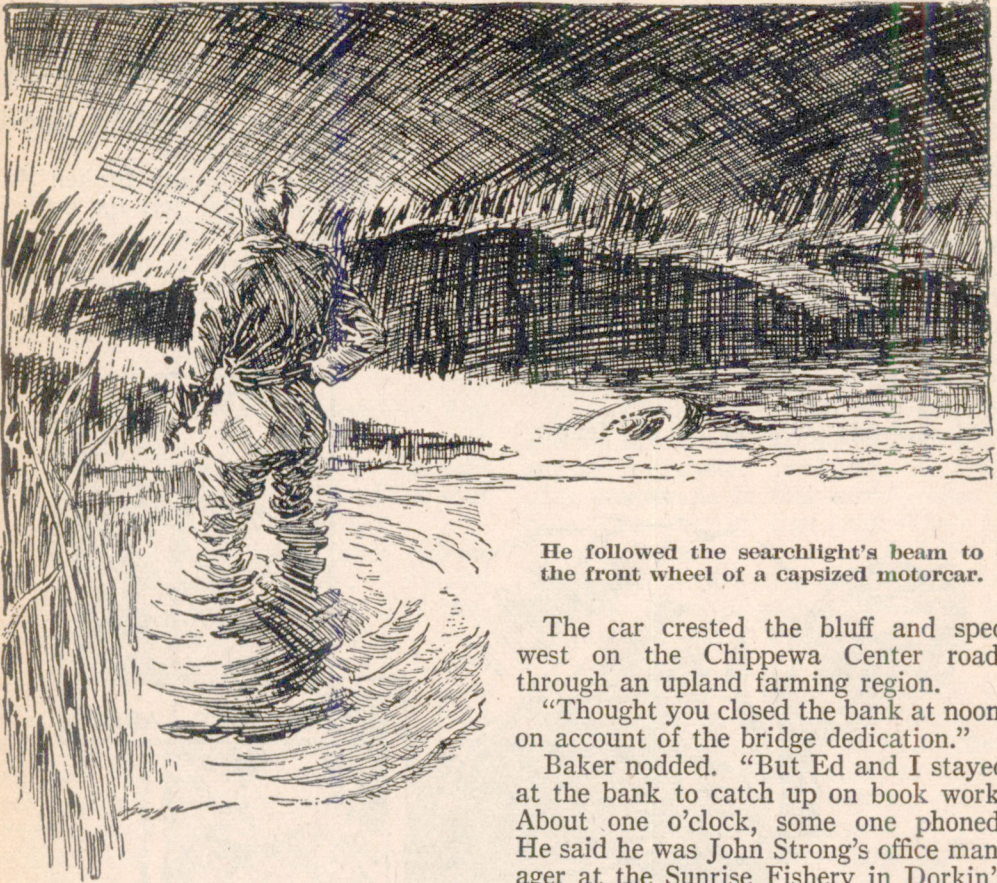


RED WILKINSON



TODD CONNOR

"Why, you young upstart!" Silas cried. . . . "Well, now, didn't mean to hit you so hard—" But he said no more. The young man whipped out a .38.



He followed the searchlight's beam to the front wheel of a capsized motorcar.

Hungrily, the sedan gulped down the turnpike. As outlying houses of towns rushed toward the hood, Sheriff Laurel jabbed a blunt thumb on the horn-button and held it there. Trees of a residential street blurred past; the Sheriff eased up on the gas and gave the wheels a taste of the brake as the car dashed along Main Street.

"There's Silas," Charley Baker said.

Laurel's blue eyes, deep-set beneath the bushy brows of his rugged old face, rested for an instant on the knot of people outside the bank, gathered about Silas Hudson. He thought of the evenings he had spent across a checkerboard from Silas. He wanted to halt the car. Instead he sent it screaming round the corner and up the road that climbed the river bluffs.

His eyes were dry, staring at the on-rushing road, but his generous mouth had tightened.

"How come they wanted to kill Silas?" he muttered.

Charley Baker didn't know. "I just heard shooting outside," he explained. "I was surprised when I saw it was Silas—couldn't hardly believe it!"

The car crested the bluff and sped west on the Chippewa Center road, through an upland farming region.

"Thought you closed the bank at noon, on account of the bridge dedication."

Baker nodded. "But Ed and I stayed at the bank to catch up on book work. About one o'clock, some one phoned. He said he was John Strong's office manager at the Sunrise Fishery in Dorkin's Landing. He said they had a lot of cash they wanted to bank. He asked if we'd open the door for their men at about two o'clock. We agreed, of course. . . . But it wasn't their men. It was these two fellows with guns."

**F**AR down the sunny highway, Laurel saw a team pulling a machine that was mowing roadside grass. He jabbed the accelerator to the floor, then snapped up his foot and shoved it down on the brake. The sedan slowed to a gravel-kicking halt.

The farmer leaped from the mower.

"A car? I sure did see one, Jim," he yelled. "Big touring-car, going like sixty. About ten minutes ago. They turned south at that crossroad—"

Laurel yanked the gear-lever, gunned the motor. The sedan half-skidded round the corner and bumped savagely along the rutted dirt road that dipped sharply and climbed steeply through hilly wooded land.

"Why'd they go this way?" Baker demanded.

"Short-cut to Number 9 to Port Fergus. Instead of goin' to Chippewa Center and south on Number 9, they took this.

Number 9, you remember, angles southeast from Chippewa. This road cuts into Number 9 about twelve miles south of here. . . . They must've known this country—"

The car lunged crazily down a steep slope to a wooden bridge that crossed a gravel creek-bed. It was dry, now, winding off toward the Mississippi.

"Hadn't you ought to phone ahead—to Port Fergus, and—"

Jim Laurel said: "It's attended to. When we passed those people around Silas, I saw Belle Henderson. She waved and nodded her head. Belle's smart. She's worked with me before. She meant she'd phoned all over. And she'll keep phoinin'—any new information she gets."

The sedan rocked furiously up a hill.

"Will she phone across the river too?" Baker asked. "To Wisconsin and Illinois?"

"Probably. But they're on this side the river. We know they didn't cross the new bridge, because that was being dedicated. And we know they're headin' south. First bridge south of Broken Ax is at Port Fergus. That's likely what they're makin' for. That'd take 'em east into Illinois, and Chicago—"

Sheriff Laurel slammed on the brakes. Then he backed up and halted. Just inside a fence, a farm woman was laboring over potato plants.

"Mis' Perkins," Laurel called, "did you see a car?"

She came to the fence. "Car?" she called, then shook her head. "Yours is the first car that's been by here all afternoon."

"What!" Laurel shut off the motor, to hear better.

Placidly the woman's voice floated through the hot country stillness.

"Just what I said, Jim. I aint seen any car but yours."

**L**AUREL had known this woman for thirty years. She was as honest as she was dependable.

"How long you been workin' with those plants?" he asked.

"Since one o'clock."

"Near the fence?"

"Right along these two rows."

"Aint you seen—you're sure?"

"Positive, Jim. Why?"

Sheriff Jim Laurel didn't answer. He jabbed the starter, whipped round the sedan, tore northward again. Not a farmhouse stood between the Perkins place and the corner.

Whizzing round the corner, he halted again by the mowing-machine. And again the farmer who owned the team, Bill Whittlesby, trotted up to the car. Bill was an honest man also.

"Listen, Bill," the Sheriff said earnestly. "You're certain that that car turned south?"

"As certain as I am that my taxes aint paid yet."

"What'd it look like?"

"Big touring-car. Foreign license—Michigan, I think. They streaked by awful fast, but I think there was four men in it. And they turned south—I'd swear to that."

"Thanks," Laurel said. And after the car started eastward, toward Broken Ax, he told Charley Baker: "Those hoodlums must think I'm a hick sheriff—afraid to shoot." He touched his .45. "The crust of them—stayin' in these hills. I'll round up the boys. . . . And I swear it, Charley, if Silas is dead—I'll have 'em in jail before Silas is buried."

Upon reaching Broken Ax, Laurel learned that Silas Hudson had died at nine minutes after two.

**D**URING the rest of the afternoon, things happened. Looking back on those fruitless hours, Laurel had the feeling of having dreamed a mad nightmare of frustration—barking orders, organizing grim men, telephoning.

Networks of wires carried his voice to Chippewa Center and a dozen more county seats, to Port Fergus, to peace officers in Wisconsin and Illinois, to every agency of law enforcement within seventy miles. Four men wanted for murder and bank-robbery: four men in a touring-car, Michigan plates, license number unknown. Short-wave radios took up the cry; the information snaked out of teletype machines; all over the Midwest touring-cars that bore a Michigan license were suspect—uselessly suspect.

Under five deputies, three-score men armed with everything from revolvers to .22 rifles and pitchforks, raked the country west and south of Broken Ax. Their search was thorough and intensive. Four times, between telephone calls, Sheriff Jim Laurel joined them, discussed with them how impossible it was that the bandits should have disappeared into thin air. But the impossible had occurred.

The area of search was bounded on the north by the highway to Chippewa Center, on the south by an imaginary line

running east and west through the Perkins potato-patch. Bill Whittlesby had seen the car turn south off the Chippewa turnpike; Mrs. Perkins was absolutely certain it had never passed her farm. And there was no cross-road between her farm and the highway where Bill Whittlesby had been mowing.

On the east, the area was bounded by the Mississippi River, on the west by a line of farmhouses, situated fairly close together that stood along a north-and-south highway a mile west of the road on which the Perkins farm fronted. Most of the farm wives had heard Belle Henderson's general ring; none had seen a touring-car bearing strange men.

The posse covered virtually every square rod of land; they scared a flock of foolish sheep half out of their wits; one posse member was chased by a bull, and two others had an unpleasant encounter with a skunk. . . . But no bank bandits did they discover.

By nightfall, the posse members returned disgustedly to late suppers. But Jim Laurel ate no supper. He wasn't hungry. He sat for a long time in the shadows that deepened in his courthouse office—seeing, perhaps, at the table by the window, the ghost of old Silas Hudson, cackling that he could outwit Jim Laurel at checkers any day of the week and twice on Sundays.

Finally Laurel creaked to his feet, drew a long breath, shuffled out of the office, across the courthouse lawn, and along Main Street. The town was talking about the robbery, the murder. . . . As Laurel passed Stenstrom's pool-hall, he caught snatches of a conversation by three men standing just inside the door, that made his body stiffen, then sag:

"Laurel, that old fool—" one was saying. "He should have left at least a couple of deputies in town, instead of havin' 'em all at the dedication."

"Yeah," another chimed in. "Laurel used to be the best sheriff this side of Timbuctoo, but he's sure slippin'. . . . Myself, I think that was a wild-goose chase with the posse. Bet them bandits was never within two miles of them woods."

"Well," said the third, "it's this way: we need a younger man for sheriff. At the elections this fall—"

**I**T was dark on the sidewalk; Laurel moved on. He felt tired—maybe he really was getting old. At a cross-street he turned instinctively east and wan-

dered toward the broad dark river that he had known and loved since boyhood. He brow was furrowed.

He pondered the strangeness of the whole affair: the bandits' choosing to rob the bank at the exact time of the dedication. That might have been accidental, but their telephoning to make sure they could get into the bank wasn't accidental. It had been they who telephoned—John Strong of the Sunrise Fishery had cleared that up.

Laurel seated himself on a packing-box on a dark wharf. He remembered Belle Henderson's report of Silas Hudson's last words: "*Driver—blood on—fingers—*" Blood—what message had old Silas been striving to convey?

Laurel stood up. Staring into the dark, he had the sense that something was not right, that something was missing. His pulse began to throb faster. He stepped to the edge of the wharf. . . . He caught his breath. Something was indeed missing. He clenched his fists, whirled, strode back toward his office. His step was twenty years younger. He hardly dared hope—but he was hoping.

**L**AUREL slammed the office door, and plopping heavily into his swivel-chair, snapped up the telephone.

"Get me Hank Byers," he ordered Central.

"He isn't home."

"What?"

"Didn't you know?" Central went on. "He and Mrs. Byers left for St. Paul yesterday to visit his brother. Hank didn't want to be here when the bridge was dedicated."

"Get him for me in St. Paul, then!"

Waiting, Laurel paced back and forth on his worn office rug. For twenty-five years Hank Byers had operated the small ferry-barge between Broken Ax and the town of Yellow Lily on the other side of the river. Hank, naturally, had bitterly opposed the new bridge—it was sure to ruin his business. His ferry barge, the *Martha*, had made its last voyage between the two towns at noon yesterday.

The telephone jangled.

"Listen, Hank," Laurel half-yelled into the transmitter, "where did you leave the *Martha*?"

"Leave her? Left her at the dock. Where'd you think I left her—in my parlor?"

"At the dock in Yellow Lily—or Broken Ax?"

"Broken Ax."

"You didn't sell her?"

"I'd just as soon sell my wife," Hank snapped.

"You didn't rent her out—or give permission to anyone to operate her?"

"Of course I didn't. Why?"

"She isn't at the dock now."

"You mean she's been stole?" Hank yelped.

"She isn't at the dock."

"You get right on that," Hank commanded. "You find whoever took her, and—"

"I'm going to," Laurel assured him, and hung up.

He stood for a moment in thought, then lifted the telephone again and called Todd Connor, one of his most dependable deputies.

"Can you work all night?" he asked.

"Sure can."

"All right, Todd—get this: Come to the office and get in touch with Michigan State police headquarters. Get a list and description of all cars reported stolen there within the last week. Get all the dope they've got—"

"Be right there."

"And another thing: I'll be out of the office. You take charge. Call up Bob Ryan and Sam Minear. Tell them to find Red Wilkinson—if they can—and bring him in."

"Wilkinson! Say—you think he might have had something to do with that bank job?"

"Don't know," Laurel admitted, "but I'd like to ask him a few questions. I didn't see him at the dedication, did you?"

"No—and come to think of it, I aint seen him for a couple of days."

"Stick around the office," Laurel added. "I'm going out. I might not be back till kind of late."

"Are you—on something?"

"It looks that way."

"Say, Jim," Todd Connor urged, "can't I come along?"

"You can't," Laurel snapped. "I'm going to handle this myself."

Replacing the telephone, he brought out his big revolver and checked over its action. He was going to show this town that Jim Laurel still possessed the old ginger, that he was still the best sheriff this side of Timbuctoo.

THE night was black, moonless. Laurel's sedan climbed the bluff road to Chippewa Center. He drove moderately, his hands and feet operating the car au-

tomatically, his mind seething with all the puzzles of the case. Why had they killed Silas? Because he interfered, because he cracked one bandit with his cane? Or was it because he had seen them too clearly, would be able to identify them too well?

Still, they hadn't especially tried to conceal their identity. They had not worn masks.

And what had Silas meant—the driver's fingers were bloody?

Laurel sighed, shook his head as if to clear his brain, and turned the sedan south at the corner where Bill Whittlesby had seen the fleeing car turn. He drove slowly along the narrow, hilly road; and when he arrived at the wooden bridge that crossed the dry creek-bed, he parked at the side of the road and got out.

GRIPPING a flashlight, he strode to the bridge, crossed it. The woods on either side of the road were clamorous with the chirps of crickets and tree-toads. The posse had combed this territory, had found nothing. . . . Laurel snapped on the flashlight and walked to the east side of the road.

He saw a gate—a gate into grazing timberland that was wide enough to admit a farm wagon, or a car. It had no lock. He opened it.

Inside, his flashlight played over the ground, searching for tire-tracks; but in this dry August the earth received no more imprints than a concrete highway. True, there were ruts—this was a woodland trail that farm wagons had used for years. Laurel followed it. It wound along the side of a hill, then dipped and crossed the creek-bed. Even in wet weather this little stream did not contain enough water to prevent fording.

Thumbing his obdurate jaw, Laurel retraced his steps, left the gate wide open, and started his car. The sedan rocked and tilted along the wretched trail, then nosed down to ford the creek-bed. But instead of fording it, Laurel jerked the steering-wheel and guided the car eastward along the dry course of the stream. It provided an excellent roadway—as good as a gravel turnpike. Once he stopped the car and got out. Behind it, he snapped on the flashlight. The car had made no tracks. The creek-bed was composed of arid chunks of gravel ranging in size up to a goose-egg.

Laurel drove on. At last the stream-bed widened and ended. The sedan's headlights fanned out over a great mass

of flowing water—over the Mississippi River. Laurel snapped them off and with his flashlight poked round in front of the car.

He went to the very edge of the river where the sand was damp. He saw no tire-marks, but he did discern two long impressions that ran parallel in the sand. They might have been made by heavy planks. He knelt. The running water had obliterated any marks which might have been made on the sand beneath its surface; but just at the edge of the water he saw an impression that was as clear to him as words printed in a book. It was the impression made by the blunt snout of a barge—a ferry-barge.

The posse had overlooked that, of course. The posse had been keyed up, hunting for living targets, not for dubious marks in sand.

Whistling softly, Laurel strode back toward his car. Suddenly he stopped. His flashlight burned down on something caught among slough-grass. His fingers plucked it up.

It was nothing much—a narrow tuft of dark hair; and on one side something had coagulated. Laurel moistened his forefinger, touched the substance. It was sticky. He carefully wrapped the tuft of hair in his handkerchief, swung into his car, and drove back to Broken Ax as fast as he could.

He saw light falling on the courthouse lawn from his office windows, but he did not go inside. Instead, he went to his boathouse, started his official launch, and headed downstream.

It was getting late; the channel wind swished dolefully through island trees; the launch's searchlight swept the immensity of flowing water. Laurel knew every cove and inlet and slough of this section of the river; he was as well acquainted with its vagaries as a cab-driver is with a city's back-streets and alleys and blind courts. As he came abreast the place where the dry creek-bed joined the river, he put over the wheel and cruised as near shore as the low stage of water permitted. Then, circling about, he headed east, crossing the river at right angles with the current.

**WHAT** had happened after the robbery was now fairly clear in Jim Laurel's mind. The bandits' get-away had evidently been carefully planned, and into the planning had gone the knowledge of some one who was familiar with the river and the surrounding ter-

rain. They had driven to the dry creek-bed and then to the river, where the ferry-barge had awaited them. The car's wheels, leaving no tracks, had rolled aboard along heavy gangplanks.

Some one had stolen the ferry—some one who knew that Hank Byers had gone to St. Paul, who knew that in the excitement of the dedication the barge would not be missed—who knew that, even if it were missed, Broken Ax would believe Hank had left it across the river in Yellow Lily. And the person who stole the barge was undoubtedly so familiar with Broken Ax that he had given invaluable aid to the planning of the crime. He had known that the dedication would draw practically the whole population of Broken Ax out of town—an ideal condition for the robbery. He had also known that the bank would close for the dedication—hence the telephone call, purportedly from the Sunrise Fishery in Dorkin's Landing, (a hamlet that had no bank), asking Baker to open the Rivermen's National door at two o'clock.

**T**HE searchlight's blade flashed on something that glittered. Jim Laurel's gnarled hand manipulated the light, focused it. The launch putted toward the object. Laurel caught his breath.

"I'm a son of a laughing muskrat," he exclaimed aloud. . . .

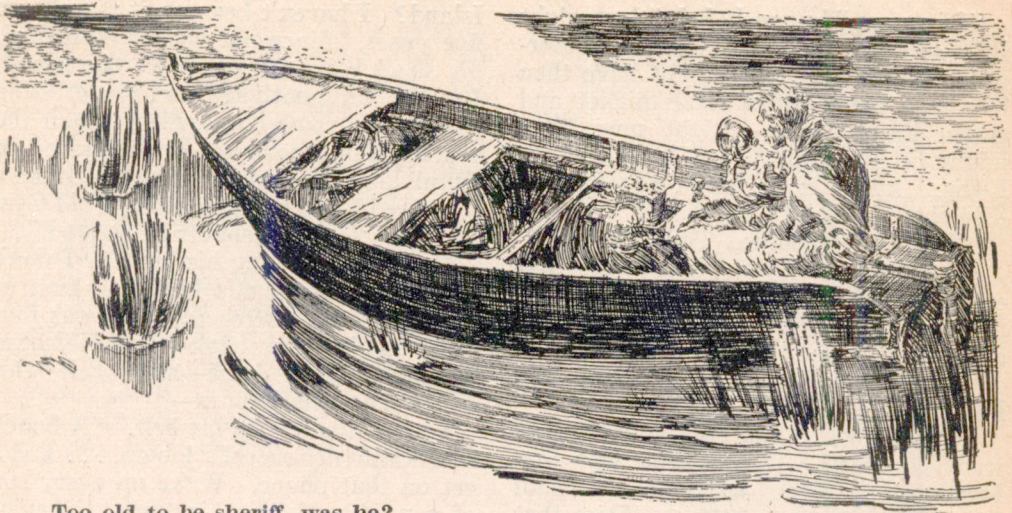
Jim Laurel was going wading. He nosed the launch into a sandbar, shut off the motor, anchored it. Removing his shoes and socks, he rolled up his trousers. After setting the searchlight beam at the proper angle, he armed himself with a screwdriver and splashed through the shallow water.

He followed the searchlight to the right front wheel of a capsized motorcar. Ordinarily, the depth at this spot would have hidden an object as large as a car. But this was a dry August, the low-water season. The current had washed the car against a shelf of sand; and one wheel poking out of the river, its hub-cap flashing, marked its grave.

Feeling his way with bare feet, Laurel waded till the current coolly encircled his chest; then took a deep breath and went under. He repeated the process a score of times. The screwdriver did the trick; when he waded back to his launch, he was carrying the car's front license-plate. A Michigan license.

He was dripping wet as a spaniel, but he didn't notice. He started the motor and gunned the launch downriver without





Too old to be sheriff, was he?

even bothering to put on his shoes. He was excited. A little smile played over his broad mouth. Too old to be sheriff, was he?

There were some things about the case that he did not yet understand, but he understood one fact well enough: He was certain that the bandits were not far away. Their strategy had been keen—but not keen enough. They had boldly fled west and south. Then, along the dry creek-bed, they had doubled back east to the barge. And in midstream, they had dumped their car overboard, thinking it would sink from sight. Probably it had sunk, at first, but the powerful current combined with shallow water had betrayed it.

The channel swung toward the Wisconsin shore. Laurel guided the launch round the north tip of an island and entered a network of sloughs. After traversing the stagnant labyrinth for three hundred yards, his searchlight picked out a craft that had been grounded on the east shore of the island. It was the ferry barge.

He brought the launch alongside the barge, threw the motor into neutral, wound the painter around the barge's davit, and clambered ashore. A minute's examination with his flashlight revealed an impression in the sand beach; it had been made by the bow of a motorboat.

Laurel boarded his launch and started at top speed for Broken Ax.

"FOR cryin' out loud!" exclaimed Deputy Todd Connor. "Did you fall in the river? An' where's your shoes and socks?"

"Shut up, Todd," said Jim Laurel. "We aint got any too much time before

daybreak, an' we've got a lot to do." He turned to Bob Ryan and Sam Minear, who had been dozing in tilted chairs. "Did you boys find Red Wilkinson?"

"No one's seen him for three days, that we can find," Ryan said.

"And he wasn't in his shack down on the bottoms," Minear added.

Laurel grinned. "What's the dope from Michigan?" he asked Connor.

The deputy reached for a sheet of paper on the desk.

"Anything on this one?" Laurel asked, handing him the license-plate.

Connor scanned the number, ran his eyes over the paper. His jaw started to drop, but it was interrupted by a long, low oath.

"Dope! Why, man alive! That's the car they think Crandall's gang stole!"

"Yeah?" said Laurel. "Go on."

"Stole from Detroit five days ago! Well, of all the nerve that Crandall's got! He didn't even change the license plates!"

"Uh-huh," Laurel muttered. "Way I understand it, Crandall's that way. Not much respect for the law. . . . Uh—" He fished a circular from a desk pigeon-hole. Beneath photographs, there was printed a long description of the man, his habits, his red misdeeds.

"But," objected Connor, "it says there that he travels with Bones Harper, Slick Marcosky and—and a dame. Flashy Flossie, they call her. . . . And four men held up—"

"Um-m. . . . So I see," Laurel grunted. He tossed down the circular. "Tell you what I've found, boys," he said.

They listened. He told of the creek-bed, the abandoned ferry.

"Of course," he concluded, "they might have left the ferry and taken a motorboat downriver. They might have then left it in some cottonwood thicket and stolen another car. Right now, they might be high-tailin' for Chicago or St. Louis. But I don't think so—I've an idee they're round here close."

"Where?" demanded Todd Connor.

"I'm comin' to that. They know that every officer in the Midwest is lookin' for them. They want a hide-out. Where's a better hide-out than some island?"

"Might as well look for a needle in a haystack," said Ryan.

"Um-m-m. . . . You boys couldn't find Red Wilkinson. This circular says that Hot-head Crandall served in Rockhill Prison from 1928 to 1933. . . . Does that mean anything to you boys?"

After a second's silence, Sam Minear ventured: "Why—I believe. . . . Yes, by golly! It was from 1929 to 1932 that Red Wilkinson was in Rockhill!"

"Two and two make four," Laurel nodded. "I'll bet my suspenders that Red Wilkinson and Crandall were kind of chummy there—and that they've kept in touch. And when things began gettin' red-hot for Crandall, he came here. He's needed quick cash. He and Wilkinson planned the stick-up. Wilkinson knew the lay of the land. He knew the ferry was going to stop running yesterday. I'll bet my left toenail that Wilkinson stole it—ten years ago he worked on the ferry for Hank Byers, till Hank caught him swiping fares and fired him. Red Wilkinson knows how to run that ferry. He's met them at the mouth of that dry creek. They dumped the car and went on down to Crawfish Slough. Wilkinson had his motorboat waitin' there, and after dark they took it and—"

"AND what?" demanded Ryan. "Then where did they go?"

Laurel thumbed his jaw. "Not south. Because the last that was seen of them, they was going south. . . . I think that after dark tonight they had the crust to cruise right past Broken Ax, going upriver. And I'll bet my Sunday trousers—no, I'll bet my job as sheriff—that they're on Diamond Island!"

"But that—that's only a mile north!" Connor exclaimed.

Jim Laurel nodded. "That's it—north. Northeast. And they went—southwest. See? They figure that we wouldn't dream of looking for 'em northeast. And how often does anyone go to Diamond

Island? I haven't been on it myself for five years. Since old Oyster Tim died, his shack's stood vacant on the island. But about a month ago, as I was cruising past, I saw some one sculling round the south end of the island—and it looked an awful lot like Red Wilkinson. It'd be just like him to move in and use old Oyster Tim's shack whenever he wanted."

Ryan was shaking his head. "I don't know, Jim, it sounds kind of—kind of screwy, to me. After all, there was four men robbing the bank—and Hot-head Crandall has a dame—and—well—this is just a hunch of yours—"

Laurel hitched up his belt. "A hunch I'm bettin' my sheriff's job on. . . . Todd, get on that phone. Wake up every son of a mud-turtle in this town. They've been sore—yappin' that they didn't see some action this afternoon. Tell 'em to be at the municipal dock in forty-five minutes. They're going to see some action tonight!"

**I**N the small dark hours of morning, before the gray little men of daybreak had started to paint the eastern sky, three boats left the municipal wharf at Broken Ax, and as quietly as nervous motors would permit, headed upstream.

The boats showed no lights, and so crowded were they that their gunwales sagged. Their passengers, some of whom wore nightshirts hastily stuffed into the tops of trousers, were grimly silent.

The flotilla proceeded under explicit instructions. The *Sally*, piloted by Felix Johnson, gave the island a wide berth, and then landed her men at the north tip. The *Mary Ann* glided into the slough that bounded the island on the east, landing her gun-clutching cargo where the island widened out to take a diamond shape. Jim Laurel's official launch came to a halt at the south point. The men of each crew slipped away into the shadows—silently, purposefully.

Oyster Tim's shack stood in a clearing a little south and west of the island's center. Toward this, through scrub cottonwoods and brambles, two men ventured. Todd Connor was carrying a sub-machine-gun, and Jim Laurel lugged a red two-gallon can, and a smaller can that he had pilfered from the department of county engineering.

"If we only had tear-gas!" he muttered. "Those tight-wads on the board of supervisors wouldn't appropriate money for it—thought it was all foolishness."

The bushes thinned.

"Better let me—" Connor began.

Laurel shook his head. "You stay here."

He scowled into the clearing. Only the sharp chirps of night insects cut the silence that engulfed the shack. It was still very dark, but a hint of impending daylight whispered among lofty elms. Laurel creaked his old body into a crouching position and edged forward. Ahead, the darkness was stained by an even blacker mass—the shack.

EVERY two or three yards Laurel paused, listened. Only the insects—If they had a lookout, he would be a dead sheriff before this work was finished. But they probably thought themselves completely safe—catching up lost sleep while the law scoured the highways of a half-dozen States. Perhaps they weren't even here. If this trump card turned out a deuce, he was done for as sheriff.

The wall of the shack loomed a few inches before his nose. Putting down the smaller can, he crept south along the west wall till he came to the little porch. He unscrewed the can's snout. Moving north again, then east along the shack's rear, then south, he poured the gasoline on the lower part of the wall, allowing plenty to flow to the ground.

This done, he took up the other can, and as he retreated to the edge of the clearing, left a trail of powder.

"That's that," he muttered to Connor. "An' if they aint in the shack, I'm sunk . . . Get ready."

Laurel struck a match on his trousers and dropped it to the powder. As the fire leaped in a lean streak toward the shack, he cupped his hands.

"Hi, Hot-head Crandall!" he shouted. "The place is on fire! *Fire!*"

And after a second he added: "The jig's up, Crandall. You might as well come out peaceful. —All right, boys!"

Deafeningly, from all sides of the clearing, there rose a tremendous clamor. Lusty shouts ripped from three-score throats. In contrast to the silence of a moment before, the roar of voices might have been made by a mob of a thousand.

The burning powder touched off the gasoline. Yellow flames leaped high. The shack-door banged open. Five persons tumbled out into the clamor, into the scarlet night.

They were armed. Two carried revolvers, one a shotgun, and the other two swung machine-guns to their shoulders.

"Let 'em have it," Laurel told Connor.

Connor's spray of bullets caught the machine-gunners first. One withered to the ground clutching his stomach, like a blade of dry grass touched by flame. The other took two steps and plunged forward on his face.

Red Wilkinson ran toward the other side of the clearing. From ambush a shotgun roared out. Wilkinson stopped short, lifted his own shotgun. Before he could fire a terrific discharge rocked him back on his heels. He tottered, then crashed backward.

The two remaining bandits dashed headlong toward the south edge of the clearing, shooting wildly. Connor's fire trapped both at the same instant. One flung his revolver high, whirled on his heel, and like a run-down top sank to earth. The other's chin plowed into the turf.

Laurel drew a deep breath.

"Well," he muttered to Connor, "guess when old Silas, over on the other side, sees all these come troopin' into eternity, he'll tell St. Peter that we've been on the job."

Seventy seconds later, Todd Connor stumbled from the flaming shack.

"Got a lung full of smoke," he gasped, "but I got these, too."

He lifted a pair of satchels. Laurel took them, glanced inside: "Lot of currency. And bonds."

He handed them back to Connor, and shuffled toward the last bandit who had fallen. He stooped, turned the body over.

"Boys," he told the group congregating round him, "I hate that."

"A woman!" some one gasped.

"Not much more'n a girl," Laurel sighed. "But she'd shot any of us. Just the same, I hate it. I knew all along we'd have to do it, but I hate it."

"Knew all along? You knew there was a woman?"

LAUREL produced a handkerchief, unwrapped the tuft of hair he had picked up along the dry creek-bed.

"A mustache," he explained. "She was the driver of that car. Way I figured it, they thought that if the word went out that four men instead of three men and a woman had held up the bank, no one would tumble to the fact it was Hot-head Crandall's gang. . . . Poor old Silas! He thought it was a man with bloody fingers."

Laurel lifted the dead girl's hand. "Silas didn't know that modern gals in cities paint their fingernails red."

# GUNPOWDER

By GORDON KEYNE

*"Gunpowder gold? I'd steal and beg and rob and murder for it! For myself? No! For what flames in a man's heart and soul, for what burns in his brain, for what drives him mad! For his father, facing the enemy with empty guns! For his brothers, condemned to the hell of a prison-ship and imprisonment because the army had no powder or food! For his mother and sister, alone in country overrun by hired mercenaries. That's the true reason I'd break into hell to get that amount of money. And I cover it up with fine words—for Dr. Franklin, for the Congress, for Washington! For my own people—aye!"*



**T**HE public diligence, which in those days was the most rapid if least comfortable means of travel, rattled into the long courtyard of the inn. Grooms ran to change the horses. The passengers tumbled out, most of them hurrying into the tavern for a bit of food and a gulp of wine. It was a summer afternoon of 1778.

One of them, with a rucksack in his hand, stood on the cobblestones looking curiously about. He was a man of thirty or under, with long arms, a lanky form beneath his dark cloak, a face with a jutting thin nose and cleft chin that looked like the prow of a ship. Blue eyes twinkled as he turned to a groom and spoke in French.

"Where is the innkeeper?"

"Master Rudolph? Somewhere upstairs. Ah, monsieur, it's good to hear French spoken in this accursed country!" The groom, a Frenchman, beamed.

"I want to speak with him, and no delay." The traveler handed the man a coin. "The name is Luther Grimm of Philadelphia. I'll want a private room for the night."

"Let me have your sack, monsieur. I'll send for him, and see which rooms are not engaged."

The groom took the rucksack and hurried off. It was none of his business to assign rooms; but the place was in a great bustle, and everyone busy. Also, the coin was gold.

Grimm stood where he was, his dark blue eyes probing around.

This Inn of the Last Virgin—the name had some connection with the thousand martyred virgins of Cologne—lay in the heart of the Rhineland, in the electorate of Treves, well below Coblenz. In this independent electorate it occupied a strategic position. Two miles away was the enormous castle of Count Otto von Osbrock. All roads crossed here—along the Moselle to Coblenz, north to Cologne, west to Belgium, southwest to Luxembourg, south to Lorraine and France. Yet there was no village here.

The tavern was a famous place, centuries old, as grim and solid and sinister as the Osbrock castle and reputation. All travelers knew the Inn of the Last Virgin. When the peasants mentioned it, they lowered their voices and crossed themselves, with reason. Built on a hillside, the inn was rumored to run into vast underground caverns.

The diligence and its bustle filled only a corner of the immense courtyard. At the far end was a smithy, where clanging iron and flying sparks told of a beast be-

# GOLD



Illustrated by  
Peter Kuhlhoff

ing shod. Hostlers and grooms ran errands.

A clang of hoofs, a hasty scattering, and into the courtyard rode a man on a steaming horse. A man small, slim, with yellow hair, a little yellow mustache, and a simpering air. The inn folk saluted at sight of him. He swung from the saddle, and taking the motionless figure of Grimm to be a groom, hurled the reins at him.

"Here, fellow! See that the horse is well rubbed down—"

GRIMM caught and flung back the reins, so that they hit the little man across the face. Grimm's hand fell to his sword; then he turned and moved away. His groom was approaching; he saw an expression of horror in the man's eyes, heard a low warning in French.

"For God's sake have a care, monsieur! It's Count Otto!"

A hand plucked at Grimm's sleeve, and he turned to see the yellow-haired, foppish gentleman, whose cheeks were undeniably touched with rouge.

"Monsieur, you are French? I perceive that I made an error in throwing you my reins. You made a still more unfortunate error, perhaps."

Grimm surveyed him with sardonic air, wide, thin lips parting in a smile.

"Run along, little man, and play with the girls."

"Your name, sir? I am Count Otto von Osbrock."

"It doesn't interest me. I'm Luther Grimm of Philadelphia."

"Hm! I never heard of the place," said Count Otto. "A Frenchman?"

"American. What d'you want of me?"

"An apology."

Grimm laughed. "Go to the devil!"

"You must answer to me for this," said Count Otto quietly. "I see you wear a sword. Will you use it, or shall I have the grooms take their whips to you?"

Grimm eyed the man. He had not missed the slight flash in those pale blue eyes at the sound of his name. He was playing with fire, and knew it. Osbrock had heard of him and knew his name, then. And he knew Osbrock to be one of the most dangerous men in Europe.

"I'll be downstairs in half an hour—if you're still here," he said.

"I shall await you." And Osbrock bowed slightly.

Grimm turned to the groom. "Well? Where's your master? Where's my room?"

"Follow me, Highness," stammered the man. "I have a room for you. Master Rudolph will be there presently."

Grimm followed to the stairs. These mounted from the courtyard, outside the building itself, to an upper floor. And as Grimm mounted, his brain was at work. He had read much in the eyes of Count Otto; if he remained here, he was trapped. This man knew of him, perhaps knew of his mission.

In the corridor above, the groom turned anxiously. That gold-piece was bearing good fruit. Also, he took Grimm to be a Frenchman.

"Monsieur, your pardon. I also am French—not of this accursed place. I must warn you. This gentleman, Count Otto, is not what he looks. He's a terrible person, a famous duelist. For the love of heaven, monsieur, have no trouble with him!"

"Thank you," said Grimm, with a courtesy he had not shown the Count. "Can you tell me anything about a gentleman named the Vicomte de St. Denis, who should have been here to meet me? Is he in the place?"

The man's eyes widened with a touch of horror.

"Yes, yes!" he breathed. "It's as much as my life's worth—I can't tell you now. I'll slip up here in a few minutes—Master Rudolph is coming now." He darted one frightened glance down the corridor, and with an abrupt change of manner flung open the door of a room. "Here, sir. You'll find the room well aired. I'll leave your bag here. . . . Ah! Master Rudolph is here now."

AS the groom scurried off, Grimm turned to the approaching figure.

This innkeeper was no obsequious host. He was tall, burly, with an immense yellow beard; a giant, no less, full six feet four. He must have been at work in the smithy, for he wore a huge leather apron that increased his apparent bulk.

"You're the gentleman who sent for me?" he inquired brusquely.

"Yes." And Grimm gave his name. "A gentleman was to meet me here, the Vicomte de St. Denis." He was speaking in German now. Luther Grimm's forefathers had been German; now the family was Pennsylvania Dutch, so-called, but the language was an asset. "Is my friend here?"

Master Rudolph fingered his beard. "I remember him well. He was here four days ago, remained a day, and then went on to Cologne."

Pinpoints of flame glittered in Grimm's deep blue eyes.

"So? He left no message?"

"I know of none. I'll inquire."

"Do so, if you'll be so kind. I'll be down presently."

Master Rudolph departed, after receiving payment for the room.

LUTHER GRIMM stood motionless for a long moment. Four days ago? The man lied. That groom, who was a Frenchman, knew the truth. Something wrong here, frightfully wrong! Osbrock was behind it.

"And I'm a dead man if I don't get out of this trap," thought Grimm. He could hear the rattle and bang of the departing diligence. "Instead of being unknown, coming here like any traveler, I find them waiting for me. Yes, something's gone wrong, and I'm the goat! Now I'll have to act fast, and be tough about it."

He paced up and down the room, until a tap came at the door. The groom slipped in and quickly closed the door. He was breathing hard, frightened, anxious.

"Monsieur, it—it means my life if they discover—"

"I'll say nothing." Grimm shoved a handful of money at him. "Talk, in God's name! St. Denis is my friend. What's happened? Is he dead?"

"Better if he were, monsieur. There was a man here with one eye, an Englishman; he went out riding with M. de St. Denis and came back alone. This was four days ago. The Englishman with one eye went away—"

Luther Grimm checked the eager words with a gesture. One eye!

"Was that Englishman a stocky, heavy-set man? Was his one remaining eye very brilliant, intensely black?"

"The very man, monsieur, to the life!"

"I knew it." Grimm felt a cold chill run up his back. That man was Mortlake, the shrewdest, most unscrupulous, most dreaded British agent in the whole game of secret intrigue. "Go on. St. Denis is dead?"

"No. I heard a soldier talking yesterday. From what was said, a prisoner is being kept in the chapel of the old castle; he is probably being tortured."

Grimm's eyes bit out. "Eh? You think that man is St. Denis? Where's the place?"

"A mile past the present castle, monsieur, on the little hill above the highway. It's all in ruins except the chapel. I know that two of Count Otto's men are living there—"

"Is Count Otto behind this? Did he order your Master Rudolph to lie about it?"

"Certainly. Master Rudolph obeys him. They're cousins. Master Rudolph is of the Osbrock blood, by the left hand. You must be very careful, monsieur."

A slight, terrible smile flashed across Grimm's face, and was gone.

"Perhaps they're the ones to be careful. . . . Good! Now, do this for me, if you can do it safely: In twenty minutes I'll be downstairs, talking with Count Otto. I may have to leave suddenly. Here's more money. Have a horse saddled and waiting by the watering-trough, near the courtyard entrance. Can you do it?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

The groom departed, with furtive care.

