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•

"Toy D'Artagnan"

The story of a swordsman known as the Viscount of Hell

By **FULTON GRANT**

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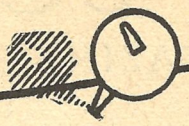

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BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1938 VOL. 66, NO. 8

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By

FULTON GRANT

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A Ranger's

An old-time Texas Ranger recalls a battle with a badman.

IN 1885 four men robbed and killed an old German, by the name of Brantigan, who had lived near Fredericksburg. As Governor Ireland was a great friend of the German people in his home town, Segine, he immediately ordered the Rangers from Uvalde to go after the murderers. In a short time we had arrested two of them.

The jail in Fredericksburg being an old rock and wood affair, and our knowing that the feelings of the people there were very bitter against the men, we feared an outbreak of violence, and so we took them to San Antonio, to a new jail, the best in the State. But in four months time they had broken out of this San Antonio jail, and had gone back to their old haunts in the Travis Peak Mountains.

In the meantime another one of the murderers had been captured and was locked up in the Fredericksburg jail. This building almost immediately and mysteriously burned down upon the prisoner. Again orders came that we were to capture the two prisoners who had escaped from the San Antonio jail.

We took up the chase. Whenever we went into their hide-out country as a body of armed men, the wanted men would disappear immediately and could not be found. We tried this several times, finally deciding that they could be captured only by "still hunting."

I was at Eagle Pass in the spring of 1886, when orders came for me to report to the Adjutant General, at Austin, for special duty. I answered this call, and the General sent me into the Governor's office for orders. The Governor lost no time and came right to the point. His orders were: "Bring those murderers in, dead or alive." I never knew the Adjutant General to give such instructions.

Leaving Austin on this mission, I went right into the country where those men were hiding out. I was unable to do much alone, as one would have to work so quietly, for the men had many kinsfolk and friends in that country.

Late one afternoon I rode up to the ranch of a friend I knew as George, on Long Hollow. I intended to stay there for the night, so unsaddled my horse and turned him loose.

About sundown George saw a man riding down the road toward the house. As no one was supposed to know I was in the country except my friends, I went into the house and hid. George came running in after a little saying: "It's your man and he is ready to fight. He's got his hand under his coat."

Scrapbook

By IRA ATEN

I knew I was cornered, and suspected the man was hunting for me. I learned afterward that such was the case. I took a position just inside the door, telling George to go outside so he would not be in the line of fire when the shooting started, and to enter into a conversation with the man. When he had come up within about seventy-five feet of the door, I jumped outside, saying: "Hands up!"

Instead of following my command, the man jerked his six-shooter from under his coat, and we both shot about the same time. I sidestepped, and his bullet went into the wall of the house. My bullet hit his six-shooter and the trigger-finger of his right hand, and he dropped his gun.

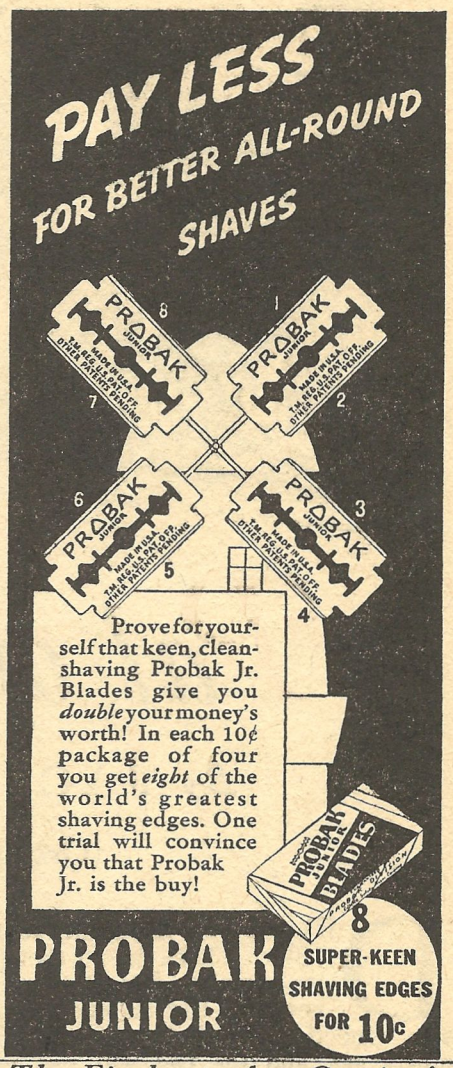
He put spurs to his horse and flattened out on its neck as he rode away from the house. I took another shot at him, and the bullet pierced a large limb of a tree just above his head as he passed under it.

By that time he was in the brush near by. George and I followed him all night, believing he would make for the only doctor in that country, about thirty-five miles up the Colorado River. We got to the doctor's house just at sunup, only to find out that our man had been there, had his wounded hand dressed, and had left about half an hour before we arrived. I had to threaten the doctor with arrest before he would tell me anything, as the outlaw had said that if the doctor told any one of his visit, he would come back and kill him.

I found out that the man's hand was badly hurt and knew he would now go into hiding for two or three months, so I returned to my company at Uvalde. I told my friends to let me know when the hunted man came out of hiding again, and I would come back.

ABOUT three months later my friends wrote that the outlaws were again seen in that country. I knew well that it was not very safe for me in their hide-out country, with two desperate criminals hunting for me when they should hear that I was in their neighborhood; but I had a duty to perform. So I slipped back into the country unknown to anyone except my friends. Going to see my friend George, as usual, I found he had become so intimidated that he would not go with me any more. And he hinted he would be more satisfied if I would not hang out at his ranch.

He told me of a man named John Hughes who had a ranch *(Please turn to page 144)*



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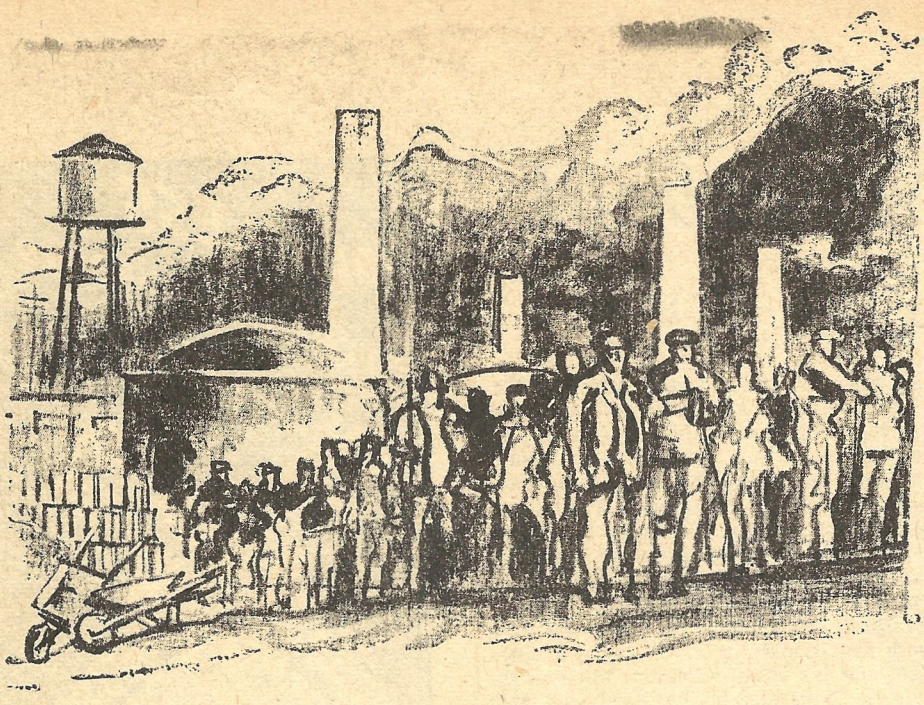


Pal of Satan

By JACK LEONARD

(Gregorio Somers)

DID you like the room, young feller? That's fine. I thought you would. It's clean as a new-fired tile, an' open to the air. One dollar a night, same as the others get, and the bed will rest you good. My wife's gone down to the store, but she'll be back in a while. Where you bound? Detroit, huh? Well, it's good to see the country. Set down on the porch an' take a load off your feet. There aint nothing to do around here now—nothing but eat an' sleep an' go some place else.

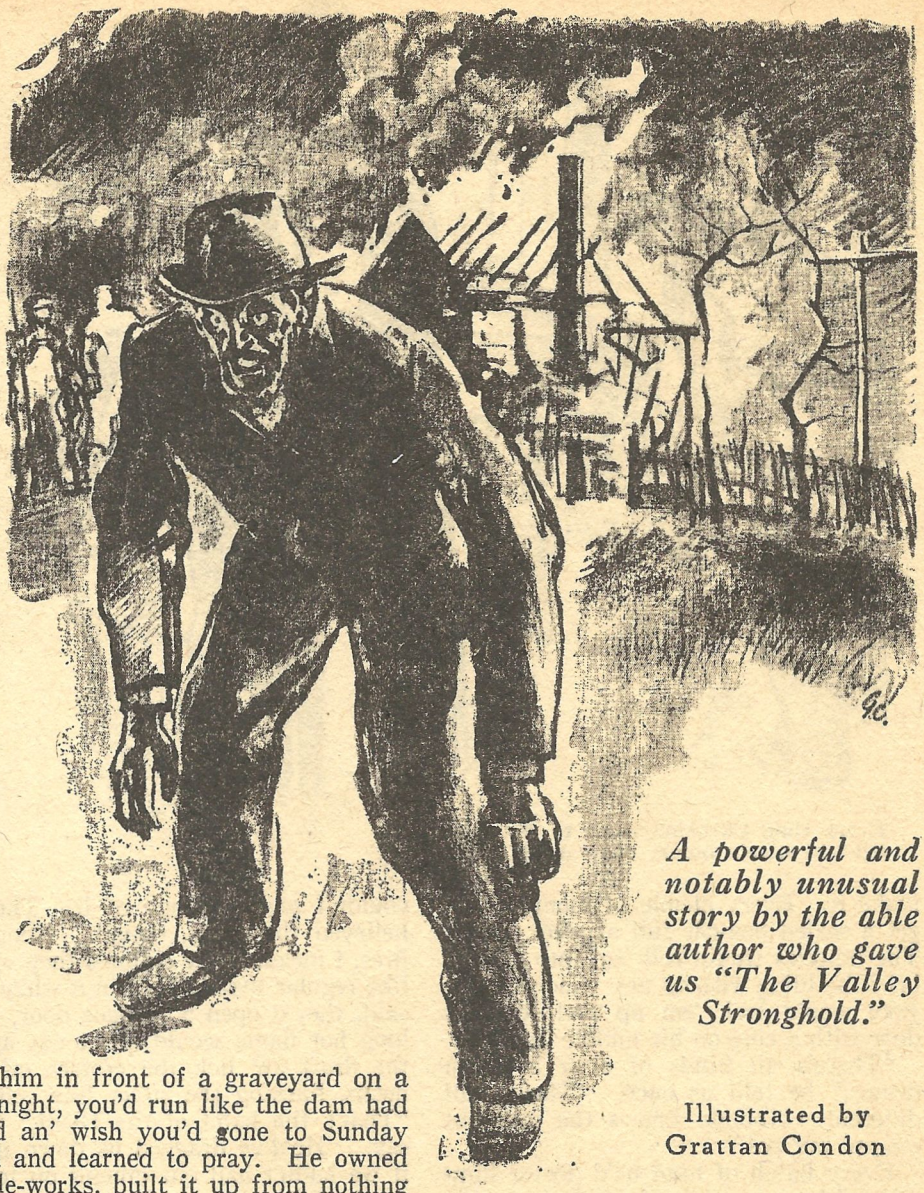
How do we make our living? Well, we farm a little, young feller, an' we work in the coal-mine when it's running, an' we pester the Government for money. This town is dead as a mouse in a pickle-crock. It was different before the tile-works quit. That was a year ago.

No excitement, you say? Well, that's where you're wrong, young feller. Le'me tell you we had excitement here a year ago to last us till the Judgment Day. We don't want no more excitement! We got the jitters yet. All we want is peace an' quiet.

You'd never know this town before the tile-works quit. Nothing but smoke an' dust an' noise. Two movies going every night—dance-halls, rum-shops, an' pool-rooms. We had money to spend, and we spent it fast. The town was full of furriners then, but most of 'em left a year ago. Some of 'em left in a hurry. I guess they didn't stop till they hit deep water!

What killed the plant? Well, it wasn't competition, or bum management, or anything slow an' easy. The plant died quick like a bob-white quail shot down with a rifle-ball. One day it's running three shifts. Next morning the fires are cold. I'll tell you the story, young feller. I'll tell it, I mean, if my wife don't come back. She says it aint a thing we ought to tell.

Did you ever hear of Jake Gross? No, I reckon you aint. Well, if you was to



A powerful and notably unusual story by the able author who gave us "The Valley Stronghold."

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

meet him in front of a graveyard on a dark night, you'd run like the dam had busted an' wish you'd gone to Sunday school and learned to pray. He owned the tile-works, built it up from nothing in fifteen years. He was a queer one—always walked bent over looking down at the ground with his arms hanging loose. He had a black beard and red eyes. He was strong as a couple of Swedes. He could crack a hickory nut between his thumb and finger, and bite a piece right out of a coffee-cup. I seen him do it plenty of times to scare the hunkies.

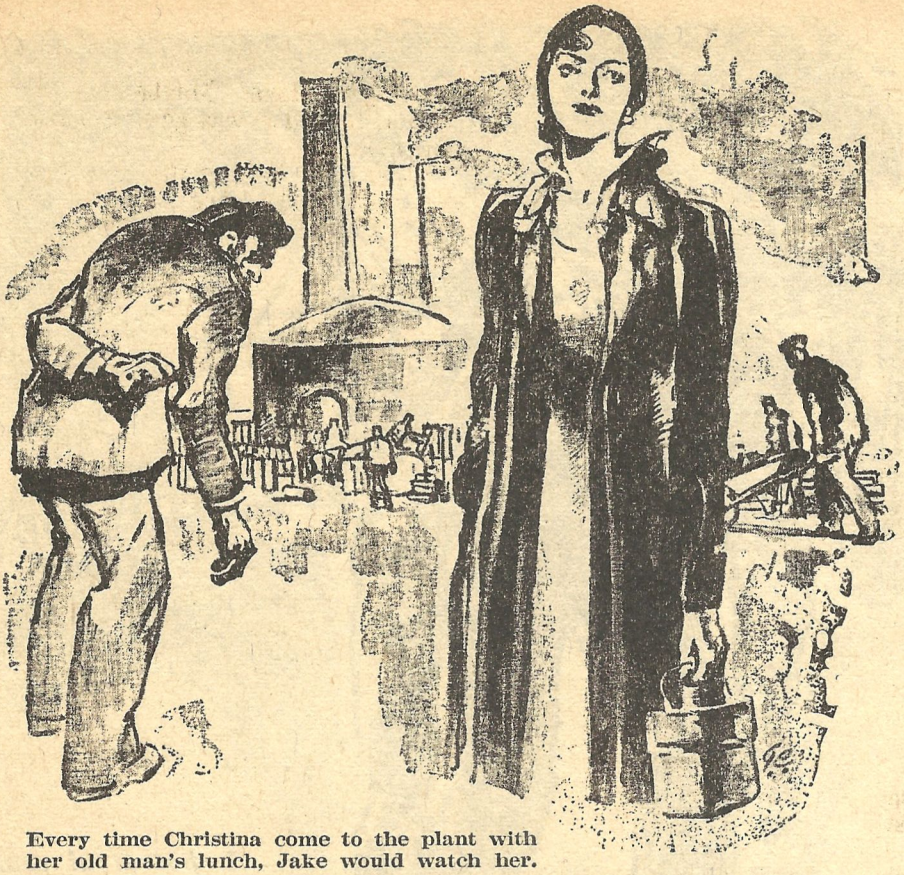
I USED to keep the gate at the plant, so I had a front-row seat for all this. Jake Gross, he'd come to the plant about six in the morning, winter and summer; and if it was cold, he'd open a furnace door and stand in a heat that would have killed another man. But Jake would rub his hands together like he was standing in front of a fireplace.

"Not near as hot as hell," he'd say; "an' me and the Devil are pals."

It made a hit with the furriners, all right. They'd grin in their black mustaches and cross themselves and whisper in their own language. They thought Jake was the Devil himself, not jest a pal; and he looked it. When he went walking downtown, the women would hide their babies and kiss the crosses on their necks. He loved it. He'd laugh that laugh of his that sounded like all the dogs of hell chasing a fire-clay rabbit down a furnace-hole.

"Boys," he'd say, "you think I own this plant, but I don't. The Devil gets half the profits. He told me how to make the tile."

That wasn't so hard to believe. It was wonderful tile. Nobody else could



Every time Christina come to the plant with her old man's lunch, Jake would watch her.

make it. Every couple of months we'd get a sealed box-car full of steel drums. The hunkies would roll 'em into a little brick building without any windows, and Jake would lock 'em up and seal the door with a ring on his middle finger.

"There's all kinds of stuff in them drums," he told us once. "They're all different. Nobody knows the mix but me an' my pal."

Every batch of mud he'd doctor himself with a barrow of stuff from the drums. I was offered big money for that secret. So was everybody else around the plant, but nobody knew it but Jake an' the Devil. . . . And only the Devil knows it now.

That sure was wonderful tile. Oftentimes I've seen him when a buyer come to the plant. He'd take him out in the yard and grab a four-inch tile-pipe off a stack and hit it a real smart clip with an eight-pound sledge. It never cracked, and it rang like cast iron.

"It's the Devil's own tile," he'd say. "Nobody makes 'em but me an' him together. It's account of we got the fires of hell in our kilns."

The buyers weren't like the furriners. They thought he was crazy, and I guess he was. But they bought the tile. He couldn't make enough of it. The men believed the story, though. About the fires, I mean. They claimed they weren't like regular fires. Once in a while, they said, they'd open a furnace door, and a long hot flame would shoot out against the draft an' lick the crosses off their necks, burning the silver like celluloid. "That's the hand of the Devil," they'd say. "He'd've dragged us down to hell if we hadn't had our crosses on to take the heat."

Jake was maybe forty years old when he started the plant; and the older he got, the more he talked about the Devil. It was growing on him. He could think of lots of ways to drag the Devil in. One time he come out to the gate at the change of shift. There was a bunch of men, mostly hunkies, waiting round for the whistle to blow. Jake brings out his pipe and fills it half full of tobacco. Then he takes out a little gold box and shows it round. "It's a present from my pal," he says. "He always gives me something when I balance the books." He opens it up an' shakes some yellow powder into his pipe. "Brimstone," he says. "Nothing like it for flavor." He puts some more tobacco on top, an' lights her up. "Smell it," he says, an' blows a

puff in my face. Le'me tell you, young feller, I near passed away. That smoke was sharp as a knife. "Smell it," he hollers an' blows some more at the hunkies. They choke, an' beat it. Then he walks off, bent almost double, looking down at the ground an' leaving a trail of smoke behind him that would've killed a rat.

There's a truck-driver waiting outside the gate. He just drove in from Youngstown. "Who's that guy?" he says. "He's nuts. Pretty quick they'll grab him an' tuck him away in the funny-house."

"Sure he's nuts," I says, "but I hope the cuckoo-catchers leave him be. This is the only town in the State where every mother's son has got a job. He don't hurt nobody."

IT was growing on him, though—no doubt about it. Jake used to live in a little three-room house on the hill above the plant no more than fifty yards from the gate. Lots of the men had houses twice as big, but Jake didn't seem to care. One time, five years ago, he blows the whistle in the middle of the night shift.

"Watch me, boys," he hollers when the men come out in the yard. "I got to give my house to the Devil. He's gonna give me a new one for it."

He pokes a stick of pine in a furnace, gets it burning good, and walks up the hill swinging the stick around his head to keep it alight. He chucks it in the door. That house was soaked in kerosene. It fires up quick like a haystack, an' burns to the ground in twenty minutes. We all go back to work, wondering some how long our jobs are going to last.

The ashes aren't cool before a gang comes in from Youngstown and starts to build—a whale of a house that covers half the hill; an' there aint another like it in *this* world. Jake says it's the kind they build in hell, but that's his way of talking. It's painted a fire-engine red, even the shingles on the roof. All around the eaves are wooden flames sticking up painted yellow. The window-glass is red like a traffic-light. In daytime it sure looks crazy; and at night with the lights inside, it looks like it's afire. Lots of times a guy drives in off the road yelling there's a house afire. Jake Gross, he always likes to hear about it.

The inside's just as bad. The walls are black, with red ceilings. They say Jake used to light the fires with chunks of yellow brimstone. Maybe that was only talk, but Jake was getting crazier by the minute. . . .

This was all before the Bartilonis come to town. Giuseppe Bartiloni was what the furriners call a *patrón* . . . a kind of a boss among his own people. Jake was getting out a line of porcelain insulators, the kind they used on power-lines, and old man Bartiloni was an expert on 'em. He brought his own gang, about twenty men, most of them with families. He bossed the insulator kiln, and saw they did their work, and took a cut of their wages. He was a big, husky feller with black mustaches six inches long, and he sure did know his business. I guess he made a lot of money, too.

Well, old man Bartiloni had a daughter maybe seventeen years old, named Christina. I remember the first time I seen her. She was bringing his lunch to the plant, and I felt like an angel was walking in through the gate. She was little and always smiling gentle-like. And pretty? Say, she was the prettiest girl that ever came into this town, which is saying something, for lots of the hunky girls are pretty as pictures.

Bartiloni's men had seen her plenty, I guess. They'd jest smile when she come to the plant, and take off their caps and work like hell as long as they thought she was watching. But a new man that hadn't seen her before— Well, he'd stop in his tracks and stare with his mouth open. I reckon I done it myself. Everybody done it. It wasn't jest her looks. Christina had something else—I don't know what you call it.

Jake Gross, he done the same as everybody else, even if he was fifty-something years old. He stopped and stared until she was out of sight. Every time she come to the plant with her old man's lunch, Jake would watch her from the office door. He'd watch her walk across the yard to the insulator kiln. Then he'd watch her coming back.

"Poor feller," I'd say to myself, "he's got it bad; but I guess there's lots of other single men in the same fix, and married men too."

PRETTY quick the whole town knew it. Jake couldn't do enough for old man Bartiloni. He raised the pay of his gang, and built another insulator kiln, and gave him everything he asked for. The whole town knew the reason why.

One night I was coming back from the movies with my wife. It was about half-

past eight, and we were walking past the Bartilonis' house on Main Street, right across from the drug-store. We see a big car stop in front of the door. It's Jake Gross. He's all dressed up in a dark suit, and I never seen him walk so straight. He could straighten up if he wanted to. This time he was pretty near straight. He goes up the steps slow and careful.

"Did you see it?" I say to my wife.

"I seen it," she says. "Let's get along home."

"Go on home if you want to," I say, "but I'm gonna have a soda in the drug-store."

My wife, she didn't go home. I knew she wouldn't. We sit in the drug-store making our sodas last as long as we can and looking across the street. In about half an hour we see Jake Gross come out. He's bent over double. I never seen him bent so bad. He gets in his car an' drives off.

"Serves him right," says my wife. "A young girl like that. Men had ought to stick to women their own age."

"It aint only that," I say. "It's different. We all got to watch our steps from now on."

That was the truth. Jake Gross was never mean before this, only crazy. Now he was mean an' crazy both. He carried a slicer-bar, walking with it like a cane, an' slamming the hunkies with it when he thought they wasn't working right. He'd cuss 'em out an' chuck hot clinkers at 'em with his bare hands. Only Bartiloni's gang he didn't ride, which was sort of funny, I thought.

Well, Christina never come to the plant again. I missed her, for one, an' I guess the rest of us did. Her father kep' her home. We didn't even see her on the street in a dog's age.

She was going on eighteen by this time, an' getting prettier every day. All the young fellers in town were trying to get her, furriners an' Americans the same. Lots of Protestants went to the Catholic church jest to get a look at Christina, or hung around outside on Sundays.

ONE young feller had the edge on the rest: Ed Reardon—he worked in the office, keeping the books an' making out time-sheets. Everybody liked him. He was a clean, good-lookin' young feller that had a smile for everybody, and lots of us hoped he'd get her. Christina deserved a husband like that. Ed was a real good scout.

The news gets around in a town like this. You can't keep one blame' thing secret! So pretty quick we knew he had her cinched. He talked to her over the back fence when she was out tending her old man's grape-vines. They met at the store as if accidental, and they sent each other letters by Christina's kid sister.