Grimm went to the open window and stood looking out on the fading afternoon with unseeing eyes. Now he knew the worst! Instead of all this affair being secret, as he had thought, everything was known. That damned Mortlake, dean of the English secret service, had nipped St. Denis. *Ergo*, Mortlake and Count Otto von Osbrock were together. This was bad. Osbrock was a power in the land, was head of the secret police both here and in Prussia.

Grimm drew from his pocket a thin sheaf of documents. He was tempted to destroy them now. . . . No. He would need them vitally, he must risk it. He opened one and studied it thoughtfully: A letter to him from the American minister in Paris.

*I must urge you to use every endeavor to put this matter through to a conclusion. M. de Vergennes, the French Minister, trusts you implicitly, as do I myself. Although an American, you stand high in the service of French diplomacy. Now you are working for your own country. France is exhausted of money. The Colonies must have funds. If you can succeed in this affair, it means that a good half of this money will go to our account. My dear sir, I need say no more. I am, sir, your obedient humble servant to command,*  
Benj. Franklin.

A thin smile twisted Grimm's lips.

"Fighting for my own country, eh? For my own neck, rather," he muttered. "St. Denis was to get hold of the woman, and meet me here. Well, everything's smashed. He's been nipped. I'm in a trap. I have to get myself out—and get him out as well. Hm! Osbrock is a duel-



"For God's sake, have a care, monsieur! It's Count Otto!"

ist. He takes me to be a gentleman, and expects to kill me. Hm! Thank the Lord, I'm none of your fine gentlemen. I'm out to get results."

If this was war, he meant to fight—in his own way. He had no other choice, if he were to save his neck, not to mention performing his errand. Luther Grimm, a secret agent, had been of the greatest use to France; but now secrecy was gone. Here was life or death.

From his sack he took such personal articles as he could stow about his person. He changed his linen, changed his hose, and abandoned everything that would not go into his pockets. He wondered what had become of this one-eyed English agent Mortlake; but no matter about that. Now he had to save his own neck, and that of St. Denis, at one swift stroke—or go under. Luckily, sunset was at hand, and night would soon fall.

One last glance about the room; then he left it and went to the stairs. A look into the courtyard below showed him the French groom leading a saddled horse to the watering-trough. Good! The man was faithful, was doing his part.

GRIMM passed on down the stairs. His quick eye took in each detail—the grooms, the horses, the whole place. No soldiers here. The last rays of the setting sun were gilding the treetops. Already the twilight mists were curling along the valley.

Now it was a gamble with death—a fair gamble. He need scarcely fear pursuit; but he must work fast and pitilessly, both here and at the ruined chapel.

Grimm's lips twisted thinly. Boyhood along the Pennsylvania frontier, Indian-fighting, a year with Morgan's rangers—that sort of training was what he needed now, not mastery of the sword.

Yet, during his years in the French service, until he went back to America with Lafayette to take his place at the front, he had learned such mastery of fence as few other men possessed. Now that he was out of the army, serving the same cause here in the Old World again—well, time would show. He might need all his sword-skill yet.

He turned into the main room of the inn. Count Otto was seated before a bottle of wine, alone, thumbing his little yellow mustache. Assuredly, this man looked neither dangerous nor capable of great things; but Luther Grimm was only too well aware with whom he dealt.

He walked up to the table and halted.

"Count Otto," he said in German, "am I to understand that you wish to fight me?"

"Unless you apologize, certainly," said Osbrock, coming to his feet briskly.

"In that case," Grimm rejoined, "you should have a better reason than you have. I'll give you one—"

His hand slid out to the wine-bottle. Swift as he was, he needed all his speed. Osbrock's rapier was half drawn as the bottle smashed over his skull. The man dropped forward; collapsed, senseless.

A startled cry broke out; but already Grimm was outside, darting toward the saddled horse. He caught the reins and swung himself up to the leather, brought down the flat of his hand, and sent the animal leaping out through the entrance gates.

A din of shouts arose behind, and were wiped out on the twilight.

"A man with a killer's reputation needs to watch his eye!" muttered Grimm. "You had your chance, my friend—you weren't quick enough. Now for your soldiers!"

**H**E kicked in his heels, put the horse at speed, and headed for the towering castle with the village clustered at its feet, a mile farther on. He was no stranger to this place, or to these German states. Much of his work for France had been done within the German borders, but never before had he encountered Osbrock, the least known and most dreaded man in all Germany.

And now he was staking everything on the one desperate play here. If he found

St. Denis, well and good. If not, he might as well turn and ride for France, his mission ruined, his neck in peril.

The castle rose ahead, and he slackened pace upon nearing the village. A massive pile of masonry above, a somber hamlet below in the twilight. Grimm rode at a canter through the outstrung cluster of houses and barns, picked up pace afresh, and peered ahead for what he sought. Another mile, and he found it, darkling in the gloaming:

A tumbled pile of ruins, the ancient Osbrock castle, crowned a small hill to the right of the highway. Grimm struck off along a track that led up the hill toward them. These ruins were complete; nothing remained standing except a tiny building at one side. This must be the chapel, then. The French groom had directed him aright.

**N**O one was in sight as he dismounted. But on approaching the building, from within it came sounds that whitened Grimm's face to the lips, brought a harsh glitter to his searching eyes. Muffled oaths, the thudding of a whip, a raging voice in pain and fury—a voice he recognized. Then the noise ceased, and as he came toward the entrance, two men stepped out and confronted him. Two soldiers from the castle.

"St. Denis! Where are you?" Grimm's voice lifted in a ringing shout.

The soldiers' amazement was instant. One, holding a long whip, uttered a startled cry and lashed out at Grimm. The second caught a pistol from his belt, and the weapon belched smoke and roaring fire. But the bullet went high, and Grimm's rapier drove through the smoke with deadly lunge. Another blow of the whip, a yell of alarm, and Grimm was upon that man, steel licking in across the frantically wailing whip. A cry of terror and pain ended in a cough. The soldier staggered, dropped his whip, pitched forward across the body of the other man.

From within the little building came a choked, muffled cry. Grimm tried the doors. They were fastened by a huge bar of iron. He lifted this clear and dropped it. The doors swung, and he passed into the obscurity beyond.

St. Denis indeed, breaking forth upon him with incredulous joy—a man ragged and unkempt, chains and manacles upon wrist and ankle. One of the dead guards had a key to those chains, however, and presently the Frenchman was at liberty. A tall, lean man, laconic in



speech, swift in action; a good second to Luther Grimm.

"You're alone!" he exclaimed, staring around. "Count Otto—"

"No time to stand here talking," cut in Grimm. "I left him with a broken head at that accursed inn. Speak up, quickly! You were supposed to bring that woman and meet me. Never mind what's happened—where's the woman? If the whole errand's done, then we'd better hit for the frontier. If not—"

St. Denis caught at his arm with a rasping laugh.

"No, no! She's safe enough. That's why this devil has held me here, to make me talk. They even tried a bit of torture; it didn't work. I left the girl safely hidden away, while I came to meet you. She has an old servant looking after her—"

"Where?" snapped Grimm.

"Not twelve miles from here." And St. Denis laughed again. "At the old Fürsten tavern on the river—it's a little hamlet on the Moselle. You have a horse? Good. I can take you there."

"Take cloak and pistols from one of these dead rascals," said Grimm. "Torture, eh? Then I've nothing to regret—except that I didn't hit that devil Osbrock harder! Come on, come on! You're not hurt?"

"No." St. Denis laughed more joyously. "You devilish American—always in a hurry! There's no rush now."

Grimm emitted a grunt. "I'm thinking of General Washington, back home.

If he's going to get any more powder, I've got to turn half Germany inside out—and I'll do it. Come on, climb into the saddle!"

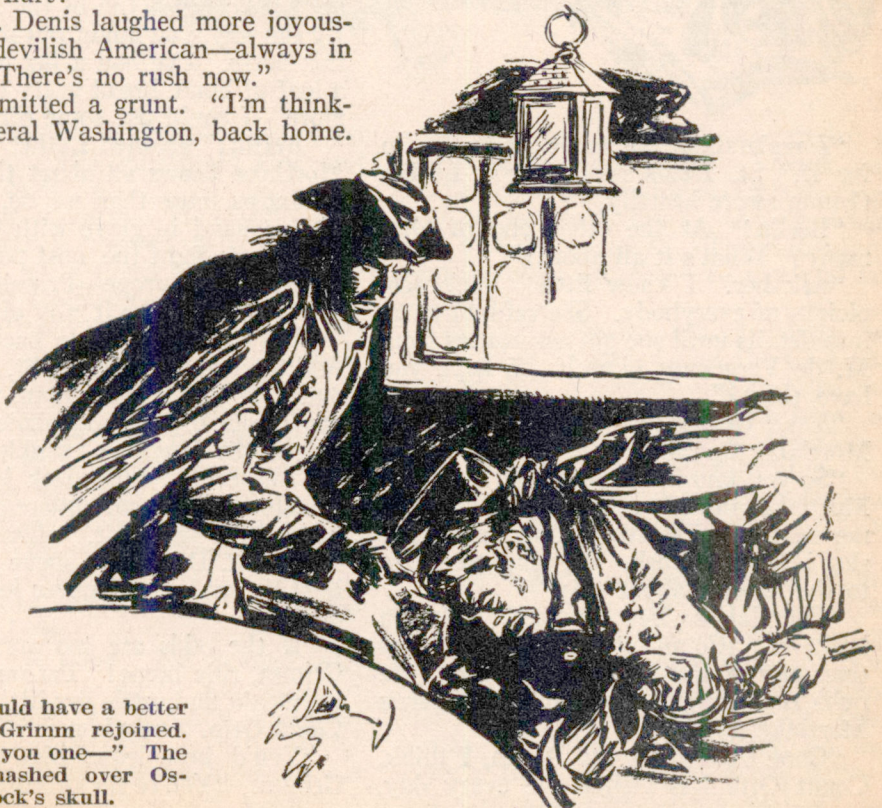
They scrambled up together and started for the highway again, where the darkness was already settling into night.

## CHAPTER II

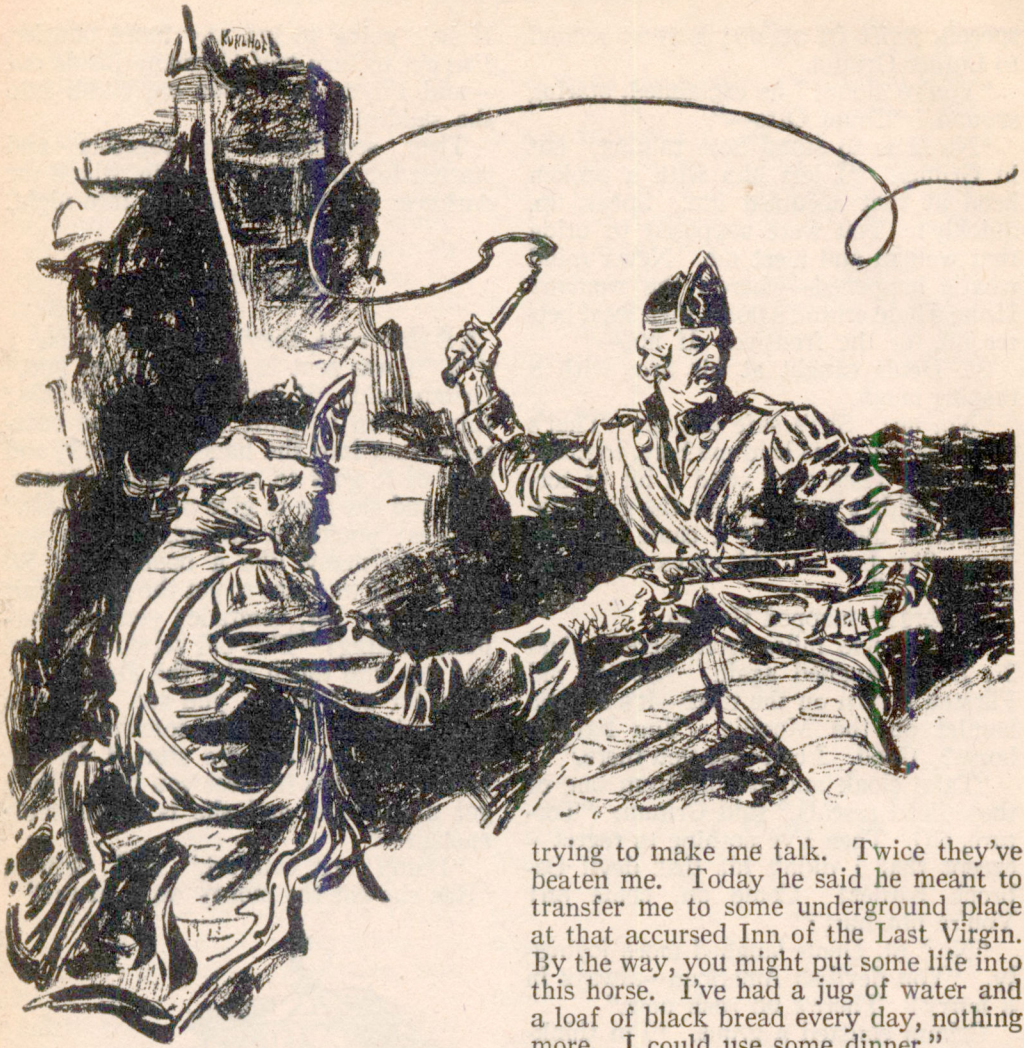
AS they rode, they talked, by jerks. "I was sent in haste to meet you," Grimm said. "I don't know the details; this woman is going to put some enormous sum into the hand of France, and part of it goes to our fighting colonies. You and she are to give me full details."

"Yes; you're in charge, because you know Germany like a book," said St. Denis. "I was sent to get the girl. Wait till you see her, comrade; you've a surprise coming! This old servant of hers had got into touch with the French ambassador at Cologne, you see. She was held prisoner there in a convent. Well, I got her out, and we started for the frontier. I was to meet you here. She's got a carriage, and she is comfortable enough—"

"Damn her comfort," said Grimm. "Has she got the money we're after?"



"You should have a better reason," Grimm rejoined. "I'll give you one—" The bottle smashed over Osbrock's skull.



"I understand we must go to Berlin for it," St. Denis replied, and Luther Grimm swore heartily.

"Berlin! At the other end of Germany! What's it all about?"

"Ask her. I know little. She's suspicious of everybody. She refused to go into details until she got assurances from M. de Vergennes himself. I hope you have them?"

"Yes," Grimm said curtly. "How did Mortlake nip you?"

"So you know that much, eh? It was Mortlake, all right; the scoundrel tricked me neatly. We went riding, and rode slap into an ambush. We must complain to the Elector about this."

"Complaints be damned!" Grimm broke in. "Count Otto is more powerful than any of these German princes. He pulls the strings; they dance! Where's Mortlake now?"

"Gone somewhere—to Berlin, I think. Count Otto has visited me every day,

trying to make me talk. Twice they've beaten me. Today he said he meant to transfer me to some underground place at that accursed Inn of the Last Virgin. By the way, you might put some life into this horse. I've had a jug of water and a loaf of black bread every day, nothing more. I could use some dinner."

"Berlin!" growled Luther Grimm. "If Mortlake knows all about this business, he knows more than we do, apparently. If he's hand in glove with Count Otto, we have to fight the most powerful combination in Europe—Prussia and England! I don't like it, any of it!"

"We can always ride back to Paris." And the rasping laugh of St. Denis broke out. He was a bitter man, this Frenchman; none of your gay blades. He never shared the laughing twinkle that could fill Luther Grimm's dark blue eyes or transform his lean, square-chinned features into debonair, whimsical merriment. St. Denis had spent years in the Bastille, and would never lose the mark of it.

"If the odds are too great, my dear Grimm, ride home! Personally, I hope to remain and settle my little affair with Count Otto. I owe him for that torture."

"You'd best leave him alone," said Grimm. "You're no swordsman; he is."

"Other things can kill," St. Denis retorted.

They rode on in silence now. Grimm never liked anything he did not fully understand; and as yet he did not comprehend very much of this entire affair. Apparently St. Denis did not know much more than he did. But this girl or woman would inform him.



"St. Denis! Where are you?" Grimm's voice lifted in a shout.

So, when at last the lights of the little town on the river glimmered below them, Grimm was in no very good humor. The Moselle was invisible. There had been no token of pursuit, but his brain was always casting ahead. As they rode, they had passed the corner of Osbrock's lands; if they went from here to Berlin, they must go back that way to reach the highway that led to Coblenz.

And Grimm was only too well aware that, if they did go to Berlin, they must run a race with death. Well, talk of Berlin seemed rather senseless. The French frontier was close. But his mission—gold for gunpowder, the sinews of war for his comrades across the Atlantic!

"You know who this woman is?" he demanded curtly.

"She has told me, yes," St. Denis responded. "She claims to be the Duchess of Courland."

"Bah!" exclaimed Grimm. "There's no such person! Well, let it pass. We'll soon learn now. The first thing is food, wine, clothes for you; then talk to her."

They rode into a little tavern, and as they dismounted, St. Denis uttered a low word of satisfaction. The carriage was still here; therefore the woman was here.

Another ten minutes, and the little inn was bustling. In a private room, Grimm

put his razor at the disposal of St. Denis; a bath, a shave, such garments as could be assembled, and the lean Frenchman looked more like himself.

"By the way," said St. Denis, "when Count Otto interviewed me today, he said that he was leaving for Coblenz to-night."

Grimm merely shrugged. A knock came at the door; at his command, it opened and St. Denis uttered a laugh:

"Ah! Comrade, this is Jacques, the faithful servant of his mistress. So you see I've turned up after all, Jacques!"

"Yes, monsieur." The wrinkled old man bowed. "My mistress sent me to tell you that dinner is being served in her rooms, and invites you to join her. We heard that you had arrived—rather, I saw you arrive."

"The devil! You did well to recognize me," said St. Denis. "Very well. We'll be with you in five minutes."

Old Jacques departed. Grimm nodded agreement: They might as well dine with the lady as here; it would save time.

Another five minutes, and they entered another room, softly bright with many candles. A table was set with steaming dishes; old Jacques stood waiting.

"Madame," said St. Denis dryly, "allow me to present M. Luther Grimm."

"Of Philadelphia," added Grimm, as he bowed over the girl's hand. She smiled and gestured toward the table.

"No ceremony, gentlemen! Jacques, pour the wine and serve."

Beauty, vivacity, wit—Grimm divined these things in her, but his brain was busy with old memories, old rumors. The Russian Duchy of Courland had been abolished years ago; the last Duke had been sent to Siberia. He could not remember the details.

She grew upon him: gray eyes that could flicker with queer lovely lights; and music in her voice. Then a change came upon her, as St. Denis talked. He accounted for his delay by an acid mention of a man with one eye having detained him. She leaned forward.

"A man with one eye—no, no! Not the Englishman, the man Mortlake?"

"What do you know about Mortlake?" Grimm demanded.

"Everything," she said. Grimm eyed the girl shrewdly at that simple word:

It was remarkable that she should know Mortlake, the shrewdest of English agents, a man who had been concerned in a thousand intrigues, a grasping, avid, cruel man who stopped at nothing.

"Before we talk," she said, looking from one to the other, "let me ask whether you have brought the promised assurances from M. de Vergennes, the French minister."

GRIMM had no desire whatever to do any more talking than necessary; his thoughts, reaching ever ahead, were set upon gaining a safer place than this to talk. But he acknowledged the imperative need of making plans, of getting information.

He produced his sheaf of documents.

"Here,"—and he handed her one,—"is my commission to act on behalf of France, signed by M. de Vergennes and by the King. And here is a sealed letter to you, which you may find satisfactory."

She glanced at the commission, and surprise shot into her eyes. Then she tore open the sealed letter. Color rose in her face; a warm glow mounted in her cheeks; and with a little joyous, excited laugh, she laid down the paper.

"Satisfactory—indeed!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Now we may relax and talk—"

"Nothing of the sort," said Luther Grimm. He got out his pipe and pouch of tobacco, asked the girl's consent, and gained it. "There are just two questions I want to ask you; then we'll know what we have to do. First, must we go to Berlin?"

"Yes, we must; that is imperative," she replied quickly. "Oh, I know, better than you, how dangerous it is. But I've prepared against that."

"All right." Grimm lit his pipe at a candle and settled back. "Now, we don't know much about this affair. And if we must go to Berlin, I tell you frankly I don't intend to sit around here and get my head into a noose by talking. Second question: How do you come to know this man Mortlake?"

"It was he who sent my father to Siberia—to his death." Her face was unreadable. "He is working with Count Otto to get my money. I saw him ten days ago; I know where he is now. You see, we had fled from Russia. My father was kidnaped and taken back there; he died in Siberia. My brother was killed. Mortlake did all this—he was well paid for it."

"He would be," said Grimm. "Who put you in prison?"

"My sister and Count Otto—she is his wife."

"Mortlake allied with them—hm! No further proof of your identity, of your

whole story, is necessary." And Grimm rose. "Will you accept orders from me?"

She looked up at him, smiling.

"Certainly. Take me as a comrade, monsieur; I've been through too many frightful experiences to flinch at taking orders from a man whom I trust."

"Thank you." Grimm's eyes warmed a little. "St. Denis and I leave here in ten minutes. Will you go down, St. Denis, get us an extra horse, have them ready? Here's money." He extended a purse; the Frenchman took it and left.

"You,"—Grimm looked at the girl,— "get off as quickly as you can pack, and leave in your carriage. Drive north to the crossroads at the highway; we'll wait for you there, if all is clear. I plan to get on twenty miles farther to Alken, and there get some sleep and rest. There too we can talk. I know little or nothing of what lies behind all this. You're sure we must go to Berlin if we're to get the money?"

"We must," she said; Grimm nodded.

"All right. At Berlin, we'll have every assistance from the French ambassador there, M. d'Evrecourt. He's a personal friend of Frederick the Great. But until then, at least, we'll be in the utmost peril. At Coblenz, however, I have friends. Now, every road will be watched. Mortlake, and Count Otto, will certainly spare no effort to catch us. They probably know that you must go to Berlin."

"Mortlake has gone there now," she said quietly.

"Good! That leaves only Count Otto to worry about. Well, you have the orders. We may expect you at the crossroads?"

"Jacques drives my carriage," she said. "We leave in twenty minutes."

Luther Grimm bowed over her hand, smiled into her eyes, and took his leave.

CURIOSITY? Yes; he was eaten up with it. This girl's loveliness staggered him. Yet, for the moment, he pressed down with iron will everything except the need for action. Safety was paramount to all else; and until they reached Alken, he refused to cloud his brain with anything but the one vital aim. Behind this girl, he could see, lay dangers and perils and torments, more sufferings than he was aware; yet the flame-flicker in her gray eyes was unquenched. A good comrade!

St. Denis had a horse ready for him. They paid the score, mounted, and rode out the way they had so recently come.

"Thank God we don't have to tumble about in a carriage!" exclaimed Grimm. "I've had my fill of a diligence—but may have to take to it again all too soon."

In those days travel was the most severe thing in life, taken at risk of broken pate or limb—rough roads, poorly sprung vehicles, hardship and peril at every turn. Yet this girl, he thought, was accepting it with a laugh.

"She's a good one," St. Denis commented, as though he could read Grimm's mind. "Moon's up—excellent! We can make twenty miles easily."

"If the way's clear," Grimm added. "Alken should be safe enough for us. There, we must separate. We can make Coblenz by tomorrow night, and join up again. After that, we have Satan himself to outwit, if we're to reach Berlin."

The rasping laugh of St. Denis sounded.

In time the highway appeared ahead, and the crossroads; these marked the limit of the Osbrock domain. All was silent and deserted in the moonlight.

TO the right, looming high, hung a grisly thing: A gibbet stood there, a gallows great and strong. From this gallows-tree, turning and twisting slowly in the night breeze, a hanged man spun upon a rope, as though still kicking with life. Nor did he seem to have been hanging there long.

The two men waited in silence, and at last the carriage of the girl drew up.

"All well, comrades?" came her inquiring voice.

"All well," said Grimm. "Turn on the Coblenz road, here. At Alken, stop for the rest of the night. We'll ride behind the carriage."

Jacques whipped up his horses, and the carriage rolled away upon the eastern road. St. Denis wheeled his mount, and glanced at Grimm.

"Coming, comrade?"

"In a minute."

Grimm urged his horse to the grisly hanging thing. He rose in the stirrups and put out his hand, touching the dead bound fingers of the man. They were stiff and cold. The body swung, and the face came into the moonlight.

"Sorry, friend," said Luther Grimm softly. "I'll pay this debt, some day."

It was the French groom from the Inn of the Last Virgin. Count Otto had lost no time in getting rid of a traitor.

"Some day," repeated Grimm slowly. "That's a promise, friend. Good night."

And he sent his horse onward.

"It was he who sent my father to Siberia—to his death."



IT was a sunny summer morning. They were in the post tavern at Alken, with Coblenz ahead and the Inn of the Last Virgin gone upon the night like an evil dream. They had gathered in Marie's room. Grimm knew her name now; she was Marie of Courland.

She had brought a number of little sticks to the table.

"Here,"—and she put out three of them,—“are Count Otto, my sister Flora—and myself. Here, off to one side, is France. Here is Frederick of Prussia, opposite.” She smiled gayly as she put down another stick.

St. Denis sat silent. Luther Grimm puffed at his pipe and nodded.

"You're telling us your own story?"

"Everything at once; and some of it hurts," she replied. "Flora, for example. She's a year older than I am. She's ambitious—halts at nothing. She's greedy for money, power. She's thoroughly bad."

St. Denis blinked. "You say that, of your own sister? Impossible!"

"Nonsense; it's quite a common thing," said Grimm. "Two brothers or two sisters are frequently direct opposites. Yes, I've heard one or two rumors about this Countess of Osbrock. Go on, Marie; why were you put into a cell?"

"Because of my father's will, which left me all the family money. We'll talk about that later." She put down another stick, at the rear. "Here's Mortlake. He's not an English agent now; he acts for any who will pay. And here,"—with a sharp glance at the American, she laid down another bit of wood,—“is the French secret agent, Luther Grimm, who

has kidnaped me and put me out of the way."

Grimm's shaggy brows drew down in surprise.

"Is this a joke? I've had nothing to do with you."

She turned suddenly upon him. "Where have you been, the past few months?"

"In America—went over with Lafayette, and joined the army there. Wounded and disabled—of more use here now. So I'm back on my old job. I just returned, came straight here from Paris—"

"And who knows it? Nobody; least of all Frederick of Prussia!" she broke out vehemently. "He's heard of you, yes. He believes firmly that you've carried me off, that France is after my money, my inheritance, that you're playing this game to get a woman's money."

AT these words, a touch of scorn flashed in her voice. She went on quickly, but Grimm did not miss the touch, and it angered him.

"Frederick wants that money himself, and wants it badly. He's going into an alliance with England against France. This means, of course, that France can send no further aid to America, to your people there. You see? England's game is won, yours is lost, France is shattered; and sly old Frederick emerges on top as usual. That's their projected campaign."

"How do you know all this?" he challenged. "You, a woman—"

"From my sister, from Count Otto. They talked freely enough of their schemes, when they were trying to make me turn over my inheritance to them."

"Bah! It's absurd!" he exclaimed fiercely. "The King of Prussia isn't stealing a few thalers from a woman. Why the devil France would be so interested in half your inheritance, I don't know. I'm merely obeying orders."

"A few thalers?" Laughter sprang in her eyes, only to be banished at once. "Then you don't know! But you know Frederick's parsimony, his evil greed. You know France and England are at war. If Frederick allies himself against France, Count Otto shows him that he'll get a substantial subsidy from England; and on top of that, a cool hundred million francs in cash."

"A hundred millions?" Grimm stared at her. "Where from?"

"My inheritance amounts to twice that sum."

Luther Grimm felt for a chair, and lowered himself into it, astounded.

"Why—good Lord! It's a king's ransom! I had no idea—"

"I've offered France half this inheritance for protection and safety," went on the girl. "To get the money, I must go to Berlin. That's your affair. You must handle it, manage all the details."

"Wait a minute, now." Grimm straightened up and laid aside his pipe. "They know all this; it's a gamble for a fortune! They know you've escaped from your cell. They know M. de St. Denis is free, and he's a marked man. So, assuredly, am I. They know we must go to Berlin—the end of the game lies there. Count Otto, we believe, is ahead of us at Coblenz. Mortlake we know is ahead of us at Berlin. Every road, every stop, every town and tavern, between here and Berlin will hold peril. Further, we know we must combat Frederick of Prussia, who has secret police; and Count Otto commands them."

"And don't forget my sister," added Marie seriously. "She's more dangerous than any of the others."

Grimm gestured impatiently. "No. Mortlake and Count Otto are the chief perils. Let's see, now: the archbishop-elect of Treves rules this territory from Coblenz. I've met him—an honest fellow enough. There's a French agent in Coblenz. We must have money; mine's about gone."

"I have some jewels I can sell," Marie spoke up. Grimm shook his head, and a smile came to his lips, a debonair, whimsical smile.

"No; I'll get what we need. We must separate here. St. Denis, you must accompany Marie—no, better still, go by yourself. Change your looks somehow, any way at all. You can do it?"

"Certainly," replied St. Denis carelessly. "When do I leave?"

"Now. You know our agent there?"

"Yes. Hoffman, the banker."

"Leave word with him where you are; I'll get in touch with you. Well, what are you waiting for?"

St. Denis blinked. "You mean—go, this minute?"

"Now."

WITH a swift salute and a rasping laugh, St. Denis swung away and was gone. Grimm turned to the girl, his face harsh again, aflame with energy.

"You're a woman. It's hard to disguise you—"

"Never mind, comrade; I have all that arranged," she said, and laughed lightly.

"I need only ten minutes to become a very different person. With the help of Jacques, I can stop a mile outside town and do everything necessary. When shall I leave?"

"At once."

She beckoned Jacques, who had been standing impassively in one corner.

"Pay our bill. Have the horses harnessed and the carriage ready."

THE old servant departed. Grimm took up his pipe, frowning. A hundred millions! That meant fifty millions for Dr. Franklin, for the Continental Congress—more, for the men who needed everything that money would buy. He looked up suddenly at the girl.

"This is more of a game than I thought," he said slowly. "I'm going in to it heart and soul now; it's no trifling matter. I must know everything—the ambition behind all this. Mortlake's, Count Otto's, yours. They have gold for their aim. But you? What's in your heart, your thought? Are you in love?"

She flushed a little, then chilled. Disdain flashed in her eye; her lip curled in a little grimace of scorn.

"You're so extremely virtuous in your aims!" she said, and the words burned. "It seems to me that you, like everyone else, have one object—seizing the money of a woman. Such high nobility, such lofty purpose, well becomes your harsh incivility."

Beneath that acid lash of tongue and eyes, Luther Grimm exploded. His cold poise was blasted away. His eyes blazing, he flew into hot speech.

"After your money? By God, I am!" And his fist smashed down on the table. "If I could get that amount of money from you, from a dozen women, from Satan himself, I'd steal and beg and rob and murder for it! Why? For myself? For France? For my own country, even? To the devil with all that—no! For what flames in a man's heart and soul, for what burns in his brain, for what drives him mad! For his father, facing the enemy with empty guns! For his brothers, condemned to the hell of a prisonship and imprisonment because the army had no powder or food! For his mother and sister, alone in country overrun by enemies of life and honor, by hired mercenaries—"

He choked upon a gasp of vehement breath, while she stared wide-eyed.

"That's what it's for!" he went on. "Gold for gunpowder—money to relieve



"Sorry, friend," said Luther Grimm softly. "I'll pay this debt some day."

the sufferings of my people—of my own flesh and blood! Didn't I starve and freeze in those damned trenches, until British bullets blasted me out of 'em? That's why I want your money, any money—not for any damned cause, but for the people I was raised with, my own flesh, my friends, the men and women I've known all my life! That's the reality of it. That's the true reason I'd

break into hell to get that amount of money, d'ye understand? And I cover it up with fine words—for Dr. Franklin, for the Congress, for Washington! Plague take the lot! If you want the truth, there it is. For my own people—aye!”

**B**REATHING hard, ashamed of his lost self-control, he fell silent. The sudden glory in her face, the glow in her starry eyes, reduced him with abruptness to awkward unease.

“Ah!” she said softly. “There, at last, I’ve heard a man speak. The flaming heart and the burning brain—yes, I know what those words mean. When my father was dragged off to death, when everything fell to pieces around me, I felt the same. Yes, I can understand, and I apologize to you for my words. Forgive me.”

Grimm cleared his throat, found no words. Smiling, she went on:

“Balance against that truth of yours, what the rest of us want! Count Otto? Love of power drives him, intrigue, money. Flora, my sister? Pure devilry, I think; also greed. Again, beware of her! Myself? I want only peace, safety, obscurity. For this, I’m giving up half of what belongs to me. In love? No.”

“All right,” said Grimm. “Sorry I lost my temper. Now see here. Once you get to Coblenz, you go to the Fürstenhof tavern on the river, opposite the wharves. Await word from me there. Sure you can make it safely?”

“Of course.”

“Then get off at once, and good luck.”

With a wave of the hand, he was gone. A somewhat cavalier parting, he reflected; but he had no notion of playing the fine gallant. She was a good comrade, not a painted, pampered beauty. And he was angry with himself for having spoken so violently.

Mortlake, eh? An old enemy, and deadly. Grimm had crossed the trail of this man more than once. He knew that Mortlake hated him with a deadly, virulent hatred. He repaid it with a vivid desire to kill the devil.

Going downstairs, Grimm sought the innkeeper and asked when the diligence for Coblenz was due.

“In just an hour, Highness. It changes horses here.”

“Then get me a seat—on top, inside, anywhere!”

He had given some of his money to St. Denis, some to Marie; he had just enough left to pay for his seat, and the

tavern bill. He saw St. Denis go spurring out and away, clad in some nondescript garments, acquired God knew where. The carriage of Marie was being harnessed; her luggage was coming down.

Presently she appeared, and Grimm, with some desire to atone for his own lack of politeness, walked with her across the courtyard, handed her into the carriage and pressed his lips to her fingers.

“*Au revoir*, comrade!” and she smiled brightly. “Be careful!”

Jacques brought down his whip, and the carriage rattled away. Luther Grimm went back to his own room; the landlord promised to summon him when the diligence arrived.

Disguise? At this, he was a past master; but so far as the crowded diligence went, it mattered little. They would scarcely seek him among diligence passengers. At Coblenz he must get a false passport; Hoffman, the French agent there, would attend to it. His own disguise could wait till then, also.

“Marie is in the most danger of all,” he reflected. “There’s a lot I don’t understand yet. Why must she go to Berlin to get her inheritance, and how get it? I forgot to ask about all that. Two hundred millions!” He whistled softly. “An incredible sum. No wonder that impoverished France and covetous Frederick would move heaven and earth to get the half of it, not to mention Count Otto and her sister. They, no doubt, mean to grab the whole thing. Well, if I win, France gets a hundred millions—and Doctor Franklin gets half for the Continental Army. By the Eternal, I’ll win!”

Puffing at his pipe, he smiled grimly at thought of Mortlake. So Mortlake had told lies about him, eh? And Count Otto had backed up the play, of course!

**T**HIS Countess Flora—Luther Grimm had heard singular rumors about that woman. Young and beautiful as an angel, they said, and heartless as a devil. Strange that she should be Marie’s sister. Marie—ah! Now that she was gone, now that the tobacco was comforting his nerves, Grimm began to realize what she was. He had time now to think about her. Those great gray eyes, that laughing dimpled face, that look of tenderness lurking somewhere—why, she was the loveliest thing he had seen in many a day! More, she had character. And brains. She was a comrade



worth the having. Grimm chuckled at thought of Count Otto von Osbrock. That gentleman must just now be in a pretty stew, and with a sore head to boot—

A knock came at the door. The diligence! Grimm went to the door and flung it open. On the threshold, dabbing with a lace handkerchief at his lips, nodding with affected amiability, stood Count Otto. And he was not alone.

FOR an instant, Grimm was thunderstruck. Not by sight of Osbrock, but to see Marie standing there with him—Marie, in a different costume, smiling slightly—

Then he pulled himself together, wakened from his stupefaction. This woman was not Marie, after all; but none the less he found himself staring hard at her. Marie in every feature, yet not Marie!

"Good day, monsieur, good day," Count Otto was saying affably in French. Under his wide hat, traces of a bandage were visible. "Very lucky that we got here before the diligence came, eh? Or you, like the other birds, would be flown. I understand you have a place reserved. Well, I must disappoint you; it's too bad that the lady has disappointed me, but I'll find her later. May we come in?"

Luther Grimm, somewhat taken aback by this greeting, held open the door.

"The pleasure is unexpected," he said dryly. "Enter, by all means."

Caught? No doubt of it. Through the doorway he had a glimpse of armed riders in the courtyard. The words of Count Otto showed that everything was known.

"My dear Countess Flora," said the simpering Osbrock, "allow me the honor of presenting Monsieur Luther Grimm of—what is that strange place?"

"Of Philadelphia."

"Ah, yes! Some place in America, I believe."

The lady extended her hand quickly, and Grimm bowed above it; for the moment he must play the rôle assigned him. He could not understand all this. Flora, eh? The face of Marie, even more beautiful if that were possible; yet with a sharpness to the eyes, a baleful glimmer, that Marie lacked. Her voice was sweet, rich-toned, like that of her sister.

"I have heard much of you, M. Grimm," she said. "So you're from

America! I've never seen anyone from that strange place. I thought you were a Frenchman."

"Others have made the same mistake." And Grimm laughed. "Will you be seated?"

Dangerous this woman might be, but he had eyes only for the man who concealed wit and power and unscrupulous rascality behind the mask of a simpering fop. As his deep blue eyes hardened, Count Otto read the look and held up a hand in quick protest.

"One moment, if you please! Let me remind you that what's past, is past—my favorite motto," he intervened before Grimm could speak. "I seek the honor of a conversation with you, not in hot-blooded recrimination, but for a purpose. I have heard much of you, and you interest me."

"Flatterer!" Grimm smiled dangerously. "I always pay my debts."

"As I do mine—unless it is to my interest to forgive my creditors." And the Count touched his bandaged head. He bowed the Countess to a chair, and took another himself, unbidden. His air of cool suavety warned Grimm, who straightway laid aside any manifestation of his own innate animosity.

"Come, shall we be friends—at least for the moment?" went on Count Otto. "You interest me. You're not unknown in the German states. Surely you'd prefer to discuss matters with a friend, rather than with the police?"

Grimm bowed slightly in assent. "Assuredly," he said. "You have, I think, already discussed me with your friend and associate Mortlake, the English agent?"

COUNT OTTO smiled placidly at this thrust, produced a snuffbox, and helped himself delicately to the dust.

"Mortlake does not work for England at all, but for himself. The English, a short-sighted people, have discharged him; they have some odd scruples, those English. However, I don't wish to discuss him, but yourself. Your work is well known to me."

"Again, you flatter me," said Grimm.

"No. I believe you were in the service of France for some years, and were only recently in America?"

Grimm assented. "Yes; I went over with Lafayette and took my place in the army of my own country—for only a short time. A wound disabled me for the time being, and it was thought that I

could be of more service here, at my old job. So it has proved. And very lucky for my friend St. Denis, too."

Count Otto swept this aside with a slight gesture. His voice deepened.

"So, I get the picture. You're no Frenchman, but an American, as you call yourself, at present in the service of France. Suppose we put aside all personal feeling, all sentiment, and all pretense likewise. Let us have plain, straight words. Just what do you seek? You've taken part in this affair of Courland, it seems, and I do not quite see why. Even suppose you and France and my sister-in-law should win, which is extremely unlikely, what would you get out of it personally?"

Grimm thought fast, trying to see what lay behind all this, and failing. In the man, he could read an earnestness, a certain sincerity; in the foppish voice, an undertone of steel. It surprised him. He decided instantly on the truth.

"For myself, nothing at all. But it is agreed that from the French share of this money, my country shall receive a loan of fifty millions."

The brows of Count Otto lifted.

"And you undertake a desperate game, you set yourself against all the powers of Europe, so that your country may receive a loan? Pardon me—is that credible?"

"Entirely," rejoined Grimm harshly. "Shall I make it so?"

"If you can. You may be reflecting that I am not talking to hear myself talk, but have some proposition to make you. Correct. At the moment, however, I can see only that you're on a par with Mortlake, the Englishman—both after a girl's money. Well, I'm after it also, because it means power, dominance of Europe, the forging of history! But you?"

GRIMM leaned forward; he had a desire to convince this rascal.

"You're right; the desire to serve my country is merely a vast abstraction. What did I find over there? The forces of my country dependent on foreign aid. My two brothers on a British prison-ship in New York harbor—why? Because their powder gave out, their food gave out, they were captured. My father is starving and freezing with General Washington. My mother and sister are alone on our farm near Philadelphia, with the Hessian troops overrunning the entire district. Who can help all of them? I can. The funds of France are exhausted;

her credit is exhausted; she can lend us no more money. Well, here's a chance to provide that money! Gunpowder gold! And I'll go through hell to do it."