But you know how the furriners are. The father has the say, and old man Bartiloni wouldn't let him have her. He liked Ed all right. Everybody did. But Ed was jest a clerk in the office, making maybe twenty-five a week. He hadn't any money saved up. So old man Bartiloni said there wasn't nothing doing. He fixed it so they couldn't see each other any more.

WE knew it as soon as it happened. Ed Reardon went around, long-faced, and the neighbors said Christina was crying all the time. This went on for a while, and then we got the big surprise of our lives. Jake Gross took a hand in the game. First he raised Ed's pay to forty-five a week. Then he put him in charge of the purchasing department, and called him in whenever he had a talk with the bank or the railroad people. Ed changed a lot. He wasn't jest a nice, easy-going young feller any more. He was working nights, sitting up to all hours in the office an' trying to show Jake Gross he was worth his pay.

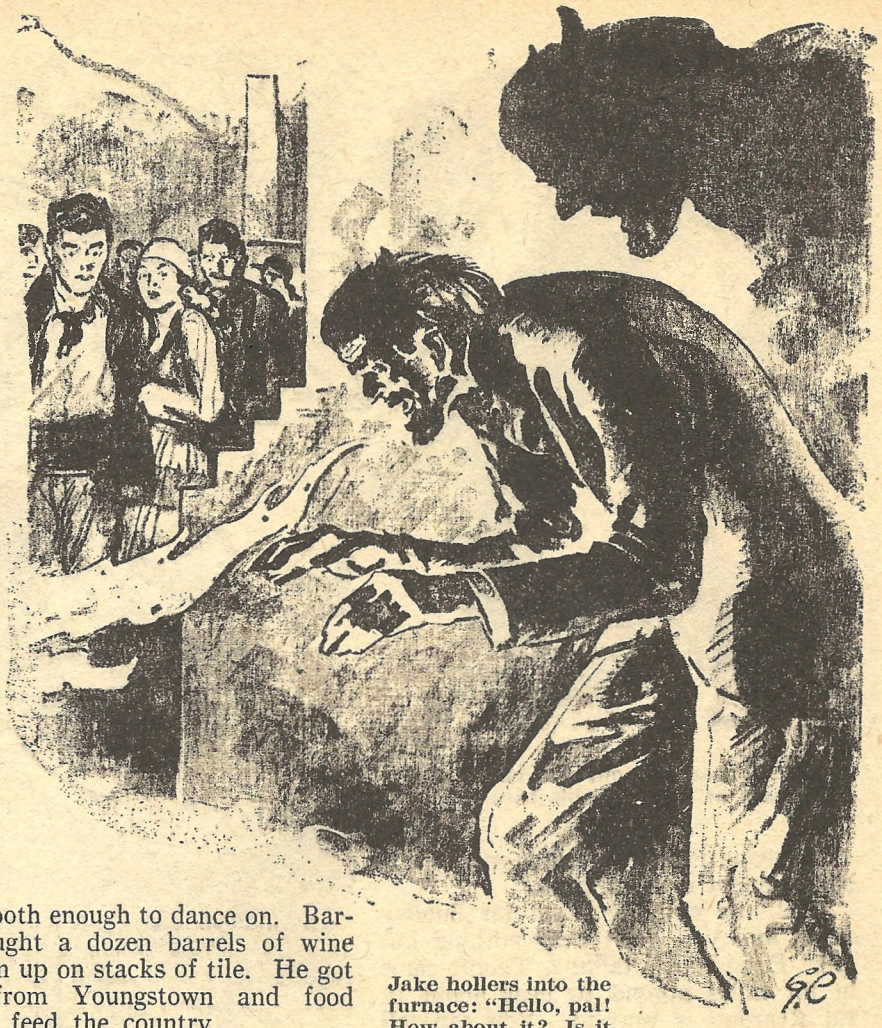
"What's the matter with the old hellion?" they used to ask me. "You'd think he'd fire Ed, not put him next the honey jar."

"I don't like it," I'd tell 'em. "It aint natural . . . knowing Jake!"

The hunkies thought he'd maybe busted his deal with the Devil, now he'd got so nice to Ed, but they said the tiles were just as hard as ever an' the fires just as hot. So it couldn't be that. Of course I didn't take no stock in the talk about the Devil, but something was going on. Jake Gross was nuts. No doubt about that.

Jest like we thought, after a while old man Bartiloni come around. He always liked Ed, and Ed liked him. So now that Ed was getting up in the business, he didn't see no reason why he couldn't marry Christina. They announced it in the Catholic church and they threw a party to celebrate.

That *was* a party, young feller. When a guy like Bartiloni throws a party, he does it up brown. They had it in the factory yard on a big piece of cement



Jake hollers into the furnace: "Hello, pal! How about it? Is it all right?"

plenty smooth enough to dance on. Bartiloni brought a dozen barrels of wine and set 'em up on stacks of tile. He got a band from Youngstown and food enough to feed the country.

Everybody come, even the sour-pan farmers from over the ridge with their wives running after to drag 'em home. Did you ever see the hunkies dance? Well, they sure can dance. All kinds of dances, an' men an' women all in bright-colored clothes they brought from the old country. My wife, she said it was sinful, but that's the way she is.

ALONG about midnight Jake Gross comes into the yard. He walks across the floor, all bent double with his slicer-bar for a cane. The dancing stops. The band stops too. All you can hear is the sound of the slicer-bar tapping on the concrete. He goes over to the furnace, which is right on the edge of the floor. He turns around an' lifts his head like a turtle.

"Folks," he says, "I got to ask my pal a question."

He opens the furnace door. We all see the fire burning, white an' hot. Everybody's quiet. Ed an' Christina are standing still, looking at each other an' looking scared. Old man Bartiloni is scowling black as a darky in a coal-hole.

Jake hollers into the furnace. "Hello, pal," he hollers. "How about it, pal? Is it all right?"

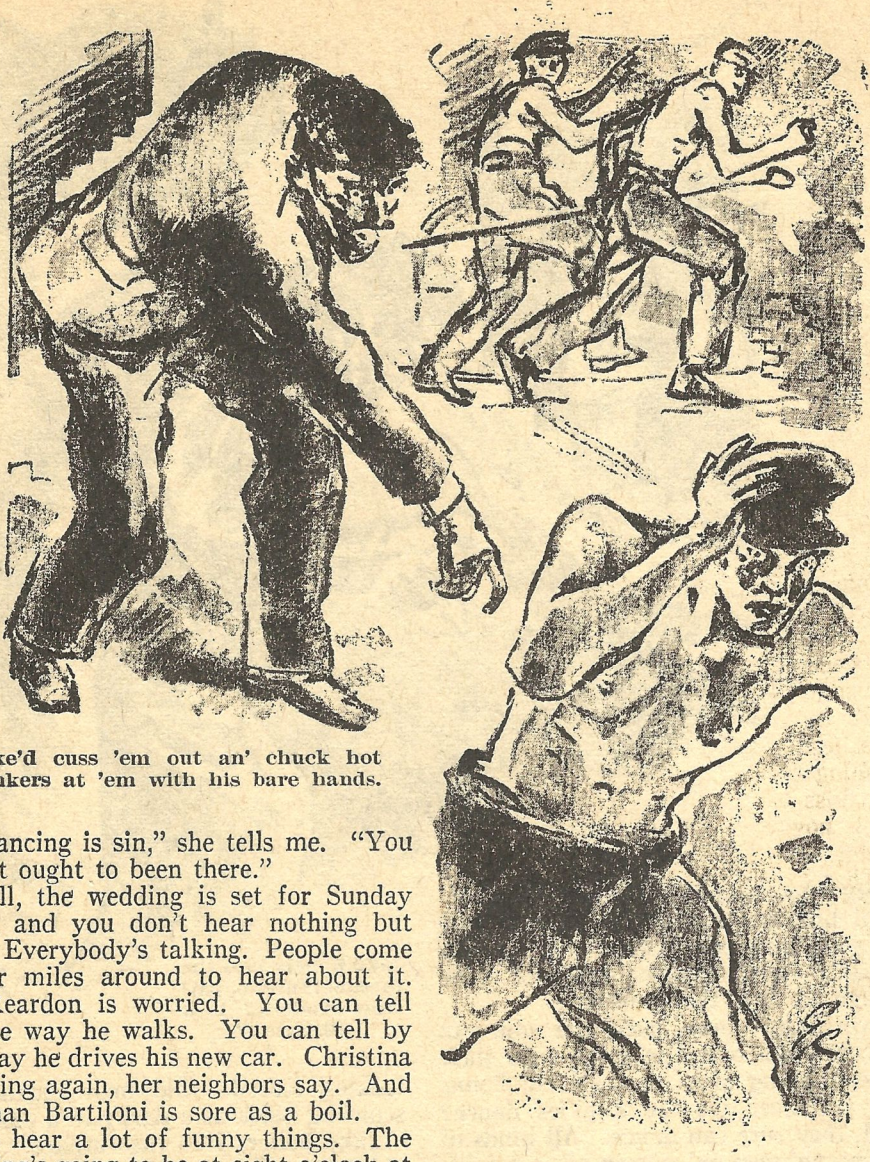
And quick as a wink a long yeller flame licks out of that furnace right into his face. It aint natural—the draught is pulling the other way. Jake don't flinch. He slams the furnace door and turns around.

"It's all right, folks," he says. "We got his blessing."

Then he lifts his head like a turtle an' laughs that laugh of his that aint like nothing else on earth. An' he walks across the floor an' out the gate.

It put a crimp on the party. The music aint the same, an' the dancing aint the same, an' nobody's drinking any wine. Pretty quick we all go home.

"That was a hell of a trick to play," I tell my wife. "It gimme the shivers, though I don't believe in the Devil."



Jake'd cuss 'em out an' chuck hot clinkers at 'em with his bare hands.

"Dancing is sin," she tells me. "You hadn't ought to been there."

Well, the wedding is set for Sunday week, and you don't hear nothing but talk. Everybody's talking. People come in for miles around to hear about it. Ed Reardon is worried. You can tell by the way he walks. You can tell by the way he drives his new car. Christina is crying again, her neighbors say. And old man Bartiloni is sore as a boil.

We hear a lot of funny things. The wedding's going to be at eight o'clock at night, which aint natural, but Jake Gross wants it that way and he's the boss. He's going to be the best man, and he's going to give the couple five thousand dollars and build 'em a house. That fixes old man Bartiloni some, but he's still pretty sore.

I WENT to that wedding, young feller, though I never poked my nose in a Catholic church before. It's a real pretty church. You better take a look at it some time. The furriners built it themselves out of tiles they made in a little kiln like the old country. It's all blue and yellow with a round dome and a couple of towers as pretty as things you see in lantern-slides at Chautauqua. The inside's jest as fine, full of candles burning and statues and pictures and flowers on the wall. My wife wouldn't step inside, but I did. And the very first thing I see is a picture over the pulpit with a lot of little candles burning in front of it.

"That's a real good likeness," I say to the man beside me. "Do you always have a picture of the bride?"

"No, no," he says quick. "That's the Madonna, the Mother of God." He's shocked, but kind of pleased, too. Christina does look like the picture; anybody could see it. I bet he seen it too.

I keep quiet after that and watch. The organ plays a couple of tunes and pretty soon the wedding party comes in. Christina's all in white, smiling quiet an' sweet like the picture. Ed Reardon is nervous and trying not to show it. Old man Bartiloni is standing tall and straight as a chimney-stack.

But I can't take my eyes off Jake Gross. He's best man and it gimme the jim-jams to look at him. He's dressed all in black, with a black cane an' he's bent over double looking down at the floor. Every so often he lifts his head like a turtle so he can see what's going on. Then he drops it back again.

The pews are full, and lots of people are standing at the back. No one's looking at the bride or the groom or the priest. They're all looking at Jake Gross, kind of nervous—but I guess they think they're safe inside a church.

THE wedding's real pretty and not so different from a Protestant wedding, though there's lots of business that don't mean nothing to me. Ed and Christina make the answers all right. Jake Gross hands over the ring the way he's supposed to do. . . . And the priest he says they're man an' wife.

Then Jake Gross speaks up. "Aint you gonna le'me kiss the bride?" he says.

Ed Reardon looks worried, but Christina jest smiles. Jake straightens up, pushing on his cane, and Christina lets him kiss her right on the lips. I don't know how she can do it, but Christina's always nice to everybody.

That breaks the jinx. Everybody begins to smile an' laugh and shuffle their feet. The people start to kid the bride an' groom. The priest comes out from behind the pulpit, smiling to beat the band. Ed and Christina walk down the aisle, trying to get a look at each other an' trying not to at the same time. I fall in right behind the wedding party so I won't miss nothing.

And I sure am glad I did. Jake Gross is following close. Soon as they get out the door, he lifts his head like a turtle and pats Christina on the shoulder.

"I hope you enjoy my house tonight," he says, smiling so you can see his teeth through his beard. "It's the finest house outside of hell."

Everything's quiet all of a sudden. The people start crossing themselves. They aint in the church no more. Then Jake goes over to his car, which is parked at the curb.

"So long, folks," he says. "I got to go. I got a date with my pal at midnight. He don't come out of hell on Sundays."

He gets in the car an' drives off, laughing that laugh of his that makes you shiver like the winter-time. Old man Bartiloni looks at Ed.

"What's this?" he says.

"We got to spend the night in his house," says Ed, "or he'll fire me out of the plant. He told me right before the wedding. Christina isn't afraid."

"I'm not afraid," says Christina. "That house can't hurt us."

"I don't like it," says old man Bartiloni. "It aint the house for new-married people."

But Ed puts Christina in his car, and they drive off. The rest of us go to the factory yard for the party. It's a bigger party than the other one. The yard's all decorated with Chinese lanterns an' paper flowers. There's lots of wine an' food, and old man Bartiloni has hired a twenty-piece band all the way from Pittsburgh.

That party don't go so very good. The music is sour. The dancing aint no fun. The hunkies drink a lot of wine, but it don't do the business. Everybody's looking up the hill at Jake's house with the lights showing red through the red glass windows. They're thinking of those two young people spending their wedding night in a room with black walls and red ceiling and the smell of brimstone in the fireplace.

We all keep at it though. The hunkies dance an' sing an' try to enjoy themselves. I hear the clock on the Methodist church strike eleven. Then half past eleven. Everybody's getting more an' more nervous. It's Jake's date with the Devil at midnight they're thinking about. They don't know what's going to happen, but they're mighty scared.

It happens all right, le'me tell you, young feller. All of a sudden we hear a yell. It's Ed Reardon running in at the gate. His clothes are torn half off him. He's got a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, an' his face is white as a gypsum pile.

"Help, help!" he hollers. "He's got her. He's come back. He's soaked the house in kerosene. He's going to take her with him down to hell."

The music stops like you threw a switch.

"Hurry up!" hollers Ed. "He locked me onto a water-pipe, but I busted loose. Hurry up! It's near to midnight."

YOU should've seen them hunkies! They grab slicer-bars an' sledges an' chunks of tile an' beat it up that hill like nobody's business, old man Bartiloni in the lead. I don't go myself. I'm a lot too old for that sort of work, but I can see it all from the yard. I see 'em

smash those red-glass windows an' go inside. I see 'em running around upstairs. And pretty soon I see 'em coming out again. They got Christina all right. The women drop on their knees an' thank the Lord.

They got Jake Gross too. I see 'em draggin' him out through the door. And just as quick as they get him out, that house fires up like an oil-well. Yeller flames come out the busted windows. You can hear 'em roar, and they light the town as bright as day. The women are praying down in the yard. The kids are screaming. And the sparks are flying up in the air.

They bring 'em into the yard, the both of 'em. Christina's all right—not even her dress is torn. I figure Jake Gross was crazy, not jest after her in the regular way. Maybe he thought he'd be better looking when he got in hell. Ed Reardon takes Christina an' she hides her face in his coat.

Jake is walking peaceful beside old man Bartiloni, and he's walking straighter than I ever seen him walk—straighter than the time he asked to marry her. He's smiling too, and he don't look scared or sorry. They bring him onto the dance-floor right in front of the big furnace. Then they kind of stop, like they don't know what to do next. An' the clock in the Methodist church strikes twelve!

Young feller, you could of heard that clock a mile away—two miles—ten miles maybe. Everything is quiet but the roar of the fire on the hill. You wouldn't have known there was any people there, they keep so still an' scared.

"Midnight," says Jake, like nothing has happened at all. "I got to keep that date with my pal."

Nobody stops him. He walks right up to the furnace door and pulls it open. We see the fire white an' hot inside, fanning up in the draft from the open door. A couple of men run forward, grabbing at Jake, but then a big yellow flame comes out of the furnace an' wraps around them. They fall back, and somebody slams the door.

Jake is gone! The women start to scream an' pray. Christina has fainted an' Ed is holding her up. Old man Bartiloni is yelling something. I look at the top of the stack. A big white puff of smoke is rising up an' drifting off.

"He's kep' his date with the Devil, folks," I say. "From now on, this town is dead."

Toy

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

DAPPER Dentist Dares Dozen to Duel!"—so may appear a snappy headline in a recent tabloid; and thereafter the chattersome scribe goes on to give us a kind of comic-opera sketch of some publicity-seeking denizen of Central Europe, issuing fierce challenges to a bank-clerk, a soda-jerker and other similar menaces. Pretty sickly, that. Maybe I'm an old fossil, crotchety and "sot" in my ways and opinions; but it rankles to see the ceremony of dueling, which used to be so grim and tragic, "talked down" and ridiculed for a generation who can't even suspect what the duel has symbolized for centuries before the radio, movies and Sunday supplements became a substitute for thinking.

I muttered something about this to my grandson the other day, and he laughed at me. "Stop your grousing, Cæsar," he said—he always calls me Cæsar, for some obscure reason. "You don't really mean that you ever took seriously this business of stabbing each other with those toad-stickers, do you? Why, a good sock on the nose is just as effective and a damsight less murderous. We've grown up, today. Don't be such an old grouch. Let us have our laugh, Cæsar."

I reminded the young scamp that I happened to have been born in France, even though we're all American from way back, and that I may have seen a few things. . . .

I said I was born in France. It just happens that my entirely American parents were living abroad for business reasons. And it was at the *lycée* Blaise Pascal in Paris, where I went to school as a youngster, that I met the Viscount of Hell.

His real name was Antoine-Marie Jean François Ectore Dieudonne de Pauly, Vicomte de l'Orgue-Pauly, (all of that), and he was a queer little devil. Precocious, understand? Even then—he was fifteen or so—he was no bigger than your hat, but perfectly formed, entirely beautiful and feminine with large girl-

D'Artagnan

By
FULTON GRANT

The gifted author of "Death Song in Spain" and "Beau Brummel of the Blades" here gives us the story of a famous swordsman who came to be known as the Viscount of Hell.

ish eyes and an expressive mouth—and chock full of fire and brimstone. I said "feminine," not "effeminate." There was nothing girlish about his utter disregard of danger, of consequences or of any restraining authority; a nice youngster and all that, but terribly spoiled by too much money. His father was one of the richest men in France, a member of the celebrated De Broglie ministry, and indulgent to a fault.

But the important thing was young Antoine's skill with the fencing foils. He was uncanny. Already at his tender age he had won the *championnat des collegiens,* which means he had defeated the best young blades from every *lycée* and school in the country. Even our old fencing-master, Henri Monnier, who used to come to the school twice a week for instruction, admitted that young Antoine was too clever for him.

BUT there were two of us American youngsters in the *lycée*—young Billy Brown and I. "Billy Brown" was not his name, but for reasons of courtesy we'll let it go at that. Billy was the son of an American official in Paris, a great gangling oaf of a lad with a big grin and curly blond hair, and even in those days the strength of a full-grown man—and a fairly good swordsman in his own right.

You see, in those days fencing was like baseball or football. To win the *collégial* championship was like being all-American quarterback today. We all fenced; it was part of the curriculum. And furthermore, it was a sort of preparation for later years, because it was the custom, in that forgotten day, for good Frenchmen to defend the thing they called their "honor" with the sword.

I mean, of course, the duel. Let's admit that dueling is stupid. Can anything be more stupid than to kill the editor who doesn't happen to like your poetry? Or the critic who thinks you aren't a good playwright? Or the politician who slings mud at you during elections? Stupid but human. And in France every small boy was trained for the duel which might—*might*, understand—come along later in his life.

Now for some reason this young imp of an Antoine de Pauly took a great shine to Billy Brown and me. Boyish friendships, schoolboy hero-worship. We played together. We broke rules together. We did lessons together. We were the "three musketeers" of the *lycée.* De Pauly was the d'Artagnan. A toy d'Artagnan.

THE year the first tragic incident occurred, Billy Brown had gone. His father had been recalled to America to accept some political position in Washington, and Billy went home. Home, by the way, was Wyoming, of all places, and a cattle ranch. Wild and woolly West, you know. So he drops out of the picture—temporarily.

This Dupont was a great swordsman; still he died there in the garden.

At the *Cercle Sportif,* every year, they used to hold the national fencing championships, senior and junior. It was natural that little Antoine de Pauly should make his try for the cup, and so he did. We all went to see him. It was a splendid show—the elite of France in their brilliance, sitting in the galleries. The judges were celebrated statesmen, patrons of the sport. The contestants were already more or less famous, and many came from Italy, Spain, Scandinavia and other parts of Europe.

And little Antoine defeated them all!

That lad was simply wonderful. They laughed in the half-kindly manner of crowds when he appeared—he was so tiny, so much like an ivory miniature, so fragile-looking. But when he displayed his wizardry with the *épée,* they held their breath. It would be stupid of me to try to describe that tournament. As well to describe the wind blowing. But our little Antoine simply overwhelmed all competitors in his class as a bantam game-cock might overwhelm a Plymouth Rock rooster.

And so he was the talk of Paris.

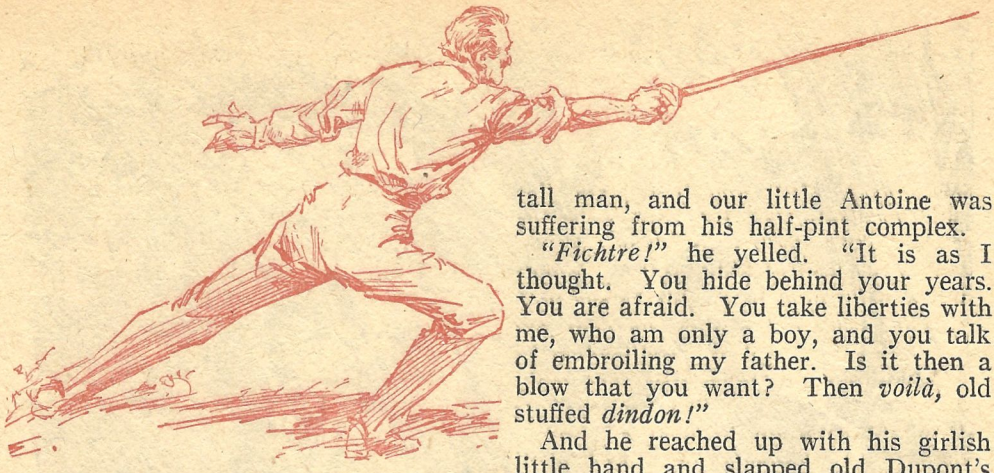
THAT night, in the beautiful gardens of the *Cercle,* they gave a banquet for the winners; and Antoine, of course,

was the toast of the occasion. I was invited too, partly because Antoine and I were inseparable friends, and partly because my father was a close friend of one of the judges, a man whom we shall call M. Dupont.

Monsieur Dupont was something rather special. Actually he was a Cabinet Minister, a statesman of great distinction. And besides that, he was a swordsman of great reputation, a gentleman of renown, and was considered as that special thing, *arbitre d'honneur*—which means that when two gentlemen became so violently angry that a duel was threatening, their friends would bring matters to the attention of Dupont, whose diplomacy, whose knowledge of the finer points of this vague thing called "honor," and whose unchallengeable integrity, often found some solution which not only avoided bloodshed but also safeguarded the "wounded honor" of both disputing parties. . . . Really quite a noble fellow, this Dupont.

But on that evening after the banquet M. Dupont was ill-advised. He was walking arm-in-arm with little Antoine de Pauly through the gardens of the Cercle, and he risked a well-meaning and kindly criticism of the boy's fencing. Very mild, it was—the sort of thing a father might say to his dear son.

"A little thing, my boy," he said. "A mere trifle, perhaps, but it could be dangerous. I could not help noticing as you were fencing this afternoon. You will permit me, an old swordsman who is not quite without reputation, to suggest that when you make your lunge, it is with a shade too much fire, *hein?* A little tendency to overplay, *hein?* Now



a bit of restraint—a trifle of caution. With these infants whom you have so deliciously beaten, it is of no consequence, my boy; but against a stronger sword than your own—"

Fatal words! I do not quite know what was wrong with our Antoine. Perhaps he had been drinking too heavily of the champagne of the banquet. After all, he was but seventeen. But the little fool went into a white rage. He spun around and spat his words at the older man, spat them into his kindly face.