"Ah!" murmured the Count. "That will not be necessary."

"BUT you are splendid—it is magnificent!" broke out the Countess Flora, her eyes shining eagerly, her face alight. "Now you've given your work a new meaning, your actions a real justification! Now all will come out right."

Grimm flashed her a glance of inquiry, but Count Otto intervened.

"Yes, I begin to understand the situation. Hm! And you are the mortal enemy of this man Mortlake?"

"That's putting it a bit strong," said Grimm. "I'd run him down in a minute, if I could; yes. Still, if there's any actual hatred, it's on his side."

"There is plenty; he hates you virulently." Osbrock's voice was smooth and silky. "He wants nothing more than your death. He's dangerous. I dislike to work with such persons. I have not, of course, informed him that you're thinking of going to Berlin. He would be only too glad to welcome you there."

Grimm picked up his dead pipe, knocked it out, pocketed it. What was the man driving at? A moment later came the answer:

"Now, Monsieur Grimm, I offer you fifty million francs of that money, not as a loan but as a gift. For France, for your country, for yourself, for what you like! And with it, the life of this man Mortlake. He annoys me. If I don't have to use him against you, I much prefer to see him dead."

Grimm's eyes blazed out suddenly. Fifty millions—a gift, not a loan?

"You offer this—when you haven't got it?" he said slowly. He did not think of Mortlake at all. That mattered nothing, in the face of this offer.

"Further," pursued Count Otto, "I'll guarantee to send your friend St. Denis back to France unharmed. And after him, also unharmed, the young lady who calls herself Marie of Courland. She'll have sufficient money left to keep her in comfort. But—all on one condition: That you leave here, go to Paris, and stay there. Where you like, but across the frontier of the German states."

Grimm was astounded, uncertain; yet he read certainty in the pale blue eyes of Osbrock.

"You're offering me terms, eh?"

"As a friend. If you refuse, you may leave here in the diligence—and take your chances as to what happens."

A heavy footfall sounded outside the door, denoting a guard there. Luther Grimm was dimly aware of it, but paid no heed. He felt stifled.

Without apologies, he came to his feet, walked over to the window, and swung it open. He had need of the fresh air in on his brain. He was facing a decision of the most frightful kind.

These two had come here to get rid of him at any cost. They were ready to buy him off. When he told Osbrock his own driving motive, he had given the man the key; here was the result: fifty millions, a free gift—for the old man in the army, the brothers aboard a prison-ship, the folks back home; for all who stood behind these symbols in his own life, the struggling army, the Congress, the banded colonies, the cause.

Fifty millions as a gift to take Franklin! That was worth selling himself, his soul, his honor, to get. For the struggling man in Paris, for the struggling country; but more, for the starving, desperate people, his own people, his own family, whose fate hung upon it. A gift of fifty millions! Gunpowder gold!

At what price? Giving up this girl Marie, and not to any danger, either. All they wanted was her money. They would leave her enough to secure her from want. Probably Frederick of Prussia would get a hundred million. Count Otto would take half as much, and hand over the balance to—whom? Grimm's hand clenched.

Not to him, no. Not a cent of it to him; it would go direct to Franklin, or even to the Congress. It meant that he would betray the trust France had put in him. If he played an honorable game, facing desperate odds, risking the loss of everything—well, Berlin was far away. France mattered nothing to him. Peace

or war mattered nothing to him. Let the Old World fight itself blind! He had to think of his father with Washington, his brothers starving, his army fighting for life along the Jersey marshes.

Honor be damned! The temptation gripped him hard. After all, the highest honor might lie in sacrificing all else, honor itself, for this cause of his.

Suddenly he found her face close beside him; a light quick step, a scent of perfume. The Countess was there, appealing to him; her hand touched his arm with slight, significant pressure. A lovely woman, this Flora, her eyes burning into him, her voice low, a mere whispered breath, for his ear alone:

"Careful!" she was saying under her breath. "Don't refuse. It would be suicide. He has pistols under his coat, armed men outside; he means to kill you. Agree. I'm your friend. Come with us to Coblenz. Many things can happen there. I want to see you again. He'll be gone. Later you can go to Paris, the cash in your pocket."

Sharp incredulity wrenched at Luther Grimm; it was impossible to mistake the implication of her words, her eyes. Clever, was she? Devil a bit. Nothing clever about this sly puss.

The temptation hit him like a counter-antidote; but for her low words, he might have wavered further. That thought about honor, about the honor of dishonor, about selling himself for the sake of Franklin, was sent reeling out of his brain. He stared out of the window.

This was the ground floor of the inn. Beyond his window were the stables. Just outside here were two men, booted and armed, idly talking as they held

"After your money? By God, I am! I'd rob and murder for it—for my people, facing the enemy with empty guns; an army with no powder! That's what it's for—gunpowder gold!"



their horses. Two of Count Otto's riders.

Swiftly, Grimm swung back to himself. Play the game, Luther Grimm of Philadelphia! That old man with the white hair would countenance no such dishonor, even for the sake of Washington's army. His own word had been passed; that girl Marie depended on him. Win the game despite all odds. No forked trails, as the Indians put it.

Grimm turned. He had no weapon; his sword was hanging against the door, and he could not reach it. He knew the seeming fop was sharply, keenly alert. Play the same trick again? A shrewd man never looked to see a trick tried twice. On the table stood a long, heavy pewter candlestick. . . . No, that was out of his reach, too.

GRIMM came to the table and halted, hesitant, frowning a little.

"How do I know you're to be trusted, after the way I tricked you back there at the Last Virgin?" he asked slowly. "How do I know you'll keep your word now?"

"It's to my interest to do so. My actions are dictated solely by policy," said Count Otto complacently. "The more dangerous an opponent is, the better friend he may be. Six months from now, who knows? We may be working together. What's past, is past. I cherish no enmities."

A curious philosophy, thought Grimm; a most rascally philosophy. Apparently the man was sincere. He was watching Grimm with catlike eyes. One hand held the scented lace handkerchief; the other was out of sight. Pistol ready, no doubt. But such a man watched for weapons, not for fists.

"Aye, that's the usual conception of such intrigue as this, I find," Grimm said in a thoughtful voice. "Here in Europe, all you chess-players are alike; you have a smooth, sly trickery at your fingers' ends. Undoubtedly your proposal tempts me, Osbrock. But we don't work that way in America."

"Indeed? I wasn't aware your savage wildness had developed a diplomatic technique!" Count Otto smiled as he sniffed at his handkerchief. "Just how, if I may inquire, do you work in America?"

"Like this!" And Grimm's fist swung. The blow lashed home below the ear.

Not waiting to see its effect, Grimm turned and started for the open window.

As he did so, he caught up the pewter candlestick from the table. There was a sharp cry, a flash of steel. The woman Flora came rushing at him, poniard in hand.

Strike a woman? Grimm hesitated, feinted a blow, and as she checked herself, he gave her a push and tripped her neatly, sending her in a headlong sprawl. He leaped at the window and was out, still gripping the candlestick. Her voice rose shrilly.

The two soldiers outside had taken the alarm. They turned, staring at Grimm as he came. It was touch and go now. If they used their weapons, they had him. A scream burst from the room behind, a scream so instinct with rage, with wild feline fury, that it sent a shiver through him.

"Quick!" he cried at the two men. "She's killing Count Otto—help him!"

A startled oath, and they abandoned their horses, plunging with a run for the window. Grimm fairly hurled himself at the horses. He gained them, was in the saddle of one with a wild leap, caught the reins, seated himself, and sent the animal jumping forward.

On now to the corner of the inn and around, reining down the frightened animal with savage hand. Here was a street of the town; he swung into it—and slap into two more of Count Otto's riders. They must have known him by sight or description, for a shout broke from them, and their swords flashed up.

The heavy candlestick swung, and like a thunderbolt knocked one man out of his saddle. The other lunged in frantically, his horse rearing. Grimm warded the blade with his left arm and swung around with his right; the soldier screamed as he went down under that crushing blow.

Kicking his horse into renewed motion, Luther Grimm went plunging down the street for the Coblenz road.

Cries rang out; people scattered to right and left. A market cart was upset in wild confusion. Figures were flooding into the street behind, and a wild tumult was in the air, yells and shouts ringing up. Two country wagons ahead—Grimm went smash at the horses, crowded the animals together, slipped through as the two carts crashed.

WITH a laugh, he dropped the bent candlestick and lashed his horse into a gallop. The narrow street was well blocked against pursuit. Three min-

utes later, he was out of the town, speeding away at fast and furious breakneck course. Out of the trap and away!

### CHAPTER III

LUTHER GRIMM pushed his horse like a madman; mile after mile dropped behind. Inquiring in a village, he found that the next post-house lay in a town seven miles ahead. He pressed on again, the good horse in a lather of foam, ran out the last few miles, and came into a place of some size. He knew that he was well ahead of the eastbound diligence. He lost no time selling his horse to a dealer who asked no questions, and in losing his identity. . . .

It was long past noon when the diligence came clattering in to the post tavern. Hostlers sprang to work. The post-horses were out of harness, into stalls, and the fresh horses being led into place. On the waiting-bench for the diligence sat a man eating bread and cheese, with a stoup of wine from the tavern. Summoned to take his place in the vehicle, he showed himself round-shouldered, stooped, anything but clean; he was clad in shabby garments, a battered old hat, and *sabots* that were chipped and dirty.

Crowded into the diligence with the other passengers, he heard the boot closed, the driver and postilions scramble to their positions, the whistle blow for departure. But no departure; instead came a rush of men and horses through the town, some riders turning into the inn yard, others clattering on past. Peremptory voices issued commands, orders. Two men inspected the passengers in the diligence, then turned to the inn.

The pursuit, the search, had caught up, and now it had passed ahead. The diligence was free to leave. The whip cracked, the post-horn's mellow note floated out; the horses swept into instant speed on the road for Coblenz.

There was little talking. The American sat hunched and braced against road shocks, like the other passengers; his face wore a vacant look; when a commercial traveler opposite cursed the clumsy wooden *sabots*, Grimm cringed a little and made no response. When some one grunted a question at him, he merely looked blank. These stout Germans had no use for a fool.

Neither did the pursuers, who did not seek a fool at all.

The miles tripped rapidly behind, as the vehicle clattered and thundered on to the great city. Even faster than the diligence, however, was a light carriage which could also command relays of fresh horses at frequent intervals. If Grimm had needed any proof of the qualities of Count Otto and his Countess, it came to him when he alighted from the diligence in the courtyard of the Coblenz terminal.

He saw them sitting there in the elegant carriage, its horses a-steam, watching the passengers leave the diligence. Evidently Count Otto was taking nothing for granted; and for once there was nothing of the simpering fop in his appearance. Despite hurts, despite hard and fast travel, the man looked fresh and savagely alert.

As for the woman who sat beside him, her strange beauty impressed itself upon Luther Grimm at this moment with singular force. It was a calm, almost an ethereal beauty, far removed from any passion or emotion; he recognized it for the mask it was. In repose the mouth had a slight downward twist which marked a subtle difference from that of Marie; this was almost the only detail in which the two women were outwardly at variance.

THANKFUL for the sweat-smeared dust on his face and hair hanging about his eyes, Grimm was half across the courtyard when a sudden commotion arose. To his dismay, two grooms ran after and caught hold of him. A woman, who with her whining baby had sat next him in the vehicle, came screeching, while a crowd gathered instantly. The woman flung herself on the dumfounded Grimm, clawed at him, and from the sagging pocket of his ragged coat triumphantly produced the baby's nursing bottle. She had put it there, out of her own way, as they rode.

A roar of laughter went up. Grimm, vacuous of eye and stooped of shoulders, peered about as he was released. He was, in reality, badly shaken by the incident. A postilion clapped him heavily on the back, with more laughter.

"So you'd steal the milk of an innocent babe, eh? You must be a Pomeranian, you rascal! They'd steal anything. Here! What's dragging down that other pocket of yours?"

Vacantly, Grimm displayed the contents—the remains of his bread and cheese, and a raw turnip. The laughter

was redoubled, and under cover of it he shambled away, his *sabots* clumping the stones. A moment later he was safely out of the inn yard and mingling with the afternoon throngs in the city streets.

COBLENZ, queen of the Rhine! Here, without curious questions from merchants, he changed his appearance as he desired. In his present shape he could not very well go to any tavern.

Turning in at a shop, he laid out some of his money with all the naïve delight of a countryman come to town. The sale of the horse had provided as much money as he now needed. With the clothes he sought, he next went to a barber near by and had his head clipped. Here, also, he was able to buy a passable wig. And as wigs were out of fashion, this served his disguise all the better.

Behold, then, an untidy, black-clad, stoop-shouldered notary betaking himself toward the river front and gaping away at the wharves, the swift-rushing Rhine, the boats and the long bridge. A notary with portfolio under arm, with spectacles perched on his thin hawk-beak, with soiled linen at throat and cuffs, and leaning heavily on his stick as he walked, with a distinct limp. Even the smear of brownish snuff about his nostrils and on his linen was perfectly applied.

At length he came to the Fürstenhof tavern, an old and comfortable establishment serving the river trade. And as he limped in and was about to apply for a private room, he once more had evidence of Count Otto's comprehensive activities: Two cold-eyed men, agents of police, were minutely questioning the innkeeper regarding his arrivals of the afternoon. But they gave Grimm a careless glance and went on with their task. They had excellent descriptions of Luther Grimm—as he had been—and also of St. Denis and Marie of Courland.

As Grimm was interested to note, they drew quite blank here. No lady whatever had come to the Fürstenhof this day. Nobody had arrived, in fact, except a young gentleman from Berlin who was out seeing the world, with an old family retainer to wait on him—and very little money in his pocket, to judge by his pinchpenny manner.

"All these Prussians are alike," grumbled the innkeeper. "This fellow acts like a lord and spends like a lackey! So stingy, just like his royal master, that he had to have the cheapest lodgings in the house."



"Your pardon!" Grimm bowed. "I have

The police merely sniffed at this information, and departed to make the round of the other taverns.

Luther Grimm secured a room, deposited his few effects in it, and after a cup of wine in the tap-room, sauntered forth. It was the sunset hour, the one best suited to his present intent. Later in the evening spies might be anywhere, would be everywhere. The banker Hoffman was probably known to be a French agent, and would be under watch.

Circling through the town, Grimm found the house he sought in the Schloss Strasse. It was the combined office and residence of Herr Hoffman; clerks were putting up shutters for the night, and the courtyard gates were being closed. Grimm spoke with one of the clerks.

"Your master is here? I must have a word with him at once."

"You're an important personage, eh?" sneered the clerk. "Thus to disturb him when the office is shut for the day!"

"Tell him, if you please, that his cousin is here."

"Oh! That's different. Will you come into the courtyard?"

Grimm would, and did. The clerk departed, to return again, obsequious and



made an error!" "More than you know," said a voice. "Who are you?"

most deferential. A moment later Grimm found himself in the presence of the banker, who gave him a blankly puzzled stare and addressed him in French.

"Well, monsieur? You made use of a certain phrase known to me, but I do not know you—ah!" An exclamation broke from him as Grimm straightened up, removed the curled wig, and flashed him a smile. "Why, M. Grimm—God bless me, I'd never have known you!"

"Thanks." And Grimm chuckled. "I need both money and information. And help."

"You have only to ask, monsieur."

"Have you received any word from my friend the Vicomte de St. Denis?"

"None. I know him, however."

"He should be here. He may get in touch with you tonight or in the morning. Now, I'm using the name of Jan Stern; but I need a passport in that name, also a thousand francs. Can you help me out?"

"Of course," replied the banker promptly. As contact man for many a French secret agent, he was used to emergencies. "The money instantly, the papers by noon tomorrow. I'm wholly at your service."

"Thank you. I shall be at the Fürstehof, under the name of Jan Stern, until tomorrow night. Could you procure me a private audience with the Elector tomorrow?"

The banker fell into troubled thought; then his face cleared.

"As yourself, or as Jan Stern?"

"Oh, the latter! I have a message for him." Grimm smiled. "I have just arrived from Berlin, where the King of Prussia confided to me a verbal and private message for him. Thus, at least, you may inform him."

Hoffman darted him a sharp glance, and nodded. With the eccentric Frederick of Prussia, who paid no regard to conventions, anything was possible.

"I'm to see the Elector in the morning at ten. I can take you with me; yes, I'll arrange it. So you've just come from Berlin?"

"That's the story." Grimm shrugged. "I'm headed for Paris. Inquiries will most certainly reach you, and it'll do no harm if you talk freely."

Hoffman nodded again. "I understand. His Highness is building a new castle, and is temporarily living at the old palace on the Schloss Platz. I can

pick you up at the Fürstenhof about nine-thirty in the morning."

"Thank you; it'll be most kind."

His pockets heavy with cash, Grimm made his way back to the tavern.

France was well served in Coblenz!

He had thought deeply about this audience with the Elector, and had determined upon it. He was risking nothing by giving a false message; and it was imperative that he get in a crack at Count Otto. Luther Grimm acted on the principle that the quicker the enemy was shaken and given a body blow, the better. "Never neglect an opportunity; if there is none, make one," old Benjamin Franklin had once advised him.

He made inquiries at the tavern. The young gentleman who had that afternoon arrived with his lackey bore a long and involved Prussian title. Grimm sent a servant to ask that the notary Jan Stern be received. The servant came back and beckoned him.

GRIMM followed to a small bare room, evidently one of the cheapest to be had in the place. Before the flickering candle-glow, he bowed and stared hard. For a moment his heart misgave him; the consequences of a mistake gripped sharply at him. No sign in this young gallant of the Marie he knew! Black hair and brows instead of rippling gold. The attire of a dandy, the finest of linen, a Spanish cloak about the young man's shoulders—no, no!

"Your pardon." Grimm bowed over his stick. Ever perfect in his part, his very voice had become dry and precise. "Your Excellency will excuse me. I have made an error."

"You have," said a voice behind him.

Grimm turned, to see a figure standing there with pistol leveled.

"More of an error than you know, perhaps," went on the voice. "And you'll answer for it. Who are you? What brought you here? Out with the truth!"

This was the young gentleman's lackey. Suddenly Grimm's heart leaped. He recognized those wrinkled, withered features. Old Jacques!

"Speak up!" The pistol came to cock, with a sharp click.

Grimm straightened. A shower of gold was disgorged from his pocket over the table. He plucked away the wig, and his ringing laugh burst upon the room.

"Congratulations, Marie!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, you fooled me completely!"

"You—you!" She sprang forward, caught his hand, and stared at him. "Oh, comrade! And I never recognized you, never knew you! Why, I saw you downstairs an hour ago; you were just going out. I thought what a queer fellow you looked! Jacques, it's he!"

"So I see," observed the old retainer with dry chagrin. "And I came near to shooting him, I can tell you!"

During the next few moments there was rapid talk, explanation, surmise. Grimm nodded, to her smiling inquiry.

"Admirable! With the cloak, you'd pass anywhere; it hides what's left of your figure. And blackening your hair was a master-stroke. I trust the stain isn't permanent?"

"I can wash it out any time," said the girl, laughing.

"Good. So you got here about broke, eh? . . . Well, we've no more money troubles for the present. No word from St. Denis yet. There's the devil of a search on foot. Police were here, are seeking everywhere. Hm!" His gaze narrowed. "Do you know, you're far better looking than your sister?"

"Flora?" A startled expression leaped into the girl's face. "My sister? You've not seen her?"

HE nodded, and sketched the day's happenings briefly.

"You and your sister are almost twins—or were, before the present change in you," he went on. "At sight of her, I thought it was you; a bad moment, let me tell you! Now let me get straightened out! Does Mortlake know her? He must, if he's known your family."

"By sight, no doubt," said the girl, frowning. "But I doubt if he knows her more than that—probably he's never spoken with her. She and Otto were the ones who had me locked up, and have conducted all attempted negotiations with me. Flora has told about the man, of course. I've seen him several times, but have never spoken with him."

"I see." Luther Grimm got out his pipe and stuffed it, then laid it aside until their meal should be served and over. "Then Mortlake has had most of his dealings with Count Otto, who doesn't like him any too well, eh?"

"Probably distrusts him," she said. "You see, Mortlake betrayed my father, sold him to Russia."

"I get the picture. Now about yourself: Do you lay claim to the Duchy of Courland?"



"Mercy, no!" She broke into a wry laugh. "Catherine of Russia has set up a new duke. I don't care anything about the title. For many years, a part of the revenues were set aside by my father; they were put into the hands of bankers in Prussia, and in the end they amounted to a vast sum.

"Well, when our estates were confiscated, when everything went smash, this money remained in safety. It's now held in trust for me by those bankers. They'll surrender it only to me in person, when I appear and establish my identity. Of course, they know me; this clause is really a formality, but it was to provide against any trickery by Flora. My father was afraid of her, you see. Well, I have the essential documents; and I must appear before those two bankers in Berlin—Arnheim and Pfalzer. They're honest men, but—"

"**B**UT?" prompted Luther Grimm, as she paused.

"But Frederick of Prussia wants that money. And naturally, they're more or less under his thumb."

Luther Grimm whistled softly. "I begin to appreciate your difficulties—and my own! Count Otto and your sister—"

"Meant to strip me. By turning over the whole inheritance, I was to receive my freedom and a life annuity. Well, I'm free! And I'm not going to give King Frederick one solitary copper!"

Luther Grimm nodded. He could now comprehend that this girl would find no safety or protection in Berlin. Once there, she would be as among ravening wolves. The King would not hesitate for a moment to extort half her patrimony from her. And as for letting her give half of it to France—

"Why," he asked slowly, "couldn't you turn over the whole thing to France for collection? Then you'd not have to go to Berlin at all."

"The bankers wouldn't pay it; the sum is in trust, you know, and I must appear in person. Count Otto was going to bring both the bankers to Cologne—the King would make them come, of course—and interview me there."

"It's Berlin for all of us, then." And Grimm nodded. "And after dinner we must separate, for safety's sake. I'm done up and need a good night's sleep. As soon as I meet St. Denis tomorrow, we'll be on our way. You have money; your disguise is admirable, and you needn't worry. Once in Berlin, go to the

Hotel de Paris. It's a quiet little rooming-house kept by a French widow; you can trust her—she knows me. Wait there for word from me."

"Understood, comrade." Marie regarded him gravely. "Do you know, at first I thought you were terribly harsh and cold; now I know you better, I don't think so. Are all Americans like that? Perhaps because they see so much of those frightful redskin savages we've heard about. I thought all Americans wore rings in their ears."

Grimm broke into a laugh. "No, not all; at least, I don't. But I may take a scalp or two before we reach Berlin."

She smiled. "Well, make yourself comfortable; Jacques will serve the dinner here as soon as it's ready. I'll step into the other room and brush up a bit."

Luther Grimm sat alone over his pipe. He thought of Marie. He thought of that other woman at Alken, her beauty, her effort to beguile him. A spark of alarm grew in his brain, but not because of her. Marie's words had suggested something to him:

He recalled how Count Otto had been sitting in his carriage here in Coblenz, watching the diligence arrive. Count Otto, giving no sign of the crushing blow that had struck him down. Count Otto, the master of intrigue, hat pulled over hurt head and yellow curls, driving like mad past the vineyards of the Moselle to reach Coblenz!

Redskin savages, yes. Oddly enough, there was something in this antagonist of his to remind Grimm of a lurking Iroquois, deadly and merciless.

#### CHAPTER IV

**C**OBLENZ, whence the Elector and Archbishop of Treves ruled all his rich domain, was plump with prosperity and peace, like its lord.

A placid, kindly, middling-handsome man was Clemens the Elector, devoted to the arts, loving justice, a great builder and beautifier of his capital city. Just such a man as Otto of Osbrock loved to deal with.

The ancient Schloss, overlooking the city and the confluence of Rhine and Moselle, was being torn down and rebuilt. The hilly streets were teeming with wagons; workmen by hundreds were bustling about; building materials were pouring in by road and by river. Across the Rhine towered the mighty hill and



"Careful!" The word was a croak. "Either I've gone out of my senses—or we're dealing with Satan in person!"

fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, defending Coblenz against all attack from the east.

Elector Clemens, who was by preference less an archbishop than a ruler, sat in the cool library of the old palace on the Schloss Platz. His episcopal ring, his purple *soutane*, his firmly pleasant and ruddy features, contrasted sharply with the dictation he gave his secretaries. His language could be most unclerical. On the surface he was an absolute ruler, a despot, although a kindly one. So, at least, he was pleased to consider himself.

UPON the room hung an atmosphere of rich elegance which was symbolic of the man and his position and his day. The morning sunlight was excluded by draperies of cloth of gold. In one corner, on its pedestal of ebony, stood the glorious marble Venus supposed to be from the hand of Phidias.

A chamberlain swung open the doors and advanced to the table where Clemens sat. "Serene Highness!" he said apologetically, then spoke under his breath. The Elector nodded quickly.

"Yes, yes, bring him in at once. And the banker Hoffman—well, let him wait." Clemens glanced at the two secretaries. "You may go, gentlemen. I'll finish with the dictation later."

After a moment, Count Otto was introduced, and the doors were closed.

With a devout expression and a mincing air, the Count came forward. He bowed low, shook the fine Mechlin lace from his cuffs, and kissed the big

amethyst ring of the archbishop-elect. His yellow curls were carefully arranged to conceal a bump and a bit of plaster above his left ear.

"Well, Otto, you're about early. I had no idea you were in the city," Clemens said with a trace of asperity. Perhaps he resented the steel fingers that underlay the silken glove of Osbrock. "I'm surprised that you'd bother to pay your respects to me."

"Your Highness is pleased to jest," Count Otto rejoined. "Your Highness has no more devoted and humbly obedient servant—"

"Yes, yes, I know all that. Save it." Clemens inspected him sharply. "So you call me Highness, not Monseigneur? That means you've come to speak with the Elector, and not with the Archbishop. Am I correct?"

"The wisdom of Your Highness is omniscient; I have come to ask for advice," suavely replied the Count. "I have just been summoned to Berlin on affairs of some moment; before leaving, I have just handed the treasurer a contribution of ten thousand ducats toward the expenses of the new Schloss, with my compliments."

"Come! You must be after something worth while this time," Clemens made cynical response.

"The advice of Your Highness is more precious than gold—"

"Bah! We're alone; suppose we abandon all pretense," the Elector broke in. "You care nothing for anyone's advice, Otto. You serve Frederick of Prussia, not Clemens of Treves. What are you after now? Let's reach the point."

Count Otto sighed.

"Your Highness is displeased; I regret the fact, but am helpless. I have come to inform Your Highness of the crimes committed by two French gentlemen in your territories and to seek your advice. These men are really French agents. They have seized and abducted a noble lady who was residing quietly in Cologne and have brought her through the territory of Treves, here to Coblenz. They have killed or injured several subjects of Your Highness. Two of my own men were killed by them the day before yesterday."

CLEMENS frowned. "What? Are you certain of your facts?"

"Absolutely. One of these men is a Vicomte de St. Denis, a French nobleman of vicious character, who spent several years in the Bastille. The other is a secret agent known as Luther Grimm—"

"What?" exclaimed the Elector. "Why, I know this man Grimm. I have dealt with him. He's a most astute fellow. Not the sort to abduct a young woman."

"It has been done," said Count Otto, and thumbed his little mustache. "This man Grimm is indeed most astute; further, he is rumored to be one of the greatest masters of fence in Europe. At Vienna, a year ago, he gave an exhibition of the sword before the Emperor. Now it appears that his mind is deranged, and he has become criminal."

"If this information is correct, as I assume it to be," the Elector said sharply, "these men must be arrested. I'll not permit such scoundrels to exist in my realm!"

Count Otto bowed. "Not ten minutes ago, Highness, I received sure information where to find this man St. Denis, and no doubt the other with him. He is at the Rittersturtz, a few miles below the city, trying to get across the Rhine. I have given orders which will prevent his escape."

"Without my permission?"

"An emergency, Highness! I hastened here for your advice and counsel. Your Highness is friendly and even allied with France. It might make trouble were these men seized and put to the question, by you."

"It must be done!" Clemens puffed out his cheeks. "Murder, eh? I'll not permit such crimes to go unpunished!"

"Ah, Your Highness is the very soul of justice!" Count Otto said warmly. "Still,

expediency is a great thing. It might be better for you to know nothing of what takes place, especially as I hope to catch both these men in the same net. Suppose they were to leave your territory and cross the Rhine. Suppose I, acting on behalf of Prussia, were to conclude the matter fittingly myself? Your Highness would be relieved of all inquiries or responsibility."

The Elector frowned, pursed up his lips, and reflected. He was startled; this was an emergency; and emergencies upset him. It suggested acute trouble with France, and he desired no trouble.

"How," he asked, "would you seize these villains?"

"By sunset they'll be secured. How? By assisting them to escape across the Rhine. They'll disappear from sight."

"Well, I'll have nothing to do with it," decided Clemens abruptly. "Do what you like; I leave it to you. The moment I receive official notice of the matter will be time enough to worry about it."

"The clemency of Your Highness, the prudence, the wisdom, is superb!" Count Otto exclaimed admiringly. "So, with permission, I'll take my leave and follow the counsel so happily received. May God keep Your Highness!"

"Wait!" Clemens checked him. "How did you happen to learn about these men being at the Rittersturtz?"

"Through a secretary of the banker Hoffman. The police inform me that Hoffman acts as French agent and will bear watching—"

"Hoffman is most valuable to me," broke in the Elector, almost angrily. "Let the police spy on him all they like. Of course he's a French agent. However, I do not want him molested or troubled in any way. Look to it!"

Count Otto bowed low, and took his departure after receiving the episcopal, if somewhat mechanical, blessing.

In the anteroom outside he came upon the banker Hoffman; with him was a bespectacled notary. Count Otto nodded affably to the banker, and went his way.

WHEN the two had been admitted to the presence of the ruler, Clemens spoke abruptly:

"Who's this man? Oh, I remember. Something about a message from Berlin?"

Grimm, beckoned, came forward and bowed respectfully.

"A message from King Frederick, for your ear alone, Highness. I had the honor of conversing with him last week.

He was good enough to entrust me with a few words for you."

Hoffman had already retreated out of earshot. Clemens helped himself copiously to snuff and nodded to the notary. There was no reason to doubt such a message, so sent. Frederick the Great was noted for his eccentricity, for mingling with people of low degree, for abrupt and unconventional ways.

"Well, my man? The message?"

"Highness, these are his exact words: 'If you should see the Elector of Treves, tell him three things for his ear alone. First, he allows himself to be served by a rascal. Second, let him believe nothing that he may hear about the French agent Luther Grimm until it is proved. Third, if he does not cleanse the stables of the Last Virgin, another may do it for him. That is all.'"

CLEMENS regarded the notary with startled gaze.

"Eh? The Last Virgin—why, that's Osbrock's inn! Yet Frederick cherishes Osbrock, holds him in high regard. . . . Hm! A damnably sharp old fellow, Frederick. Served by a rascal, am I? Whom did he mean by that? Not Count Otto?"

Grimm bowed again.

"Your Highness undoubtedly understands the message. I do not."

"Hm! Perhaps Osbrock doesn't stand so well with Frederick, after all," mused the Elector. Then he frowned. "If that's a threat, he'd better be careful! Treves is no dependency of Prussia. Perhaps it's a warning. . . . Well, well, thank you for the message, my good man. You may go, Hoffman."

The two departed. The carriage of the banker was waiting in the courtyard. As they approached it, one of Hoffman's clerks appeared.

"Master! This message arrived after you had gone. Your secretary opened it, and sent me on with it as being urgent."

Hoffman opened a paper, glanced at it, and turned to Grimm.

"Here. Read it."

Grimm glanced at the writing, which was a huge sprawling scribble: "*Hoffman: If anyone asks for me, I'm waiting at the Rittersturtz. Wonderful wine here. —St. Denis.*"

Grimm was for an instant aghast. Hoffman was watching him anxiously, and now spoke under his breath.

"Is it his writing? A strange way for him to reach me."

"His writing, yes." Grimm crushed the message in his hand and pocketed it. "Not his usual writing, though. The fool's drunk. Why didn't he come to you himself? Afraid he might be recognized, perhaps. . . . Drunk—drunk! Heaven save me from a fool! I'd clear forgotten that St. Denis had that weakness. Well, it's my own fault. What's this place he speaks of, the Rittersturtz?"

"A hill, a tavern, on the river just below the city. If you want to borrow this carriage of mine—"

"Thanks, no. I must go back to my own inn first; I'll walk. We separate here. Thanks for all your assistance. Is there any chance of this message having leaked out through anyone in your office?"

"No," said the banker. "My secretary can be trusted."

"Then—until we meet again!"

Luther Grimm strode out of the palace courtyard with his slight limp, and soon lost himself in the street throngs. The passport and papers of Jan Stern were in his pocket. As he made his way to the Fürstenhof, he recovered from the anger that had seized him. After all, it might be as well that St. Denis had not risked showing his face in the city. But how the devil had St. Denis, drunk or sober, reached the Rittersturtz instead of coming into Coblenz?

"I'll soon learn," thought Grimm, and his spirits rose. "Well, I've put a flea into the Elector's ear that'll keep him interested! And if Luther Grimm shows up here unexpectedly, Clemens won't throw him into a cell on Osbrock's advice."

He purchased a few things of which he had need, exchanged his clumsy stick for a sword-cane with a very fair blade, and so came back to the Fürstenhof. Here he learned that Marie and Jacques had departed, and nodded contentedly. Having paid his score, he engaged one of the carriages at the door and told the driver to take him to the Rittersturtz.

THE carriage passed the valley of the Laubbach; the driver pointed with his whip to the Rittersturtz ahead—a low hill commanding a glorious view of the river and city with the higher humps of the Dommelberg and the Kuhkopf bulking up behind.

On the hill, as the winding road took them upward, was disclosed a charming old tavern, its grounds laid out with flowers and shrubs. Grimm alighted,

dismissed his carriage, and went into the tavern. Noon was approaching, and so he ordered a bottle of wine, a meal, and made inquiries about the Vicomte de St. Denis. No such person was known here.

Considerably relieved by this indication of caution on the part of St. Denis, Grimm went out for a stroll while his meal was preparing. As he came to the end of the gardens, he caught sight of three men talking together. Two of them he took to be peasants or boatmen; the third was St. Denis.

Beyond his change of clothes, the Frenchman had made no attempt at any disguise. He finished his talk with the two men, and they departed. Then St. Denis swung around, glanced at the apparent notary, and without a second look was passing when Grimm spoke to him:

"M. de St. Denis, I believe?"

"Eh?" The Frenchman turned. "Yes, yes. What do you want?"

"I have a message for you," said Grimm in French. "My master says that you made a great mistake in getting drunk last night."

"*Diable!*" St. Denis stared. "I learned that this morning. My head's still bursting. . . . Look here, who are you? Who's your master?"

AT the bewilderment in the man's face, at his sudden suspicion, Grimm exploded in a gust of laughter. He resumed his own normal voice.

"Comrade, you're not so good at this game! Sending that note to Hoffman was a mistake—"

"You! Why, damnation take you, I never suspected it—*you!*" St. Denis seized him in a hearty embrace of wild delight. "You rascal! That note to Hoffman? Well, it's true I had a bit to drink. However, I didn't want to show my face in Coblenz. I got here without coming through the city at all, you see. And the lady?"

"Marie? Oh, she's splendid! She got off for Berlin this morning."

"Good. So you criticize my letter to Hoffman, eh? Let me tell you—"

"Forget it," Grimm intervened. "No harm done; you shouldn't have used your own name. However, you did well not to enter the city without some disguise, for the police are hunting high and low."

"I'm no play-actor," St. Denis growled. "However, all's well. You saw those two men? River men. They have a boat close by, a fine big craft. At sunset they'll put us across, and no questions

asked. I didn't have money enough to pay them in full, but you can take care of that."

"Come along. I've ordered a meal. Talk as we eat—no French, remember."

FROM across the table, St. Denis eyed him curiously.

"Marvelous, Grimm! You've become a different person. I don't see how you do it! So our Marie has become a man, eh? That girl's an angel, comrade. If I were twenty years younger, I'd—well, I'd take to dreaming."

"Nothing to prevent you," said Grimm.

"Bah! Don't be a fool," broke in St. Denis, with his sardonic twist of the lip. "The Bastille ended me for flights of fancy!"

Before going to the Frenchman's room, Grimm examined the place and everyone in sight before deciding for himself that it was safe to remain here for the afternoon. With his customary attention to detail, he took such things for granted only after he had satisfied his own wary senses.

Alone at last, Grimm abandoned spectacles, wig and pose, and got his pipe out. His money, in gold, was safe in a belt under his clothes. He had kept out only enough for current expenses.

"Did you bargain with those boatmen for one passenger or two?" he inquired.

"Two. I thought you'd be along today," said St. Denis. "So, comrade! All grief has an end. The road's clear now. When I was in the Bastille, I said to myself that it was the end—I'd never crack a smile again. But look at me now! By the way, I was talking last night with the innkeeper here. I mentioned that I'd come from the Last Virgin. He knows Count Otto and got to talking about him—"

"Eh?" Grimm gave him a sharp glance.

St. Denis waved his hand.

"Oh, never fear! He suspected nothing. But he also spoke about the Countess. He hates the two of them like poison. He says that damned woman is worse than a dozen of her husband."

Grimm frowned, shrugged and changed the subject.

"If we finish this errand, I'm coming back to these parts some day," he said. "I want to go through the Inn of the Last Virgin—with about fifty men at my back. I've heard queer rumors about that place, for years past; everyone has."

"I want to go through it with a sword in one hand and a torch in the other,"



"Damn you! Keep away—don't trip him!"

St. Denis added with a growl of oaths. "But when we get around to it, watch out for one man—that fellow they call Master Rudolph, the landlord. He's no fool."

Luther Grimm puffed at his pipe and grinned.

"Neither am I—sometimes. Well, for the present we have the Rhine to cross, and Berlin ahead. Once across, I'll take your disguise in hand and give you a few pointers."

They passed the afternoon in talking, drinking and making plans—plans destined to a sudden and abortive ending.

## CHAPTER V

**A** FOOT, Luther Grimm and St. Denis followed the boatman who came to get them. They came down into the wide highway, and went on to a group of buildings by the river's edge, where a large craft lay moored to a wharf. Grimm eyed the road and the dust by the wharf.

"A carriage has been here," he said. The boatman, who was the skipper of their craft, grinned.

"Yes, Excellency. We smuggle over a bit of contraband now and then from Nassau, on the other side of the river. Our customers come to get it by wagon and by carriage. . . . Will you have some supper before we leave?"

"We've just finished a meal, thanks."

"Then we might as well go aboard and be off. We'll need an hour to get across,

as we must pull up against the current to reach our usual landing. Your worships may have the cabin. Now about the payment to be made in advance—"

This detail was quickly settled.

As they went aboard, their guide shouted. Some men came from ashore, others tumbled up from below—ten in all, with the master. Sturdy, cheerful fellows, who loosed the mooring-lines and got out sweeps, five to a side.

The craft, as Grimm noted at a glance, was a decked barge, with an after deck-house or cabin, a mast forward with furled sail, and plenty of cargo-space below.

They went to the cabin. It was large, crudely furnished, and was lit by a stern window of some size which had apparently never been opened. St. Denis settled himself in one of the bunks, but Luther Grimm went back on deck. He stood by the helmsman, as the boat got away.

The men tugged lustily at the long oars, heading the boat upstream along the shallows where the current was not so rapid.

"We'll make that island just this side of the Lahn," said the master, who came to join Grimm. "But to do it, and reach the landing beyond, we must go up higher on this side. The current has a sweep here. It'll be dark long before we land; and so much the better."

Already the level rays of the sun were tipping only the higher hills above the river. The vineyard slopes were merged into the background.

Grimm had carefully kept to his rôle of notary. To his queries, the boatman assured him that horses could be had at the landing, or could be bought at any farm or vineyard near by. He eyed the opposite shore with a heart well-content. Once they picked up the highway a long road lay ahead, on through Nassau and Hesse and Saxony, through minor states and principalities, with Berlin at the end; swiftest travel of all was by the diligence, for a private carriage would attract too much attention, would be too easily traced. . . .

And at Berlin waited Mortlake, the one-eyed Englishman. Thought of him grew upon Luther Grimm.

Thus he stood musing on the darkling river, until he became aware that the boat had changed course. It was heading across the stream now, the men tugging hard to keep the current from sweeping them too far.

"There's a lantern in the cabin," said the boatman. "I can't spare a man to light it, but your worship will find flint and steel—"

"I have everything," said Grimm.

He went back into the cabin. With St. Denis' tinder-box, he soon had the swinging lantern alight. St. Denis sat up and began to polish Grimm's sword-cane. He looked up at Grimm with a chuckle.