"Vieux bougre! Species of relic!" he spat. "Is it then that you are so jealous of me, a youngster who wins what you could not win until you were thirty? My lunge, is it? A stronger sword! And whose sword, then? Not yours, by God!"

It was one of those terrible moments. I remember seeing the face of Antoine de Pauly's father—stricken and bewildered. And the other judges—all gentlemen of distinction. We were shocked breathless and speechless. It was incredible, but those words had been said; and what's said is said.

And the great Dupont? It is no easy thing even for a finished diplomat to maintain his dignity when a mere boy calls him an old blackguard. But he turned slowly to this fiery youngster, and he smiled.

"La, la, la, mon enfant," he said in his soft voice. "But that is not well, what you say there. At my age one has learned to control the temper. One cannot fight with a minor, my boy. It would be my duty to challenge your father, who has no skill with the sword, *hein?* So it is best that we forget those words so badly chosen, eh?"

A nice reply, but it didn't work. The champagne was bubbling in the boy's head; and besides, this Dupont was a tall man, and our little Antoine was suffering from his half-pint complex.

"Fichtre!" he yelled. "It is as I thought. You hide behind your years. You are afraid. You take liberties with me, who am only a boy, and you talk of embroiling my father. Is it then a blow that you want? Then *voilà,* old stuffed *dindon!"*

And he reached up with his girlish little hand and slapped old Dupont's face.

Now in France it is better to stab than to strike with the hand. Queer if you will, but the French are like that. The touch of a person upon a person is insulting beyond measure. And the poor Dupont was left without recourse. The blow was a stain upon his honor.

Very slowly and majestically he drew his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face—slowly and sadly.

"This is to be regretted, my boy," he said; and with impeccable gravity he bowed, drew his card-case and handed the boy a card. Then with much restraint he spoke to the boy's father.

"I am torn for you, Monsieur de Pauly," he said. "I am disoriented that this thing should be. I do not know how else to deal with your son, poor unwise young man."

The poor father, speechless with humiliation, could only bow his head. All the others understood. . . .

They arranged the meeting for early next morning. It was to be at the little villa of one of the other judges at Saint-Cloud. Dupont, the cabinet minister, resigned his portfolio that night—these things were taken seriously in those days. Little Antoine went back to the *lycée* with me, and I was convinced that he was a little insane, but I dared not try to reason with him. I could only hope that the effect of his banquet-drinking would wear off, and that somehow he would apologize before harm was done.

But it wouldn't and he didn't.

THEY met at six in the morning. I was one of his seconds. We sneaked out of the *lycée* by a window and took a taxi to Saint-Cloud. That was young Antoine's first duel, but alas, not his last one.

What happened I shall not try to describe. I doubt if ever such a thing has been seen, before or since. There was a devil in the boy. In his head, his hand and his soul. This Dupont, as I told you was a great swordsman. Of the older school, perhaps, but great. A little stiff, a little classical in the *dégagement*, a little conscious of his binds, but good.

Still, he died there in the garden.

DEATH came in exactly four minutes. And it was the lunge—that too-enthusiastic lunge that the good Dupont had so genially criticized—which did the killing. Believe me when I say that the older man did not wish to kill the boy. He was cold, sure, controlled, exquisite. His parries against the electric young whippersnapper were wonderful. But that lunge which was "overplayed," which involved the special *élan* of a pride-mad little fool, surprised the old man, passed his iron guard, and the needle point of Antoine's rapier pierced the white shirt-bosom of Dupont and left a little triangular stain of red there.

Dupont drew back, lowered his weapon and saluted.

"I wish you well, my son," he said with gravity. "This thing is to be regretted. I did not know that I was to fight with not one but two persons together, Antoine de Pauly. All your life you will possess two souls in the one body, and so I pity you, my young friend."

And then he died. Just crumpled and died.

"Two souls in one body!" On the threshold of death this old Dupont could see, perhaps, what none of us had even guessed, not even Antoine himself then. A metaphysical phenomenon. Call it the *Jekyll-Hyde* possession. Use the dry-as-dust phraseology of the pedagogue. Explain it with complexes and fixations—as you will, doubtless. The label matters little but the contents of the flask matter much. Whatever and however you call it, young de Pauly was a sick boy, mentally ill, and there was some kind of devil in possession of his soul.

I left France soon after, and there is a lapse of years which I can tell only by hearsay. A mania for dueling seems to have consumed Antoine. He fought and he killed; he fought insanely, as though to vindicate something. In all other things he was a lovable, normal young man, sweet, generous, kindly and loyal. But let the merest shadow of suspicion creep into that warped brain of his—a suspicion that some other person of that hallucinatory world of bigger men was entertaining an opinion of him which was even slightly critical—his seething rage would consume him, distort him, transform and metamorphose him into a little avenging demon. And straightway his seconds would present his card, a duel would be arranged—and another man would die.

At the death of Antoine's father, a vast fortune came to the boy, which did nothing to alleviate his mental sickness. He lived richly, dangerously, and madly. He became a byword in Paris. A crowd of loiterers and hangers-on followed him for the crumbs dropped from his table, toadying and cringing to him. He was dropped from the best clubs and *cercles*. He was like a man walking alone, and there was blood in his footprints.

"The Viscount of Hell," they called him, and it was a terribly apt title.

ANTOINE and I corresponded for a while. I remember he wrote me from various parts of Europe. And what struck me every time was his report of his duels. He killed. He always killed. He killed in Bucharest, in Salonica, in Rome and in Sorrento. But between the lines I could see that a phantom pursued him.

"*Mon cher, cher ami Arthur,*" he wrote once, and then there was a dirge of remorse in which I could see the lad's soul suffering. "There has never been, in my whole life, but two who could understand this thing in me, you, my dear Arthur, and our big Billy. Why is it that I did not hate Billy also for his great size? I do not know. Perhaps it is that always we fenced together and we both knew I was his master at that thing. Do not think I am stupidly jealous, my friend. It is not so simple. I am in me two persons in one body, the one fighting the other. And now that I am already no longer so young, it is that even the newspapers are making mention. I am ashamed, *moi*. I am haunted, humiliated."

And he enclosed some clippings from the Paris journals.

The clippings were startling, I remember, and the headlines gave me a phantasmagoria of the poor mad boy's progress.

DE PAULY KILLS AGAIN; A DUEL FOR A SMILE. THE VISCOUNT OF HELL TAKES HIS TWENTIETH VICTIM. MUST MODERN FRANCE SUBMIT TO AN ARCHAIC ABUSE? WHAT OF THE LAWS AGAINST DUELING? DE PAULY'S CASE BEFORE THE SENATE. ANTOINE DE PAULY IS EXILED FOLLOWING THE VON MURGHEIM AFFAIR.

That, of course was the worst—exile. The thing happened at Roches-Gaillard, a pretty little resort on the Brittany coast. The swaggering Austrian called Von Murgheim was attached to the legation and had diplomatic privileges. There was a woman in the case, too—some kind of woman scarcely worth the mentioning. She had come to the resort with this Murgheim. They had quarreled. There was a public scene. The man had slapped her. And little Antoine, sitting there on the *café terrasse*, seeing it, had bounced up and slapped the Austrian giant.

Typical of course—the perfect toy d'Artagnan.

So they fought. Give Antoine credit, the fault was as much Murgheim's as his own. The man was a swordsman, too—a saber champion of some sort, and conceited beyond belief. They met in a little wood. The giant Austrian swaggered and blustered. And death came to him in fifty seconds.

It was the thankless little trollop who did the rest. She complained to the authorities. At last the long-suffering government acted. The letter of *interdiction de sejour* was presented to Antoine by a quaking little state-marshal. It gave him forty-eight hours to leave the country.

Letters came from him; more news of more killings. There was the business of the Emir of Abes-Halkhar in Marrakesh. There was a great Russian fellow—some Boris or Dmitri or Piotr, with a "vitch" at the end of his name. There was a rather ghastly affair with an Italian professional fencing-master which lasted the better part of an hour, and in which Antoine and the Italian were both wounded, and both so faint from loss of blood that their seconds wanted to call it off. But Antoine killed him, and recovered in the hospital.

APPARENTLY there was no country of Europe in which his sword was not. And his evil fame went before him, sadly. He grew to be a marked man. There were no rooms for him in the better hotels. At Monte Carlo he sat alone against the Greek baccarat syndicate. Theaters refused him seats or made him sit alone in a great box.

And the poor young man, no longer so young now, must have suffered a mental hell that we more normal persons can never quite understand.

But the denouement came, and big Bill Brown came back into his life. . . . And so did I.

IT began in America when Billy turned up one day. In all these years I had heard nothing of him beyond vague rumors—schoolboy friendships are like that; and I had wondered about him a little. But one day, when I was walking down through Broad Street, right in the thick of the old Curb Market in its out-of-door days, a tremendous weight came down upon me like the destruction of Sennacherib. A great hand smote me between the shoulders, and a great voice bawled:

"Arthur Cozens, you old coyote! By God, but you're good for sore eyes!"

Of course it was Bill Brown, though I scarcely recognized him. He was huge; he was a massive giant. He wore a two-gallon hat like a story-book cowboy, and a gabardine suit with a bulge under his armpits, and he was bronzed and hard and tremendous.

Well, we went to my club and talked. That was fun, and curious. Billy Brown had not only inherited a ranch in Wyoming but was also the sheriff of some county out there, where he had been chasing "bad-men," fighting rustlers and conducting himself generally like the heroes of those dime-novel wild-and-woolly West tales.

Now Billy had come to New York to send his little sister off on a boat for Europe. It was to be a sort of traveling finishing-school affair, or so he said.

"Hell, Arthur, a gal oughter get shaken loose from things and folks in one place," he told me. "I don't want she should grow up like any old stick-in-the mud out our way."

But that was the only flash I could see in the man which suggested he ever had a European viewpoint.

I told Billy the pathetic story of our little boyhood playmate Antoine de Pauly. At first he hardly remembered him, but finally his reaction was classically Western and classically provincial.

"The hell you say," he roared, when I brought up the dueling. "Why, that

little runt of a tissue-paper dolly couldn't get like that, feller. Sure, he was plenty good with his pig-sticker, I remember. I wasn't so bad myself, hey? Me, I've kept up with fencing a little. But hell's bells, this is the Twentieth Century. We read about duels, but nobody really does it today!"

So I let it drop. I didn't quite like his attitude, and I did still have an affection for little Antoine.

I didn't meet Bill's little sister. Business kept me from that pleasure. But I saw quite a bit of Bill Brown, who seemed to be trying to establish a record in New York for hell-raising, drinking and general playboy-ism. And then one day I told him that I planned to go back to France—business, you know—and urged him to come over with me.

He gave me a grin.

"Not me, Arthur. I've gone American. But say, if you go over, you've got to look up Becky in Paris and see that she behaves herself. Promise me, now."

So I promised.

I sailed in about a week. I finished my business in Paris promptly, but I found no sign of sister Becky Brown, save that she had gone down to the Riviera, according to her bankers.

SO I went to the Riviera.

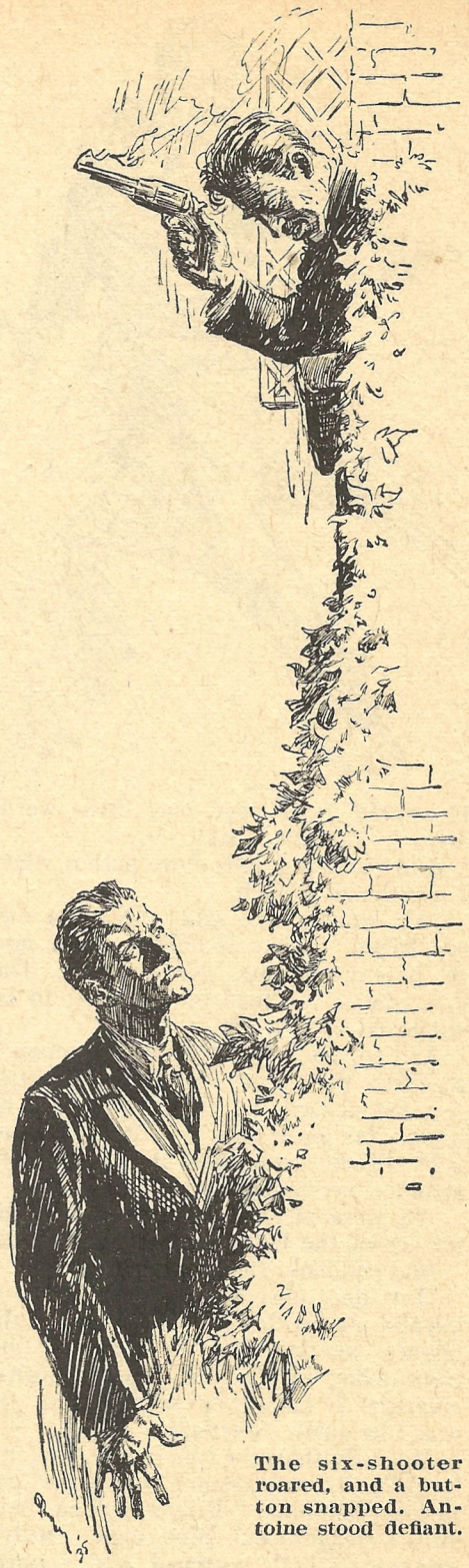
I was in Nice when the letter came from Antoine. It had been forwarded several times and had been finally sent back from America and came to me by the devious ways of the post.

Antoine de Pauly was in San Remo—not three hundred miles away. So I went there.

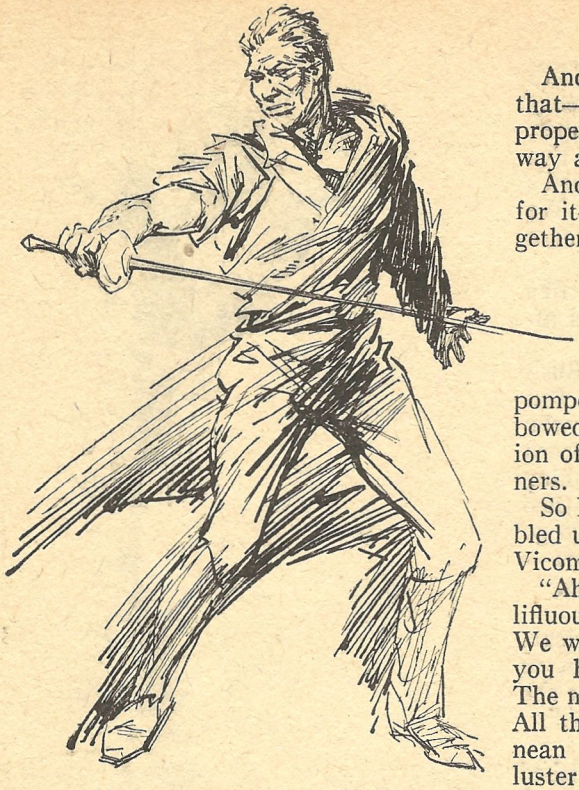
I found my little friend easily. He was sitting all alone on the terrace of the Hotel de la Grande Minorque, solemnly sipping his absinthe. I knew him at once, although he had aged, and a streak of white had cleft his hair. His face had hardened, his eyes had saddened, his mouth, which had been so pretty and girlish as a boy, had drawn tight and pinched, as though he were constantly struggling to contain some emotion that wanted out. And when I came over to him, he wept. Yes, wept, with honest joy. Your Frenchman will do that, and you can't stop him.

Fundamentally the boy had changed little in manhood; he was alert, quick-worded, agile-minded, and a magnificent conversationalist. He chattered like a magpie in his high glee at having me there. But when I told him of Billy Brown, there was just a note of sadness came creeping into his voice.

"Ah, the great Billy! The life, she is like that, *hein?* He has grown away from us, *mon ami.* Ten times I have written, but always there is no answer.



The six-shooter roared, and a button snapped. Antoine stood defiant.



Apparently there was no country of Europe in which his sword was not.

He could have sent one little word, *hein?*" Pathetic, that!

And there was still more pathos when I mentioned women.

"Ah, women," he said. "Not for me, my friend. There is only the fear and the hate around me. Not the love. The love, she is the food of the soul; to be not loved, it is tragic."

And so, sensing that I had hit upon a sensitive note, and realizing that little Antoine needed my friendship, such as it was, far more than any little sister of Billy Brown could need it, I decided to abandon my search for sister Becky.

We were sitting, one day, upon the terrace of the hotel in our usual places.

And suddenly she appeared.

How does one describe that which is beyond conception? She came to the terrace, moving like the rustle of ancient silks, by far the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. And she was obviously American.

Not only that, she was just as obviously Billy Brown's sister: Billy's features turned feminine. Billy's golden hair. Billy's magnificent blue eyes. Billy's firmness, a little softened, and a queer air of unsophisticated wisdom about her.

An odd thing happened then. Even before I could get myself into motion the little Vicomte had stared at her with that pathetic wistfulness of his lurking in his fine eyes, and she saw him.

And she smiled. Yes, she did just that—smiled, and scandalized the ultra-proper American tourists who sat in the way at other tables between us.

And then he bounced—no other word for it—to his feet and drew himself together with his tremendous little-man's pomposity, and bowed to her. Yes, bowed—neatly, dapperly, after the fashion of a forgotten age of exquisite manners. How the tourists gasped!

So I had to save a situation. I scrambled up and started over; only the little Vicomte beat me in spryness.

"Ah, madame," he babbled in his mellifluous voice, "my deepest compliments. We were in the season of the rains, and you have brought the summer again. The mistral, she has ceased now to blow. All the hidden pearls of the Mediterranean are sending out their brightest luster to make the sea glad for us. And all this, mademoiselle, is because you have come. Will you not permit a friendless gentleman—"

I stopped him there. I managed to say to her:

"I'm sure you're Becky Brown—Bill Brown's sister. I'm Cozens—Arthur Cozens. Bill must have written you about me. I was meaning to look you up. And this is my friend the Vicomte de Pauly. We were all schoolmates together, Antoine, Bill and I."

And she was laughing then.

"Please, please!" she said. "Both of you sit down and do one thing at a time. If Monsieur le Vicomte is to flirt with me, then let him; but for heaven's sake, don't mix it with Old Home Week. But I am so glad you're here—Arthur—I may call you Arthur, mayn't I? Do sit down, both of you."

AFTER we had got over the first confusion, she said to Antoine:

"I've been here almost a week, now. I've seen you often, M. de Pauly. Please tell me—you've been pointed out to me as a kind of bad-man. Are you one? You don't seem so."

Naïveté? Precocious cleverness? Superb acting? How could we tell? At any rate it gave Antoine his chance.

"Ah, madame," he said with that boyish gravity he could assume, like a schoolboy confronting his professor, "per-

haps it is that I am what you call a bad-man; I do not know. I tell you true, I have killed. Ah, yes, killed—but always with loyalty, always—how you say it?—always fair, *hein?*"

She nodded.

"A fair fight is fair," she said, as though it were an axiom learned in school. And promptly the whole issue was forgotten.

WE didn't talk much of Bill, because Antoine was at his most fascinating. I did not mention that this sister Becky was as tiny as her brother Bill was big, because you didn't seem to notice that at first, her vividness was too overwhelming. But when she stood beside Antoine de Pauly, just as we left the hotel terrace, I could see they were of an exact size. Perhaps this fact had some subtle effect upon both of them. I'm inclined to believe it explains, partly, what happened.

Because it did happen. The days that followed that meeting were beautiful. Antoine de Pauly was a changed man. No longer did he bristle. The hard little lines around his mouth were softening perceptibly. The terrible *cafard* was gone from him, and very evidently, under the mysterious influence of Becky Brown, he was reverting to the old devil-chasing schoolboy Bill and I had known in the *lycée*, a hero to the boys and the terror of the professors.

Call it "love." It mingled admiration and devotion and some pathetic quality of worship and an awful hunger for the sympathy of a good woman. And the girl was fascinated by Antoine, although it didn't stop with fascination. She had a gift, that child, a gift of burrowing into the souls of people and dragging up the fine things hidden there. Perhaps I was a little jealous. I could have cared a great deal for the girl myself. But I sensed the utter cruelty of opposing him, and his boyish worship of her made me forget myself.

They rode horses—splendid animals which Antoine's money provided at huge expense; they played tennis; they swam in the blue Mediterranean. They went hither and yon, holding hands like burbling school-children, digging up historic ruins upon whose beauties and stories Antoine would discourse for happy hours. It was love, all right, and it was very pretty and sweet. And very dangerous, too, though none of us sensed that.

But trouble came.

Trouble, curiously enough, came in the shape of Bill Brown. It was a queer, unreal business. It was more than misunderstanding and resentment. It goes farther than that. It digs down into the very vitals of human behavior, and it makes you see how futile and limping are all our pseudo-scientific dabblings in the thing we like to call "psychology."

Bill Brown arrived in about a month. Of course Becky had written him, telling him we were both there and pleading with him to come and have a kind of general reunion, a sort of old-school-week. So he gave in, and sailed.

I remember the day we went down to Ventimiglia to meet him, all three of us, laughing and prancing and happy and joyous. I remember the great burly frame of him—two-gallon hat and all—swinging off the Rome Express, shouting American English to dazed Italian porters, waving handfuls of paper money whose value he never even guessed, letting out an Indian war-whoop at us, and finally striding over the platform and picking little Antoine off his dapper feet and tossing him high in the air.

"You little old varmint!" roared Bill, nearly knocking the wind out of Antoine's slight body. "You rip-snortin' little old cayuse! Say, I'm sure glad to see you—both of you. Imagine my little mite of a sister digging you up, in this ungodly country!"

And if his wild-and-woolly-Western veneer (or was it veneer?) was unmindful of the fragile dignity of little Antoine, the Vicomte de Pauly had his own innings when he threw his arms around Bill's huge neck, and kissed him—eight times on each cheek, after the Italian fashion of the day—while a crowd of a hundred or so stood on the station platform and stared and giggled and nudged each other and assured each other that all Americans are completely insane, as could plainly be seen by this performance.

But that was all right. That was a pleasant afternoon.

IT was that very evening, however, after Antoine had brought us all together in the hotel dining-room for a regal banquet that the trouble started. I remember he stood up, champagne-glass in hand, and proposed a long-winded French toast beginning with *"Eh bien alors, mes amis—"* and ending with some noble sentiment like, *"Pour l'amitie perpetuelle Franco-Americaine."*

Then he went on in English:

"My Bill, this is an occasion of extreme joy and felicity. I am to understand that your dead father is no longer among the living and that you, my Bill, are now at the head of your family. And it is to you, my friend and the brother of Rebecca, that I now come at this delightful moment, to ask of you the hand of your beautiful sister in marriage, to become the Vicomtesse Rebecca de l'Orgue-Pauly—"

It took Bill some minutes to grasp it, and then a cloud came over his face.

"Well—gee!" he began, like a schoolboy. "Gee, feller! I—I don't hardly know what to say. Things like this have to be talked over, hey?"

It was a little chilly and awkward, but Antoine's effervescent joy saw nothing of that.

"*Naturellement*, but surely," he said, nodding. "It is a most important step. There is, naturally, the financial aspect. Tomorrow, *mon ami*, I will supply you with all of my statements of condition. Tonight let us sing, let us dance, let us have joy—"

We did all of those things, too, but there was something dull in it, something strained which all but Antoine could feel.

WE took Bill and Becky back to their hotel. I walked with Bill while the two lovers walked on ahead.

"Listen, Arthur," said Bill seriously, "this here is bad. The little Frenchman's all right, see? But—well, I don't want Becky marrying any Frog. We're Americans, see?"

I "saw" his point, but I didn't like it.

"What's the difference?" I asked him. "He's got an ancient name, a lot of money, and he's a splendid fellow. What's more, Becky loves him."

"I don't care if his ancestors were kings," said the ultra-American Bill, "He's a Frog. He's a damn' foreigner. Out in Wyoming we don't cotton to foreigners, Arthur. Sister's only a kid. This little Frog has turned her head. Besides, he's got a rotten rep. I hear he's been exiled. I'm not going to have him marrying my sister. They say he's a killer, too—you told me that yourself. I've got to stop this monkey-business."

How could I explain to anyone, much less a man who had changed so much since his schooldays, that Antoine was *not* a killer, not really, not deep in his heart? That he was suffering from a weird inferiority complex? That the very love between himself and Becky Brown would change all that? I tried, limpingly, but it only made things worse.