"Comrade, I'd like to meet this sister of our pretty lady—what's her name?"

"Flora."

"Right. I wish she'd make a pass or two at me, as she did at you. I'd reform her quick enough!"

"She'd reform you with a dagger, as she tried to do with me."

"Bah! You red-skinned savages from America don't know how to deal with a fine lady like that. Fine lady, eh? You kiss her hand; what that sort needs is a box on the ear. And if we keep to the main highways, we may run into her. Or perhaps we'll run into Marie."

"Not likely," said Grimm, "but not impossible, either. She may be staying in Coblenz, for all I know. Count Otto, I take it, heads for Berlin; she may go with him or may not. He'll have to patch up his whole cursed intrigue now, with Marie gone. His one chance to catch her and win, is to kill me."

"War to the knife, without quarter, eh?" St. Denis laughed. "I hope you know the country ahead. I don't."

"It's savage enough, in more ways than one. This isn't France we're fac-

ing, but Prussia; it's an untamed country. I've been through it more than once. Anything can happen there, and anything does happen."

"So much the better." St. Denis spoke blithely. "This isn't a bad sword you got hold of. I wish I could use the damned thing the way you can! I'll poke my nose on deck for a breath of air. That window apparently doesn't open."

Grimm nodded, stuffed his pipe, and got it alight, while St. Denis started for the deck.

It was still far from dark outside, but evening was rapidly closing down on the river. They must be getting well across by this time, thought Grimm. He puffed his pipe well afire; then, at a step, turned and glanced up. St. Denis had come back.



Grimm stiffened, speechless for an instant. The face of St. Denis was livid; his eyes were bulging; his mouth was opening and closing spasmodically.

"What the devil!" Grimm leaped up.

"Careful!" The word was a croak. St. Denis beckoned. "Either I've gone out of my senses or—or we're dealing with Satan in person. Come and look."

Grimm followed him to the cabin door. St. Denis opened it a couple of inches.

Looking out, Grimm saw that they were nearly across the river. They were, indeed, under the bare little rocky islet the boatman had pointed out to him. Two men up forward were getting ready the landing-ropes. Grimm half turned.

"I don't see anything wrong—"

"Wait!" St. Denis spoke hoarsely, at his ear. "There, he's coming now!"

Ten feet away in the gathering twilight, a figure came into Grimm's range of vision. It was Count Otto—*Count Otto!* Grimm stared, swallowed hard, saw another man come up to the Count and speak—a soldier.

"The men are all up, Highness, and ready."

Luther Grimm softly closed the door. He bolted it, then turned and stared at St. Denis, his brain afire.

**I**N a flash, he had the explanation: There had been some leak in Hoffman's office. The secretary who had opened that letter? Well, no use upbraiding St. Denis now.

"Caught," he asserted quietly. "Count Otto and his men were below the whole time. It was a trap. The boat—everything."

A contortion passed across the features of St. Denis.

"I see; you were right," he said slowly. "It was that accursed letter with my name in it. I wrote it last night; I was drunk. It didn't need to have my name signed, of course. So it's all my fault, my fault!"

Grimm was paying no heed.

"Stop your babbling. They've waited to spring the trap here, because they mean to finish us and throw us into the river. No quarter! That's it. Well, there's the window. We're across to the shore, it's close. Can you swim?"

St. Denis gaped at him.

"Swim? What do you mean?"

"It's getting darker every minute. Almost too dark to see much of anything now. We can slip away and make the shore before they know it. You can swim?"

"Oh, swim!" St. Denis uttered a hoarse and terrible laugh that held no mirth. "Of course, of course. The Bastille is a great educator; one learns everything there. Or almost everything. I can swim like a fish."

"Then get that rear window open. No time to lose."

They darted to the window, with the lantern. A swift examination showed there was no chance whatever of opening it; the frame was built solidly into place. Luther Grimm lifted his foot and drove it at one of the two panes.

The glass shattered out. Another kick, and he had cleared away most of the jagged fragments about the edge. The rest came away easily, leaving an opening well over a foot square; it was large enough to squeeze through.

Voices sounded outside the door. A heavy knock sounded.

"Go, get off with you!" exclaimed St. Denis quickly. "If you can get those shoulders through, it'll be easy for me."

Grimm stooped. He got his legs through the opening, and worked his body after them. More knocks at the door, imperative voices.

He was through at last, his shoulders scraping clear, his legs hanging. It was a six-foot drop to the water. Gripping the window-edge with his hands, he hung there and glanced up. The rail overhead was silent and deserted; there was no suspicion of this evasion.

"You'll be right along?" he grunted.

St. Denis had come close, his face to the opening, gazing down at Grimm.

"Sorry, comrade!" And his sardonic laugh rang out softly. There was a hammering at the cabin door now, a thudding. "You should have known that the one trick nobody ever learns in the Bastille—is to swim."

"What?" gasped out Luther Grimm, in sudden frightful realization. "You can't swim? You lied to me?"

"Exactly. It's my fault that we're trapped; I'll pay. You wouldn't have gone if you'd known the truth. But now you have to go. Win the game for us both, comrade! For us, and for the sweet girl. Go with God, my friend—"

Desperately, frantically, Grimm drew himself up. The fist of St. Denis smashed down on the fingers of his right hand; they loosened. He fell, hanging by one hand. One furious oath, one effort to claw up—then St. Denis knuckled his other hand, hammered the fingers, leaned down and thrust at his shoulders. Grimm's hold gave way; he went down, and the water closed over him.

The money-belt of gold about his waist dragged at him. No time, no way to get rid of that burden now. He had to fight for very life, with a horror of despair at his heart. The thought of St. Denis was torment to him.

He struck out desperately as the current gripped him. Breaking the surface, he found himself in shelter of that little rocky islet. Stroking rapidly, he headed for it. The gold, his garments, his boots, weighted him down. Worse yet was the realization that he had no other course. No use blinking the facts; any return to the boat was impossible. It would only be giving himself up to be murdered.

**H**IS feet struck shallows. He stumbled on until the water was around his knees. From here across to the Nassau bank was only a little way, a short swim; but he could not go yet. He turned and stared at the barge, scarcely fifty feet



distant; an anchor had been put out, and she was swinging on the current.

Her after deck was clearly revealed to him, as two lanterns were held high and cast a flood of light on the cabin doorway. The circling throng of men there had fallen back, well back. Into that doorway Grimm saw St. Denis come, sword-cane in hand, his air cool and collected. Count Otto, flinging aside his coat of silk brocade, bowed to that tall slim figure. St. Denis returned the bow with a low laugh.

GRIMM could guess what had happened while he was swimming, from the words that reached him clearly.

"Well, I'm here," said St. Denis. "Are you trying to trick me out of shelter so your men can stab me in the back?"

"Upon my word of honor, I'm hardly so crude." A rapier glinted in the hand of Count Otto. "I face you, and I alone. But where's your friend Grimm?"

"Damned if I know!" exclaimed St. Denis joyously, lightly. "There was a cursed rascally notary with me; he had agreed to put me on the Berlin road—and he went out the stern window with all my money. I believe that Grimm is by this time well on his way to Berlin."

"So? A likely story, but I hardly credit it," Count Otto rejoined smoothly. "So I must first attend to you, then to him, eh? Very well. Surely you're not afraid to meet my poor rapier?"

"Devil take me if I ask anything better!" cried St. Denis, and flung himself forward.

Steel glittered in the lantern light, glittered and crossed, clashed. Watching, Grimm caught his breath with fear, with hope, with wild anxious suspense. After all, St. Denis was a splendid blade. He himself had taught the man a world of skill with—

Ah! St. Denis was down! Up again on the instant; up again, a little splotch of scarlet growing on his shirt. Too confident, eh? No great hurt; a mere touch. He was laughing now, laughing and thrusting in. Grimm stiffened. Good God, what an attack! No swordsman could stand before that dazzling assault!

Count Otto stood before it; not only stood, but returned thrust for thrust, an agile and amazing figure to see. The two blades clung in the air, grated, disengaged, rippled in and out faster than eye could follow. Minutes dragged on.

Suddenly a cry broke from the men. Count Otto staggered back a pace or two. His right sleeve darkened; blood dripped over his hand and fingers. Swift as light, his rapier glinted as he tossed it to his left hand. Rapidly, fiercely, he pressed in with so terrible an attack that St. Denis was forced back and back.

The lean dark man hardened. Now his thin sliver of steel became a flashing wall through which no thrust or riposte could pierce. He gave attack for attack. Luther Grimm, looking with every nerve tense, realized that St. Denis was exerting a superhuman skill in this moment—

"Damn you! Keep away from him—don't dare trip him!"

The sharp, furious cry broke from Count Otto, as though at some man behind St. Denis; but there was none behind him. The Frenchman flung a startled glance over his shoulder; and in this instant the Count lunged.

One sharp, frightful oath escaped Grimm as he saw St. Denis go down to that foul thrust. The circle of men closed in. Steel flashed once more, and once more drove to the mark.

"Good luck, comrade—"

The words, bursting from St. Denis, ended in death.

SHIVERING as from an ague, Grimm wakened from the trance of horror and despair that had gripped him. The boat that was put over from the deck of the barge was already filling with men. Count Otto was shrilling out orders. Men passed down a lantern to the boat.

Grimm turned and stumbled away with tears on his cheeks, tears of grief and wild fury. Away through the shallows, into the channel, striking out for the shore beyond as he came to deep water.

St. Denis was dead, and had died to save him. And he, weaponless, helpless, futile, could do nothing.

St. Denis dead—and tricked into death! This thought burned like very insanity within him, spurring him into frantic efforts that he could not even realize. The weight of the gold bore him down anew, as he headed for shore.

From the boat issued a chorus of excited shouts. The men in it found his floating hat and wig; the hue and cry redoubled as they pressed on in hot pursuit of him.

The next installment of this swift-paced and colorful novel by the author of "Life's a Fight, Kit!" will appear, of course, in our forthcoming August issue.

# Pete



"First thing I know, I'm right in the middle of them rustlers. They'd heard me comin', an' they had me."

**Y**OU can't tell me nothin' about rattlesnakes, big boy." Chuck Dutton speaking. Chuck was a cowboy on the T.P. ranch, generally called the Tepee. We had ridden down to Big Willow Spring, just loafing, while I waited for the streams to clear so the trout could see to strike.

"Now me," said Chuck, "I wouldn't of kilt that rattler, but of course with you it's different." Chuck got a long stick, picked up the rattlesnake I had just killed, and flung it over in the willows while he went on talking: "Oncet I had a pet rattler that saved my life, an' ever since then I been kinda easy on rattlers. Pete was a real hero."

"A pet rattler?" I marveled. "I never heard of one."

"Neither did I, up to then," said Chuck. "I'd been goin' along killin' 'em by the hunderds, mebber thousands, till I met up with Pete. Course, I never told it round the Tepee about Pete, because, you know, the fellers would all think I was tryin' to string 'em." Chuck gave me a wistful look. "Folks don't un'erstand a guy's feelin's about such things, an' it's hard to explain, so I jest kept still an' let 'em think what they pleased."

The misunderstood cowpuncher took one of my proffered cigarettes and stretched himself luxuriously by the spring. "Yes sir," he said, "Pete was the nicest rattler I ever met."

"A nice rattler?" I repeated a trifle scornfully; to me, no rattlesnake has ever seemed nice. I rather wanted to know how a rattlesnake could be nice. "Listen, Chuck," I offered, "you know I can keep my mouth shut. If I could hear about Pete, why, I might ask the old man if you couldn't go up with me for a couple of days for trout. I'm going to need a guide."

Chuck sat up. "Oh, sure," he agreed; "but it's jest between you an' me. . . . It all come about when old Con Butler sent me over to the West Fork to look up a couple bunches of cows that had got strayed too far from the Tepee range. Easy job, an' the fishin' was good, so I wasn't any too anxious to find them cows all of a sudden. It was pretty near a day's ride from the ranch, so it was sure I'd be gone a week, or mebber I could stretch it to two weeks. The old man had built a shack there in a nice little park, an' it was stocked with canned stuff for jest such occasions as

# Was a Real Hero

*The astonishing saga of a rattler and six rustlers—to say nothing of Chuck Dutton.*

By THOMAS TOPHAM

this. Kind of an outpost where the boys could put up an' be comfortable.

"So I settle down for a few days' fun. I fix me up some swell feeds, an' when I'd clean out a can of grub, I'd throw it out the door. The result was the trade-rats an' some chipmunks started comin' around to git free eats. That was all right by me, but the rats commenced comin' in the shack an' stealin' my soap an' bacon an' anything loose. Worried me a lot. Why, oncet I come in sudden, an' find a pack-rat tryin' to lug off a boot through a hole about two inches round. He was sure a puzzled rat, wonderin' why it wouldn't go through.

"I'm figgerin' I'll have to throw the cans farther away, or mebbe pack 'em off a half mile or so, but one evenin' while I'm settin' out in front coolin' off, I see a big rattler come sneakin' up to the tin-can pile an' coil hisself up back of a small sage bush. I started quiet for my gun to blow his head off, an' then I tumbled to what he was up to. He was after a nice fat rat, an' I wondered if havin' him around wouldn't mebbe scare them rats into good order. So I leave Mr. Rattler alone an' wish him good luck.

"The rattler was back ag'in the next evenin', an' it seemed to me like the rats hadn't been so bad the night before. I slip over to take a better look at the reptile, because he was sure a fine specimen of diamond-back. He didn't git a bit scared when I come up, an' don't rattle. Jest stays there an' looks at me like he wonders what I am.

"Well, guys do funny things when they're alone up in the hills. I start talkin' to this rattler, an' it strikes me he kinda likes it. He rattles his tail sorta feeble, not like he was mad, but like a dog waggin' his tail. Then I remembers somethin' I'd read in a magazine about the Indians over in India—not our Indians—singin' to snakes. Co-bras them are, too—"

"They play music to them on flutes," I interrupted. "You've got that a little mixed up."

"Well, I thought I remembered it was singin'," said Chuck. "An' anyway, I sing to this here snake. The boys would tell you that this would prove the story about Pete is a lie—that my singin' would scare a snake off'n the place. But that's because they're jealous of my singin'. Boy, I twang a mean guitar, an' I can warble.

"Anyway, my singin' didn't scare the snake. I sing him a lullaby about swingin' in the trees an' that easy stuff, an' he cocks his ears like he's listenin'. You say a snake aint got no ears? Well, they have. Mebbe not like a jack-rabbit's, but they got ears, an' they can hear a lot better than they can see.

"It commences to git dark an' I decide to quit foolin' with the snake an' hike back into the shack. I aint figgerin' on killin' him yet, thinkin' mebbe he is cleanin' up the rats or scarin' 'em off. So I start away, an' darn' if the snake don't uncoil an' start follerin' me. Yes-sir, that singin' had got him. He coils hisself up as close as I'd let 'im when we git to the shack, an' rattles like he wanted somethin', so I try another song on him, an' darn' if I didn't sing him plumb to sleep.

"WELL, the upshot of this is, me an' that rattler become real friendly. I name him Pete, an' teach him to come wrigglin' to me when I whistle, an' he never makes no pass to grab me. I poke sticks an' a old boot at him to see if he'd bite, an' he don't; so one day I git down close an' talk to him, an' I git up enough nerve to pick him up. He puts his head in my hand, comfortable as you please. Yes *sir*, it takes nerve to pick up a rattler the first time!

"No sir, I never did think I'd make friends with a rattler, but this come around so gradual it seemed natural;

an' Pete, if he was treated right, was as harmless as a kitten. After that I invite Pete in the shack, an' he lives under the bed. An' boy, he kept that shack clean of rats. The only trouble about it was that Pete would git cold on chilly nights an' crawl up into my blankets. The first time that happened I was scared silly an' darn' near strangled Pete. But he clumb up ag'in, so I get wise an' fix him up a piece of blanket in a box under the bunk, an' he liked that fine.

"Of course, I never think about Pete bein' a nervous snake, an' one night when I hear a noise I hop outa bed kinda suddent; an' Pete don't know what's goin' on, so he makes a pass at my feet that come down right in front of his box. Yeah, he missed me only because it kinda mixed him up, two feet bein' there, so he goes in between 'em. After that I crawled out easy if I got out suddent, or sometimes makin' a jump of it.

**I**T sure was a comfort havin' Pete up there in that lonesome place. I couldn't locate them cows as quick as I thought I could, but I knowed the old man wouldn't worry. He knew it might be a hard job. Pete an' me'd set out in front of the shack, evenin's, an' I'd play my guitar an' sing him the 'Cow-puncher's Lament,' an' he'd rattle that he liked it fine. He sure was a good audience.

"If I was a liar like some of the boys, I'd tell you I trained Pete so he'd keep time to the music with his rattlin'. No sir, I couldn't git him to do it; but I did try. Oncet in a while I'd think he'd got the idee, but then he'd flop on it, so I give that up.

"I s'pose you've heard that a rattler won't eat nothin' less he kills it himself, but I proved that was a lot of bunk. I trained Pete to eat bacon an' flapjacks, an' he got to be a reg'lar fiend for syrup. That was funny, the day he tried to pull the stopper out of the syrup jug. He gits his jaws around the cork all right, an' yanks it out, an' then he can't git the cork out of his face. A snake's teeth go backward, you know, an' when they git somethin' in their mouth, it won't come out.

"So there come Pete a-rattlin' up to me with that stopper stuck in his jaws, a-beggin' me to help him. I cussed him out, but I had to laugh. After lettin' him wriggle around for about a hour to teach him a good lesson, I ketch him an' try to pull the cork out, but I see I'll pull out all his teeth, an' what good would a rattler be without teeth? The cork had slipped down farther too. So finally I pry his jaws open an' git the stopper out; but Pete gits sore about me pryin' him open so wide, an' goes off in a corner an' sulks. Every time I'd come around, he'd rattle; but by that time I knowed he was only bluffin', so I pick him up an' put him on the table an' feed him. For a couple days he can't eat nothin' unless I poke it down his mouth, so I keep him filled up on flapjacks, which is easy to git down. It sure would have surprised anybody comin' in suddent to have saw Pete coiled up there



"If you move, he'll nab you, I tell this new bird. Well, he's scared stiff. I make him talk by threatenin' to sick Pete on him,"

Illustrated by  
Henry Thiede

on the table an' me feedin' him flapjacks an' pourin' syrup down his gullet.

"One of our boys shows up about then an' tells me the old man wanted to know if I was gonna stay up there all summer. It was Jack O'Keefe, an' he was on his way over to Big Meadows. I start to tell Jack about Pete; then I think better of it, because soon as Jack shows up, Pete takes to his box an' don't come out. That showed me he didn't like visitors none. So Jack rides off next day, never knowin' he'd slept in the same shack with a rattler.

"Well, havin' got this word from the old man, I figger I better be leavin', so I start the cattle I'd been after down the cañon toward the ranch. First I think I'll take Pete back with me; then I think the boys wouldn't stand for havin' him around, an' it would be kind of embarrassin' for Pete. Even if the boys got used to him, some stranger might come around an' slug off Pete's head before anybody could make explanations. So I pet Pete awhile, an' next day go off an' leave him.

"Course, I didn't tell it around at the ranch about me an' Pete. They'd jest have said I was lyin'; an' if a feller gits a reputation for lyin', it sticks to him.

"WHEN spring comes around ag'in after a hard winter, the old man calls me an' wants to know what I think about some of the cows havin' wintered up in the West Fork. He knowed I knew a lot about the country up there. We discuss it awhile, an' the boss says I better pack a mule with grub an' go up to see what I can find out. When I hit the shack, I look around, but Pete aint there; it's still kind of chilly in the hills an' I guess he aint come out yet.

"I spend about ten days turnin' back a few cows that I find had spent the winter purty good; then I go back to the ranch for some more supplies, an' on my second trip back to the shack, there's Pete big as life, an' he aint forgot me a-tall. An' he's so glad to see me he busts off a rattle knockin' it on the table-leg.

"But Pete aint keen on the mule I'd brung back with me. He was jealous of that there mule an' showed it. The mule used to come around lookin' for syrup an' flapjacks too, an' finally Pete an' the mule has a reg'lar knockdown an' drag-out fight. Pulled it off right in the door of the shack, an' like to wrecked things.

"Pete was on the table when the mule sticks in his mug, so Pete r'ars up, an' the mule makes as if he'd bite off his head. At that, Pete makes his pass, forgettin' he's on the table. A mule can be quick if he wants to, an' he gits his face out of the way. Pete misses an' goes floppin' off the table, an' the mule tries to stomp him, but Pete recovers quick an' takes a bite at the mule's leg.

"Then I take a hand an' kick the mule out, an' I ketch Pete an' give him a lickin'. How do you lick a snake? Why, you ketch hold of his head an' lam him up ag'in' somethin', but not too hard, or you'll bust his back. Yeah, the mule was pretty sick, but he don't come beggin' for any more flapjacks. He's got a mighty healthy respect for Pete after that.

"Well, I settle down to work, an' ag'in in the evenin's I'd take my old guitar an' set outside an' give Pete an' the mule an' my bronc' a concert. The mule an' the bronc' both liked music about as well as Pete, an' I guess we'd of looked funny to anybody, me settin' on the step a-strummin' the guitar an' singin', with Pete coiled up at my feet an' the mule an' the bronc' standin' off a little ways, listenin'.

"One night I try a croonin' song. I'd heard 'em over the radio down at the ranch, an' allers had figgered I could do 'em, but the boys wouldn't let me practice. Here was my chance. I find out I could do 'em swell. I'm right in the middle of 'When the Moon Comes over the Mountain,' when I stop to git my breath, an' I hear Pete rattlin' to beat the band. I look at him, surprised, an' I see he's hoppin' mad. I stop croonin', an' he stops rattlin' an' sinks his head down on his coil like it oughta be. So I strike up the moon song ag'in, an' Pete starts his rattlin'. Then I savvy. He don't like croonin', an' he's tryin' to rattle me down. Seein' he can't do that, he makes a bluff he's gonna bite me, so I stop.

"It sure strikes me as funny to think about Pete losin' his goat over croonin'. So, thinkin' it a big joke, I hit her up ag'in, an' the son-of-a-gun, after givin' me fair warnin', makes a lunge. He only got in one fang an' that through my overalls, or I'd be a dead cowpuncher now.

"I was mad enough to kill Pete, but he quick gits out of the way. Of course I go doctorin'. I'm a sick *hombre* for a couple days—yeah, an' drunk too. Pete shows up the next day an' crawls up in

my bunk like he's sorry, but I grab him an' drop him out. Then he goes off an' brings me a nice fat rat. Thinks I'm dyin' of hunger, I guess. Well, after that I couldn't be mad at him, so we make up.

"After I got well, I wonder if Pete's still sore at this croonin', so I climb up on a chair where he can't git at me an' try it on him. It sure drives him wild; if I'd been in reach he'd have grabbed me ag'in. So I decide croonin' is out. It don't do to rile a rattler too much.

"This whole story might have been different if I'd been out after them cows the day a king snake got after Pete. I was loafin' around the shack, bein' still a little sick over Pete's bite, when Pete comes gallopin' in the door like he was in a turrible hurry, an' right after him is a whale of a king snake. Purtiest thing you ever see with them rings all around him, but he had a mouth on him about the size of a bulldog's. King snakes hates rattlers, an' this one'd picked on Pete for his dinner.

"Pete ducks under a chair in the middle of the shack an' coils, an' the king snake begins circlin' the chair with Pete tryin' to turn his head an' keep track of him. Purty soon the king is goin' so fast he looks like a complete circle around that chair, an' Pete is so dizzy he's cross-eyed. Pete gives up an' flops over, an' I see I got to help him out, so I grab a club I got to beat the mule with; but I can't hit the king, he's goin' so fast. Finally I stick the club inside the circle an' push out; an' the third time I push, I connect. The king is goin' so fast that collidin' with the club knocks him cuckoo, so I shove him out the door. . . .

"Yeah, that's the way kings kill rattlers. Make 'em dizzy, then grab 'em."

"**Q**UITE a contribution to natural history," I suggested to Chuck.

"Yeah, 'tis," said Chuck. "An' Pete's sure grateful. He won't hardly stir outa my lap the rest of the day.

"About this time I commence to tumble where some of our cows musta went. I begin to suspicion they's some rustlers around. I run onto a old camp, an' I foller a trail an' git pretty suspicious. But I'm too brash, an' the first thing I know I come round a bend in a cañon an' I'm right in the middle of four of them rustlers. Yeah, they'd heard me comin' an' they had me.

"I'm sure disgusted. No chancet to fight, so I jest stick up my paws, an'

I'm their prisoner. The rustlers is sure tickled I'd been so careless, an' when they get me, they hold a big pow-wow. Seems they aint got their bunch of cows together that they're aimin' to drive off, an' they's two more of the rustlers out roundin' 'em up. Then the boss of the outfit decides what he'll do. 'Jess,' he says to one of the guys, 'this feller is campin' down in the Tepee shack near Big Rock. You take him back there an' hold 'im. The other boys will be back tomorrer, an' with this bird outa the way, we can drive down past Big Rock an' it'll be easier out than up over the hills. We'll pick you up when we come by tomorrer. Keep yer eye out for anybody who might come up from the Tepee.'

"'What'll I do with him?' asks this Jess.

"'Keep him tied up when you git to the shack,' says the boss rustler. 'We'll tie his feet together under the horse an' tie his hands behint him. We'll leave him there when we git past, an' then we'll have one of the boys telephome from town to the Tepee an' they can come up an' git him, but by that time we'll be in the clear. We don't want no killin' in this unless we have to. They can git up an' turn him loose before he croaks.'

"**A**INT that puttin' me in nice, now? Old Conway Butler an' the boys will come bustin' up there an' find me all hog-tied an' a big bunch of cows gone. Mebbe I'll be dead from thirst when they git there, which right then I wish I was.

"They go ahead with their plans. Jess takes me back to the shack, an' next thing I know, we're there, an' I'm tied hand an' foot an' shoved on a bunk, not mine. Jess had decided to use my bunk that I had fixed up all nice an' soft.

"I'm in hopes Pete won't come out, because Jess would kill him *pronto*, but I'm purty sure he won't. When Jack O'Keefe had been up, I remembered Pete kept outa sight, an' I'm purty sure he'll do the same with Jess around. So I don't say nothin' about Pete.

"This guy Jess aint such a bad egg for a rustler. He feeds me good that evenin', an' talks a lot, real friendly, about this an' that. Then he lights the lamp, takes off his boots to be comfortable, grabs my guitar off the wall, an' sets down on my bunk.

"'Well,' says Jess, grinnin' at me, 'seein' you is in a fix where you need enter-



"That moon song's my fav'rite piece," says Jess. And he begins warblin'.  
**Bingo!** Pete fastens on his leg with great promptness, from under the bunk."

tainment, I'll give you a tune. What'll you have?"

"It looks to me that that's gonna be Pete's finish. When he hears that guitar, Pete's liable to think it's me, an' come scramblin' out, and then Jess will break that guitar over his head. But all of a sudden the big idee hits me. For a minute I can't say nothin'. Then I pipes up: 'Can you croon?'"

"Can I croon?" says Jess. "Boy, I got them radio crooners backed off the air. The boys like it fine, an' they'll miss me tonight. What's it gonna be?"

"Can you croon 'When the Moon Comes over the Mountain?'" I ask him. 'I was practicin' on that the other night.'

"Can I croon that moon song?" says Jess. "Boy, that's my fav'rite piece. Take her away, guitar," he says, imitatin' them radio announcers, an' hittin' the guitar a bang, he gits down to business. He opens his big mouth an' begins warblin'. I can see that he knows how to croon, an' I'm sorry I aint a-goin' to hear the rest.

"**Bingo!** Pete fastens on his leg with great promptness from under the bunk. They aint gonna be no croonin' around that joint, if Pete has to kill everybody in it!"

"Jess gives a yell, hops up an' sees Pete danglin' on his leg. He shakes off

Pete, gives a stomp at him that misses, an' Pete goes like a flash back under the bed. An' then Jess begins rippin' off his pants. Pete had got him right above the ankle. Jess slashes it with a knife an' then finds he aint got no permanganate of potash with him. That makes him wild. 'I wish I could reach it to suck it,' he yells. 'I'm gonna die.'

"Untie my hands an' I will,' I tell him.

"He gits out his gun to hold on me, an' unties my hands, an' I do the best I can. Yeah, I aint afraid to suck a rattlesnake bite, an' it's the surest way to stop it. But Jess has monkeyed around too long. 'I'm a goner,' he says suddent, an' keels over.

"Of course I untie my feet then, park Jess' gun on my hip, an' go to work on him. He's only a rustler, but he's a human bein', an' as I said, not a bad egg. He oughta been hung an' all that, an' probably would some day, but I couldn't let him die. I worked hard with that guy. I give him some whisky I had, an' tie a rope around his leg, which we'd both forgot in the excitement, an' I walk him hard all night, even smackin' him to keep him goin'. An' by daylight Jess is weak, but he's past the worst. His leg is swelled up scandalous, an' he's as helpless as a sick kitten. So I

put him in my bunk an' feed him some more whisky; but to be on the safe side, I tie him up.

"I sure give Pete a big feed of flap-jacks an' syrup that mornin' over him havin' got me out of my jam. Jess looks on astonished, an' he's still more surprised when I tell him about Pete not likin' crooners. That makes him sore. 'So he don't like crooners?' says Jess. 'An' you hornswoggled me into croonin', knowin' that rattler would take a chunk outa me. That's what I calls a dirty trick. I didn't think one crooner would do another crooner that way. I guess you was jealous.'

"I felt kinda sorry he'd look at it like that, but I had other things worryin' me. It was them other rustlers. They'll be passin' the shack before noon, an' the best I can figger there's five of 'em left. But they reduce the odds themselves. The boss rustler sends along a bird to see that all's well at the shack before they drive down the cows. The minute he sticks his head in the door, I've got him. I make him tie up his own feet, an' I tie his hands behind him an' put him in a chair. Then I whistle out Pete. Pete's still kind of nervous over havin' so many visitors, but he comes when I whistle. When he sees this new bird in the chair, he rattles plenty, but I pacify him. 'Long as you're still,' I tell this feller, 'Pete won't bother you; but if you move, he'll nab you. He got Jess last night.'

"The new bird is scared stiff. I make him talk by threatenin' to sick Pete on him, an' I find I'd figgered right. Only four rustlers left. But four is plenty.

"The best I can think of to do is to make a stand in the shack. I can hold 'em off for a while, an' if I can plug a couple, I can discourage 'em plenty. They aint goin' to set fire to the shack with Jess an' his friend in it. So I fill up everything with water, git my guns an' the guns of Jess an' my new prisoner all set, an' wait. This new bird is named Dusty Somebody.

"**PURTY** soon I hear somebody poundin' leather down the trail, an' it's another of the rustlers lookin' for Jess an' Dusty both. I git all hopped up, thinkin' mebbe they'll come one at a time till I git 'em all.

"This third bird, he peeks around careful. I slip over an' gag Jess an' Dusty. The rustler sees all is peaceful, so he sneaks up cautious, opens the door an'

hollers. Nobody answers, so he steps in, an' I put a gun in his belly. In about two minutes I've got him tied up too an' gagged. He looks purty wild-eyed when he gits a squint at Pete, who's paradin' up an' down, threatenin' to bite somebody.

"My hopes about the others, though, don't pan out. The other three wait about two hours; then they ride down together. They figger somethin' bad has happened, an' when they git in sight of the shack, they don't take no chances. One starts to go around back, an' I know that will be fatal, because they's a winder there. So I let him have it through the leg, openin' up suddent. He drops, an' the other two duck for cover before I can git at 'em.

"**T**HEN the siege is on. One of the two rustlers works around back an' the other stays in front, an' they do plenty of shootin'. I have to bottle up Pete while I move the rustlers I'd captured down onto the floor, because bullets is comin' in through the back winder an' splinterin' the door in front. A bad thing happens too. A shot hits the door ketch an' busts it, an' the door swings open. I try to push it back with a stick of wood, but can't keep it closed.

"I do all right so long as it's daylight, but when dark comes on I begin to feel anxious. Pete an' me e't supper between shots, an' I turn Pete loose in the shack. He's kind of excited by the shootin', an' keeps prowlin' around the birds on the floor. I tell 'em so long as they're quiet, he won't hurt 'em. It's a cinch they aint goin' to do much wriggin'.

"These rustlers outside is smart. They've figgered it out from the way I'm shootin' that it's only one person shootin'. Of course, I try to make 'em think they's more by quick work, but you can tell. It's turrrible dark that night, an' these birds figger on rushin' me.

"Well, they's only two of 'em left, so I think I'll let 'em come. I drop down in the door so I can shoot out. Sure 'nough, they try to sneak up for the rush, an' I plug one. I hear him groan an' cuss an' cough, so I figger I got him bad. The other guy turns loose, an' a bullet plows a hole in my scalp. See the place? You gotta look close. I'm out temporarily, an' the bird who aint shot, I guess he hears me groan, for he comes on in suddent. Him steppin' on me brings me back to myself. My head is bleedin' hard, an' I've lost my guns.



Then this guy strikes a match to see what's goin' on, an' a second later the cyclone busts loose. 'Rattler!' he howls, an' I know Pete has got him.

"They's plenty of excitement after that. I hear the bird stompin' an' cussin' fearful, an' I guess he's puttin' poor Pete out of business. The bird keeps yellin' for somebody to help him, so I stagger up in the dark, an' while he's tryin' to find the lamp, I crack him on the jaw an' knock him cuckoo. Then I light the lamp; an' sure 'nough, poor old faithful Pete is dead. I purty near cried, but I suck the poison out of this last bird an' do what I can for him, an' look up the two men who is wounded. One is shot in the leg, an' the other is hit in the lung an' hurt bad.

"There I am with this mess of rustlers. Six of 'em! I can't leave 'em, 'specially the last one who's been bit. So I tie up the ones who aint tied already; an' when it gits daylight, I go out an' git my bronc'. I give him a slap, an' tell him to beat it.

"First, the bronc' don't git the idee, but a horse is purty smart. I lay down on the ground an' groan. The bronc' sniffs me a couple times; then he h'ists his tail an' away he goes, headin' for the Tepee. I know if he ever gits in, old Con Butler an' the boys will come quick. . . . Yeah, an' by sundown they're there. Surprised? I should say they was. There I had two prisoners snake-bit, two shot, an' two that was okay; an' I was shot a little too. An' we find the herd the rustlers had gathered up, all safe an' sound.

"No, I never tell 'em about Pete an' what a hero he was. They wouldn't understand how a guy could be friends of a snake. Yep, the six rustlers all went to jail, an' that's Pete's skin hangin' in the bunkhouse. He was sure a good old reliable snake, an' a hero to boot."

CONWAY BUTLER, owner of the Tepee ranch, watched me getting my things together for a couple of days' fishing up on the West Fork. "You can sleep in that shack at Big Rock," said Con. "Plenty of grub there. But son, watch out for snakes. That country up there is lousy with rattlers."

I looked up from my fishing tackle. "Oh, yes," I said. "Wasn't it up there that Chuck Dutton had a battle with rustlers?"

"Battle?" snorted Conway Butler. "Yeah, that's the place, but I aint never

heard it called a battle before. Anyway, look around careful when you git in the shack, because snakes do crawl in now an' then, an' there aint no use to take chances. Why, a snake crawlin' in there an' bitin' a couple of them rustlers was how Chuck happened to ketch the gang. You've heard about it, I see."

"Yes," I said, "I heard a little."

"I BET Chuck didn't tell you how scared he was of that snake," chuckled the old man. "I never did git much of it from Chuck, but I got a lot from the rustlers. Seems like a rattler had got in the shack, an' Chuck couldn't rout him out, so Chuck aint takin' no chances. He moves out under the trees.

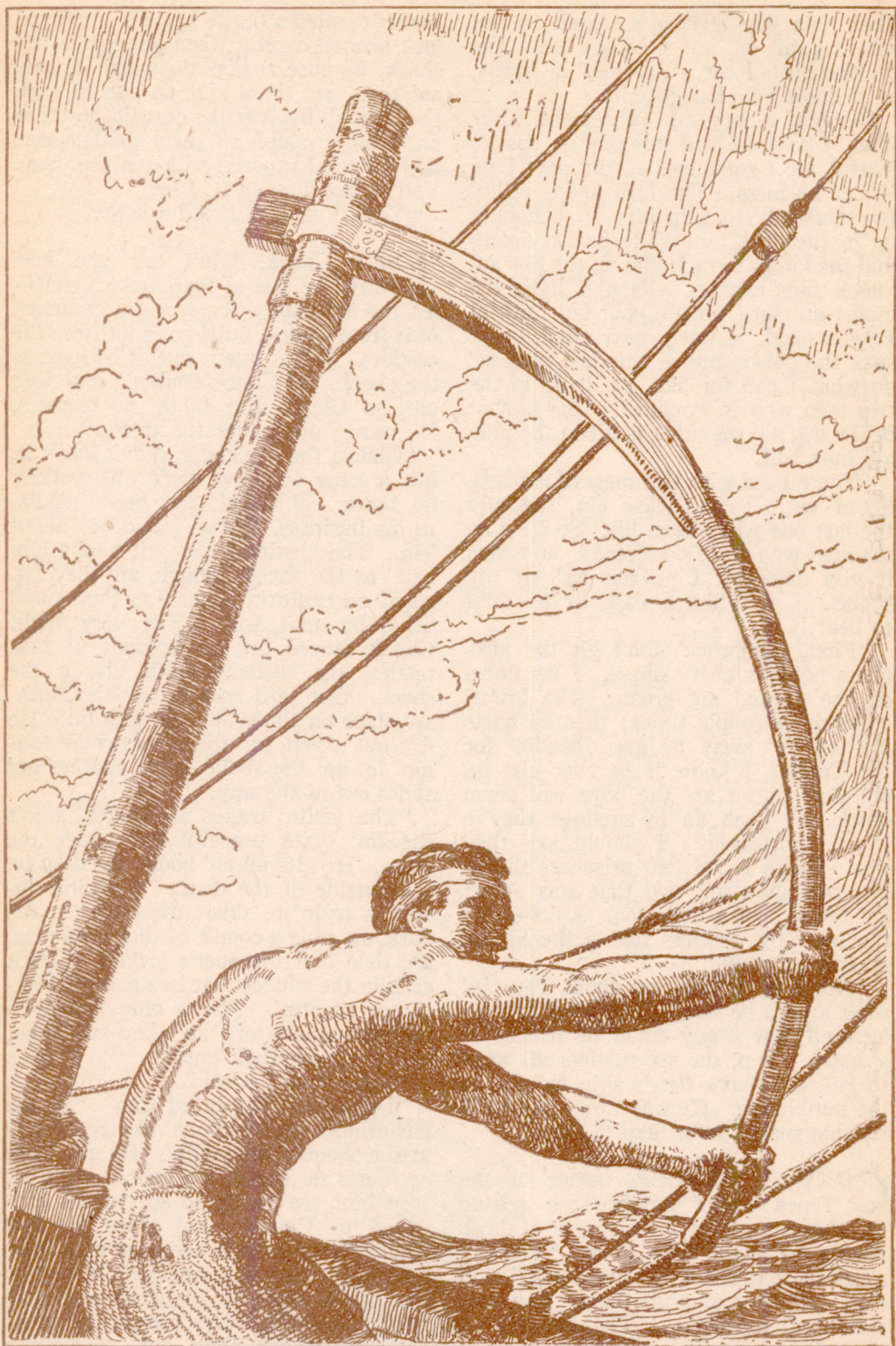
"Chuck, the big loafer, didn't know it, but a gang of six rustlers was workin' up there. If Chuck had been 'tendin' to his business, he'd've found out about 'em. The rustlers knew all about him bein' at the shack, though, an' they figgered on capturin' Chuck so they could drive by that way. The very night Chuck moved out on account of that rattler, the rustlers sneak up on the shack. One bird goes in to nab Chuck, an' steps on the snake, an' gits bit. He lets out a yell, an' the others come runnin' in, an' the snake grabs another an' slides out of the way.

"The yellin' wakes up Chuck, who's snoozin' quite peaceful out under the pines. He gits up an' hooks the hasp on the outside of the door. The birds inside is tryin' to shoot the snake in the dark, an' plug a couple of their own men, an' then find the door's locked. Chuck calls in the winder that he's goin' to commence shootin'. They's only two able-bodied rustlers left, an' they surrender, and pitch out their guns."

"Marvelous!" I said.

"Dumb luck," snorted Con. "In the meantime Chuck's bronc' had got scared at the shootin' an' yellin'. He gits loose an' dusts for home. Of course, when we seen him, we go up to see what's happened to Chuck. An' there we find Chuck camped out in the open with them rustlers tied up in a row, waitin' for the hurt an' bit ones to git better so he can bring 'em all in. 'Don't go in the shack careless,' Chuck sings out. 'They's a rattler in there that'll bite off yer leg.'