"He's a nut, then," said Bill. "Cracked. That's worse than just being bad. Hell's bells, feller, can't you see? She *can't* marry a bird like that!"

So I subsided for the night.

NEXT day the explosion came. I was not there, and I don't quite know how it happened. Apparently Antoine came pattering over, full of love and confidence, and carrying with him all manner of documents to prove that he was a wealthy man, as well as a typical French paper formula for the "dot"—that equivalent of a dowry which a wealthy Frenchman offers, in cash, to the bride's family in exchange for a similar financial concession on the part of the bride's people. There is really nothing sordid about it. It is merely custom. The French are Latins and therefore practical and recognize the importance of money as a means of insuring marital bliss against the trials of impecunity. I don't say it's an especially romantic or delicate procedure and I don't say we should adopt the practice in America, but in Europe things are done that way.

And when the sense of it finally got over to Bill Brown, he just saw red.

"Take your dirty money away, you damned little Frog!" he howled. "My sister isn't for sale. We don't need any of your slimy francs."

Perhaps he was seizing upon this as an excuse for refusing. Perhaps he was *really* as shocked as he pretended. One can never really know. At all events he snatched the document out of the astonished little Frenchman's hand and tore it up, swearing and roaring and stamping and storming.

And he called Antoine a little "runt!"

He might just as well have snatched a piece of meat from a wildcat. Antoine's hand slapped the big brown face of Bill. His slender body bounced up and down with rage. He screamed and he bleated and he swore and he spat, the picture of futile madness, a little man beside himself.

Bill needed only that. He picked the little man up like a doll and tossed him out of the window—second floor—into a garden of zinnias, while Becky screamed and called for help and wrung her hands in fear and agony.

But what followed was even worse. I imagine that tempers out in Wyoming were none too long and that habit made it a natural thing for sturdy citizens of that thinly civilized state to reach for firearms. Because that is just what Bill did. He produced a huge six-shooter—the kind you read about today in the Western magazines—and he leaned out of the window with it, yelling:

"Don't you ever come back here again, you little Frog! You can't insult anybody by the name of Brown with your dirty French money! If I ever see you around my sister again I'll make a sieve out of you, by God! I'll—"

And he started shooting.

Not to kill. Just to show what he could do. The big six-shooter roared. *Zip!* A button snapped from the Frenchman's coat. *Bang! Zip!* Another button. *Bang* again, *zip* again. And the little gamecock Antoine just stood there, defiant and utterly fearless, while the bullets whistled.

When the gun was empty, he bowed.

"Great stupid hunk of American cheese," he spat up at the window. "For this thing I will kill you."

And then, while Bill's sardonic and raucous laugh followed him, he turned neatly and walked away.

I SAW him, of course, when he came back to the hotel. He was pathetic. He was terrible. On the one hand he had been insulted and disgraced by a man whom he had remembered as his best friend, or one of them. On the other he had been rebuffed by the brother of the girl he loved. And all this talk about his money, his dot, was foreign to him. He could make nothing of it at all.

"Like a loyal gentleman," he cried at me, quivering with righteous indignation, "I come to him and ask for her hand. I present the credentials of my bank. I present the correct formula for the dot. It is the custom of my country—that is to say of France, which *was* my country. And he is insult'! Where is the insult? It is that he is mocking himself of me, *hein?* It is that he has called me a little frog, a runt, a thing unspeakable. Certainly, my Arthur, I shall kill this great oaf!"

I tried to explain but got nowhere. So I went to see Bill.

When I got there, Bill was in the bar of the hotel and he had been drinking. Anger is like that with some people; get them angry enough and they will drink,

Antoine de Pauly—"Viscount of Hell."

as if to preserve the sharp edge of their rage. There's a curious phenomenon. Bill was drinking like that, drinking and muttering to himself. He turned a reddened eye on me and growled.

"Don't you come over and give me any guff about that damned little runt, Cozens," he warned me. "I gave him whatfor—and now I'll skin him alive if he comes around here. I'm taking Becky back to God's country tomorrow. I'll get some sense into her head if I have to paddle her."

Stupid, blind, ignorant pig-headedness.

"I'm not going to mix up in your business," I told him. "But you've got yourself a duel on your hands. That little Frog, as you call him, is going to kill you."

He roared with false laughter.

"Kill me? Him? By the Lord Harry, I could crush him like a flea under my finger-nail. If he comes here I'll toss him into the frog-pond where he belongs. Kill me, huh? Don't make me laugh."

BUT we were interrupted. Two very distinguished-looking Italians—I never did find out who they were—came into the place then, and walked straight up to Bill and began jabbering. I had to translate and I finally caught on that these men were professional "seconds," supporters in a duel, for the Vicomte Antoine de Pauly. They were thrusting crisp cards at Bill. They were rattling off a long preamble of formalities. They were, in short, giving him a formal challenge in the name of their employer, to fight to the death at any time, place and with any weapons which he, the challenged one, might care to choose. So I translated.

Bill drank another glassful of brandy and roared with laughter. Perhaps it

was the liquor that made him mad enough to do what he did.

"Tell them I'll fight him! Tell them I'll use his bloody toad-stickers, swords, sabers or bayonets—anything, any time, any place. Hell's bells, if I couldn't beat that little runt—"

I tried to reason with him. I told him that Antoine was probably the greatest swordsman in Europe and that to meet him with rapiers was practically suicide. But he only laughed at me.

So the duel was arranged.

They met next morning before sunrise, in a little wooded copse behind the miniature Trocadero under the shadow of the Alps. Antoine was grim, precise, vicious and deadly as a little viper. Big Bill Brown seemed to have lost some of his rage and was beginning to see things more clearly. I imagine he was beginning to realize for the first time just what he had done. Too late, of course.

I mentioned that Bill Brown was not a bad swordsman in his schooldays. For some reason which only a devotee of fencing could understand, he had kept up his practice a little, even in the rather incongruous surroundings of an American ranch. I learned later that there was some old Spaniard, a ranch-owner who lived not too far from his own place, who fenced with him now and then. So it was not quite a case of a defenseless man against the wizardry of Antoine.

They removed their coats and fought in their shirtsleeves. Bill towered over the little Frenchman like an elm over a shrub-oak. His reach alone was tremendous. In fact the physical differences between them were so impressive that I began to have misgivings—for little Antoine, not for Bill. The American seemed like a stone wall, a tower, a thing of stone and steel, impossible to hurt with the mere straw of steel which is a rapier.

But the cry, *"En garde!"* changed all that.

If you have ever seen a mongoose worry and finally kill a great cobra twen-

ty times his size, you have an idea of the incredible handiwork of Antoine de Pauly. From the first clash of steel it was apparent that the little Frenchman could have killed Bill Brown at his leisure. He seemed to be made of rubber.

Bill had started a lunge and he could not check it suddenly. . . . "*Je meurs!*" Antoine whispered. "I die!" And he wilted to the ground.

He bounced in and out, as with electric flashes. He merely turned his wrist a trifle, avoided Bill's whirring point, tapped the big man's sword away, grinned diabolically, and turned his own thin needle into an invisible wall of steel. He made no effort at all. He was coldly calm, as though in mere practice. And a worried look came over Bill's face as the deadly point flicked a hundred times in as many seconds across openings which incredible skill had forced, and withdrew again. And all this time Antoine had never even made a complete lunge.

Suddenly he struck up Bill's blade and stepped back.

"Miserable worm of an American," he said. "So this, then is your friendship? Upon me you have laid your great hands. You have insulted my name, you have stolen my honor, you have stupidly and for no reason refused me the wife I have desired. And you have taken your great cannon which gentlemen do not employ to shoot the buttons from me. So clever, *hein?* But now I will show you a thing more clever—before I kill you here. *En garde!*"

And they were at it again.

But this time it was Antoine who was the aggressor. With his razor-like sword darting like a living thing, worming around the bewildered blade of the American as though it were drawn to it by some slithering magnetism, he lunged . . . *Tac! Tac! Tac!* And the tiny point snipped three buttons from the shirt of Bill Brown, while the witnesses stared in unbelief.

Tac, tac, tac! More buttons. Little slashes in the shirt which left tiny red stains. *Tac, tac!* A little slice of the big man's ear, a long scratch upon his neck. *Tac, tac!* A cross-mark on his chest. *Tac, tac, tac, tac!* The shirt is in ribbons. There are cuts on Bill's knees, slashes in his trousers, little drops of blood mingling with the perspiration on his face.

And the grinning face of Antoine de Pauly was devilish.

THE effect of this on Bill Brown was electric. New fire seemed to ignite in him. He began lunging with terrible thrusts, he began to lose all instinct of the rules of fencing, whipping his blade around like a lash, swiping, flailing, beating from all angles—a man frantic in the consciousness of futility. It was his only chance, of course. It is always possible that the sheer awkwardness of a man who does not follow the rules can find some instant of luck when the practiced sword is caught with the unexpected. It was the last effort of a man about to die. *"Morituri te salutamus."*

And it almost worked. The sheer strength and fury of Bill's wild attack drove the Frenchman back and changed his button-cutting and cruel toying to

grim defense. Bill's arm was longer and stronger. There was real menace there. And we, the witnesses, began to wonder.

We had not heard the *fiacre* driving hurriedly to the edge of the little park. We had not heard the running feet nor the swish of skirts.

"Stop—stop it—Tony—Bill—stop it!"

It was Becky's terrified voice and it worked a miracle.

Perfect in his control, Antoine de Pauly drew back and lowered his blade—a gesture of courtesy to the girl he sincerely and earnestly loved. But Bill had no such control. He had started a lunge with all the violence of his great body and he could not check it suddenly. He lunged, and his point, meeting no parrying blade, caught Antoine full in the breast and appeared, twinkling with red, in the small of the Frenchman's back.

Becky screamed.

Antoine's eyes grew large and round and full of pain.

"*Je meurs!*" he whispered. "I die!" And he slowly wilted to the ground.

IT was the great arms of Bill Brown that snatched him up, and it was Bill's great hand that pulled the sword from the wound. There was confusion. Becky Brown was screaming and wailing. The two Italian seconds were shouting and gesticulating. The hired medico, an expert at such occasions, I learned later, followed Bill to a waiting carriage with the limp body of Antoine de Pauly. Becky Brown had fainted and it was my lot to carry her.

That was a tragic ride, and I'll never forget it. We managed to get Antoine to the hotel and up into our rooms. The doctor worked over him and Bill stayed in the room with them, shutting the door in our faces. There was half an hour of absolutely silent anguish while we waited for them to come out, but when they did, they were smiling.

"Thank God," said Bill. "Thank God, Arthur, he'll live! I was crazy. I was mad. I didn't know what I was doing. Hell, if I'd have killed that little guy I'd never forgive myself—never—"

But the De Paulys are a hardy race and hard to kill. That same afternoon, while we all waited in the living-room of our suite, still in the agony of suspense, we heard Antoine's voice weakly calling. We all went in, Becky, Bill and I, and the little Frenchman was sitting up in his bed, tightly bandaged and pale, but with a queer half-smile upon his lips.

"Antoine—" Bill began. "For God sake, I didn't mean—"

But the little vicomte held up his hand.

"One knows well that you did not intend to strike when I had withdrawn, my big Bill. There is no more to be said of this thing now. It is forgotten. But I shall recover presently and there must be another meeting. This time, my friend, it is to be with the pistols, *hein?* That is what you call it, the fair play, *hein?*"

Bill stared.

"You mean you still want to fight me? And use pistols?"

"But certainly. We are both living, are we not? There is still the matter of your insulting language . . . the little runt of a Frog, *hein?*"

Bill reached over to the bed and took the little man in his arms.

"Listen, you little runt," he said, and he was laughing. "I don't want to fight you. I apologize. I take it all back. Maybe you're a little runt, but you're a great little guy—and if Becky wants to marry you, by God, I'll be proud to have you for a brother. But don't talk about dowry. We're Americans. We don't go in for that. Money's one thing and love is another, and they don't mix out where we come from. Now shake my hand and tell me you forget I called you a little runt—you grand little runt!"

And that night it was a very happy little Frenchman who said to me:

"Arthur, my friend, you have heard of the Viscount of Hell? Well, he is dead. I think you can understand, *hein?*"

WHO can tell what their future would have been? Would the evil *Mr. Hyde* in Antoine have remained dead throughout his life, and the good *Dr. Jekyll* lived happily forever after with Becky Brown? Who knows? For the war came then, and answered the question in its own fashion.