"So we go in easy an' search the shack, an' find that rattler coiled back of the syrup-jug in a corner, an' Chuck smacks him over with a club. He was a big one too. Chuck's got his skin."



From an etching by Yngve E. Soderberg

*"The Widow's Son" is a story that goes back, far back, to the time of King David, and Solomon his son, when Hiram was not yet king in Tyre, and her colonies were reaching out; for those Phœnicians were fine seamen, and their captains held jealously guarded secrets.*

# SHIPS and MEN

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

Drawings by Alfred Simpkin

"HIRAM, THE WIDOW'S SON—"

The words flashed out at me as I passed a dingy little shop in a back street of Avignon, the City of the Popes, a city of dust and death and towering ruins. The last place in the world, you would say, where one might find a roaring lusty sea-tale for the plucking.

Yet it was on those ramparts above that the exiled Richelieu planned his reconquest of power. In the pleasant little hotel down below, lingered singular anecdotes of Bonaparte. . . . Queer romantic things could be sensed in the very air of Avignon, as one looked out across the river bottoms at the abruptly shattered old bridge and the massive tower of masonry rising into the sky, where Popes had ruled. . . .

I turned and peered into the window of the dingy little shop again. Here were all kinds of junk: old jewelry, would-be antiques, colored prints, pathetic faded worthless relics of past generations. And printed in English words on a tag-end of old paper lying in the window:

*"Hiram, the widow's son—"*

Pushing open the green-painted door, I went into the shop. It was as dingy as the window. An old man with yellow-gray hair and a hooked nose inspected me. He had a wild and wandering eye.

"That paper in the window," I said. "Just what is it?"

"It is not what you think," he responded, and paused to take a pinch of snuff.

Strange words, those, jerking me up sharp. How the devil did this old man know what I thought? He peered at me and cackled a laugh.

"It's a paper to bring good luck," said he. "Handed down in the family. I put it in the window, and men stop to ask about it—men like you, tourists, Americans. What should they know of the widow's son? No more than I know myself. All that was long ago, and it

is a story of my people, not of yours. You are no seafaring man."

His people? But I had many friends among his people, said I, and we talked desultorily, until he took another pinch of snuff, slowly shaking his head.

"The story is not in the Talmud," he said. "We hand things down from generation to generation, as the Moors in Morocco hand down the keys of the houses their ancestors left in Spain. Things, or ideas. Some generation seizes upon them and uses them. A woman whispers to her son; and in fullness of time he remembers and makes use of her whisperings, and perhaps changes the face of the earth and the story of nations. If I told you the story of the widow's son, and the great tin ship, and how the blood ran down her decks—what would you do with it?"

"At least, I might understand it," I said. This pleased him.

"BUT the story goes back, far back," he said, blinking at me with that wild eye. "Back to the time of King David, and Solomon his son, when Hiram was not yet king in Tyre, and the commerce of great Tyre was growing by leaps and bounds. Her colonies were reaching out, for those Phœnicians were fine seamen, and their captains held jealously guarded secrets passed down in their families."

"Yes," I said. "They were the first to use the stars in navigation."

The wild eye lit up. "Ah! Then you do know something about it!"

"Was this Hiram who figures in your shop-window, the king of Tyre?"

"No, no." The old man cackled with amusement. "The name was common in those days, when young King Solomon sat on the throne and had not yet grown great. The widow's son, this Hiram was called; his father had died before he was born. But his mother knew all the wis-

dom of ancient days, passed down in the family—wisdom of the sea, of the children of Abraham, of work in metals, wisdom of commerce and practical affairs. Ideas, handed down—”

**B**Y his gestures, his words, his strange intangible force of character, this old Provençal Jew conveyed an impression of singular deep wisdom poured into the heart of a youth, there in a corner of the blazing city of Tyre where the waves ringed the whole place and the sea-winds blew down the narrow streets.

A woman dark and sorrowful and lovingly, whispering into the brain of her son those fancies and traditions, those ideas and inventions, those dreams of what might be if a way were only found, as the months and the years passed.

His father? He knew not, nor asked; men cared little in those days. There was no stigma in his title of the widow's son. If she were from the city of the Jews, as some said, all who knew her respected her; if Hiram's father were also from that city, no one knew. Her heart was intent upon his taking the seafaring road, and if she spoke sometimes of Jerusalem and its god, she had some good reason for not returning there nor urging him to go. He fancied that his father had been one David, from things she said, but this was a common name among that people.

And ever as Hiram grew, the city waxed greater, galleys and commerce pouring in from Greece and Egypt, Carthage and Sicily, caravans going out into the Eastern deserts and coming back again, until Tyre reeled with wealth and power and golden vistas. Young Hiram worked in the shipyards, learned to draft construction, and when he had his growth was apprenticed as gentleman officer.

He was bound over to old Captain Adoniram the hawk-nosed, who was taking a new galley out to Carthage and the isles in the spring. But before spring arrived, two things happened.

First, word came from Jerusalem that the old king, David, was dead at last, and in his place, rocking upon unsteady throne, sat one Solomon. In those days the widow mourned greatly, though Hiram knew not why; then came the second thing, and caused his own mourning. For his mother, the widow, died.

Before passing, she gave her son a broken half-shekel of Jerusalem, an old coin struck by the first king, Saul. The broken coin was strung upon a cord.



“Some day,” she said, gasping out her life, “when you have greatest need for the help of man, let this come to the eyes of King Solomon. Say to him that Hiram, the widow's son—sends—sends—”

To the young man, bowed in grief, the death-stopped words meant little. Jerusalem was but a name to him, a far inland place. If his mother were perhaps of the house of David the king, if his father had been some valorous man in that court, if her story held some odd secret of destiny that linked itself with this new king, Solomon, the youth's eyes could not visualize nor grasp it. A puny little city back in the hills, fierce warriors who worshiped an unknown god—what were they to Tyre the glorious? Here was life, here was destiny!

So, when the spring came and the gales were done, Hiram went abroad with that hawk-nosed old skipper, Adoniram, whose great rule of life was that a thing be done right or not at all. Most of your old shellbacks have some such fetish, which rules them hard, and Adoniram preached at all times this dictum of his.

**O**NLY one of all this ship's company was ever to see Tyre again.

Adoniram did not lay up his ship at night, as most seamen did in those days. He drove on and on, knowing the secrets of the stars and how to steer by them. Hiram knew these secrets also, and learned more.

From the start, however, the voyage went ill. By the time that they reached Carthage, there was but little cargo in



When the Jewish officer came before his king, he asked to speak privately with Solomon.

the hold; and at Carthage, a tiny place, the merchants had been cleaned out by some Cretan traders. So Adoniram went on, clear to the Balearic Isles at the end of the world. A year had passed; ill luck dogged them still. At the Balearics, however, they found store of strange metals, bright tin and soft lead, which had come from some unknown land far to the west. Adoniram resolved to find that land.

"If we come back empty-handed we get the sack," he said.

So the ship was revictualled, and when the crew had had their fill of wine and women, they put forth once more. Through the Strait of Gibraltar and on around Spain they nosed, looting here and raiding there, trading when the chance offered, and the word of the Tin Isles came ever clearer to them.

In the long night watches, as he paced the deck beside Adoniram, Hiram came to open his heart to the grim old man. He spoke of the things handed down, and of the ideas that were his own.

"Our ships are good enough for voyaging to the isles of Greece and even to Carthage and the Balearics," he would say. "But they're not stout enough for such seas as these, for such long cruises. We need ships bigger in the beam, ships that can fight like the Greek ships and trade like our own; fighting-ships with cargo space."

Adoniram said little, but asked cunning questions that drew Hiram into talk of construction and how it might be improved. The other officers flouted such ideas, but Hiram took small heed of their jokes and jeers.

**I**N the end they came to the misty islands where tin and lead were found, and here they loaded the ship deep, after scraping her bottom of weed, and set about for home with a wondrous rich cargo.

By this time, near two years had passed. What with sickness and fighting, the crew had shrunk to a scant eighty. The officers had changed also; Hiram was second mate now, a tall and powerful man, so shrewd of wit and arm that none could meet him with weapons. Adoniram was gray and grim, wasting with some sickness.

They crept back toward the coasts of Spain through tempest and hurricane. Then the grandfather of all gales smote them out of the west and north; dismasted, foundering, the first officer swept overboard with five other men, Adoniram none the less got his splintered hulk to a cove of the coast and there beached her, cargo intact.

"One lesson learned," said he grimly. "Not to take this voyage in winter!"

Barbarians swooped down to loot the sea-spoil, but after one taste of Phœnician weapons, they judged friendship the better part; then barter was opened, and the Iberians helped the castaways build a village of huts, gave them women in marriage, aided them in all things.

Adoniram, looking over the ship with Hiram, found her ruined; her back was broken. There was nothing for it but to build an entirely new vessel, or rot in Iberia.

"And while we're doing it," said the old grim seadog, "we'll do it right. Build the ship of your dreams, Hiram."

**T**HEY fell to work, men of all trades being in the crew, and the Iberians lending eager help. It was the labor of months, but time meant nothing to Hiram, and little to any of them, save only old Adoniram, who had but scant time left. . . .

With the help of the old hulk, a new one arose as the weeks and months fled; a massive-beamed ship of Spanish oak, fighting-ship and cargo-ship in one, according to the plans Hiram drew up. She went swiftly on to completion, once the



main task was done, for they wasted scant time on ornamentation or frills.

But Adoniram lay on his last bed.

"For every new ship built, an old skipper passes, they say," and he smiled at Hiram. Then he touched a roll of sheepskin that lay beside him. "Here's your commission as master, young 'un; it'll hold legal. There's few go out apprentice and return master, but it'll be three years and more since we left Tyre ere you raise the island city again. You'll do. And remember, when you come to stow cargo, do it right!"

They buried the old skipper there by the sea.

None disputed Hiram in his command. He had grown very masterful, powerful beyond most men, skilled and cunning in all ways and equal to any emergency. When the ship was floated and tested, he alone held the steering-oar which three other men could scarce manage, and the tests were good. His heart swelled to the joy of the keel under him—keel of his designing, finer than any keel that swam the seas, better suited for the work of Tyre.

Amidships was built an altar of stone to Eshmun, the chief god of Tyre, and when the cargo had been stowed away, with jars and skins of water, sacrifices were made to the god while Hiram looked on. He took small part in such things, for the widow had whispered to him of another deity, and her words lingered with him.

**S**UMMER at last, of the third year. He took aboard the men and their families, and shipped Iberian slingers and archers for fighting-men, and so sailed forth from Spain for the long voyage home.

Safe through the straits, he laid course for the Balearics, and there watered and re- victualled. Carthage? Not he; too

many Sidonian pirates in those waters. A straight course for Tyre, with a stop at Cyprus if need be.

**T**HE winds bade them fair, and the smoking cone of Aetna rose into the sky to steer them past Sicily. On the day they sighted the cone and lost it again, two men fell sick and died suddenly in the night. Hiram put in to shore, where there was a Greek colony a-building, and here took on fresh food and water. While they lay moored, other men fell sick, and the sickness spread among the women and children. An old man from Tyre, long stranded in this place, begged passage home again, and Hiram gave it him, and took him aboard.

That night the Greek colonists came with torches and spears, and bade Hiram leave or suffer burning, because of the sickness he had brought. So he cast off and stood out into the wine-dark sea, and the wind was fair. He thought little of the sickness spreading among his men.

The old Tyrian came to him as he stood by the tiller that night.

"Here is a curious thing, Captain Hiram," said he, mumbling his words. "When I was a young man in the inland trade, I went up to Jerusalem where David was king, and did good business with him too. A full two hundred per cent profit. And, by the gods, you are as like to him as two peas! I could swear in truth that you were that Jewish king come to life."

Hiram laughed. "Dead men rise up never," said he. "And who is king there now?"

"Solomon, and like to be the greatest of his line; and Hiram the Wise rules Tyre and has made alliance with him. Eh, eh!" The old man coughed. "I like not the sickness in this ship."

No wonder he misliked it, for by

morning he had caught it, and ere sunset was dead.

The days passed. Despair and frightful terror fell upon all the company. No sacrifice availed; the sickness spread. The children died quickly. The women and the Iberian slingers offered no resistance. They too died, and the Tyrian seamen, tough and hardy men, began to perish.

Gone was all their laughter and exultation. Some god had cast this plague upon them; they bowed their heads and died. As the crew thinned, Hiram headed for Crete—but winds blew him off that course and he had too few men left to tend the canvas. He drove on toward Tyre, a gaunt and spectral man, worn with weariness.

The time came when he was alone, with three others. The dead had gone overside. These four moved about like ghosts; but Hiram, whom the sickness had not touched, was as good as any half-dozen. Luckily, the wind held fair, the seas rose not.

**N**OW the last three men sickened, and lay dead, and the wind fell. Hiram put the bodies into the sea, and dropped on the deck, and slept the sun around. When he came to himself, voices were in his ears. He started up, and found his arms and legs bound with cords, and men aboard the ship.

The dead calm continued, but alongside, her oars still dragging, lay a Sidonian trader. Her captain and two other men came and stared at Hiram, their dark fierce faces alight with the treasures they had found below.

"What, pirates of Sidon?" said Hiram. "Loose me. Put me some men aboard. If you tamper with a vessel of Tyre and a captain of Tyre, you'll have trouble!"

"Hearken to the lion's growl, Cap'n Jabal," said one, and they broke into laughter. "Trembling in your boots, aint you?"

"Aye, sweating with fear." And Captain Jabal eyed Hiram shrewdly. "Stout as an ox, this fellow is. He'll bring a fat price in the Cyprus market. Captain of Tyre, eh? Well, I'll take the name of Hiram myself, and the ship to boot, and her papers will be in order."

They all laughed again at this jest, but Hiram said nothing. Sidonian slavers and pirate-traders; he was taken, and his ship was lost, and he would be sold into slavery at Cyprus. There was, he felt, no use wasting words.

Captain Jabal stooped over him, plucked at the thong about his neck, and eyed the broken shekel, then dropped it with a laugh.

"A Jewish love-token, eh? We'll leave it to him, for luck. All right, boys! Clap a score of men aboard here; I'll take her over myself. You, Azazel, take charge of our ship and keep company. If separated, we meet at Cyprus. And stay! Fetch aboard that image of Moloch and set it up over this altar—the gods have been too good for us to forget them."

"True enough," said one of the others. "Moloch is more to the point than this accursed Tyrian god Eshmun."

"There's no luck in laying your tongue to any god, you fool," snapped Jabal, the Sidonian captain. "And Eshmun was a god of our own people once—wasn't Tyre founded by us? Bring Moloch aboard, and that puling Greek girl we picked up in Chios, and do the thing right. We'll sell everything in Cyprus, and no questions asked, and every one of us a rich man for life. We can well spare a girl, to make our luck hold."

Hiram was picked up and dropped abaft the deck-house. There he lay, silent, and saw a small image of the god Moloch brought aboard from the Sidonian ship, and set up over the altar. A Greek girl, a child evidently abducted for slavery, was dragged aboard and laid screaming over the stones, and Captain Jabal cut her throat and prayed to Moloch as the blood spurted.

Seeing this, Hiram heaved at the cords binding him, but they were new and strong, thongs of bullock hide, and not even his great muscles could burst them.

The two ships headed together for Cyprus.

That night came wind, and fierce gusty squalls swooping down. The great ship rode steady and serene, but the Sidonian galley was lost to sight, and daybreak showed no sign of her. Whereat Captain Jabal laughed heartily.

"If she doesn't make Cyprus, so much the more for us all!" said he.

**D**AWN came gray and lowering. When it came to feeding Hiram, Cap'n Jabal looked on with mocking words. He had found all the accounts of the cargo, and the ship's papers transferred from the wrecked vessel, and he jeered gayly as Hiram ate his fill.

"Captain of Tyre, eh? Well, I'm Hiram myself—Cap'n Hiram, you dog! And I've got everything to prove it. En-

joy yourself and have a nice passage, you rascal; soon enough you'll be set to earning your keep."

The course was set to the south steadily, away from danger of encountering any Tyrian galleys, but clouds covered the sky and when evening came there were no stars. Instead, rain came down in sharp abrupt squalls, incessant downpours that soaked everything, including the naked man who lay abaft the deck-house, under the steering-platform on the poop. That the ship had been swept far from her course for Cyprus, Hiram could well believe; but not even he could tell where she was or whither heading, though he thought that with morning the skies would be clear again and the gale past. Now, if ever, he must act.

"Jahveh!" he muttered, peering with salt-rimmed eyes at the cloaked skies.

His mother's whisperings came back to him. In time of stress, when aid he most needed, the broken shekel; in time when no man might help him, something else. Call, she had said, upon the god of her own people—when no other god would help, Jahveh would hear his heart's cry. He had indistinct memories of things she had said, besides, about his own father who had thus cried to Jahveh and had been helped, not once but many times. One David, a common name among the Jews.

"Jahveh!" muttered Hiram, as he lay there. "Never until now has the time come; in Spain, in the far isles, in the plague, was time for the help of men. Now it is past, and there is none to help. Give ear, Jahveh! Perhaps You have small need of a worshiper, but I have great need of *You* in this hour."

But no god came from the sodden skies to help him. Only a fresh squall of rain swept down, drenching him afresh.

Then, suddenly, he realized that the wet and slippery hide thongs about his arms must stretch with their condition. He swelled and hardened his muscles; the thongs stretched. With a gasp in his heart, he put forth all his strength and worked at them.

**M**IDNIGHT was well past before his arms came free. His legs clear, he lay in silence; it was a long time before the circulation was restored in hands and feet. Jahveh's doing? Perhaps, and perhaps not.

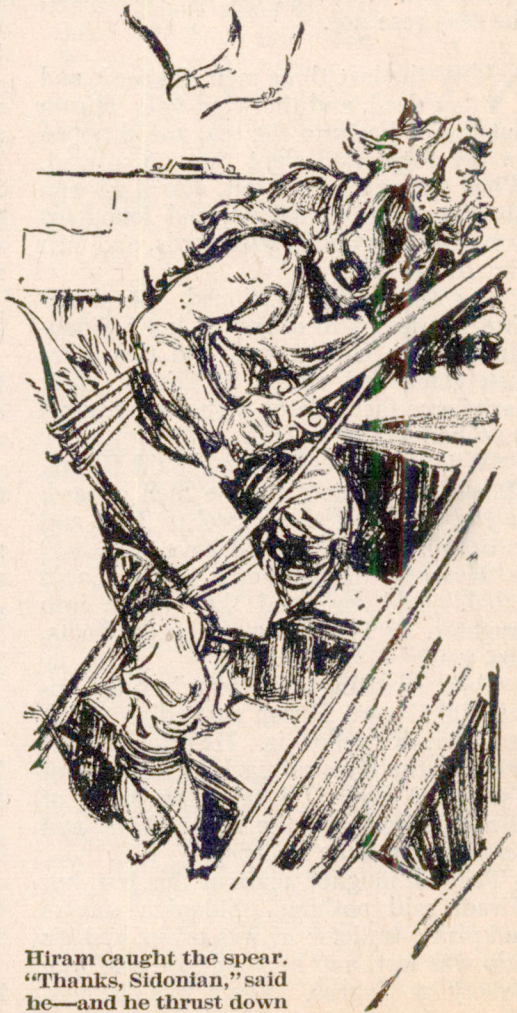
"Let the issue decide," thought he grimly. "The credit goes to Jahveh, and I go with it, if the impossible happens.

For, if no god stands at my side, I cannot overcome these men."

**W**ITH early morning hours, the clouds swept away and stars came out pale and thin. Captain Jabal left the after cabin and mounted to the platform above, to plot the stars and see where he was, and to lay his course. Then, so quietly that he made no sound, Hiram rose and went into that after cabin, which had once been his own.

He needed no light for his purpose, going straight to the chests slung along the bulkhead wall. They had been smashed open, but the contents were intact. From his own chest he took a shirt of cunningly meshed iron rings, and a sword that Adoniram had given him, well tempered and keen.

He donned the shirt, girded on the sword. In another chest, protected from salt and weather, were the slings of the Iberians, with chosen pebbles and round-



Hiram caught the spear. "Thanks, Sidonian," said he—and he thrust down at a man on the ladder.





ed pellets of lead. Those slingers, during the long months in Spain, had taught him all their art. He chose a sling, filled a pouch with stones and lead bullets, then went back to the deck.

The day was breaking; the first red fingers of the sun were streaking scarlet flames across the eastern sky. Captain Jabal, who in his cruel way was a devout man, ordered the steersmen to lash the huge oars in the stern, then summoned all hands to the 'midships altar, there to offer thanks to Moloch and Baal.

A black cock was fetched from the pen. As the first level rays of the sun struck across the waters, the cock was killed and its blood sprinkled on the stones. And suddenly a cry burst from one of the Sidonians.

"It is the god Baal himself—look! Look!"

THEY all swung around, gaping. On the poop platform, between the two massive steering-oars, stood Hiram. His sling was in hand; and the level sun-rays glittered from his mail coat, and the sound of his grim laughter came down the deck to them.

"A god who seeks better sacrifice than a crowing cock," said he, and whirled his sling, and loosed it.

The leaden slug took Captain Jabal between the eyes and crushed in his head, so that he fell forward across the altar and lay dead. Swiftly, Hiram set another bullet in the sling, whirled and loosed it, and then another, each to the mark.

Now they recognized him for whom he was, and between fear and anger fell into sharp action, some rushing for arms, others running aft to get at him. Two more men died ere they reached the quarterdeck ladder. Then a spear flew through the air, and a second after it. Hiram evaded the one and caught the other.

"Thanks, Sidonian," said he—and he thrust down with the spear at a man on the ladder.

When it was cleared, even more men lay dead, and Hiram hurled the bleeding spear and transfixed a man who was climbing aloft with bow and arrows. That man screamed, and plunged into the water alongside.

Now, whipping out his sword, Hiram leaped to the deck below and flung himself on the Sidonians. Some turned and fled, some stood against him with weapons, one or two caught his feet and prayed for mercy; but all died. When one does a thing, Captain Adoniram had said, one must do it right or prove a fool.

The sun was strong and high when the last of those Sidonians crossed the threshold of hell. Hiram rid himself of the mail-shirt, and bound up his wounds, which were not deep. Then, after washing himself, he went to the steering-platform and changed the course, and set the sails to suit. He judged that the ship had overshot Cyprus, so he headed straight into the east to make the coast

of Phœnicia, the wind being fair and steady.

The corpses he flung overboard, but he could not wash the decks, or the crimsoned altar. Once more he was alone aboard the ship.

The day passed, and then another, and ever the wind rushed him along eastward. On the third afternoon, he raised purple shadows above the eastern horizon, and made shift to brail up the canvas and slacken speed. All night he drove on, and sunrise showed him the barren hills of the land close ahead. A little to the south he descried fishing craft, and then made out a hill with a white city sprawled below it.

Not Tyre, certainly. No great place, indeed; however, the authority of Tyre must be acknowledged here, so he had come to journey's end. Unshipping one of the massive steering-oars, with the other he headed the ship southward.

The city came closer. No harbor, but a breakwater, and small galleys drawn up on shore. The great ship swam in, ever closer. A fishing-craft swooped by, and to the men Hiram called his name and rank.

ASHORE grew wonder and vivid curiosity. By his recent marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, King Solomon had gained Egyptian outposts, widening his borders and by arrangement with King Hiram of Tyre, held joint authority here in the city of Jaffa, which put the southern trade route in his hand and gave him an outlet to the sea. One Saul, who ruled here for the Jews, was summoned forth by the Tyrian governor to see the strange sight.

"A ship such as never was seen, with all its decks bedewed and splashed with blood, and only one naked man aboard—look at her!"

Men came running. "A boat came in. The man says he is Cap'n Hiram of Tyre!"

Tyrian and Jew watched while the sails fell, and from the bow of his ship the lone naked man let fall a great weight poised there, so that his ship was anchored. Then, in vivid curiosity, they went out in the governor's galley.

Hiram welcomed them. At sight of him, the Jew emitted one startled gasp and came up to him with a question.

Hiram laughed wearily.

"Whence came I? Why, perhaps from the east, or the west, or beyond the world's end—what's it to you?"

"Hm! You look uncommonly like a man I once knew," said Saul, muttering in his beard.

The Tyrian governor intervened.

"Enough of this, Saul! You, Hiram, whether captain or no by authority of Tyre, will consider yourself and your ship at the disposal of King Hiram. This is no affair of yours, Saul; the man looks like a Jew, but the new law confiscating all ships of thirty ton or over to the use of King Hiram—"

"Confiscate my ship?" blazed out Hiram suddenly. Weary and worn as he was for lack of sleep and rest, he fired up on the instant. "Confiscate a ship that will change commercial history and open a new era to shipping—I'll see you damned first! What's this about King Solomon?" and he whirled on the Jewish commander. "He has authority here?"

"Enough," said Saul dryly.

Hiram plucked from his naked breast the broken coin that hung there. He thrust it at the Jewish officer.

"Take this. See that it comes to King Solomon himself—I appeal to him, do you understand? Tell him that Hiram, the widow's son, sends—sends to him—"

He staggered as he spoke. The Tyrian governor, who was not a bad sort, and who was anxious to keep on friendly terms with the Jews, intervened. There would be no trouble about it. Saul could put some men aboard and await a response from Jerusalem. If this fellow spoke the truth—

"It is in my mind that he does," said Saul, eyeing the broken coin and then the face of Hiram. "In fact, I'll take the message to Jerusalem myself; I have to go up there to attend court day after tomorrow."

So it was arranged, and Hiram turned into his bunk and slept like a dead man.

When the Jewish officer came before his king, he asked to speak privately with Solomon; and the latter took him out into the scant, scrawny garden of the rocky hill palace, and heard his story. King Solomon whistled softly at hearing it, and fingered the broken coin.

"I have the other half of this coin," said he.

"I thought you might," said Saul, and met his eye. "To be frank about it, Solomon, I've heard a story or two—"

"Don't be frank," said the King quickly. "It's a bad habit, Saul. Let us suppose a case. . . . Do you think that this

fellow Hiram, who looks so much like my father David, could have any erratic ideas about it? That is to say, about his birth?"

"No," returned Saul. "I spoke with him before he went to sleep. He thinks this ship of his will do wonders, and that other ships like it will hold the commerce of the seas. His mother left him this coin. She's dead. By the way, he says Jehovah helped him and he wants to join the church."

King Solomon fingered his bushy black beard, and then smiled a little.

"Give that fellow anything he wants, but keep him out of Jerusalem," said he, at length. "Ships, eh? If he has something good in ships, I can use him. Now that we have Jaffa for a port, I'm aiming to go in for shipping myself. Good! We'll give this Hiram a commission to build us a navy. I'll send up to Tyre and get King Hiram to take a fifty per cent interest in it, and he may copy these new ships if they're worth while. Let this Hiram, the widow's son, draw on the treasury up to ten talents for personal expenses. The cargo of his big ship, as I understand it, goes to Tyre. Good. I'll have the letters made out at once—"

The King laughed softly.

**H**IS laughter died away with the sunlight, and became the cackling mirth of an old man in a dingy Avignon shop. He had come to the end of his story, and now was chuckling delightedly.

"Just what does your story imply about this Hiram?" I asked him. "That he, to put it frankly, was a brother or half-brother to Solomon?"

"Take the great king's advice, my friend," said the old man, wagging his finger at me. "Take the great king's advice—and never put things frankly. So you will never be embarrassed."

After a time I went out of the shop, and as I left, directed a glance at the window. The paper was still there, with its strange words:

*"Hiram, the widow's son—"*

What secret those words hid, or whether the curious traditional story really had given me the origin of the great Phœnician trading and fighting ships that held the commerce not only of King Solomon but of the ancient world—I did not know. For the mists of time had closed down upon all reality.

# Men Once Stood on

*We contract ourselves into a nutshell of civility, or expand into a vaporous atmosphere of thin and empty generosity, that we may sell our neighbor some groceries or a pair of shoes; but I have read in an old book that men once stood on their own feet.*

I COULD not but think of those words of Thoreau's as we saw old Jackson standing there in the timber. My wife and I had met him before on the carries—usually toting a bark basket of roots; but this was the first time we had encountered Old Jack in his full glory of buckskin shirt and old-time rifle, and one could realize the whole stature of the man. He stood, in every sense of the words, on his own feet. That birchbark canoe of his, floating partly hauled out in this carry-landing from Round Lake, was his own make. His shack, about a mile up the carry-trail to Crooked Lake, was shake-roofed, the shingles split with a froe by his own hands. Its timbers and planking were his own axmanship; not a gadget nor a furnishing in it owed so much as a nail to civilization. Those bark and oak-strip baskets that we could see stowed in his canoe were woods made. They were filled with roots, and dried leaves in bundles, bound with rush twine. "Yarbs," (*i.e.*, *herbs*) Old Jack called them. Quite evidently he was starting on his annual trip with them, over the long trail of stream, lake and carry down to Georgian Bay, where he met the drug-company buyer from Detroit. What he did with the money for them we could only conjecture. Probably he supported some indigent old relative, who must have her flat and her comforts, in some small Michigan town. Old Jack would have no more use for a silver dollar up here than to make a bad sinker of it to catch fish withal.

My wife and I had ourselves become very weary of contracting into Thoreau's nutshell of civility, and employing his expansively false geniality in order to sell our big dealers some goods. The depression had ironed out all that cajolement business, and it wasn't any use being a hypocritical good-fellow any more. We had sublet our city apartment, and

had come up here for the summer into the Algoma lake and forest region, where you really got something for all your hard work. Health, and freedom of soul, anyway. . . . At that, we owed everything we had—canoe, tent, outfit, rods and tackle—to civilization's dollar. Old Jack, by contrast, owed nothing. His skill and his woodcraft had supplied them all.

We were both wet through and tired. It had been rough, crossing Round Lake. I remember whistling a quiet little tune and throwing the canoe gunwale up to ward off each whitecap in turn. Nedje—my pet name for Inez—at bow had plied her paddle valiantly and got soaked through. She was shivering while I was lashing our paddles in place for the carry. There was a sparkle of jewelry in the sun—that cherished ring of hers, being flailed about, as she whipped her arms to get warm.

Old Jack's woodsman's eye was quick to note it. "Missus," he said, "ye hadn't orter wear that thing on no rough canoe trip. Ye mought lose it, with your fingers all wet an' shriveled-like."

Nedje stopped flailing and tugged at it experimentally. "It won't come off, Mr. Jack," she said, and stood eying the bauble sentimentally. "It's my mother's ring. Never been off my finger since she—was taken."

"Relic of bygone dayceny," she called it. Her people had been wealthy—owned the most of a small railroad that her father had built; the depression had transferred his holdings into the pockets of some Wall Street gambler. The ring had two large diamonds and a sapphire. I don't know how much it was worth—perhaps fifteen hundred dollars. I do know that when I suggested pawning it, to meet our taxes, I had let myself in for a bad half-hour with Nedje.

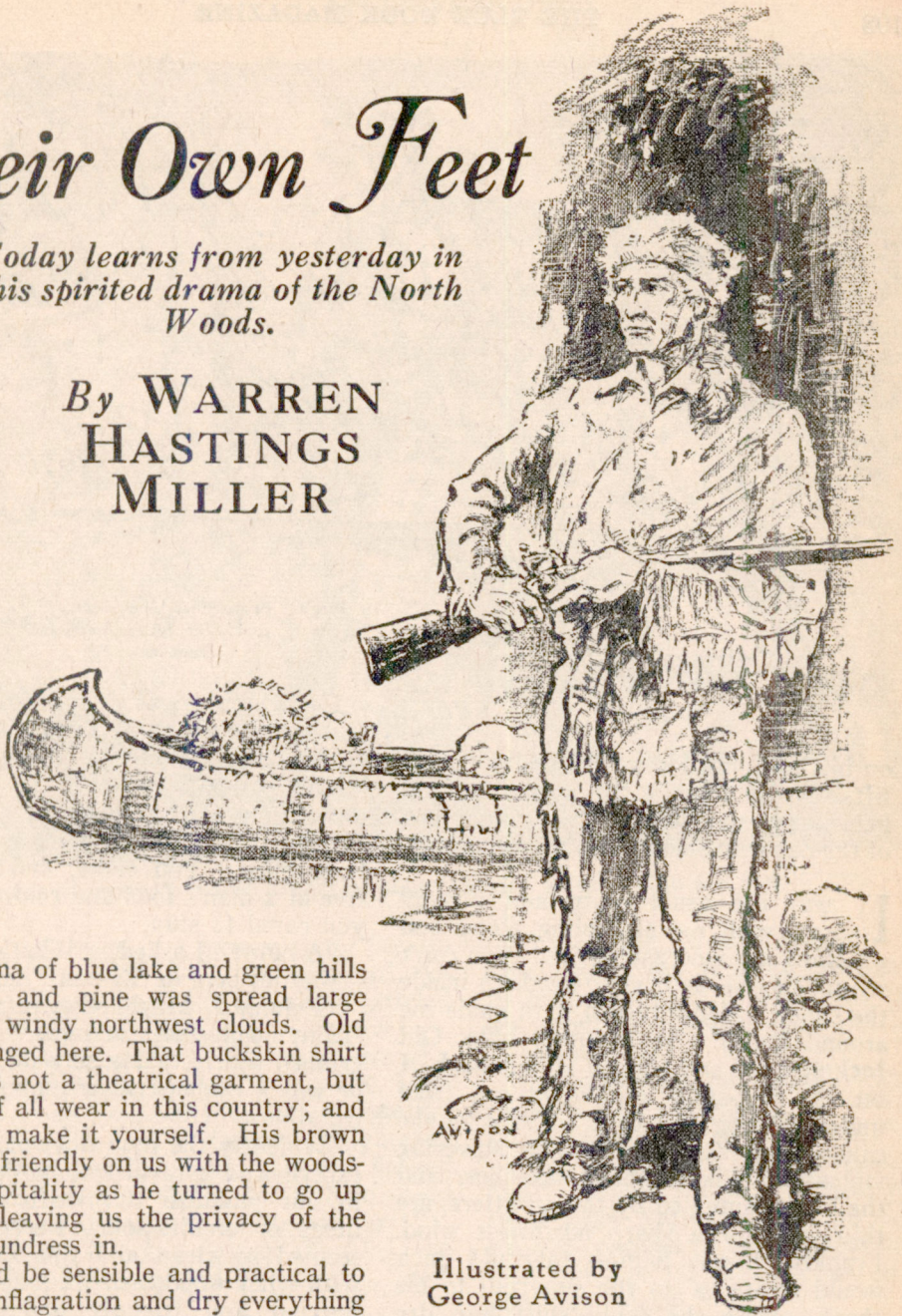
"Well," said Old Jack, "you two build ye a gre't big fire an' dry everything out, afore you do nothin' else. You can't take no chills in this country! I got to hike back to the shack an' tote some more yarbs."

He made us free of his wilderness with a gesture of his buckskin-fringed arm. It was a bright and beautiful nature's world all about, and we reveled in its freedom.

# Their Own Feet

*Today learns from yesterday in  
this spirited drama of the North  
Woods.*

By WARREN  
HASTINGS  
MILLER



Illustrated by  
George Avison

A panorama of blue lake and green hills of spruce and pine was spread large under the windy northwest clouds. Old Jack belonged here. That buckskin shirt of his was not a theatrical garment, but the best of all wear in this country; and you could make it yourself. His brown eyes were friendly on us with the woodsman's hospitality as he turned to go up the trail, leaving us the privacy of the forest to undress in.

It would be sensible and practical to start a conflagration and dry everything out before going further. But those clouds looked like rain, soon, to me; and we would probably be wind-bound at Crooked Lake for a spell, anyway. I preferred to make the carry and set the tent up and get organized before conditions got any worse.

"Thanks, Jack," I said. "But it looks as if we'd better get over to Crooked as soon as we can. —You game, Nedje?"

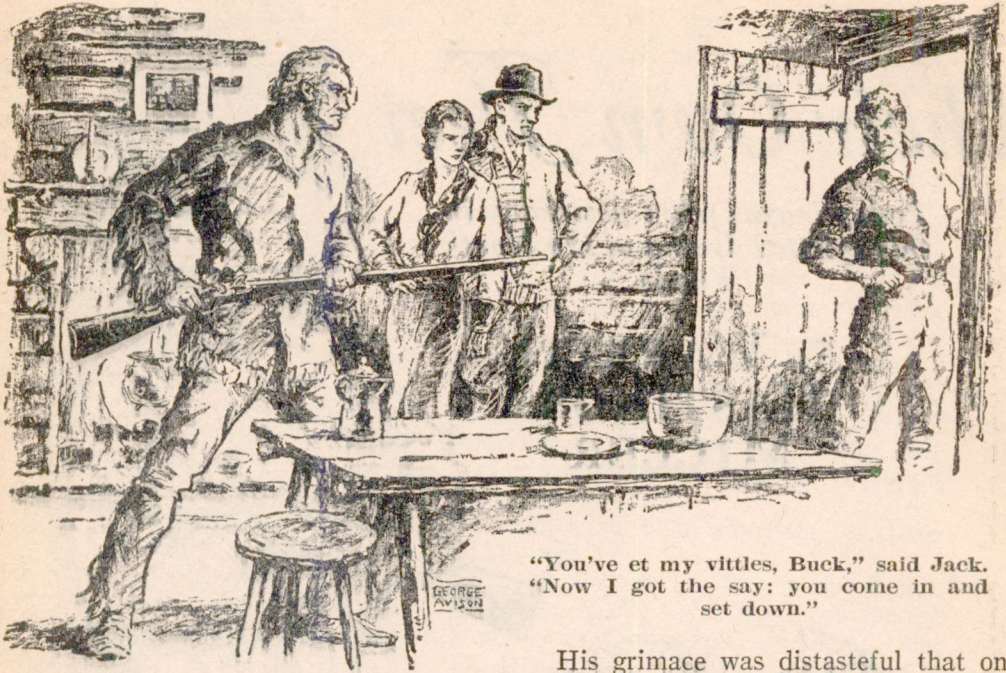
"Guess so," she said. "It might warm me up to hit the trail. I sure do need that tent!"

I swung the canoe up and got my head between the paddles, with them resting on two pairs of socks on my shoulders.

Nedje passed me the rest-stick that we had cut for holding it up, while I stood out from under for a rest-spell at times. This carry was two miles long. Nedje picked up our rod-case and tackle-box, and was about to burden herself with the two duffle-bags, when Old Jack interposed.

"Don't ye do that, Missus; you'll get you a misery of the back," he warned. "Here; I'll tote it as fur as my shack. 'Twill be six miles of carry if you hev to come back for it."

We generally did for ourselves; but I was glad to see him swing our pack up



"You've et my vittles, Buck," said Jack.  
"Now I got the say: you come in and  
set down."

on his hard shoulders with a single easy lift. Nedje draped the small stuff on herself and took the down-curving stern of the canoe to steer me over the portage.

IT was the usual rooty and quaggy carry, with me stumbling along and watching my moccasined feet. You can't see much else with your head up inside the canoe. Nedje turned it to guide me around bends. At about a mile, Old Jack stopped and slipped off our pack. I set the rest-stick and stood out from under, holding fast to it. Nedje let the canoe stern down. She was shivering violently. Those khaki breeches, and the blouse supplied by the outfitters, are thin stuff for a sharp northwest wind. Frankly, I was hoping that old Jack would invite us up the side-trail to his shack, where she could shift into dry clothes and warm up. Besides, I wanted her to see it—see what one man alone could do in home-building, with his own two hands. I had something of the sort in the back of my mind myself. Nedje was by now in love with this free outdoor life that we were leading. We could wait out the depression up here better than anywhere else, I thought. At least it would cost us no money.

"I got a bum staying with me," Old Jack apologized for not inviting us to his shack. "It will be only a mile back to your pack now, son. You leave it here. . . . No, look! Here's where I cache it for ye."

His grimace was distasteful that one had to hide anything at all, up here, as he deftly cached our pack under a small balsam. I gathered that his guest was unwelcome—and dishonest. However, there was the unwritten law of woods' hospitality. You came, and you were free of a man's food and roof, so long as you cared to stay.

"A bum?" I asked. "What's he doing,—way up here in Algoma?"

"I dunno. Maybe they're after him. 'Taint no business of mine." Old Jack grinned sourly. "He sure does eat! If he was a timber-cruiser, now; or he'd a trap-line—"

Evidently the bum did not belong. I experienced a revulsion, in that we had in our paradise this drifter from the dregs of civilization. Everything had seemed so clean and fine and honest, with what woodsmen we had met good-hearted and friendly and hospitable.

Old Jack was looking at me intently. "Don't ye set that tent of yours up on no point, son," he said. "He"—he jerked a thumb up his trail—"puts in most of his time along that there lake bank. He aint cut me so much as a lick of winter wood fer his keep, yet, but—"

I sensed what he was driving at. Nedje is not hard to look at; and there was that heirloom ring of hers, that she would not consent to take off for one moment. It was our last valuable possession; and woman-like, it was also her visible fort against dire poverty. We might have an extremely obnoxious caller, if this bum found us at home in our tent. At the

very least, we might wake up and find our canoe gone. It was obvious, if he was building a raft, that he wanted to get across Crooked Lake. It was much too long to hike around without a regular woodsman's outfit.

I was liking our paradise less and less with this serpent in it. Here we were wind-bound between the two lakes for an indefinite period, judging from the threatening sky overhead. And here was this derelict of civilization at large, a predatory creature, with none of that woodsman's sense of common honesty, of any obligations to his neighbors and his host, Old Jack. . . . I was about to hurry on with the canoe when Nedje said: "Could you get me the flask out of that pack, Jim? I—I think I am going to have a chill."

Her teeth were chattering violently. Her lips were blue with cold, and her brown eyes looked on me apologetically. She always hated to go sick—seemed to consider it, somehow, a fault.

Old Jack became immediately all concern. "Sho! An' us talkin' here like boobies! Don't ye give her but a mite of that whisky, son. What she wants is good ol' yarb tea. Ye can't beat it when you're feelin' low-down, an' ornery, an' shivery all over. You come right up to my shack, Missus, an' I'll fix ye some."

He offered Nedje his arm. I let down the canoe. "How about this—person?" I asked.

Old Jack's eyes snapped. "I'll fix *him*, if he gets funny," he said. "Don't you worry none, son."

**T**HERE was nothing else to be done. Nedje needed immediate attention. I gave her a nip from the flask, and dragged out of her pack a spare kit of dry khaki. While they were starting up the trail, I dug down into my pack till I found our small revolver, that we had brought to discourage porcupines and other predatory varmints.

I followed them up the trail. Presently, in a little open glade, we came in sight of Jack's shack, and I began to see visions. Back in 1834 there was a depression exactly like this one, and my great-grandfather was a young fellow, and there were no jobs for such as he. Did he hang around hopelessly, or go on relief? Not that son of the pioneers! He packed all he owned into his blanket, took along ax, auger and timber-saw and some seeds, picked up his Josh Goulcher rifle, and went into the woods. They

didn't see him again for three years, when he came back looking for a girl to share his plenty. Up at a lake he had cleared him a homestead, and built a fine shack, and put in a crop. There was jerked venison, grouse and duck hanging in his meat-house. Wild rice and acorn flour in the bins; there would be corn and potatoes this season, it taking two years to tame the soil. All this with his own two hands. He had even made a long-bow, to save on powder and lead.

**J**ACK'S establishment was like that, only he had no use for either lake. Soil too poor and swampy, probably. He put in his summers ranging the woods for herbs, gathering for a drug-manufacturer in Detroit. Eupatorium,—his "Queen-o'-the-medder,"—bloodroot, and crane's-bill, snakeroot, ginseng, for the Chinese trade, mandrake-root—they are all used in medicine. His income from these gave him all the supplies he needed.

Going inside, Nedje looked around her at all his treasures with little feminine chirps of delight. After days and days of our tent, this was a real home. I could see that she was dying to go to house-keeping in it. Old Jack opened the door of a small room built out as a leanto.

"You change yore clo'es in there, Missus, while I be brewin' ye that there yarb tea," he said. I handed her the spare outfit, and the leanto door closed on her.

"The bum sleeps here," Jack told me with a gesture at a cot across from the chimney hearth of his living-room. "I don't hold with no fire, come night. Give me my fur sleepin'-bag, an' my windy wide open."

I had seen the window with that glance into the leanto sleeping-room. "Where is he now?" I asked. "I'd rather they'd not meet."

Old Jack followed my glance at Nedje's door and shrugged. "Down to the lake, I s'pose; he's workin' at somethin' down there. Most likely a raft. I wish't he'd finish it an' git along! He aint done *me* a stroke of work."

That set me worrying about our canoe. If the bum was building a raft to cross Crooked Lake on some precarious voyage, he would not hesitate to pick up a canoe where he found it, and decamp. I was about to hurry Nedje up and forget the yarb tea, when a heavy tread sounded on the duff outside.

Old Jack turned from stewing some dried leaves in a bowl on the coals.

"That's him," he said quietly. "You better leave it to me, son."

The tread came up to the door, and the stranger stood there looking in. He was a husky brute; but at sight of me, he started back. Old Jack laughed.

"He aint no one but jest a dude sport, Buck," he said. "Come right in. What's yore name, son?" he asked me.

"Barton," I said.

"Buck, meet Mr. Barton. He's fishin' up here," Old Jack explained me.

Buck nodded to me unpleasantly and sat his big weight down on the cot. "I'm leavin' you, Jack," he announced. "Got a raft all built. They must be wonderin' why I don't show up at H.B. on the Groundhog."

I could not imagine what use the Hudson's Bay Company could have for this raw tenderfoot dressed in civilization's old clothes. And I seemed to have seen him before. . . . Then I remembered. It was in the post office at Biscotasing, back there on the railway. Nedje was writing some post-cards back home, while I idly scanned the posters of men wanted by the Canadian police. This chap, if I recalled correctly, had robbed some small bank in Ontario and had slugged the poor cashier to death. Evidently he was lying low up here, and trying to push on farther into the Northern wilderness. But he would have a long way to go to get beyond the arm of the Canadian police.

Just then Nedje came into the room. Her eyes, in her pretty nut-brown face, were sparkling with vivacity. Her round throat rose out of that wide khaki collar as from a brown calla lily. The red tie was in a graceful knot over her bosom.

"I feel much better, Mr. Jack," she said to our host. "I won't need the tea; thank you just the same—" She had noted Buck sitting on his cot and staring boldly at her. She stepped back a pace, and her hand rose up across her bosom. The ring gleamed and sparkled there.

**B**UCK'S eyes fastened on it. He knew better than I did how much that "ice" was worth.

"My wife," I explained her to him. "Well, so long, Jack. It's been a life-saver, I assure you. We'll be getting along to the lake."

Buck rose and protested effusively. "You aint campin' out with this weather comin' on, little gal!" he said to Nedje, ignoring me. "Not so long as Jack an' me has got this shack for ye! You make yourself right to home!"

He went to the door and looked up at the sky, with elaborate concern for her. I could see that the weather had indeed thickened up. All those fleecy clouds had banked into a solid canopy of gray. Nedje was not to be deterred by it. My little lady was finding this person most offensive. Even his gaze was an insult.

"I think we'd better hurry back to the canoe, Jim," she said. "It's going to be a short afternoon, with all we have to do."

Buck still blocked the doorway. "Oh, ye've got a canoe, have you?" he asked with interest. He was torn now between two desires; absconding with our canoe, or possessing Nedje's only too visible heirloom.

"Naturally," I said stiffly. "You won't get far in this country without one."

He eyed me grimly. "You said something there, Mister!" he growled with sinister suggestiveness.

**I**T was too much for Nedje. She moved on him impatiently. "Let me pass, please," she said icily.

"Oho!" Buck said, and moved aside gallantly. "Ye've got sperrit, little gal, haint ye?" he teased.

Nedje ignored him and went on past. I was about to follow, when Old Jack said: "No."

It was a quiet, soft explosion of sound, but it arrested us all in our tracks. I turned to him inquiringly, trying to guess him out.

"Jest a minute, Missus," he said. "Ye've no idee how ol' Crooked gits up in a blow like this. 'Twill be more'n yore life is worth to try it. An' it's comin' on to rain, right now. She'll be a hum-dozzler, and last three days. You two better snug down right here in the shack. Yo're sure welcome to all I got."

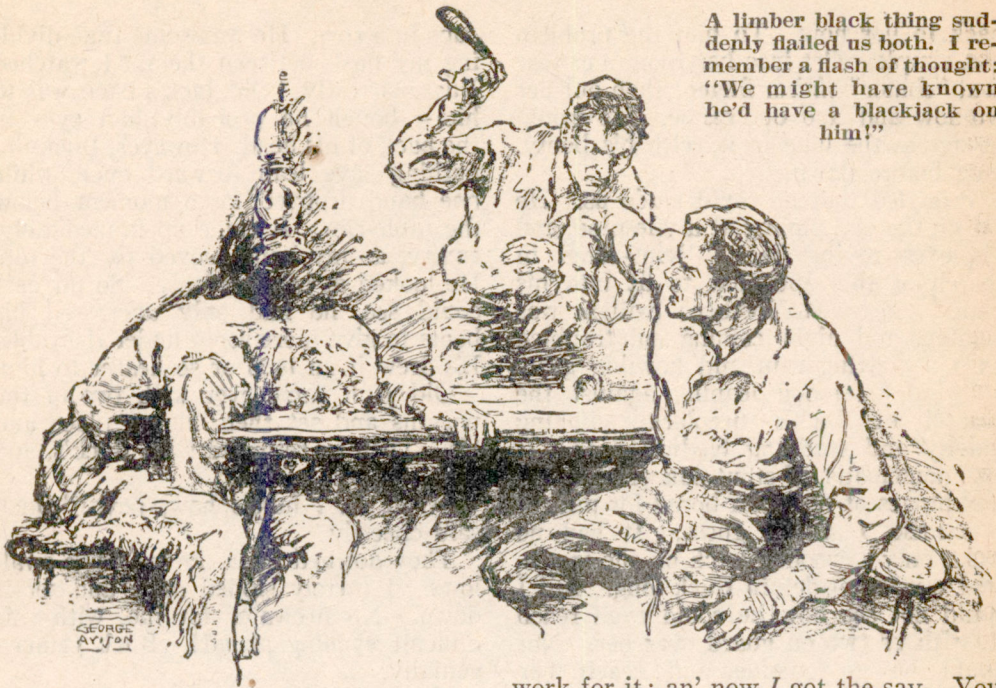
I simply could not get him, at first; then I admired his quick thinking. There was nothing to prevent Buck's following us to the canoe. Once alone in the woods with him, there were a thousand ways he could dispose of me, and then he would have both canoe and girl. Far better was it to concentrate these possibilities for disaster right here at the shack, where Jack and I could deal effectively with Buck. It was the lesser of two dangers, though a bad enough risk for her.

"Yore yarb tea is all ready now, Missus," Jack added hospitably.

"Thanks, Mr. Jack; I don't need it," Nedje said hastily, and made to flee.

Buck laughed. "Oh, well; if you feel





A limber black thing suddenly flailed us both. I remember a flash of thought: "We might have known he'd have a blackjack on him!"

that way about me, lady, I'll take meself off! Gosh, I won't bite you!"

He affected to be injured, and had given her up in preference for our canoe. I started for the door. He would have to fight me for it, first.

Again old Jack interposed his decisive, "No!" That stern and hostile woodsman's stare was in his eyes now. "You aint goin' to fool with no raft—nor no canoe either—on that lake, Buck. I mean it. . . . Y'd ought to know better."

Buck eyed him arrogantly. "Sez you?" he snarled, relapsing into the slum vernacular. "Why, you runt, I guess I'm a free man all right; and I kin go where I damn' please in this neck of woods!—Mister," he said to me, "you lay mighty low, if you know what's good for you! I got jest about time to cross the lake in that canoe of yourn."

WITH that unmasked defiance, he took a stride out the door. But Jack had swept up his rifle in a single reach. He did not aim it. It lay easy in his two brown hands, the hammer up, a bright percussion cap on the nipple. It was a poem, built like a violin, that old nail-driver. Your deer wouldn't need but one shot, with its dram and three-quarters of powder behind the hundred-and-ten grain bullet.

"I guess not, Buck," Old Jack said quietly. "You've et my vittles for a week, and aint done but a lick or so of

work for it; an' now I got the say. You come in and set down."

I was appalled at the temerity of the man. Buck in here, at close quarters with us! But Old Jack was not in the least afraid of him, near or far off. And Buck knew, as I knew, that it was Jack's extreme quickness that made him so formidable. That hunting-knife in his belt was a guarantee against the success of any surprise move.

Buck came in sullenly and sat down. Nedje's eyes were full of fright, for me. It was clear to her that I was no match for this powerful ruffian. But where could we go, except risk crossing the lake immediately?

"I wish that you would stay, honey," I said. "You take the room. You won't be annoyed."

She came in, then, avoiding Buck as if he were a tarantula. "Do be careful, Jim!" she whispered to me as she passed me at the fireplace. Old Jack had slung his rifle up on the pegs and was now rooting in his herb closet, ignoring Buck. He had stooped to drop a couple of black roots into her tea bowl as she passed us.

"I'm fixin' it so ye won't take no cough, Missus," he said. "You bundle up good in my sleepin'-bag an' git you warm."

She was shivering again, this time from fright and mental distress over our little show of violence. She closed the door after her, and could be heard for some time moving everything movable inside against it.

Buck seemed content. He had switched

back to her now. To him the problem was simple. Get into her room and tear that "shiner" off her finger; then out her window and find our canoe. He would be across the lake in it, with his booty, long before dawn.

Provided that he could elude us. He sat on the cot, puffing at a vile pipe, and his eyes roving Jack's living-room in search of this and that to fit into his plan. The swift Northern twilight was waning, and night coming on, troubled with a slatting rain and howling gusts of wind. I stood leaning against the mantel of Jack's fireplace, smoking quietly and studying Nedje's door. It was homemade, of stout oak planks, and had hinges of rock-elm bored for pins of tamarack, I should guess. It had no lock; only a wooden latch on the inside, that would not detain Buck long. But I could not see how he could even reach it, with us two on guard over her. Nor could he go outside and reach her through the leanto window. There would be a prompt veto from old Jack the moment he made any excuse to go out.

OUR host was meanwhile going right on with his household chores for the evening meal. Things were frizzling in skillets and boiling in pots, and an ash-cake of corn-meal was going forward in the coals. Nedje's bowl of yarb tea he had set aside to cool. The shack smelled of good things to eat, and was warm and comfortable in all the storm. I felt a powerful urge to build one like it myself. Nedje and I could—only one's neighbors up here sometimes weren't too good. . . . At that, an obnoxious wastrel like this Buck would be a rare thing. He had only left civilization because too many policemen were interested in him down in Ontario, hadn't he?

Jack shoved over his small cedar-log table to where Buck sat on the cot, and kicked up a couple of three-legged stools. An extraordinary assortment of table service for our evening meal went on it; maple-knob bowls and plates, bark containers, a few utensils packed in from civilization. He then turned to me.

"Got that flask of yourn, son? We might as well hev a leetle tetch of the ol' rattlesnake."

Good idea to divide it up, I thought. Buck would quickly become unmanageable if he ever got hold of my flask. He was looking on with interest while old Jack stooped over the hearth ashes, where he had set three small cherry-knob

cups in a row. He was some time dividing my flask between them. I watched Buck narrowly. Old Jack's back was to him—though he probably had eyes in the back of his head. However, Buck did nothing save lean forward once, while one hand dropped for a moment below the table-rim. It came up immediately, empty, as my hand moved for the hip. He looked at me woodenly. So far as I could see, he had only uncrossed his boots to give more room under the table. He drew it an inch or so nearer to him.

Old Jack came over with two of the noggins and set them at my place and his. Then he returned with Buck's, and we sat down.

"Well . . . here's how, boys!" Jack said cheerily.

They downed theirs in two huge swallows. I merely sipped mine and set it down. No firewater for me, with this difficult evening ahead! Buck grinned genially.

"If ye aint drinkin', Mister, I *am!*" he said, and his left hand reached over for my cup.

"Hey!" Old Jack protested good-naturedly. His hand and mine shot out to protect my cup. Our heads were leaned together—and that was the last either of us knew, for some time. A limber black thing in Buck's right hand had suddenly flailed us both, in two quick strokes. I remember, as I passed out in a shower of sparks, the flash of thought: "Now, we might have *known* he'd have a blackjack on him somewhere, all this time!" Not in that many words, of course.

WHEN I came to, Buck was not in the shack. And I want to say that I suffered, then, all there is to suffer in mental agony. I could hear him cursing and tugging at her window-sash outside. Evidently he was crouched in the angle between the leanto and the shack. There was not a sound from her; then came the soft, stealthy snap of breaking glass.

I raved and cursed then, struggling with my bonds. I was lying on the floor, with wrists tied behind me and ankles roped. The firelight showed Old Jack doubled over the table, his elbows trussed up and feet tied. The sounds of a grunting body squeezing through her window galvanized me to a frantic stumble to my feet. I fell against Jack, knocking him over, and we both tumbled on the floor.

"Jack! Wake up! He's in there!"

I whispered desperately. His eyes opened on me, dazed. No deadly shriek as yet had come from Nedje. Had he begun by silently choking her? The thought brought a frenzy of punishing tugs at my wrists.

"Stiddy, son," Old Jack said. "I'll back up to ye. See if you can ontie that knot." Fiercely I picked at it with my fingers. You could hear movement in there, and still no outcry from Nedje.

"God! Take us forever!" I cursed. But Jack did not seem so concerned.

"Waal, mebbe," he said, and seemed to be listening for something.

IT came, presently—a deep male groan of distress. I had opened Jack's knot, and he turned over with a pleased grin on me.

"'Bout time!" he said. "I told ye I'd fix him! I wasn't taking no chances on't, neither!"

"You mean?" I said, hope reviving.

"Yaas. I give him a dose. In that there whisky. Them yarb roots sure does git ye somethin' powerful, son! They was in that tea what I was bilin' for the Missus."

They certainly were effective! More groans, the sound of a heavy body tumbling on the cot.

Then the sounds became vocal.

"Owoooo! . . . Hey, Jack! Help! . . . I'm dyin'!"

"No, ye aint, neither!" Jack called out. "Ye'll git over it, Buck. Not afore Mr. Barton an' me can come in there, though."

He cursed us; but it was swiftly abbreviated as the yarbs took another twist on him. Jack had meanwhile untied me, and together we leaped for that door.

"Go easy, son!" Jack laughed at my furious shoulder-charge on that stout oak. "That aint no way!"

He was only a few minutes in driving out the hinge-pins, but it seemed an eternity to me. That side of the door opened to our combined pull, and we squeezed in, to find Buck lying on the cot with both hands gripping his stomach. We were not gentle with him. He was rolled over and tied with his own cords in no time at all.

"'Bout time we guv him a leetle law!" Jack said, roping him to the cot.

I had meanwhile been feeling under it, in the hope that Nedje had hid herself there. But she was not there, nor in any corner of the small room.

Old Jack laughed at my dismay. "She

done lit out long ago, son, I'm thinking! Sense, that gal of yours! *She* warn't goin' to stay, with no sech comp'ny as we hed!"

It dawned on me, then, that nothing on earth would induce Nedje to spend the night in that room. We would find her out in the woods somewhere, probably near the canoe. There was a perfectly good sleeping-bag in her pack, and our tent to roll up in. And it would be like her to close Jack's window after her, in this driving rain.

We got a lantern and went down the trail. We were sometime finding her. She was not under the canoe; oh, no—she wasn't taking any chances of being found there, either. But in a leafy hollow between two down trees near by, old Jack held the lantern over a long, glistening green bundle in the rain that was our tent. From within were coming gentle rhythmic sounds.

"You leave her be," said Old Jack, grinning at me beatifically.

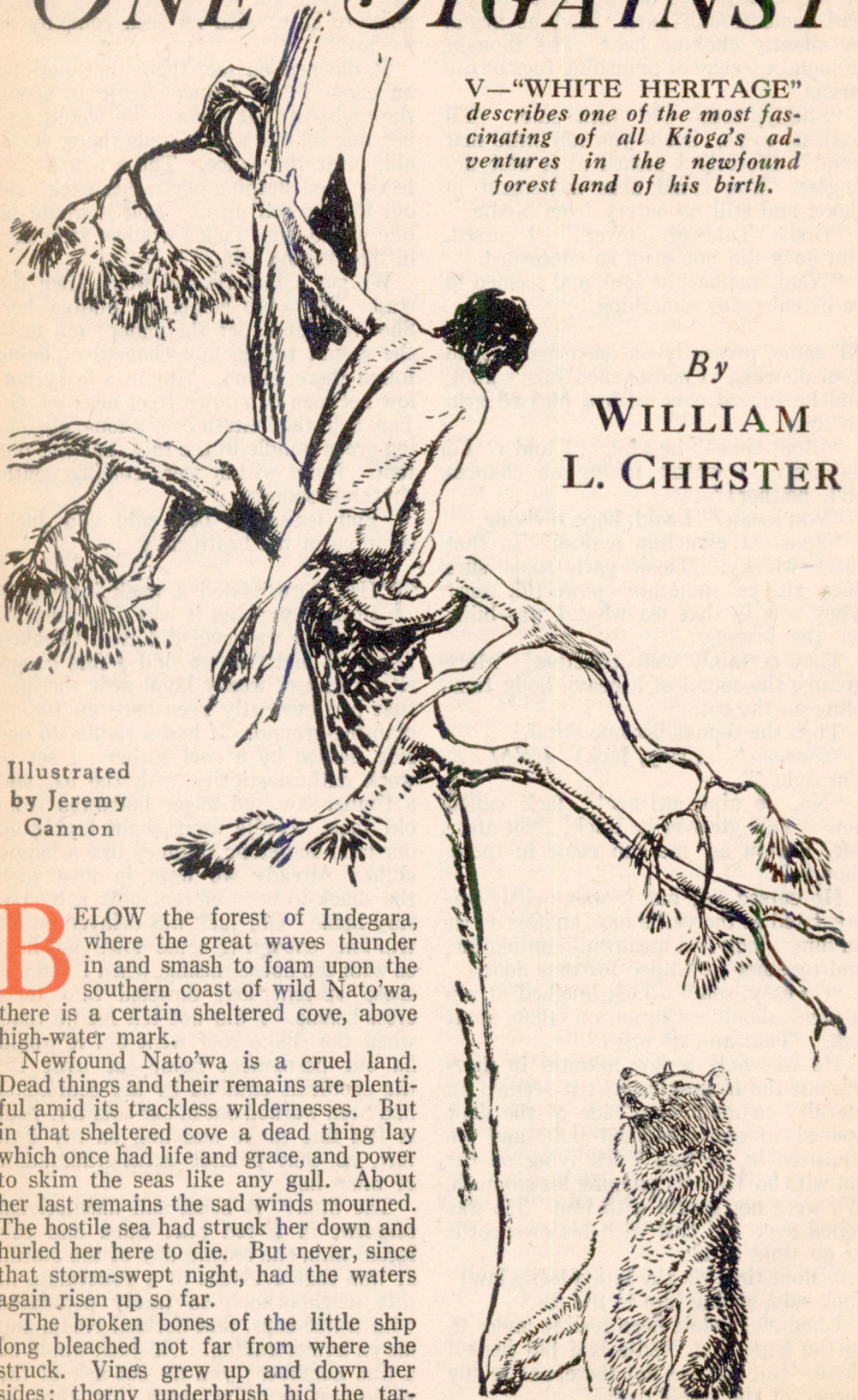
THE storm lasted a week instead of three days; and it was a blessing in disguise, for we never did cross Crooked Lake. I had time to find a fine camp-site, a sort of weedy knoll near the lake that had evidently been once an Indian planting-ground. It had a rivulet to one side, served by a cool spring. I set to work enthusiastically with the ax, and a timber-saw and auger borrowed from old Jack. Nedje went about laying up our mud-and-stone chimney like a happy child. Already we were in love with the shack-to-be; our tent only a temporary home. Old Jack was delayed on his trip long enough to come down and help us with the house-raising, when I had got those upright logs doweled into their cross-beams. I did not tell Nedje that, when the shake roof went on, it would be our permanent home—at least till the problems entailed by the depression had been worked out in our country. And it felt fine to be standing on my own feet, as that pioneer great-grandfather of mine had.

The bum? A brisk and unemotional sergeant in a red coat came and collected him, the second day of the storm. It was that evidence of a policeman, in this neighborhood so thinly populated with traffic-cops, that decided Nedje and me on homesteading. Old Jack would be a fine neighbor; you do not ask of the wilderness anything more than that, in case your own two hands are not enough.

# ONE AGAINST

V—"WHITE HERITAGE"  
*describes one of the most fascinating of all Kioga's adventures in the newfound forest land of his birth.*

By  
**WILLIAM  
L. CHESTER**



Illustrated  
by Jeremy  
Cannon

**B**ELOW the forest of Indegara, where the great waves thunder in and smash to foam upon the southern coast of wild Nato'wa, there is a certain sheltered cove, above high-water mark.

Newfound Nato'wa is a cruel land. Dead things and their remains are plentiful amid its trackless wildernesses. But in that sheltered cove a dead thing lay which once had life and grace, and power to skim the seas like any gull. About her last remains the sad winds mourned. The hostile sea had struck her down and hurled her here to die. But never, since that storm-swept night, had the waters again risen up so far.

The broken bones of the little ship long bleached not far from where she struck. Vines grew up and down her sides; thorny underbrush hid the tar-

# A WILDERNESS

nished name-plate, which bore the one word *Cherokee*. Sometimes great white-toothed brutes sniffed about her broken decks; and on her tilted mast a colony of sea-birds had a favored perch.

For fifteen years the sad relics of the *Cherokee* had sunk slowly deeper into the concealing of the wilderness. In all that time no human glance or touch had fallen on her remains, when on a dark and shadowed rainy afternoon a vast primordial brute strode near on feet that scuffed the earth with careless laziness.

It was a bear—a creature like a grizzly, but on an even larger scale, as all the creatures of Nato'wa grow to be. The great majestic animal drew near the hidden ship's remains, and with an air at once disconsolate and lonely, looked here and there as if in search of something or some one long lost and much regretted. Then with a heavy sigh that blew up dust the bear sat slowly down, grotesquely like a man, the picture of complete dejection.

A droning bot-fly lit upon his ear and stung. In sudden rage the grizzly pawed the air, and at his roar other lesser creatures checked every movement. A spike-buck, bedded in a thicket, froze suddenly, cud-chewing stopped. Birds in the trees grew still and even the leaves seemed to whisper in awe when this mightier visitor spoke.

But as the bear stood upright, the lord of all his neighborhood, a dripping mass flew hurtling against his heavy head and struck with a sodden *smack* and streams of golden honey trickled down upon the massive chest.

Taken off balance, the bruin toppled over backward. A jay laughed heartily overhead, but no whit louder than another voice, its owner as yet unseen. At sound of that voice the giant bear rolled lightly to his feet, and with a yelping cry absurd in one so huge and heavy, stood up erect again, and quivering with eagerness peered every way with little red nearsighted eyes.

A moment there was silence. Then came a voice to aid him.

"*Hai, Aki!* Rich yellow honey! Come get thy share. 'Twas worth these little stings to rob that dripping store!"

And now the bear caught sight of a human figure squatting on a lofty limb,

with naked back against the rugged trunk. In either hand the figure held great chunks of honeycomb, and on his breast and body the stuff was smeared. Elsewhere upon his bare tanned skin, uncounted flaming marks betrayed the price paid for his loot.

Roaring with delight, great Aki reared beneath the limb and begged with gaping mouth. Down into the open jaws the supple youth flung dripping hunks of comb and honey. Devouring the last morsel, he licked his fingers and drew a muscular forearm across his mouth.

"With smoke Kioga drove the bees away and robbed the hive. *Hai-yah*, but I am full, friend Aki! What better now than to find a sunny ledge and sleep until the hunting-hour?"

AND the lithe, smooth-skinned Kioga dropped to earth as lightly as a tree leaf falls. The bear fell to all fours. Then began the scene which ever marked each fresh reunion of this strange, almost inseparable pair. They tumbled, wrestled, rolled upon the ground. The bear struck mighty blows that never fell. The boy dodged in and out, pulling Aki's ears and seeking with his lesser strength to pin that mighty friendly adversary to the earth. The round young muscles writhed and swelled beneath his naked skin, and when huge Aki flicked a paw and caught him unawares, Kioga tumbled through the forest trash which stuck to him wherever the honey had spread.

Upon a ledge not far away a sinuous striped form crouched, whining at the sight of that young and tender prey he dared not spring upon while Aki stood near by. From high afar, eyes like yellow corn burned fires of hate upon Kioga. Of those eyes were seven pairs belonging to T'yone and his ravening pack, who, had they numbered a few more, might even now have dared give chase to Kioga, human consort of the bears of Indegara.

Presently the game of rough-and-tumble ended, and they who had made that glade a bedlam melted out of view, leaving only silence. Of those who watched, but one dared even follow Guna of the hundred stripes. But Guna had not taken ten long padding steps when, from a limb, a lithe form swung to ground, grimaced defiantly, and before the tiger



The warriors raced in to count first coup upon Kioga. . . . They blundered there.

could gather up his wits, sprang quickly out of reach again, returning shrill jeer for throaty roar. Thus did Kioga mock the Enemy of Men, until Aki loomed dark upon the scene, and Guna turned away.

Kioga and Aki turned toward a certain steaming pool upon a mountain-side. There, in the waters of a sulphur spring, Kioga bathed and washed the sticky honey from his skin and hair, then, with Aki likewise dripping at his side, turned toward the coast again. . . .

Upon a rock that overlooked the foamy chaos of the inner reefs, Kioga mourned the fickleness of men—the savage red-skinned Shoni men with whom, until not long ago, he had made his home, almost as much an Indian as they themselves.

"Ho, faithful Aki, glad am I that you are not a man. For men are friends to-day and foes to-morrow. 'Twas only recently that all Hopeka hailed Kioga, who brought them warning of the flood which swallowed up the old Hopeka-town. They brought me juicy meats and sweets to eat. *Ahai* . . . but that was moons ago, when friends outnumbered foes. Hopeka's walls are rising up again. But now I am not welcome there—and know you why, my mighty friend?"

Great Aki twitched his heavy ears attentively.

"Because I was adopted of Mokuyi and Awena, who treated me as if I were their son. The Long Knives slew them, Aki—in dead of night they crept upon them, killed them in the dark, even as in the long ago they slew my white-skinned

parents. And why? Because they knew too much. All four knew that the Long Knives sought to kill wise old Sawamic, emperor-chief of all the Shoni tribes."

Kioga paused, his eyes dark with the recollection of those recent tragedies. The hand with which he worried Aki's ear was quivering, but not with fear. "I caught them in the act, and now they would kill me as well, because I put Sawamic on his guard. And know you, Aki, what the Shoni law commands? Listen:

*"Whoso kills thy father or thy mother, him thou must then destroy, and all his blood and issue, until not one remains. Whoso breaks this law shall bear the name of coward, and go about with hanging head, and wear a woman's garments."*

"So speaks the Shoni law—and look you, Aki, the Long Knives have slain both those who took me in, and those who gave me life—four lives I must avenge, or bear the name of coward, I, the Snow Hawk, who laugh right into Guna's very teeth!"

Kioga's voice had risen in intensity. The great bear growled in sympathy as Kioga fell silent, staring moodily at the crags below. For the white boy's intelligence was keen; what reprisal upon his enemies would bring back to him his beloved dead?

Still brooding, his staring eyes were suddenly caught by a bit of time-bleached cordage caught in a cleft at his feet—white man's rope like that shown him by Mokuyi long ago among the few relics of



his white parents. Some nesting bird—the *Cherokee*? At once Kioga sprang to his feet and took up again a quest he had maintained for years—the search for the wrecked vessel that had brought his white parents hither. Must it not be somewhere near this spot?

“Men of my race have mighty lodges,” Kioga continued on a theme that never lost its fascination for his semi-savage mind. “Lodges that go higher than the lightest arrow flies. Pale-skins tame the cataracts, and make the lightning work for them.”

Thus for a little time Kioga rambled vaunting on as once again he searched the shore for traces of his father’s ship.

**ELSEWHERE**, not far away, three sinewy human figures passed like silent apparitions through the forest. Each was painted on breast and face in figures of red and blue—insignia of the Long Knife secret brotherhood, a rebellious malcontent society among the Shoni tribal federation. All three were naked but for moccasins and for breech-cloth belted round the waist. In every belt a knife and tomahawk was thrust. Keen arrows and strong hunting bows completed their savage armament.

They did not speak, except by silent hand-signs, and every eye was on a fresh-made trail—the spoor left by Kioga. Then suddenly one of the trailing party pointed, hissing, to a tear upon a limb whence branch had been ripped away. From time to time, along Kioga’s trail, they found the chips of his whittling.

The last of these still showed the damp of recent cutting.

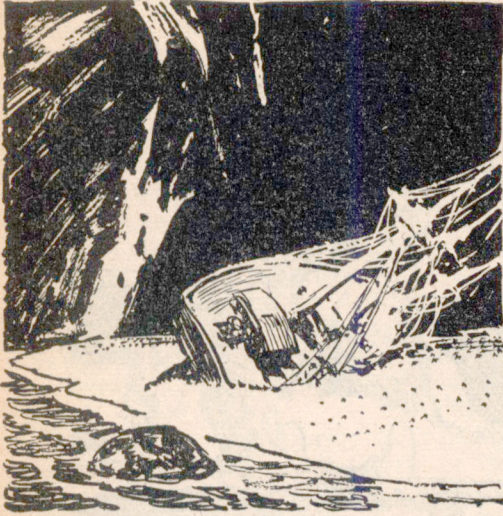
The painted apparitions trod more swiftly yet, and with redoubled caution, and presently they glimpsed a well-known and much-hated figure seated on a rock within short arrow-range. Each looked to each, with eyes that glittered like the snake’s as it writhes toward its prey.

Then, as by prearrangement, they separated and stole apart, until each one commanded a different shooting-angle. Here was no sporting chance for the unlucky prey, but a three-fold stacking of the cards of chance, that Kioga might not escape their arrows.

Now slowly to one knee the nearest warrior rose and nocked an arrow to his bowstring. He drew the weapon to an arc, sighting down the shaft with extra care, at little more than point-blank range. Then with a vibrant *twang* the bow released its deadly missile. The shaft sped like a flash of light. Kioga dropped as one pole-axed. Two of the warriors saw him fall.

The third saw nothing, nor ever would again. No will of his had loosed that pointed death. A sudden unexpected blow, delivered by the mightiest thews in all the forest, had fallen on him, crushing the skull. The armored paw of Aki dripped with blood. He crouched above the prostrate warrior, watching for a sign of life, in order to crush it out.

The killing was a silent one among the thickets. The other warriors suspected nothing, but seeing Kioga fall, sprang from concealment, threw aside their



bows, and with knives drawn raced in from either side, to count first *coup* upon Kioga, and bear his scalp away in triumph.

They blundered there. The nearest came within ten feet before he realized his error.

Upon his side Kioga lay, indeed. But in his hand the bow was arched, an arrow on the cord, green eyes ablaze behind its feathers. In a limb beyond him was the arrow of the dead would-be assassin.

The startled warrior yelled and wildly flung his knife. With greater coolness Kioga simultaneously loosed his whizzing shaft, impaling the foe with a true heart shot that brought him down in middle stride. The thrown blade passed high above Kioga's head, toward the one remaining Long Knife warrior.

Dodging the flying blade, the enemy drew back his tomahawk to throw, then beheld a shaggy juggernaut charging upon him. From startled haste, his cast was over-quick. The war-ax struck the great bear flatly, but adding to the fury of his charge. The red man turned and fled, with Aki in full chase.

Kioga's haste to drop at first sound of plucked bowstring had saved his life. His heart beat fast with keen excitement. But not the slightest tremor shook his steady hand as Aki returned, the chase abandoned.

"There is to be no peace. Here lie the proofs!" Kioga turned the nearer body with his toe. "This one is Little Wolf, one of the Long Knife secret brotherhood. And this one,"—proceeding to the spot where Aki had got in his lethal stroke,—“no paint could hide the greatest part of Big Nose. Had I but half thy

strength, my Aki, they had not dared to hunt me down. Three came and two are dead. One then is left, Thirty Wounds. He is a coward. He'll trouble us no more."

(But there Kioga presumed upon good fortune. The enemy beat a swift retreat, but only to the summit of a ridge nearby. There, glancing back, he glimpsed Kioga and the giant bear departing by another trail. With caution now redoubled, the sinewy savage again pursued.)

Kioga's eyes roved from foe to fallen foe. Gone was the happy, carefree smile, and in its place upon that youthful face strange bitter marks, contrasting darkly with the clear and shining eyes.

He spoke to shaggy Aki in soft low tones, pitched at a grimmer level. His voice seemed older than his years:

"Many moons have passed since the Long Knives slew Awena and Mokuyi in their sleep. Many moons since I took sacred vow of vengeance on the guilty ones. I broke my vow. I walked the peaceful trail. For this the red men's gods are angry with me. This is their first warning—but they will strike again."

He passed a strong hand through his tangled hair, in a gesture of weariness and uncertainty. "*Ai-ya*, blood must flow to satisfy the Shoni gods. Big Nose and Little Wolf are the last of their clan, and they are dead. But there remain Thirty Wounds and his two children and a woman. And when I think of that, my blood grows thin as water."

The Snow Hawk spoke those last words heavily. "If I do not take their lives the spirits of Mokuyi and Awena will never rest," the Indian in him muttered, and thus for a while he sat in deep and troubled thought. His face grew set in harder lines; presently he spoke again:

"My heart is flint. What does Kioga owe the kin of Thirty Wounds? Did they not throw the stones that drove me often from the village? Have I not lived a wolf because they hated my white skin and drove me out to dwell among the forest beasts?" He threw back his shoulders defiantly. "Come, Aki—let us seek them out and have an end!"

And with the words Kioga rose and turned toward Hopeka-town where dwelt the family of Thirty Wounds.

But words alone do not achieve a resolution. In half a mile he turned ten times. He kicked a stone and limped more slowly, though it did not pain him. Although he was not tired, he paused to rest upon a rotting log. Beside him Aki



followed suit, and then suddenly, what with that enormous extra weight, their seat gave way and both fell through into a dark and musty place, damp with the smell of long decay. It was a quick and sudden fall, and in the thickets out along their back-trail, a pair of dark eyes narrowed at their startling disappearance. A painted form inched forward through the brush with utmost stealth.

Twisting in mid-air, Kioga alighted on his feet, while Aki fell more heavily, and as their eyes accommodated to the darkness, both looked round about them in amazement.

They crouched within a gloomy chamber, lighted chiefly from the hole above, which they had caused, but with a glow diffusing also through a round hole on one side. A moment Kioga's glance leaped here and there. Then in husky vibrant tones, more full of awe than any outcry could be, he spoke his wonder:

"The ship! The *Cherokee*! My father's ship is found at last!"

ALL his short life Kioga's dreams had bubbled with imaginary pictures of his father's homeland and the countless wonders there of which Mokuyi oft had spoken. Now here he stood upon the threshold of a greater knowledge of that far exterior world. He felt his blood leap quick with high anticipation.

A moment more, the while he tamed his leaping heart to this magnificent discovery. Then with a careful step he moved about what was, in fact, the cabin of a little vessel that had been covered by shifting sand and driftwood. In the semi-darkness, in a bracket, a ship's lamp hung. He touched it gingerly, not knowing what it was, and in the handling broke the glass. He turned a little screw. Wonder of wonders, up rose a little blackened wick, that had a peculiar smell! He also heard the gurgle of a fluid, but could not judge the uses of this curious thing.

Examining the wick, he knew the black for char. That suggested a wick, for the Shoni used a sort of tallow dip; and making fire with his fire-stick, he held it to the wick, which sputtered up. The sickly flame rose weirdly, lighting up the strange interior.

Ahead he dimly saw a half-open door. Approaching cautiously he passed through into the bow of the *Cherokee*. Forward the little vessel was a wreck. The chain-locker, burst open, contained but a short remaining length of rusted links, which

clanked at his touch. Her bow timbers were all stove in. This must have been her mortal wound, received on that frightful passage through the southern reefs.

The galley too was in ruins, but of its fittings Kioga salvaged some old pots and an iron frying-pan, bearing them into the main cabin aft. There things were in better case. The well-built hardwood deck had kept out wet and weather. Breathless with eagerness, Kioga pursued his discoveries, with mighty Aki looking on and digging on his own account for little creatures that had made the rotting ship their home.

A heavy chest was first to catch Kioga's eye, bound round with metal bands, and by some cunning mechanism locked beyond his immediate powers to open it. For half an hour Kioga tugged and pried and tore his nails in his efforts to uncover what must be contained within. His labors went for naught. Defeated, he looked about elsewhere.

In one dark corner lay a wooden box, held together by a snap-clasp which presently sprang open at his fingers' experimental pressure. The cover fell away. Out upon the floor there clattered several objects the like of which he had never seen before.

One was a thing of rusted metal, with a wooden grip at its broad end, and narrowing toward the other, with on one edge a row of countless teeth. Squatting on a bench, Kioga took it up in wonder and chanced to let it scrape along his wooden seat. The teeth removed some bits of wood and left a scar. He repeated the action. The scar grew deeper. He did it yet again. A little heap of wood-dust piled up on the floor as he continued it. He found a certain rhythm in the rasping, back and forward movement. Then, all in an instant he glimpsed the vast utility of this, to him, extraordinary thing—a common carpenter's saw.

Delighted with the deepening cut it made, he sawed like mad. Soon there came the crackle of breaking wood, and down Kioga sprawled upon the floor, the bench on which he knelt sawn through.

KIOGA looked from saw to chest, a great idea dawning. He laid the teeth against the wooden cover and sawed away until he heard a harsh and grating sound—steel teeth on metal lining. The saw would cut no deeper. Foiled once again Kioga turned back to the box of tools. But now his quick intelligence

suggested what before he had not understood. These several objects had a definite use. With patience he would discover what and why they were.

He took a piece of wood up in his hand. Sunk in it was a little glass, containing viscous fluid. A little bubble moved back and forth as Kioga shifted the angle of the stick. It was an ordinary level, but confounded him completely.

But here was something more engaging. A round and flattened handle, with a curving grip below it, and in a kind of jaw a bit of oddly twisted pointed metal. He took it up. A point suggested a hole. He pressed it against the table, bore down without result until, by accident, he turned the curving handle, and saw the bit twist deep into the cabin table. He caught on instantly, and as he bored the steel went through the wood as if it were but wax, leaving a clean round hole.

Thus, little by little, Kioga discovered a few of the manifold uses of the tools found in the tool-box. One cut; another bored holes. Alone no tool was capable of very much, but wielded together, by a skillful hand, they could accomplish mighty works. Thus, in the semi-darkness of that little wrecked ship's cabin, Kioga vaguely recognized the uses of those implements by which the people of his race had raised themselves above the level of their forbears.

Ere now his own cunning hands had fashioned naught but arrow-points, spear-heads and knives of flint or bone, the weaponry of war and hunting—destructive things the which he needed in his perilous forest life. He had been moving toward a life of barbarism, which must destroy in order to survive, with a like destruction lurking always in his path.

But now a nobler vision rose before him. With these new implements, a builder—a creator—he would learn to be, and bring a new advancement to his savage people. He dreamed great dreams of how his skill and craft would lighten the rebuilding of Hopeka's palisade and make the rude Shoni lodges more livable and lasting.

Once more he would be welcome among the red men, as moons ago when his warning had saved a thousand tribesmen from the roaring waters of Metinga Lake. Hopeka-town and all the Shoni folk must surely hail him who redeemed them from the labors of their savage life, and taught them the magic uses of these wonderful new tools!

Now and in the days that followed, he would practice with these tools and learn their every possibility. But first he would go back to the locked chest. He tried with each new tool he found, to open it. Each trial was vain. Behind him, as he worked, the shadow of a head rose up outside the porthole. A face streaked with lines of green and yellow pigment appeared. Gleaming eyes roved the cabin, a strange mixture of wonder and cunning in their expression.

Intent upon his discoveries, Kioga did not notice.

Upon a hook beside the door he found a rusty ring, with other rusty little objects fastened to it which rattled musically when he shook it—a bunch of keys—another baffler. For these he could conceive no use, and idly swinging them on one forefinger, he crouched intently before the chest again, as if by scowling at it he could make it fly apart and reveal its alluring secrets.

He concentrated on the giant padlock once again. And now there awoke in his mind recollection of tales Mokuyi had told him—tales of the white man's life, its creation to barter and exchange, its strange money which was always guarded by lock and key. He looked again at the rattly objects on the metal ring. One of them seemed to fit the hole within the padlock perfectly. He fumbled about, gave a twist and felt the thing of metal grate and turn within the mechanism. He heard a sudden *click*, and at the sound the lock flew sharply open.

With quivering fingers Kioga drew the padlock from the eye-bolt, raised up the iron hasp, and then, with gleaming eyes, threw wide the cover of the chest, while Aki peered over his shoulder.

**T**HIS was the chest in which the Snow Hawk's white-skinned surgeon father had stored articles intended to be traded with the Alaskan Indians, on whom he hoped to bestow his medical skill and white man's learning. Such things as met Kioga's eager gaze within!

The chest was filled with bolts of bright red cloth and children's toys and trinkets of a hundred kinds—so many that Kioga scarce knew which to take up first; and everything in perfect order and condition, thanks to the sound construction of the chest.

Here was a roundish box, alluring because it had a cover screwed down on it, concealing the contents. A moment while he puzzled out the secret of the turning

top. Then slowly he unscrewed it, pausing to prolong suspense and wonder what was in it, while Aki sniffed it with a comic caution.

All at once the top flew off. A long and yellow thing, shaped like a snake, sprang into air. Both Aki and Kioga staggered backward in surprise. Some moments passed before either dared to touch that strange toy with the spring



So startled was the savage by the flame and smoke of the weapon, that he jumped, slipped and lost his balance.

concealed inside of it. Thereafter Aki kept his distance from the chest, regarding it with vast suspicion from the farthest corner.

The ship was growing cold. Kioga built a small hot fire in a big pan to break the chill. Rummaging further among the contents of the chest, he found another box with bright brass fittings on its either end. This too he sought to draw apart, when, as he pulled, discordant strains of music magically issued forth, to startle them. It was a child's accordion; as Kioga worked the various keys, the tunes would change; and for a time this held Kioga charmed, and Aki too forgot his suspicion.

Then something else came into view, some small and red-wrapped packages, marked "*Made in China.*" On one the wrappings had torn, exposing a double row of small red paper cylinders. From each of these a short white tail protruded, and all the slender tails were

braided into one. Kioga knocked the package on the floor, and Aki, in a playful mood, flipped it into the air.

The packet fell close to the fire. About to bat it round the cabin, Aki snorted in surprise. A little thread of sparks and pungent yellow smoke was spitting from one of these slender tails!

Then happened that which set their nerves on edge—a sputter and *pop-pop-pop*, as with a wondrous crackling din the bunch of firecrackers exploded, dancing all about the cabin floor, and settling finally into a little smoking heap.

Flattened back against the wall, Aki and Kioga stared at it in profound amazement, and seeing that nothing happened, they presently dared approach it. With a stick Kioga stirred the smoking heap and watched to see results. Still nothing happened. He circled it as cat would circle mouse, and touched it from the other side.

Also grown bolder, Aki pushed it with a stealthy claw. Nothing happened even now. He dared to take one sniff, most gingerly, each mighty muscle on the stretch. His breath blew up the sparks. Then swiftly, with a sharp resounding *crack!* the last live firecracker burst and filled his nose with stinging powder-fumes. That was too much for Aki.

Wheeling, catlike, he reared, reached for the hole of entry, and with a frantic scramble, was up and crashing out into the forest, bleating like a two-months' cub. Kioga stood alone among his new-found treasures and laughed until his sides ached.

And now several lockers on the wall challenged for attention. And now he realized these little keys were his open sesame to them all. But first he whistled Aki near, enticing him back finally to the entry-hole. Nearer than that the great bear would not come, but watched proceedings from above.

**K**IOGA opened the nearest locker with a key. Some rolls of paper—maps or charts—fell upon the floor. He sought to examine them more closely, but it was growing dark, and so he set them aside for later perusal. Once more he reached into the dimness of the locker. A metal object, hard and cold, he now drew forth.

Before one bulging part it had an odd device, within which was a metal tongue, and over that a cylinder containing small compartments from which protruded round leaden tips. He counted five of these.

That this might be a distant cousin of his own light bow and arrow Kioga never dreamed. His finger hooked the little metal tongue. Feeling it yield, he pulled. There was a sharp metallic *snap* as the hammer fell upon an empty cartridge. A startled "Hai!" escaped Kioga. He held a loaded pistol in his hand, and thought it some strange club, with hollow handle.

And yet—most clumsy for a club, he thought. Perhaps it was a pipe. He put the muzzle to his lips experimentally, but found no bowl wherein to stuff tobacco. He toyed with the mechanism of the old revolver. He squinted through the black mouthed barrel. His finger fell upon the hammer which, moving backward, also turned the cylinder. A deadly loaded cartridge now lay in the firing chamber.

Pleased by that earlier *snap*, Kioga's thumb now hooked the trigger awkwardly, and feeling it yield, he pressed again, fascinated by this curious thing of moving parts, and peering into the barrel, seeking to fathom its utility. The hammer fell. Acrid smoke and fire flamed from the pistol mouth. He heard a deafening explosion, and fire burned the hair above his ear.

Then came another mighty crash. The monstrous bulk of Aki fell from above upon the cabin floor beside him and lay there still and silent.

**A**CRY broke from Kioga. He flung himself upon his shaggy friend and raised the heavy head. It fell back limply. There was an ugly wound that bled profusely. Appalled at this calamity to his wild companion, Kioga crouched there, linking thought to thought, recalling what had happened—the smoke, the flame, the loud report.

A half-suspicion growing, he picked up the still smoking pistol. But now he handled it with special gentleness, particularly careful not to touch the trigger. He noticed now that only three of the round lead-colored tips could be seen in the five visible chambers. Before there had been five. He ascertained that one was in the firing chamber by drawing back the trigger, which made the cylinder turn, showing two empty chambers.

This thing, then, reason told him, was a kind of strange misshapen bow, which threw not arrows, but little heavy pellets, with a deadly force. A word sprang into mind that Mokuyi once had used and not explained. This was a "fire-arm."

He turned to Aki once again. Poor Aki's eyes were closed. A choking something came up into Kioga's throat. He had killed this loyal forest friend! The world grew dark. For Aki of the valiant heart was dead, slain by one who loved him most. The Snow Hawk's vision blurred—and then cleared magically as one of Aki's thick ears twitched beneath his hand.

A moment more and the great bear struggled up, staggering on his feet, his great head shaking. Then from the wound he clawed the flattened leaden pellet that had stunned him, but could not penetrate the armor-plate of bone about his forehead.

**R**ELIEVED of anxiety for Aki, the Snow Hawk's thoughts went back to the pistol. Here was an arm wherewith to destroy his foes! That thought renewed what, in the excitement of the day, had been almost forgotten—his duty to avenge his dead. It was an unpleasant recollection.

Trying not to think of it, Kioga looked around. One locker still remained unopened. But it would have to wait.

Thirty Wounds and his family—Kioga's vow, his sacred promise, his four-fold duty to his murdered parents, red-skinned and white! Once more his mobile face reflected the black thoughts behind it.

He stuck his new-found weapon through his belt, and with Aki climbed out into the forest, concealed well the entrance to the *Cherokee* and turned toward Hopeka. Upon a ridge he paused hesitant, however, and looked back toward where the ship was hidden. And thus the burning Arctic stars beheld him on the lofty ridge, now looking toward Hopeka-town and vengeance, now gazing toward the coast whence he had come to wrestle with his complex dual nature. . . .

There it was, that implacable Thirty Wounds caught sight of him unguarded now by wandering Aki; and crawling close behind along a rocky ledge above with infinite stealth, the Long Knife warrior upraised the heavy warrior's club thonged to his wrist.

What it was that warned Kioga, it is impossible to tell. Just in time he leaped aside. Lightning-quick, the thought of his new strange weapon came to him; and lightning-swift his hand snatched the revolver from his belt, pointed it at the out-leaning Thirty Wounds and pressed the trigger.

He missed, of course; but so startled was the primitive savage by the flame and smoke and thunderclap of the weapon that he jumped back heedless of his footing, slipped, lost his balance and plunged downward to carom grotesquely from the sloping cliff and land upon the rocks below.

Two circling buzzards saw, and drifted downward toward the silent body. Kioga watched, a superstition in his mind.

"The forest gods have slain my enemy," he decided. "It is a sign of favor. Surely I may wait awhile before I seek out the family of Thirty Wounds."

Drawn by his mystery of that one unopened locker in the *Cherokee*, Kioga now turned back to the derelict again.

He glanced about suspiciously, thrice circling before he entered by the ragged hole that now gave entrance to the drift-covered cabin. He made a little blaze by which to see, and once again tried the keys. Then with a chisel and a hammer he went to work. An hour before dawn found the strong door hanging by one heavy hinge, the locker gaping open. A curious spell fell on him—a spell as of some vast, important happening impending.

**W**ITHIN he saw a small black metal box. Kioga drew it forth, with careful hand. It had a lock. Upon the ring he found a little key to fit it. He turned the key and felt the cover yield, and raised it. At what he saw he felt a little disappointed.

In one compartment there were papers—a bill of sale which named the *Cherokee*, a ship's clearance-papers, a sea letter certifying to the vessel's American ownership, a list of stores, and some other business documents which Kioga skimmed through. He read slowly but without too much difficulty, for Mokuyi had taught him the language of his fathers.

Then came a little packet of letters, tied with a faded ribbon. He opened it, read one of the letters mailed by his fair-skinned mother to his father, many years before. It began "*Beloved*" and ended with her name and tender sentiments.

Kioga tied the packet up with reverent hands, replacing it among his father's other treasured papers, lifted up the top compartment. Below there was a single paper in a brown worn heavy envelope.

Again that sense of coming things was on him. He drew the paper forth, unfolded it, and gave a sudden start, as if a voice had whispered in that silent

cabin. He saw these words in round and graceful script, below the date "January 1st, 1863."

"To my dear son, on his sixteenth birthday."

Kioga's eyes went wide. He seemed to feel a gentle hand upon his shoulder. The next lines leaped from the page:

*This is a great day in your life. I saw you yesterday. You were a boy no longer; you had become a man. And to a man I now address these words:*

*As you go on to great achievement, I have these hopes for you:*

*That you may ever exert yourself to protect the weak. That you may never strike except in self-defense, or in defense of highest principles, but then deliver clean, hard blows, ignoring every low advantage. That you may ever hold life sacred. That you may never harbor hatred in your heart.*

*I hope that you may ever know the meaning of true chivalry, which even treats an enemy with honor.*

*And much, much more I hope for you, which cannot be expressed in words.*

*I send best wishes and my tenderest love.*

*Your friend and father,  
Lincoln Rand.*

Kioga devoured the lines again and yet again. Unconsciously he spoke a word he had never before uttered in English. The word he spoke was "Father!"

The echo floated back to him. Startled by the sound of his own voice, Kioga glanced about him. No one was here except himself. And yet, he was not alone, as when he had earlier entered. Aware of this, yet unafraid, he looked toward every corner and out through the glassy port into the forest.

Far in the past another Lincoln Rand—his own great-grandfather—had penned those words to his growing schoolboy son; little dreaming that the last to bear that name would read them amid the shadows of a virgin forest-land unknown to civilized men. . . .

For long Kioga sat in thought, before once more he climbed back to the lofty ridge. There he took three certain arrows from his quiver, which he had set apart for purposes of vengeance. Across his knee he broke them, one by one—he tossed the pieces from the ridge, then settled down to watch the sun rising upon a new day.

Another thrill-packed adventure of Kioga the Snow Hawk will be described in an early issue.

# Just Like

*Tiny David and a pal of the State Police undertake a bit of extra duty.*

QUITE some years ago—I was a cub reporter then—a Los Angeles policeman literally "blackmailed" a prominent surgeon into performing an operation that made it possible for a crippled boy from the slums to walk.

In New York I knew a tough cop who ruled his East Side beat like a czar, handing out justice, advice and mercy. He is a detective captain now; but I happen to know that his heart aches for the days when the people of the crowded tenements regarded him as a god.

There was a warrant officer in the United States Coast Guard, who risked his ship in heavy seas to take off a rum-runner, his sworn enemy, who would die without medical attention.

Again, I saw a New York State game protector pounce upon two youthful violators and instead of arresting them, give them a man-to-man talk on sportsmanship and conservation.

Another time I saw two men wearing the uniform of the New York State Po-



Illustrated by  
Monte Crews

# Old Times

By ROBERT  
R. MILL

lice start off on a long cold ride into the mountains. They didn't have to go. But it had been their duty to arrest a boy, and they were afraid his aged mother would be without food and fuel.

I think of these men, and others like them, as the "Extra Duty Legion."

The accomplishments of the members of this Legion seldom appear in the annual reports of their organizations. Instead they are written in the hearts of people living in the territories they serve.

LIEUTENANT EDWARD DAVID was slated to make an inspection trip in the northern part of the territory patrolled by the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police. Duty decreed that Lieutenant James Crosby perform a like mission in the southern end of the territory. The fact that Captain Charles Field, commanding officer, was attending a conference in Albany caused them to sally forth from the barracks in the same troop car, first giving all interested persons the not-too-convincing explanation that they were "combining duty with pleasure."

To themselves they made gruff apologies:

MR. DAVID: "We can double up and get through this just about as quick."

MR. CROSBY: "Yeah. Lot better having somebody to talk to."

But they knew, and all the barracks knew, the reason for their braving official displeasure:

They had ridden these roads together for many years, finding them highways of adventure. They had ridden them in varying capacities, the chevrons of a sergeant appearing on the arm of first one and then the other, depending entirely on their state of grace. That had worried them little, if at all, for the lonely roads beckoned.

It had been a wild country then. They had been told to "go by the book," the official regulations; but the country grew faster than the book, and so occasionally



"Beat it!" came  
the order.  
"Keep going!"

they wrote a few pages. They had been wild, headstrong—but just and fearless. If Old Man Misfortune dogged their elbows, Lady Luck perched on their shoulders.

They emerged from it all, thanks to an understanding commanding officer, and sympathetic executives in Albany, a little older, presumably a little wiser, and with the silver bars of lieutenants.

They bore their new honors easily, and down in their hearts, a little sadly. A commission had its points. They were the boys who could enjoy them. But more than once amused onlookers saw them gazing wistfully after departing patrols of the troopers.

THEIR departure on their present expedition in search of lost romance was watched sympathetically by a little group of old-timers, all of whom listened politely to the protesting explanations, and all of whom were fully aware of the real motive behind the trip.

"David and Crosby," said Sergeant Max Payton, the top-kick, as the car pulled away, "the clean-up kids!" His gruffness masked his emotion. "Seems like old times to see them starting out together." He scowled at a group of rookies. "We sent out some real patrols in those days."

"Yes," agreed Sergeant Henry Linton, who had shared many of those patrols, "they were the boys to get quick action. Half an hour after they went

to work, the Skipper always detailed one man to the telephone to answer complaints about them."

But Messrs. David and Crosby presented an outward picture of decorum as they rode along a road that wound its way through the mountains. Mr. Crosby, who was at the wheel, occupied the quarter of the front seat not filled by the bulky form of his companion, whose size was responsible for his nickname, Tiny. They were silent, both trying to recapture something which, in their hearts, they knew was gone, perhaps forever. It was Mr. David who made the first and only attempt to bring this into the open.

"This," he declared, "brings it all back."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Crosby, "uncomfortable as it always was, with you hogging most of the seat."

Mr. David sighed with resignation. Romance, if it was recaptured at all, must be taken on the fly, and with no outward comments or indications. He devoted his talents to keeping Mr. Crosby in order.

"And your driving hasn't improved any. If you would keep the car on four wheels, a guy could relax in the far corner of the seat and we wouldn't be crowded."

Mr. Crosby measured the seat-space with his eyes.

"They could nail you against the far corner of the seat, and there still wouldn't be room for anybody but a midget."

**D**URING the next mile Mr. Crosby developed this theme. A sudden gust of wind brought Mr. David revenge. When Mr. Crosby's hat left his head, he used both hands to save it, and the car swerved to the right. Mr. David seized the wheel and kept the car in the road.

"Thanks," murmured Mr. Crosby.

"Don't mention it," said Mr. David. "I'll even tell you how to keep your hat on your head. Use a thumbtack."

"I seem to have heard that before," retorted Mr. Crosby.

"If you did," declared Mr. David, "you didn't profit by it. As the Skipper once said, in order to get anything into your head, you have to blast." He cast an accusing glance at his companion. "You might have killed me."

"In that case," said Mr. Crosby, "the loss would be trifling."

They had reached a state of armed truce, and were deep in a discussion of

European affairs, as they approached the outskirts of Tranquil Lake. Both men glanced at a neat house a short distance from the road.

"Might as well stop," said Mr. David.

"I was going to stop," retorted Mr. Crosby with acerbity.

**T**HEY drove to the rear of the house, parked their car, entered a back door without knocking, and found themselves in a spotless kitchen. A white-haired woman, bending over the stove, looked up with alarm, then gave a cry of pleasure:

"Tiny! Jim! Well, I do declare!"

They bore down upon her, arms extended, faces wreathed in smiles.

"Hello, Ma Gilsdon!"

She pushed them from her, and gazed at them with mock severity.

"It's about time you dropped in! How long ago was it that you were stationed here?"

"More years than I care to think about," said Mr. Crosby, seating himself astride a kitchen chair.

Mr. David, with the air of a man following a familiar trail, found his way to a cookie jar. "Substation was built four years ago." A cookie vanished in two bites. "We lived with you about a year before that." Another cookie disappeared. "That makes it five years."

"There will be steak for dinner," said Mrs. Gilsdon, "so let those cookies alone. And how many times have you been to see me in those five years?"

"Every chance we had," declared Mr. Crosby, deserting the chair for a tin box, which, when opened, disclosed the best portion of a chocolate cake. "That cake looks fairly good, Ma."

"It will look better after your dinner," ruled Mrs. Gilsdon. She turned to Tiny David. "Do you remember the Hopper boy?"

"Hopper?"

She stamped her foot with impatience.

"You should remember him. The lad the constable caught breaking into the general store, and wanted to send away for life. You saved him from the reform school, and—"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. David hastily. "What about him?"

"The first of the year," declared Mrs. Gilsdon, "he was made cashier of the bank."

"That," said Tiny David, "is swell."

"That," repeated Mrs. Gilsdon, "is one of the many things this town remembers





"Sort of saints, weren't we, eh Ma?" Crosby asked. But Ma Gilsdon sniffed. "Saints! 'Devils' would be more apt!"

about two roughnecks that were well hated when they were first wished on us, and missed—well, just a little—when they left us."

She wheeled on Crosby. "Wipe that smile off your face, Jim Crosby. You had your share in it. I could tell—"

"In that case," said Mr. Crosby, "I guess it's safe for me to cut this cake." He helped himself to a generous slice. "Sort of saints, weren't we, eh Ma?"

But Ma Gilsdon sniffed.

"Saints!" she repeated. "Devils would be more apt. But kindly devils."

She busied herself at the stove.

"Set that table while I am finishing up. Many's the time you have done it. You have silver bars on your collars now, but it won't hurt you a bit."

They grinned as they went about the task.

"SHALL I set a place for Bea, Ma?" asked Crosby presently.

They saw a shadow cross her face.

"Bea won't be home."

"School?" asked Tiny David.

"School?" She turned to face them.

"Don't you realize five years have gone by since you were here? Beatrice isn't a schoolgirl." Bitterness crept into her voice. "She's a young lady."

"She was a sweet kid," said Tiny David, preparing to attack a piece of steak.

"Pretty as a picture," added Crosby.

Mrs. Gilsdon sighed. "Too pretty," was her grim comment.

Tiny David pushed his knife and fork aside and asked:

"What's the trouble, Ma?"

Crosby took part in the conversation: "Too much Tom Wilson? He always was on hand to carry her books."

The woman hesitated, then answered the last question first:

"It isn't Tom. He's a good hard-working boy. I only wish Bea would go out with him more."

Tiny David spoke quietly: "Who is it, Ma? And what's the trouble? It's all in the family, you know."

"The trouble," said Mrs. Gilsdon, "is Glover Menton."

"Glover," declared Tiny David, "must be a recent improvement. I don't remember him."

"He's no improvement," retorted the woman. "Oh, he's handsome, in a weak way. He has too much money for his own good, and all the time in the world to spend it. Bea"—she hesitated—"Bea is just at the foolish age, where all this has swept her off her feet."

"Where does he get all this money?" asked Tiny David.

"He says it comes from his father."

"Where does his father live?"

"Syrchester."

"What keeps him here?"

"He came here for a vacation. Said he liked the place, and stayed on; but I guess Bea is the answer."

Tiny David eyed what food remained, placed both hands on a bulging waistline, and sighed regretfully.

"Well, Ma, have to be moving along in a little while. Help you with the dishes first." His upraised hand stilled her protests. "Do us both good. Got an apron for Jim?"

They dried dishes with a skill that belied their large hands. They kept up a flow of bantering conversation. It was Crosby who made the only reference to the problem they all were considering silently.

"Think it would do any good if I talked with Bea? She used to be right fond of her Uncle Jim."

Mrs. Gilsdon removed the last dish from the pan.

"This has gone too far for that. Beatrice always was a good girl, but now she won't listen even to her mother. Besides, I don't know when you'd have a chance to talk to her. This is a full-time proposition. They have gone to the races at Haone this afternoon. Bea will be home just long enough to change her dress. Then they are going to a dance at Mack's."

Tiny David carefully piled the dishes in the cupboard.

"Got to be moving, Ma. This sure was swell." He struggled into his coat. "By the way, where did you say this Menton lives?"

"The Central House."

"Tom Wilson still working in the print-shop?" asked Tiny David.

"Yes."

They took their leave, amid promises to call soon again. Tiny David slipped behind the wheel of the troop car.

"If I have to die," he explained, "I would prefer it to be suicide, rather than murder."

"Why quibble about technicalities?" demanded Mr. Crosby. "The public benefits in either case."

**T**HE car headed toward the business section of Tranquil Lake.

"The Skipper," declared Mr. Crosby, as if in answer to an unspoken statement, "will be back day after tomorrow. God help us if we aren't through with these inspection trips. And we will need divine help anyway, if he learns we went together."

The car continued its way along the main street.

"Not that I mind spending the night at the Central House," added Mr. Crosby.

"Who said anything about the Central House?" demanded Mr. David.

"Nobody. Just wanted to let you know I was willing to play along."

They registered, exchanging wisecracks with the clerk, who greeted them by their first names. When they were in their room, Tiny David spoke:

"Going for a walk. Be back in a little while."

"While you are gone," said Mr. Crosby, "I'll find out what time the dance starts, and what time it is likely to break up."

Mr. David remained silent.

**M**R. CROSBY was the first to return. Soon Mr. David appeared, carrying a large bundle.

"Shopping?" asked Mr. Crosby.

"Borrowing," Mr. David corrected.

Mr. Crosby sighed deeply. "Most of your schemes have a slight backfire. Something tells me this will be a major explosion."

"This," said Mr. David with heavy dignity, "is a worthy cause."

"Uh-huh," said Mr. Crosby without enthusiasm. "By the way, Menton drives a yellow Speedway roadster."

"Supper," said Mr. David, "will be served in half an hour. Don't know why, but I am not as hungry as usual."

"Two pounds of steak may have had something to do with it," was the opinion of Mr. Crosby.

They made their way to the dining-room, where Mr. David, despite his gloomy foreboding, made an impressive showing. Later they adjourned to the lobby, where they took an active part in a discussion that ranged from politics to religion, and then to hunting and fishing. It was not quite ten o'clock when Mr. David led the way to their room.

Crosby sat on the bed, while Tiny David stood before the mirror above the bureau.

"Jim," said the man before the mirror, "I am senior to you."

Crosby scowled. "All right, Tiny. Going official on me?"

Tiny David ignored the thrust: "I think I have this thing doped out swell. It will be better for you, and better for me, if you don't know anything about it. I want you to grab a chair on the front porch, and hold it down until I get back. That's an order, Jim."

Mr. Crosby shrugged his shoulders.

"This," he declared with heavy sarcasm, "is just like old times." He paused to light a cigarette. "Very well, Lieutenant."

Alone in the room, Tiny David went to work. He removed his uniform. He opened the bundle he had brought to the hotel, took out dark, rough clothes, and proceeded to don them. He produced a large handkerchief, which he stuffed into the pocket of his coat. A cap completed his costume.

For a moment he stood gazing at the revolver and cartridge-belt he had removed when he doffed his uniform.

"Better not," he decided. "Better without it, if this thing should back-fire."

Then he made his way down the back stairs, left the hotel by the rear door, and walked to the troop car, which he had parked in a back street near the hotel. . . .

The dance was in full swing at Mack's, a roadhouse near Tranquil Lake. An orchestra, imported from a neighboring city, was demonstrating its ability at swing music. Couples had deserted the tables and thronged the floor.

Beatrice Gilsdon danced easily, a worried frown upon her attractive face. Her partner, a rather flashily dressed youth, pulled her up short.

"What's eating you?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

"Then get that look off your face."

They danced on. Back at the table, the girl faced the youth.

"GLO, where did you go tonight, when you made me wait in the car?"

He made a gesture of impatience. "I told you before, Bea. Want me to make a recording of it for you? I had to see a guy on business. Business for my dad."

"What kind of business, Glo?"

He pushed a glass aside. "You'd not know if I told you. Skip it."

She sighed.

"What's eating you?" he demanded again.

She hesitated. "N-nothing."

"Still crazy about me, aren't you?"

"Y-yes. But tonight things don't seem the same. You don't seem like yourself. You—"

He laughed bitterly.

"That's a dame for you. When they play ball, they want to bat all the time. A guy can keep putting out and putting out, and that's swell. But once he asks one little favor, that's a different mess of fish."

Her hand crept across the table and rested on his coat-sleeve.



"Lean over—I want to whisper something to you."

"It isn't that, Glo. I would do—do almost anything for you. But I want to know that it was on the level. Was it on the level, Glo?"

A snarl escaped him.

"All right. Just for the sake of argument, suppose it wasn't? What does that make you?"

He saw a look of terror leap to her eyes.

"What does that make you?" he repeated relentlessly. "The cops have a word for it. You ought to know. You grew up with them, and you still call them your uncles." He laughed sarcastically. "That's a hot one. Uncle Tiny and Uncle Jim! I've heard about those two guys until I see red."

There was a calculating look in his eyes.

"Not that they are after me; but just suppose they should be. You were with me. If they take me, they take Little Sunshine. And I got a picture of them doing *that!*"

His manner changed. "But all this is a fool argument, Bea. I am telling you it is on the up-and-up. And you are crazy about me, aren't you?"

She made no reply as she struggled to her feet.

"I am going home," she told him.

He started to protest, then shrugged in resignation.

"Fair enough." He paid his check to the waiter who stepped forward. He lowered his voice. "Sorry that you did one little favor for me, Bea?"

"Not that I did a favor for you," she said.

He pretended to miss the inference as he walked across the floor with her.

"That's my girl!" he said.



"Drop that gun, you rat!" Crosby was over the side and upon the youth.

They stood outside, drinking in the clear air of early morning.

"Now I know you are crazy about me." He laughed lightly. "Might even call on you again sometime."

She was silent.

They started along a path that led through woods to a parking-lot. His hand rested on her arm possessively as the lights from the roadhouse were swallowed up in the foliage.

"How about a little kiss, Bea?"

Before she could answer, a bulky figure loomed before them. It was a man clad in rough clothes. A cap was pulled low over his eyes. A handkerchief concealed his face. His right hand was in his coat pocket, apparently grasping some solid object.

"Stand where you are, and don't make any noise!" The order was delivered in a gruff, disguised voice.

They obeyed him. The girl drew in her breath in terror. Menton's knees buckled. He attempted to speak, but no sound came from his lips.

The left hand of the masked man was extended as it pointed at the youth.

"Beat it, you! I don't want you. I am after the dame."

The moonlight that seeped through the trees played on a ring on the hand of the masked man.

Menton hesitated.

"Beat it!" came the order again. "Keep going. Right across that parking-lot, and into the woods on the other side. One word out of you, and I'll drill you."

Menton hesitated not at all; he started along the path at a trot. The trot became a run as his courage increased with the distance between his precious self and the masked man.

Tiny David, watching him over his shoulder, stifled a chuckle. This was what he had wanted. Now the glamour was gone. The girl had a picture of the youth as a coward who deserted her and fled, seeking safety for himself. It was a drastic cure, but effective.

The thought that the girl must be suffering from fear, and the desire to reassure her, caused him to turn about. There was no fear on her face, only wonder. Her lips moved; the words were barely more than a whisper.

"Uncle Tiny?"

HE drew back in surprise. "What? How did you know, Bea?"

She took a step toward him. "The light flashed on your troop ring, Uncle Tiny. Remember how you used to spell out the motto for me? I guess I'll never forget that ring."

They stood facing each other. He was ill at ease; his voice was even gruffer:

## JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

"It was a bum joke, Bea. But I meant it to—"

She spoke slowly: "I—I think I understand."

"Has it worked?" he demanded.

"Yes, Uncle Tiny."

A crooked grin transformed his almost ugly face, making it strangely attractive in the moonlight.

"Good girl," he muttered. "Well, that's that."

**S**HE was looking behind him, gazing along the trail.

"Uncle Tiny!" There was terror in her voice. "He has a gun! He has it pointed at you!"

With speed strangely at variance with his size, Tiny David went into action. One arm seized the girl, and tossed her into a clump of bushes. The trooper slipped behind a tree.

His voice rang out in the woods:

"All right, Menton. The kidding is over. This is Lieutenant David, of the State Police. Put down that gun!"

The youth with the gun gave a gasp of surprise.

"Damn her!" he cried. "She told you! All right—she's in this up to her neck. And you won't live to get me!"

A bullet crashed into the tree behind which Tiny David was crouching.

The youth backed along the trail. Tiny David crawled forward to the next tree. A bullet struck the ground near his feet.

Menton was crazed with fear, trigger-crazy. He was close to the car. Tiny David cursed the impulse that had caused him to leave his gun behind. The cry of the youth was ringing in his ears:

"She's in this up to her neck."

The trooper was gripped by a feeling of despair. This was a fine mess: Not a leg to stand on. He had no business in this town. He was in civilian clothes, and had been playing a bum practical joke. He had stumbled on something sinister; and Beatrice, apparently, was involved in it. Fine present for Ma Gilsdon!

Dull anger surged over him, crowding out fear and caution. He leaped to his feet, and raced forward. Menton, standing beside the car, paused to take careful aim. Tiny David gritted his teeth, and went on.

Then there was the whine of an approaching car. Menton hesitated, turned to face it. Headlights illuminated the

scene. The youth ducked back. The voice of Crosby sounded:

"Drop that gun, you rat!"

The car was at Menton's side before he recovered from his surprise. Crosby, sitting beside the driver, was over the side and upon the youth before he could make up his mind to fire. There wasn't much of a struggle.

"Now, then," demanded Crosby, "what's this all about?"

Menton's whining voice sounded:

"She's in this too, I tell you. She isn't going to—"

"Shut him up, Jim," ordered Tiny David.

There was the sound of a slap.

"He's shut," announced Mr. Crosby.

"Be with you in a minute, Jim."

"Right."

Tiny David retraced his steps along the trail. Beatrice Gilsdon had struggled to her feet. She stood waiting for him.

"What did he mean, Bea?"

She faced him frankly.

"I don't know, Uncle Tiny. We were at the dance. After about an hour he begged me to—to go out and sit in the car. But when we got there he drove off and parked the car in the woods near the Four Corners. He left the engine running, and told me to sit at the wheel. He was gone for about half an hour. When he came back, he seemed excited. But we went back to the dance."

She hesitated.

"He got angry when I asked him what it was all about. He said he had to meet a man on a business for his father. We—we had a quarrel. I guess it was all over before—before you showed me what he was, Uncle Tiny."

He felt a wave of relief.

"All right, Bea. Come along with me, but keep back until we get this straightened out."

**B**ACK at the parking-lot, where a crowd of the curious had gathered, Mr. Crosby, Troopers Haines and Wolf stood about Menton. The youth obviously bubbled with the desire to talk. But each time he began, a slight motion of Mr. Crosby's arm insured silence.

Tiny David beckoned Crosby to one side.

"What brought you here?"

"It was this way," began Mr. Crosby: "I was sitting on the front porch, as per orders, when Haines and Wolf drove by. I yelled at them. They were going

## JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

to investigate a complaint that the feed-store at the Four Corners had been robbed. Neighbors heard a noise and called them. I went along for the ride. Somebody got about two hundred bucks from the store, and we got this—"

He produced a glove, which he handed to Tiny David.

"Look inside."

The name "*Hopper*" was inked on the leather.

"That," said Mr. Crosby, "was what brought me here. Despite your veil of secrecy, I figured you were operating in this neck of the woods. I figured that you would want to know that apparently your shining star that had made good at the bank was going sour. It just happened that I stumbled on this laddie with a gun. I don't like boys with guns."

MR. CROSBY paused to light a cigarette.

"In addition to the gun, he had about two hundred bucks. For some reason, he doesn't like to have me raise my elbow. When I raised it, he admitted that he stole the glove from Hopper, and dropped it in the store to throw suspicion on him. He had heard about the mistake Hopper made when he was a kid."

"Nice going, Jim," said Tiny David.

"The second time I raised my elbow," continued Mr. Crosby, "he admitted six or eight other little jobs, here and there around this neck of the woods. Busy chap." He lowered his voice. "How did you make out?"

"Good."

"But what's this dope he is trying to spout?"

Tiny David stepped forward and faced Menton. He spoke in a low tone:

"I am giving you a chance to do one decent thing, and to make it easier for yourself. I never did this before, but this is a special case. Forget about Miss Gilsdon, and we forget the gun charge and everything except the feed-store robbery. How about it?"

Menton nodded.

Tiny David turned to Troopers Haines and Wolf.

"Book him on that. I'll sign the complaint."

He watched them drive off with their prisoner.

"Bea!" he called.

She stepped forward.

"Hello, Uncle Jim."

"Hello, Bea."

"You drive, Jim," said Tiny David. The girl and the big trooper sat in the back seat.

"Uncle Tiny—"

"Yes, Bea."

"I've been a fool."

"Guess we all have, one time or another."

"I've learned my lesson—thanks to you and Uncle Jim."

"Forget it, Bea."

There was silence for a minute or two.

"What shall I tell Mother, Uncle Tiny?"

"Just what you told me: that you have learned your lesson. Tell her as soon as you get home. She'll be awake, and she'll understand."

He paused for a moment.

"And don't tell her any bunk about Jim and me. Let her think you learned it yourself. You and your uncles owe her that."

The car came to a halt before the Gilsdon home.

Beatrice stepped out and stood by the running-board while Tiny David climbed in beside Crosby.

"Lean over, both of you," she commanded. "I want to whisper something to you."

They thrust their heads over the side of the car. She bent down, and quickly kissed them both. Then she jumped back. She was laughing, but tears welled from her eyes.

"You'll—you'll never know—"

Her voice choked. She ran toward the house.

THE troop car made its way along the deserted street. They were almost at the hotel when Mr. Crosby went into action:

"Far be it from me to interfere with your welfare work—moral talks to young girls, and all that; but being a practical guy, I feel moved to point out that this is morning and another day. Therefore, the Old Man gets home tomorrow. Therefore, we get—"

"We," said Tiny David, "get hell."

"With trimmings," added Mr. Crosby.

Mr. David sighed contentedly. "Just like old times."

Mr. Crosby thrust his elbow into well-padded ribs.

"Exactly," he admitted. "You still hog most of the seat."

# REAL EXPERIENCES

*Life's high moments of adventure are described in these true stories contributed by our readers. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see Page 3.) First an Arctic explorer tells why he loved his lead dog Rowdy.*



## When Wolves Attack

BY JACK O'BRIEN

**M**AYBE I shouldn't have attempted the trip, with the outfit I had. But a year's waiting while plans were perfected to sledge alone across the Arctic had made me restless. Coppermine and the Great Bear Lake district held great promise of rich claims. And Nome was three thousand miles away. I'd better get going if I ever intended to. Freeze-up had come, and Hudson's Bay was stiff.

From Churchill it's three thousand miles right along the northern rim of North America. I figured that even with six dogs—although they were young and only partly broken to the trail—I'd make a start, and summer up along the Circle. I could re-outfit there, and push on to Coppermine the following winter if everything went right. So early one January morning, with the glass pushing down past thirty-eight, I took off. The sledge—I was using a forty-foot Eskimo *komatik*—groaned under the load as the huskies bellied deep to get it started.

There's nothing much but work when you're sledging the North. And you can say that again. It's the hardest work ever set before man. The Bay was a solid floor that had suddenly become badly warped. Upheavals caused by the tides built hummocks ranging from eight inches small to twenty feet high, and running in length from three feet to two miles.

It's in such places that a real lead dog comes in handy. He can steer his way through the passes of those miniature

ridges, and save a lot of turned-over sledges and heart-breaking labor. Rowdy, my leader, was a young, heavy-footed husky, strong as an ox, willing and game, but inexperienced. So it was up to me to do a lot of jockeying, which meant that at the end of the day I was plenty tired. We made about twenty-five miles the first day out, which wasn't bad.

Well, for five days on this trip nothing happened. It held cold, and the sun-dazzle would have blinded me, had it not been for the blue glasses. The night of the fifth day it began to warm up, and by morning it came on to thaw. The wind switched to the south—a regular chinook; the sun ducked under gray, scudding clouds, and the sweat rolled down my back.

I kept going until ten o'clock. Then there was a sudden heave in the ice like the deck of a ship dropping down from under you. That was bad; I was seven miles out from the shore, and if the anchor ice along the coast let go, I knew we were headed for a long sail out into the Bay.

Though it wouldn't be such a long ride, at that, the way the wind was blowing. Big chunks of floe break up rapidly in that kind of weather. So I yelled "Haw!" to Rowdy, and swung to the west hoping to hit solid going.

The sledging became heavier. The slush clung to the runners like wet sand, and the dogs pulled until their sides heaved, while from their mouths red ribbons of dripping tongues hung out.

Rowdy fought that gang like a maniac. He raged and snapped and slashed and cried, begging them to keep going. They were doing their best, and the way they whined as they pulled, you'd think I was beating them. But they didn't like that ice-swaying business any more than I did, and were doing the best they could to get away from it. At last they stopped and dropped right in their tracks. No use. Not another foot could be made.

BY this time the water was splashing halfway to my knees. I cut the team off and turned them loose. Then with rifle, matches and a few rounds of .405, I started in. There was a trapper's shack in the district somewhere. I figured I'd hit for there, eat and dry out, then come back and pick up the load when the warm spell broke. It couldn't last more than twenty-four hours, I argued.

But there's where I was wrong. It began to get warmer, and before we'd reached shore, the dogs had been ducked a few times and I was wet to the skin. Then my matches were soaked; and the last time—I went in up to my neck on that one—my rifle slipped from my hands and slid below the licking waves.

"Mister," I said to myself when I'd recovered enough breath to talk out loud, "Mister, if you don't hit that shack, it's going to be just too bad." I found the shack all right, just after dark. But the trapper had gone back country to trade a bit with the Indians. And he'd cleaned the shack out. There was a little wood, half a loaf of bannock, and about two tablespoons of frozen caribou stew in a pan. That was all. No matches, clothes, guns; nothing except a ragged old sleeping-bag stuffed under the bunk frame.

I split the grub with the dogs, saving a little of the bannock, then peeled off my sopping clothes and crawled into the bag. It was a dry camp, but one night of it wasn't going to hurt anyone. I was so glad to get off that belying ice that I dropped off to sleep the minute I lay down. But all through the night I'd be awakened by the churning of the Bay. It was making plenty of medicine.

I crawled out at daybreak and beat it for the sledge. The dogs raced along with me as full of pep as though they'd never had a day in the harness in their lives. And I felt pretty good myself after a night's rest, with prospects of some grub about an hour away. Well, I'd never been so wrong in my life. For the sledge was gone.

I hunted that Bay for two hours, and finally gave it up. No use ducking the fact: Either it was drifting out to sea, or a crack had opened up beneath it. Whatever had happened, it was gone. And so were cameras, guns, ammunition, every bit of my gear, and about three thousand dollars in a wallet. I sat down beside a hummock. Rowdy and his pals romped about without a care in the world. It didn't seem to make any difference to them that we were a hundred miles from the nearest camp, without a rifle or a match or a bit of grub. In fact, I reasoned that they knew that sledge was gone, and were celebrating the fact that there'd be no pulling that day.

Well, the only way I know of to hike a hundred miles is to walk it. So I got started, heading back over my own trail as best I could, though it was broken and distorted by the thaw.

I stayed out on the Bay, knowing that if I kept going, I couldn't miss Churchill. I might be in bad shape by the time I got there, but with the help of the Lord and a fast outfield, I'd make it. Then it started to turn cold, after the damage had been done.

The cold helped in one respect: It tightened up the ice and made the walking easier, so I paced myself to cover as much distance as possible while daylight held, planning to ease up a little at night, rest more often, but to keep moving just the same.

THE dogs ran on ahead but never got out of sight. They kept looking back to see if I was coming; and every so often Rowdy would gallop up like a baby tractor, let me rumple his ears, then tag along beside me for a while.

By nightfall I was tired. Traveling without grub isn't the best way in the world to tour the North. The dogs, too, had slowed up. A frosty moon gave light enough to see, however; we kept going.

Every half hour I'd stop, crawl behind a hummock, pull the dogs around me and doze. My eyes burned a little, but when I'd catch myself nodding, it was a signal to move on. With no food, fatigue comes quicker; and with fatigue comes the poison that drugs one to sleep. Sleep meant freezing. . . .

Morning. Face raw and lips puffed. Thirst now worse than hunger. But most of all a weariness I'd never known before. And the constant glare of white had swollen my eyes until they were just slits, and streamed water constantly.



Noon. Still going. Still cold and, oh God, just to lie down and sleep for twenty years! The shuffling crackle of my battered moccasins crunching the snow was the only sound to break the patter of the dogs' paws upon the crust.

Night, daylight slipping into darkness with the change unnoticed. It's colder now, colder than it was when we left camp—how many days ago? Three—five? What's the use of keeping track of time? The only thing to keep is travelin'.

AS best I can recall, it was early morning on the fourth day that it happened. The moon had swung low, and the aurora was weaving down so that it seemed as though I were walking through the flashing colors of it. I knew I must be nearing Churchill because the dogs who had, up till now, been dragging their weary bodies as slowly as myself, suddenly perked up and disappeared ahead in the half light.

I had been dozing. I was roused by a vicious, snorting sound. Thinking at first it was one of the dogs come back, I pried open my eyes and looked behind me.

Not twenty feet away, two big gaunt figures crept toward me. Their breath spurted from their nostrils like white cones; and even in the diffused moonlight their glaring eyes gleamed yellow and green. Wolves!

I got to my feet and stumbled ahead. Sure, I was panicky. Four days and nights of trail-beating wasn't making me think any too clearly. I stumbled a lot, and fell, but somehow regained my feet. Every time I'd look around, those two big devils had pulled up closer, one out a little bit on the flank, his speed increasing as though trying to cut me off, the other directly on my trail.

The only thing that kept me going was the desire for self-preservation which is deeply inrooted in us all. Scared? I was never so scared in my life. I knew that it would only be a question of time before the stillness of that vast, lonely wasteland would be disturbed by the ripping of flesh and the cracking of bones—with myself furnishing the meal.

They were closer now. The padding of their paws on the crusted snow rang out like the beating of hammers. I could hear the gasping of their breath, accompanied by a low, whimpering sound. It was their whine of victory, as well as impatience for the kill. The last time I went down, the fellow behind me actually

sprang at my outstretched foot, while the chap in front circled swiftly inward and crouched down, waiting.

I began to scream, and I know it sounded like the hoarse croaking of some wild bird. I flopped my arms as best I could, and kicked my legs at the beast behind me. Then for some unknown reason, and with a painful effort, I curled my lower lip against my teeth and whistled. I recall how surprised I was that it worked. Shrill and loud the whistle blasted out across the frosty air.

I lay there whistling until my breath was gone and things went black. Swimming up through the half daze into which I had lapsed, the sounds I heard, although confused, began to make sense. There was a quick rush of heavy feet patting against the snow. Then came a snarl, followed rapidly by a short shriek of agony. I pulled myself up on one elbow, and saw that Rowdy had returned and launched himself upon one of the wolves. They were locked in a death-struggle. Back and forth across the snow they thrashed. The other dogs came into view one by one, and the remaining wolf ran off toward the shore, his body swung low to the snow. Thus encouraged, the huskies chased him for some distance, but were unable to bring him down.

HOW Rowdy ever stuck with the other fellow I'll never know. In his weakened condition you would have thought he could have been licked by a cat. It was the strength of desperation. That, coupled with the wonderful courage and loyalty a dog displays for his master. Whatever it was, he had been lucky enough to get a throat grip; and when his pals returned, he had the big beast down. They went to work on him in a hurry. It was all over in less time than it takes to tell about it.

I lay there a long time. The dogs ripped the carcass to pieces, gloating as they wallowed in hot meat. When my feet began to get numb, I got up. Dawn streaked through the hills behind the trading-post.

I made it by nine o'clock. The trader cut my clothes off and put me to bed; and for the next twelve hours I alternated between naps and drinking hot milk. And every time I'd wake up, there would be Rowdy lying beside my bed, eying me. It was as though he wanted to see that his job of life-saving was complete.



# The Butcher

With an evil grin on his coarse face, Fierro drew his pistol and taking careful aim at the comb, squeezed the trigger. With the shot, the beautiful Concepcion fell forward over the table, spilling wine in her escort's lap, a dark hole squarely spaced between her sloe-black eyes. Fierro slumped in his chair, his gun rested on the table, carefully trained on General Saenz, while he bewailed the trick of fate that had caused him, Adolfo Fierro, a crack shot, to miss the comb.

"Ah, Don Roberto, it is too bad. I miss the comb; I am drunk. I must be drunk when I make such a bad shot. See, I am nervous; my hand shakes. I will pour you a drink to show you how drunk and nervous I am."

Fierro grabbed the cognac bottle, and without the slightest tremor poured two drinks—poured until there was not room for another single drop in the glasses, then raised his glass and drank it down without spilling a drop.

"You see, my friend," he said with a Machiavellian look, "I am so drunk I cannot keep good liquor in my glass."

The "accidental" shooting of La Concepcion angered Villa, and he sent Fierro to León, where the rebel troops were battling against the forces of Carranza. Fierro insisted that I go with him, for the hundred million readers of the great United States must see pictures of the brave soldier Fierro in action.

I got some good pictures, all right, for the fighting was heavy and the action fast. The main line of the rebels was held by that famous organization known as the "*Dorados*," or Villa's Golden Ones. Each and every one of them a selected man, selected by Villa himself for daring and trustworthiness. The *Dorados* in turn worshiped Villa; and his slightest word was their law.

Fierro, although one of Villa's most prominent leaders, and body-guard, was not a member of the *Dorados*. He felt that they were beneath him, and never lost an opportunity to deride them; and many were the gallant fights put up by this body of soldiers to prove that they were braver than he or his followers.

For several days I busied myself photographing interesting bits of action. Both sides were entrenched and evenly

MY business is to get pictures, news pictures. If it is news, I must get it. Pictures, not excuses!

Colonel Adolfo Fierro, "*El Carnicero*," or as it would read in English, "the Butcher," was for a while one of my favorite subjects for photographs. Fierro loved to have his picture taken, and was an excellent subject.

Colonel Fierro was General Pancho Villa's right-hand man, and wielded great power, through fear. When in Villa's camp, I was under his protecting arm; but sometimes the protection had a reverse kick. To understand a character like Fierro, was to understand the devil. It was in Chihuahua City, Mexico, that I first found this out.

COLONEL FIERRO had a sweetheart, one of those lights-of-love that followed the army. On her he lavished his loot; he made her queen of the camps. A beautiful woman was Señorita Concepcion de la Noche, but a trifle. . . .

I was having dinner in a *cantina* in Chihuahua, a guest of Fierro, who was heavy with liquor. Into the *cantina* came his lady-love on the arm of General Pablo Saenz, the most dashing officer in all Villa's forces, and one of the few men who did not fear the Butcher. Morosely Fierro watched his rival pour wine for his erstwhile sweetheart. His mumbings finally broke into articulate words.

"*Amigo mio*, look at Concepcion. See her smile on that little dressed-up dude—while I, Fierro, can only sit and look. I gave her the clothes she wears, the shoes on her feet, the rings on her fingers, even the beautiful comb in her hair. Why, I ask you, should I dress her in splendor for some other man? . . . Well, she shall not wear the comb; I shall take it back—like this."

# Poses

A reckless rebel officer puts this news photographer in a tough spot.

By BOB DORMAN

matched, but while the firing and fighting were heavy, the casualties were light.

Fierro stormed up and down the rebel lines, urging the men to fight, setting an example of bravery worthy of a better man.

At one spot in the lines the firing was particularly heavy, and the rebel soldiers were not returning the fire with the heartiness of spirit that Fierro thought they should display.

"Get up!" he commanded. "Get up and fire on the enemy. Don't lie there in the ditch like children. Are you afraid?"

"But Colonel," protested one of the men, "there are too many machine-guns over there. If we stand up, we will be killed."

FOR answer Fierro stalked out on top of the trench and stood there facing the enemy with a sneer on his face. "Why are you not brave like Fierro?" he demanded. "How can you expect to win a war with cowards?"

Then his evil genius began to work, and his distorted mind conceived another picture that would show the bravery of Fierro. "Don Roberto," he called to me, "I had been keeping my head well down behind the parapet,—“come here. I want a picture made like this.” And he posed himself there atop the trench, utterly unmindful of the bullets kicking up the dirt around him.

I focused the camera from where I stood in the trench, but that idea did not appeal to him. "No," he shouted testily, "I want the picture made from the front, out there." And he indicated a point some twenty yards in front of the trenches. I looked at the man in consternation: he must be a madman to ask anyone to go out toward the enemy lines, which were only five hundred yards away, just to make a picture; but that was what his vanity demanded. I protested that I was there to make pictures, not to draw fire from the enemy. If I were dead, I could make no more pictures of him.

His hand dropped to his ivory-handled forty-five, and stayed there suggestively, in a manner that belied the twinkle in his eye while he coolly pronounced my

fate. "Don Roberto, my friend, I want the picture made so; you would not refuse my little request, would you? You would not have these *pelados*,"—and he gestured in contempt toward the soldiers cowering in the trenches,—“think my gringo friend was afraid, would you?”

Putting on my best front, I clambered over the parapet and hurried forward to the point indicated by Fierro. I could hear little Mauser messengers whispering things to me as I went out, and I wondered if any of them were tagged with my name.

That, I think, was one of the fastest jobs of making a picture I ever did. I got the image of Fierro on the ground glass, ran the bellows out until it was sharp, and pressed the lever for the exposure. Seconds later I was again in the protection of the trench, with nothing but the experience, and an exposed negative, to show that I had been under fire.

Fierro still stood there, chiding the soldiers. "You Dorados call yourselves brave men; yet you hide in the trenches while my gringo friend goes out in the open, in the face of the enemy, to make his pictures. You complain of the machine-guns! If I had a company of my own men here, I would go over to the Federal lines and bring back a machine-gun for a *recuerdo*. With our pistols we would do this, but the Dorados hide in their trenches."

"WHATEVER the men of Fierro can do, the Dorados can do better," shouted one of the Dorados. "If Fierro could capture a machine-gun with his pistols, so can the Dorados. We will go and bring back a gun for you."

"Oh, no," grinned Fierro, and now I knew he was a madman, "I'll go along with you, to see that you do the job right; and my friend the gringo will go along to take our pictures. If you are not afraid, get your horses."

It wasn't a question of being afraid—I was scared to the point of paralysis. It was the question of going and maybe getting back, or staying here and knowing I would get a bullet. With a curse for this kind of friendship, I went behind the hill where our horses were held.

With the rest of them I climbed into the saddle, and then I passed a leather strap from the camera around my neck.

They surged over the top and across the open like a mob of howling madmen, and I followed along, as far in the rear as I could stay and still be in the charge. Machine-guns and rifles opened up in front of us, and saddles began to empty. It doesn't take long for a horse to cover five hundred yards on a dead run, but it seemed like hours to me. Then they were in the trenches of the Federals, and all was wild confusion. I don't pretend to know what happened. I reined in my horse short of the line and tried to get a couple of pictures, and then I was engulfed by the returning horde.

Things were more quiet on the return trip, and not so many bullets whispered around my ears; but it was with something more than relief that I once more reined my horse in the safety of our own lines. Only half of the Dorados had come back, but they had their machine-gun, and no one could say that the Dorados were afraid to go any place Fierro went. The Butcher was safe and unhurt. He sat there on his horse and reloaded his pistol, a sardonic grin on his face. "Not bad," was his comment. "If I commanded the Dorados, I would soon make soldiers out of them."

I LEFT Fierro that night and made my way back to Villa's camp. I just had to get back and send the pictures of Fierro to the newspapers, so the world would know what a brave man he was. Villa raved over the loss of so many of his brave Dorados; and for some time Fierro kept out of his way; but later all was forgiven, for Villa had need of the killer's pistol.

Months later Fierro died, died making one of those same wild gestures of bravery, or insanity—whatever you choose to call it. His men refused to cross a flood-swollen stream, and the Butcher again set the grand example. Calling them cowards, he plunged into the water—to be swept from his horse by the swift current and disappear from sight—pulled under the waters, they claimed, by the heavy load of gold coin he carried in belts around his waist.

I am sorry I was not there to get that last picture, but after all, it's probably best. Fierro no doubt would have demanded that I make the picture from the middle of the stream; and a picture has no value unless you get it to your papers.

# Toll of the

*The strange and tragic experience of the cable-ship crew on the scene of the Titanic disaster.*

By CAPTAIN

W. D. LIVINGSTON

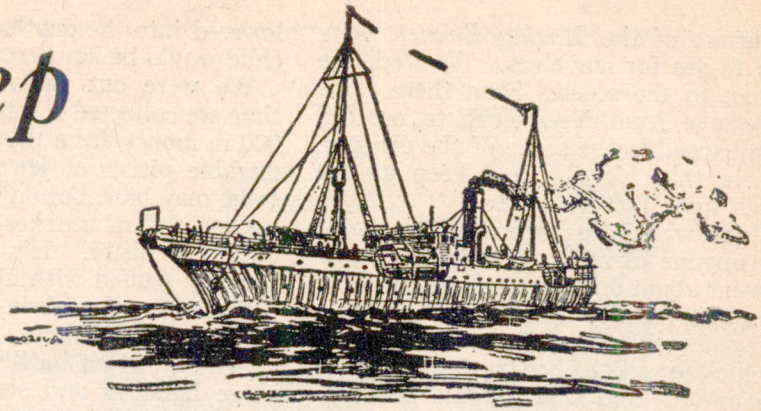
THE icebergs that come down from Greenland each summer drifted southward unusually early in 1912. We heard about them in Halifax, where the *Mackay-Bennett* lay at her dock, ready to go out and repair a trans-Atlantic cable. Their frosty breath was in the air. "The *Titanic*," we observed, "had better keep pretty well to the south'ard."

That was in April, just a quarter of a century ago. Meanwhile a new generation has grown up, and the world has seen the greatest war in history. In 1912, however, there wasn't much excitement, and the sailing of the *Titanic* from Southampton on her maiden voyage attracted more attention than recent record-breaking crossings of the *Normandie* and *Queen Mary*. She was the finest passenger liner in the world; structurally, she was the safest ship ever built; the last word in size, speed, and luxury. Among her many passengers, bound for New York City, were some of the richest and most famous men in the world.

On the night of April 14th, there were half a dozen trans-Atlantic liners near a point directly east of Nantucket and south of St. John's, Newfoundland. There was also a white, misshapen derelict. Almost eight hundred feet long, this sinister mass reared its jagged peaks more than a hundred feet above the water. It carried no port or starboard lights; patiently it waited, while the careless hands of man flung at it the biggest ship afloat.

Wireless messages were exchanged between the ships in that part of the North Atlantic, but none reported icebergs on the course of the *Titanic*. That is, no messages were brought to the Captain's attention. One from the *Mesaba*;

# Deep



a vital warning, was not delivered to the bridge, it developed later.

The sea was as smooth as the proverbial mill-pond, with not a breath of wind. At eleven-forty P.M. there were three sharp clangs on the crow's-nest bell, and a shout from the look-out: "Ice right ahead, sir!"

The officer of the watch, alive to the danger that threatened, shouted a command, born of instinct:

"Hard astarboard! Full speed astern!"

Her bow swung, but not enough—and she struck a sharp shelf that lay beneath the cold, greenish water. The iron plates were ripped below the water line. A shiver ran through the vessel.

Scores of wireless messages were filling the air with their faint whisperings; the operator on the *Titanic* silenced these with an imperative SOS. Then he sent his message: "HAVE STRUCK ICEBERG; BADLY DAMAGED; RUSH AID; STEAMSHIP TITANIC; 41° 16' N; 50° 14' W."

Every ship within hearing of the call turned from its course, and headed at full speed toward the stricken liner. Seamen stripped off the *Titanic* lifeboat covers. There were twenty boats, in all—less than enough to take off a third of the human freight. But it was all that was required by law. Women and children were gathered on the deck, seventy feet above the water, loaded into the lifeboats, and lowered away.

"Get into this boat, madam!" said an officer to an elderly woman.

"I shall stay with my husband!" was her calm reply. They were not among the rescued.

"Leave my husband?" replied a bride of a few weeks. "Never! We started life together, and we'll finish it together!"

The bows of the ship got lower and lower in the water, and the stern higher.

The ship's orchestra played a gay march, a two-step, and light operatic airs as the stricken vessel settled, although by remaining there every man faced almost certain death. The angle of the deck grew steeper and steeper, until at last the force of gravitation overcame the bolts that held the huge boilers, and they went crashing through the bulkheads. Until then the electric lighting system had kept the ship brightly lighted, but with the breaking loose of the boilers, the decks were plunged into total darkness; there was no moon.

Still the orchestra played on—"Autumn," a favorite practically unknown to this generation, and finally, with the end actually in sight, "Nearer, My God to Thee." Slowly the *Titanic* reared up on end until she was almost perpendicular. Then, very quietly and with gathering momentum, she slid under the sea.

THE operator of the *Carpathia*, a hundred miles distant was about to retire, and had taken off his shoes, when the S.O.S. came. Fortunately, he still wore his ear-phones. Had it come two minutes later, the *Carpathia* would not have received it.

The *Carpathia* steamed slowly into sight at daylight, hoisted one lifeboat after another on deck, wrapped warm blankets about their passengers, and fed them hot soup; there were 705, in all. Then she turned and headed for New York City. . . .

In Halifax, Captain Larnder and the rest of us were stunned by the suddenness and completeness of it all. According to the figures given out, there were 1,320 passengers and a crew of 860, or 2,180 in all. The *Carpathia* had rescued 705; that left 1,475 men, women, and children fighting for their lives out there in the chill Atlantic.

But we of the *Mackay-Bennett* were soon to see for ourselves. We were the nearest to the scene. Soon there came a message from New York to proceed at full speed to the scene of the disaster, stay in that vicinity, and keep up the search until further orders.

There was little hope that we would find anyone alive in that icy water, so we went about our preparations carefully and methodically. We took on board a clergyman, an undertaker, coffins, canvas in which to sew the bodies that could not be identified and which would therefore be buried at sea, and twenty tons of iron to weight them.

It was a ghastly business, but it had to be done. The officers and crew of the *Mackay-Bennett* volunteered to a man. We steamed out of Halifax at full speed, and reached the scene of the disaster a day and a half later. It was midnight when we arrived at the spot, and as we had no searchlight in those days, Captain Larnder gave orders to stop the engines.

There was a heavy sea running next morning. When we looked over the side of the ship, there were six bodies that had been carried against the hull by the current. One was that of a woman; all had on life-belts. Most people think of the *Titanic* victims as having been drowned. They weren't; they were literally chilled to death in water that approached the freezing point! The life-belts were so buoyant that they held the bodies upright in the water. Fortunately, the icy water had acted as a preservative. The victims of this greatest of all sea tragedies looked as if they had died at peace with the world; each face wore a calm and serene expression.

WE found fifty-two bodies the first day, including that of a little girl. Twenty-four unidentified dead, including some of the crew, were buried with appropriate ceremony at sea. We didn't know how long we would be out there, how many bodies we would find, or whether they could be preserved. So we buried the unidentified. With one exception: The crew had determined that the little girl should have a decent burial ashore, and they circumvented every attempt to bury her at sea. When the skipper would read out her number, and the burial crew would look for her, she was not to be found. The next day Captain Larnder would have a search made, and she would be found. But by nightfall, when the dead were always

lowered into the depths, the body of the child would be nowhere in sight.

We were out twelve days. In that time we collected a total of about \$180,000 in money from the bodies, and innumerable pieces of jewelry. One victim (who may have been a gambler) had two pockets full of watches, and in each hind pocket a pistol. His pocket-book was literally stuffed with all kinds of money—Canadian, American, English, French, German, and Italian.

We stayed on until we had recovered three hundred and six, in all. Among them were the little girl and Colonel John Jacob Astor—two human beings as far apart, in the social and financial world, as two people could possibly be. Our boatswain, Himmelman, recognized the millionaire from a photograph he had seen.

A day or two later we saw the actual iceberg that ripped the innards out of the *Titanic*. It was almost eight hundred feet long, and there was a thirty-foot shelf, sharp as a plow-share, curving out from one corner. Steward Smith, Dr. Armstrong, and Engineer Naismith said they saw splotches of paint on the tongue that projected under water, where it had been scraped from the liner's bottom, but I didn't see it myself.

When it seemed that no more were to be found, we were ordered to turn back toward a grief-stricken nation, and arrived at Halifax with flags at half-mast. Hundreds of people were there from all over the world. They lined the piers and stood with bared heads as we steamed toward our dock. It was a sorrowful homecoming for the old cable-ship, but we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had done an unpleasant job well.

The crew of the *Mackay-Bennett* arranged for the funeral of the unknown little girl, and bought a suitable monument, and attended the services—the one incident that we care to recall in that nightmare. We buried her on a hill, all by herself, and in Halifax today you will find the grass-covered plot, with a stone marking the last resting-place of this child. Later a man came all the way from Pennsylvania, on the chance that she might be his little one. She was. But when he heard our story of how we kept her from being buried at sea, how we fixed up a small coffin, and how we had as fine a service as we would have had for a child of our own, he said:

"I'm going to leave her here, folks, among friends."

# Tigers' Night

*A professional hunter in Manchuria describes a weird wilderness adventure.*

By N. BAIKOV

DO you know what "The Tigers' Night" is? Probably you do not, so I shall tell you about it.

I was hunting in a thick cedar forest, running back from the Lianzuze River; and at sunset of a freezing December day I reached the hut of Li-Sun, a respectable Chinese trapper. He was overjoyed to have a visitor in his lonely hut; and with the true hospitality of the Taiga, he invited me to spend the night in his shelter. The kettle was promptly put on the fire, and Li-Sun busied himself with the preparation of *Pielmeny*—small boiled meat pies, a favorite food of both the nomadic and settled peoples of Siberia. We enjoyed our meal together, and I soon retired to a corner where my host had spread out a pair of good goat-skins for my bed.

I was tired after my long day of walking in deep snow, with a heavy sack on my back, and it was good to snuggle comfortably into my fur bed. I felt supremely happy, and congratulated myself that nothing in the world would disturb the peace of the luxuriously warm hut.

Li-Sun was a very old man, probably eighty years of age. He sat by the fire smoking his long pipe and occasionally dropping a word to me, or muttering to himself. Beyond the walls of our shelter was the cold, moonless night. Thick layers of ice had blocked up rivers and streams. The frosts were now attacking the trees, freezing out moisture and causing them to crack ominously. We could at intervals hear the roars of tigers away in the distance. Their angry voices had at first seemed to be close to the hut. Then we heard them far away. The noises came back to us like a kind of moaning, and mingled eerily with the



soughing of wind in the pine-tops and creaking of snow-loaded cedar-trees.

"This night, and for the next two nights," said Li-Sun, throwing a few small dry logs on the fire, "is the time of the tigers' annual festival. They answer the call of their chief, the Great Van, and come from all over the forest to join him here. They are after blood. No other animal will remain in their vicinity at the time of the Tigers' Festival. They go away, leaving the tigers to the undisputed possession of the forest. If the tigers cannot find any other animal to kill, they tear to pieces one of their own community and drink his blood. Only the Great Van does not take part in this ceremony; he looks on from the top of a rock." Li-Sun spoke in a hushed voice, an expression of awe-struck reverence on his worn face.

He put aside his pipe and listened intently to the rustlings of the Taiga. The wind, growing in force, howled furiously, carrying masses of dry snow and throwing it against the walls.

To hear the roaring of tigers in the Taiga at night is an unsettling experience for anyone; and to a novice hearing it for the first time, the effect on his nerves can be seriously harmful. The tiger, when stirred to a state of excitement, makes a noise peculiarly his own. It has no resemblance to any familiar sound. He starts with a deep commanding growl, something like "*Eoun.*" Twice he gives this tremendous growl—very seldom calling three times. The growling is followed by a short pause, possibly to enable him to replenish his lungs with air. Then a violent torrent of thundering sounds comes tumbling out of his throat. They are ferocious, blood-curdling, and no animal chooses to remain long within earshot of

those tiger calls. Panic-stricken, man and beast flee headlong for safety, disregarding every other kind of danger in their terror at Great Van's voice. Sometimes fright overpowers them to such an extent that they cannot run, but fall on the ground in a state of stupor, temporarily paralyzed, and so falling easy victims of the tiger. Instances of fright-paralyzed hunters being killed by tigers, are not uncommon in Manchuria.

"Tigers' Nights" occur regularly toward the end of December, when the period of mating begins. The festival lasts about three weeks, and during the time the tiger is at his most daring and most cruel, fighting desperately both against man and his own kind.

I have spent many nights in the Taiga, alone, or with my fellow-hunters, sitting by the fire and listening to tigers challenging their rivals. I must admit that I found something splendid in their ardent powerful calls resounding through the frost-bound forests. There is a primitive splendor in the challenging roars. Supreme masters of the great Taiga are in command!

ON one such Tigers' Night I had with me a companion, a young man not experienced in the ways of the Taiga. The effect on his nerves was disastrous, and might have cost him his life. The young man was a particular friend of mine from Moscow, who had come to Manchuria in order, so he told me, to shake off his troubles, and also to hunt tigers.

Frosty weather and clear Manchurian skies made him soon forget the troubles left behind in Moscow, and it did not take him long to enter whole-heartedly into the spirit of our hunting life. Shortly after his arrival in the Taiga, we began preparations for a long trip into the mountains, for we were going on a tiger-hunt.

Before taking my friend into the depths of the Taiga, we had a few short practice expeditions. I wanted him to get some knowledge of a huntsman's ways, and to learn something of the district we were in. Also, I could see that he needed practice with his excellent gun, which he had little opportunity to use while living in Moscow.

We started out on a December morning for our real hunting tour, expecting to remain away from our hut for at least a fortnight.

Our first halt was planned to be at the cabin of a trapper friend of mine,

Chapy-gow. The cabin was on the bank of the River Tutakhetze, and about twenty-five miles from where I was living, but we expected to cover the distance, in spite of the short winter day, before nightfall. Boars had been invading the upper reaches of the river that winter, and where boars were plentiful, one could be sure of finding tigers, for they follow closely on the trails of their much-appreciated food.

My friend's eagerness to bag a few boars caused us frequent deviations from our course. The boars' footprints crossed and re-crossed in a dozen directions, with the result that dusk found us at a spot fully ten miles away from the trapper's hut, busily engaged in skinning four boars we had killed during the afternoon.

To resume our march, seemed to me inadvisable. The night was drawing in, and the presence of tigers in the neighborhood—we repeatedly saw their footprints on the snow—made me wonder about my friend. I was not at all sure how he would behave; this was going to be his first night of face-to-face meeting with tigers. So I thought it would be better for both of us to remain near a good blazing fire during the night, and reopen our operations by daylight.

Accordingly we made the necessary preparations for a night's camp, gathering in quantities of twigs and collecting a good pile of broken branches from fir-trees. The larger branches we formed into triangles, placed at intervals to form a wide circle. These we lighted; and we also had a smaller fire blazing in the center of the circle. I intended to spend the night in security, if not in peace.

THE blazing fires, creating a circle of quivering light, emphasized the darkness around. Beyond the fires the night became remote, thick, forbidding. My friend was apparently fascinated by the strange remoteness of the night, the fires and the unusual "atmosphere" of a night camp in the Taiga. He sat silent, watching me making tea and preparing our hard-earned meal. When he did speak, it was in a sort of mesmerized way. "You say,"—he looked at me dreamily—"that Tigers' Nights occur only in December! What a remarkable theme for a play! Beasts' festival! Beasts, obeying the call of Nature, assemble in the dark frozen forests—they have come to celebrate the wedding of their master. Blood flows on the white snow. They are all thirsty; they drink, they fight for the blood."



I TURNED round sharply and stared at him. Was the fellow dreaming or joking? "Wait a moment," I advised him. "You will hear the artists presently—and they will act, I assure you. They will sing, howl, and roar to your heart's delight. Their singing might inspire you to compose suitable music for your play."

No sooner had I finished my jocular sentence, than I heard, unpleasantly distinct, the unmistakable "*Eoun*." It came through the dark curtain of night hanging thick, forbidding, around our blazing fires. That call, I knew, was the first call of invitation. Another voice answered, then another and another, all of them announcing their owners' intention to fight to a finish.

The sounds of their roaring echoed back from the distance, and it seemed that a host of tigers were descending the hill and heading toward our camp. So far, there was really no danger in the situation; two of us, armed with excellent rifles and sitting behind a barrier of blazing fires, were fairly secure against an attack. And no tiger, whatever his mood, would be likely to attack us behind our blazing barricade, I thought.

To pile on more wood and get the fires blazing still more fiercely, was all that seemed necessary; and I threw on an armful of twigs and branches which we had gathered earlier for our night's protection. The tigers were padding our way, and were not far off now—at least so I judged by the tremendous noise permeating the darkness. Growling angrily, they challenged each other. For a while the noises were near at hand, coming from the left; then they were on the right, higher up, behind the hills. Again they were on the lower level; this time calling in a different key—like the gigantic miaowing of cats.

Holding my rifle in one hand, I moved from fire to fire, piling on all available fuel; and I kept a rather anxious eye on my friend, for his reaction to the display of firework, accompanied by the sonorous voices of tigers, was rather disturbing. He sat close to a fire, his rifle behind him on the snow. His face was quite expressionless, though his eyes, staring blankly, were focused in the direction of the sounds. Then, as I looked at him, he jumped to his feet, and lifting his head above the fires as if preparing to address an audience in the theater, he began to sing!

He had a beautiful baritone voice, and had indeed some fame in Moscow as a

singer. He sang with great emotion, choosing an aria from a popular Russian opera for his opening number. The singing, accompanied by the roaring of tigers and cracklings of blazing fires, added to the fantasy of the night. At the end of the first song, he paused awhile, his face still an empty blank. He didn't take the slightest notice of me. Presently he began another aria, singing it in a much fuller voice. A definite sense of uneasiness crept over me. What was the matter with the man? Had he gone mad?

There could be no prospect of help from anywhere. The trapper's hut was ten miles away, and the night dark as pitch. I took comfort in convincing myself that the fires, whatever happened, would keep the beasts at a safe distance. I must attend to them: I must make them blaze—pile on all available fuel. I pushed a thick branch into the nearest fire and threw cones into the others. The beautiful baritone was ringing behind me at the far side of the fire circle, filling the air with familiar tunes. "I will put another piece of wood or two into the fire," I thought, "and then I will try to pacify him. He is frightened. Tigers' Nights are not for these Moscow fellows. Why did I ever bring him down here? I should have known better!"

BEHIND me the singing stopped—came to an abrupt end, broken off in the middle of a word. I turned quickly, and to my horror, I saw I was alone. My friend had gone. He had disappeared into the darkness as if he had been taken away by invisible hands. I looked round again. I shouted to him to answer me. There was no response. And the tigers, who up till now had been quarreling and growling near us, had quieted down. The crackling of our fires broke into the sinister silence. What was the use of them now? I must go and find my friend. Where was he? His rifle was gone too, a fact that gave me a certain amount of relief. It meant that he had not been carried away by a tiger, a possibility which I imagined might have explained his disappearance.

"The Tigers' Night has played on his mind; it has upset him completely," I thought. Here was a misfortune bad enough in all conscience. But where should I go in search of him? In which direction? I had no idea. I fired several shots in the air and waited awhile, and again fired a succession of shots. There was no reply.

The tigers had gone too. That added to my anxiety. Perhaps they were following my friend, and he would be killed by them before he was aware of danger! The man must be out of his mind, wandering about in the dark frozen Taiga! The mysterious business completely baffled me. And I could do nothing till daybreak. Then I must look for and follow my friend's footprints. I must try to find him, dead or alive. I sat by the fire and patiently waited, firing my gun from time to time and listening, hoping for an answer. But no answer came to my signals. The sounds of my shots alone echoed back to me through the grayish light of approaching dawn.

**W**HEN it grew light enough to distinguish footprints on the snow, I started in search of him. After careful examination of the ruffled snow, I thought I had found the right marks, and followed them for some distance. They led me toward the river bank, but there they disappeared under a sheet of fresh snow, fallen since daybreak. I stood irresolute, feeling utterly baffled. My friend had been roaming alone for several hours, and literally had left no trace behind. Was he still alive? Was he wandering about, trying to get back to our camp?

I fired more shots into the air, but no one answered.

It was useless, I thought, to continue my search singlehanded; I must get help. Chapy-gow's hut was about eight miles distant, and I set out quickly toward it. I hoped to get help from Chapy-gow and possibly from other hunters as well.

Chapy-gow was at home, and it did not take long to persuade him to join me in my search. He was a brisk little man, and soon we were on our way to call on two other Chinese trappers in the forest. They willingly agreed to come with us. With four of us on the search, we should be able to explore every corner of the district.

For five days we searched the woods bordering the valley, and scoured the adjoining hills, crossing and re-crossing them many times. Our search was in vain. My friend had vanished, leaving no marks, no traces—nothing in fact, that could even help us to imagine the sequel to his dramatic disappearance. We believed that he was dead: no townsman could exist for long, wandering alone and without food in the frost-bound Taiga.

We held our last council, considered every possibility, examined all the suggestions put forward, and finally agreed that there was nothing else to be done. We must give up our search.

The trappers returned to their huts, and I went back to my station, weighted with sadness about my friend. I felt I was responsible for his death: I should not have taken him to the Taiga at that time of year.

A few more days passed, and I still hoped against hope that by some miracle my friend might be found. There was just a possibility he'd turn up one day. And—my optimism was rewarded! I received a message one evening, telling me that a hunter seventy miles away, on the extreme border of the Taiga, had been trailing a family of bears, when he came across my friend in the forest. This hunter knew nothing of the search that had been going on for days, and he was alarmed when he saw a man in the depth of the forest walking aimlessly, his eyes haggard, his clothes torn, and talking loudly to himself.

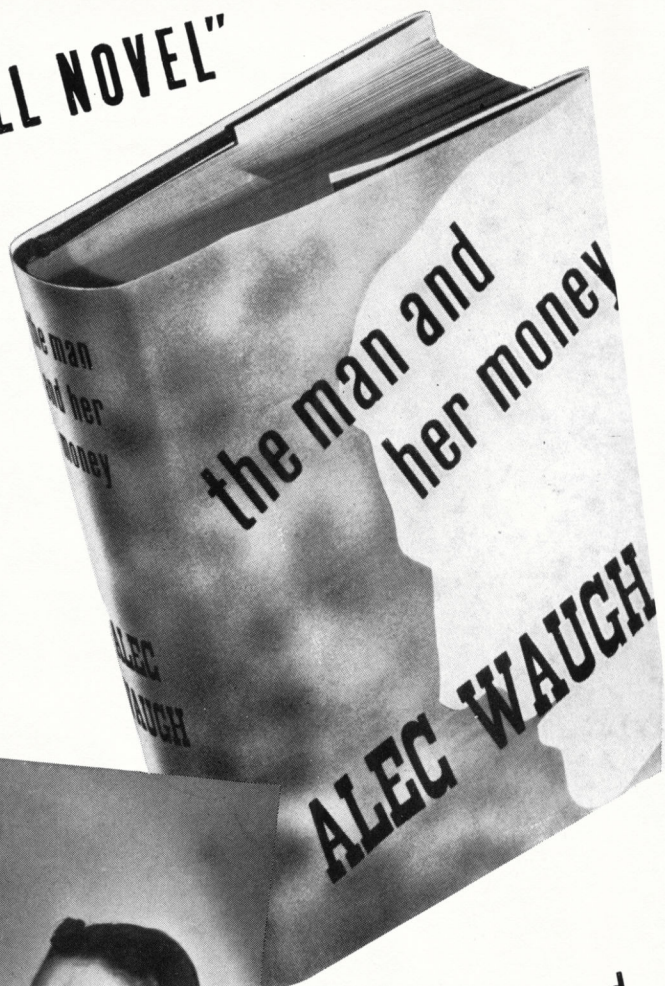
This surely was a madman! After some conversation with the wild-looking person, the hunter gleaned that the unfortunate man had some connection with me. So he persuaded my friend to follow him to his hut, gave him warm food, put him to bed and dispatched a messenger post-haste to me.

**I** FOUND my friend in a very bad nervous condition. When, weeks later, he had recovered sufficiently to undertake a journey, he was taken to Siberia and then to Moscow for special treatment in a mental hospital.

A Tigers' Night in the Manchurian forest is not a performance to be attended by nervous people. My friend fell victim to it. The roars of tigers, combined with the blazing of fires, in the depth of the frozen, snow-clad Taiga had unhinged his mind. He had left me on that memorable December night, in a terrified attempt to escape. No one knows how many miles he had walked in the forest before he was found, seventy miles away. It was something of a miracle that he was not attacked by tigers.

He eventually recovered from his illness. A year after his visit to Manchuria, the Great War broke out and he wrote to tell me that he was going with his regiment to the Austrian front. Within the first month of hostilities, he was killed.

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