Becky had gone home to America, and Bill with her. Antoine remained to complete his convalescence and arrange his affairs. He was to have followed them for the wedding in the fall. And then came—the duel of the nations, and a challenge which the fiery little Gaul could not ignore.

Exiled from France, he was not eligible for service under his own colors; nor was he tall enough to enlist actively in any foreign service. But he managed, somehow, to work into intelligence-liaison work with the British, and had become personal interpreter to General

Craig-Marsters. This much I learned from a letter Becky wrote me. The final chapter I heard in detail only years afterward from an English officer who happened to have been present.

THAT January night (said my English friend) was a bad one in my sector, and especially for me. I got myself caught in the British H. Q. dugout just after a German raid when the Heinies were pouring metal onto us and I could not get through to Daguerre-Machen's division with the plans and orders that able general was waiting for. So I sat there, and listened, as did the rest of us in that dimly lighted, smelly hell-hole. Suddenly there was a lull in the pounding of shells and just as suddenly the wooden door of the dugout burst open and a little man tumbled in. He was in a British lieutenant's uniform, but anyone could tell that he was French. He rushed up to Colonel Wrentrue, who commanded the sector, and delivered some kind of a message. Whatever it was, it set the good Colonel into a rage.

"Blast their bloody hides!" he roared. "Where in hell are their observations? Can't they see we're in a trap here? I can't send these men over in the face of that damned gun-nest right in front of us! The Boches have three guns in a cement pill-box on top of that little church, and they've been mowing us down daily like stalks of wheat. I've told them back there to blow them out before we push over. Dammit, De Pauly, you go back and tell them again! There's still time."

Then in an aside to the other officers:

"It would be our luck to have a little rat of a Frenchman handling liaison just now. Not an ounce of guts in the whole army of them, I say. And a midget, too."

Antoine sprang to his feet.

"Mon colonel," he snapped. "That was an insult!"

"Ha!" laughed the Colonel sourly.

"An insult, monsieur, which, I regret, I cannot return. At any other time, monsieur, I would immediately kill you for that. At the moment it is impossible."

"I'll report that in my journal, little man," said the Colonel. "Are you or are you not going to send my message through? Forget personalities, man, and get going. Or I'll have a volunteer take your place, if you're afraid."

"Afraid?" Just the one word. Then:

"It is your request, monsieur, that our batteries be directed against the church of Bois-le-Roi? There is a gun-nest there? *N'est-ce pas?"*

"Yes—*pas!"* said the Colonel sneeringly. "Get going."

There was a rage in the little Frenchman's face that was fantastic.

"Non, mon colonel, I shall not carry that message. There is no need," he said, and he walked straight to the opening of the dugout.

"Damned little rat!" said the colonel. "I'll have his hide for this, when I can make a report."

But he never did.

LATER, we learned what happened. The little Frenchman walked down the trenches and got an armful of Mills bombs. He said nothing to anyone. He merely slipped over the top and out into the darkness. Only one man saw him go—a private—and because he wore an officer's uniform, the man did nothing to stop him. But fifteen minutes later there was a sputtering and a series of explosions where the gloomy shape of the old church loomed up. The machine-guns chattered, then stopped. And our drive came two hours later, with no trouble at all from the gun-nests. When they raided the church, they found Antoine sitting up and smiling a little. He was wounded in ten places; how he clung to life is a miracle. But he sat there with a long German bayonet in his hand. Around him lay the bodies of six Germans, half blown to bits from the Mills bombs, and a single German lieutenant with a bayonet-wound through his chest.

Antoine, when he was picked up, asked to be taken to Colonel Wrentrue.

"The little men of France, Monsieur le Colonel," he said, "are not all rats nor cowards. It is that you are mistaken. . . . I am glad that I have remembered that what is spoken in anger is a kind of insanity, *mon colonel.* I forgive you your insulting words. *Vive la France!"*

And then he died. . . .

And Becky? A year or so after the war she married an English officer—the man who told us about Antoine's death. You see, a letter of hers was found among his effects; and when the war was over, the Briton felt in duty bound to look her up and tell her how Antoine died. . . . Queer how things work out, isn't it?

A short novel by Fulton Grant is scheduled for publication in our next issue. Don't miss it.

The Pearls of

The distinguished author of "Vaiti of the Islands," "The Flaming Sword" and other noted stories of the South Seas here gives us another colorful romance of the strange far islands she has made her own.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

THE young sea-captain asked: "What's the very first thing you remember?" It was one of his beginnings with girls, after he'd got to know a bit about them. It got them talking, saved time—and time was always short. It was very short, now. The schooner's cargo had been landed, her one passenger put ashore. The tide would serve tomorrow about dawn—and he'd only had two days. The worst of it was that this girl, companion-maid to the Magistrate's wife, this Easter, with the moonlight blue eyes, and berry-brown hair, wasn't like other girls. She was dainty, reserved, sweet—as sweet an armful, indeed, as any young master mariner could wish to clip in arms as strong as a sea-bear's. Empty arms—because after all, you couldn't rush Easter.

So, since he had nothing better to do, he began with one of his formulas, there on the coral beach, with the trade-wind singing, calling. It had called him in his cradle, almost. It would keep calling him till he died, that wind that gave so little, took so much. . . .

Brown wives, if any, for the slaves of the island winds. Palm huts instead of real houses; how could a man afford to marry and settle, on a salary that hardly paid his clothes? There was little money in trading nowadays, and captains of trading-ships were poorer than clerks ashore.

And girls like Easter—one couldn't have them, one couldn't leave them; yet one must. Life was hard, for sailor-men.

She was answering him; he didn't listen, as a rule, to the talk of girls; he let his eyes do the work for him, and followed his own thoughts—but this reply snatched his attention.

She said: "The first thing I remember is the sound of pearls scooped up in a brass shovel, such as they used to have in banks, and tumbling with a noise like hail into a big glass pickle-jar. That was when I was four, the year before Father was lost at sea, with his ketch; Father used to come home to Thursday Island after one of his voyages that he'd never tell anyone about, and call for me at the convent where they kept me, and take me to the big store; and then he would open up a chamois-leather bag as big as a loaf of bread, and the storekeeper would scoop up the pearls that were in it with his shovel, and run them into the pickle-jars. That's the first I remember."

IT takes a good deal to surprise an island captain; but Archer Kingdon, listening, said: "Good gosh!" All sorts of wild ideas went racing through his brain, in the minute before Easter spoke again. Pearls—heiresses—ships of one's own; houses ashore with wide verandas, and walls built of good imported pine. . . . But hold on, belay there! Heiresses didn't work for prim, tiresome wives of island magistrates. He knew about heiresses; he had been Third on an ocean liner. They got up at four bells and scolded the stewardess; they had their lounges carried all over the decks; they danced and played games, and were plainish and bossy; the Captain had to have them at his table, though he hated it.

Easter—Easter was as lovely as an island lily; she didn't lie about on lounges and scold people; she didn't boss anyone, but was bossed herself. She was no heiress; she hadn't the symptoms.

The girl was going on: "And then Father used to give me lollies from the

Benbow

Illustrated by Hanson Booth

They were not pebbles; they were pearls. "But they can't be!" Easter said aloud, as she held them up to the clear moon.

boxes in the store, and the storekeeper gave him—"

"Money?"

"No." She looked puzzled. "Papers with stamps on them."

"Ah," said the young captain significantly. He knew about those papers. He had had reason to wish he didn't.

"Your mother?" he asked presently.

"She died before I remember. Father's name was John Moon."

"Then," he said admiringly, "you're Easter Moon—I never heard a lovelier name. Pity if a fellow had to go and spoil it for you, eh?" She shied away from that; he had known she would; she was the shying-away kind—best kind, he thought. And he thought, too, that if he'd had a few more days, she wouldn't have shied—much. And he'd have liked, dearly, to spoil that lovely name of hers for her, if he'd had time, and chance, and —oh, money, money! Easter Kingdon—not so bad. But it would be Easter Moon for him to remember her by; just that.

"Your father," he said aloud, "must have been a poet."

"Maybe he was. They say poets all die poor."

"Did he never tell anyone where he got the pearls?"

The berry-brown curls were shaken. "He said he meant to make me rich some day if it hadn't been for swabs and skunks ashore. But when he was lost, I had nothing to live on; I was five years old then, and the nuns took me into the school. They were very kind; and when I was eighteen, this year, they said I was old enough to earn my living, and Mrs. Judd offered me this place, and they knew about her and said I ought to take it. But it's a long way from everywhere, and there's only the Judds and me."

"Too right it is," a hoarse voice broke in. Dutton, the passenger, was standing within a few yards. The wind blew hard; how long had he been listening, there in the lee of the gray palm-trunks beside Kingdon and the girl? Well, thought Kingdon, he's heard nothing to write home about.

DUTTON went on—he was a gross, grizzled figure of a man, with a huge belly, scarcely restrained by a perilous belt: "Cripes," he said, "it's a hell of an island; I dunno how I can put in three days waiting for that other boat. Not a sign of a pub from end to end, and the natives as prim and prissy as so many old maids' pet cats. Poor place for trade, and as for recruiting—"

Kingdon told him coolly: "You won't get boys for the nickel mines here, even if they wanted to go. Benbow is under a protectorate now, and the good lady Miss Moon works for, and her husband, are attending to the 'effective occupation' business. Benbow is on the trans-Pacific air routes, I understand, or may be."

"Never seen such a place," Dutton went on, unheeding. "Notices up everywhere; strictly forbidden to smoke, and

strictly forbidden to throw rubbish into the 'arbor, which is no sort of an 'arbor anyhow; and strictly forbidden to dance or sing after nine o'clock at night—why, you can't even spit without running up again' one of them notices."

Easter turned on him like an angry kitten. "They're the kindest people in the world—Mr. and Mrs. Judd; and if they are a little strict, it's because they don't want to see the people of this place die out as they've done in other islands. They're only looking after their health!"

Dutton said, hunching away with his head over-shoulder: "And who may you be, to be giving out your chat? When your dad used to drop in here in the old days for wooding and watering, I lay he had a kiss or two and a sup of palm toddy before he sailed again."

"Did you know him?"

"Knew of him; I know Thursday Island. They said he had his pearling-grounds somewhere out west of this, and he used to call here for wood and water for the trip home again. But hell, there's no pearl oysters in this part of the seas; it must have been a yarn. Wherever he got them, you never heard, hey?" The ugly, grizzled face was grinning at her unpleasantly.

"I don't know anything; I never did," Easter declared. She had made the declaration often enough to grow very weary of it.

Dutton turned his head away and began tramping off through the deep sand. "It would be worth a cut throat or two if anyone did," she heard him mumble, half to himself.

FOR a moment or two, after he had gone, there was silence. The steady trade-wind sang in the trees. There were whitecaps beyond the bar. The sea, where the southeast took it, was cruelly blue; a flaming color that made the gentle greens and ivories of the land seem faded, dull; too quiet, they looked, too safe, beside those tossing plains where salt blew strong on the lips, and danger called.

Easter Moon, gypsy's daughter, looked at the sea, and drew a sighing breath. The sailor said, with his arm about her waist: "You'd go out there?"

"Oh, yes," she answered him, hardly breathing. There was no one to see the kiss that followed close upon her words—a long kiss, changing the world. They fell apart; it seemed as if the sun must have sunk away down the sky, since hot lips met hot lips—but there it stood unmoved, on the same frond of the same tall palm above.

Kingdon swore a sailor's oath between his teeth. "I can't help it," he said. "To think I'll have to sail and leave you here—and scrape for pennies to make a home—and maybe it'll be years!" In his heart the shining dream of Easter's wealth died hard. It was not that he loved the girl one kiss or one hand-press the less for being poor like himself; but how easily that inheritance, if she had only had it, would have swept away the time of waiting!

"I wish you hadn't to live with those Judd people," he complained. "Like being in prison: fussy and faddy all the time, I reckon, and no freedom for anyone. Dutton's right that far; there's no sense in treating your natives like pet cats."

"Oh, they mean well," she said dispiritedly. "They were both school-teachers before they came here, and it's the habit of their minds."

THE Captain and the girl were walking together toward one of the few small native villages that made up the population of Benbow—a barren coral island, surrounded by sunken reefs; left unknown and unvisited for half a century, till the great nations began to snatch at small Pacific gains; Benbow, with no attraction for trader or recruiter, rich only in its beauty and its peace.

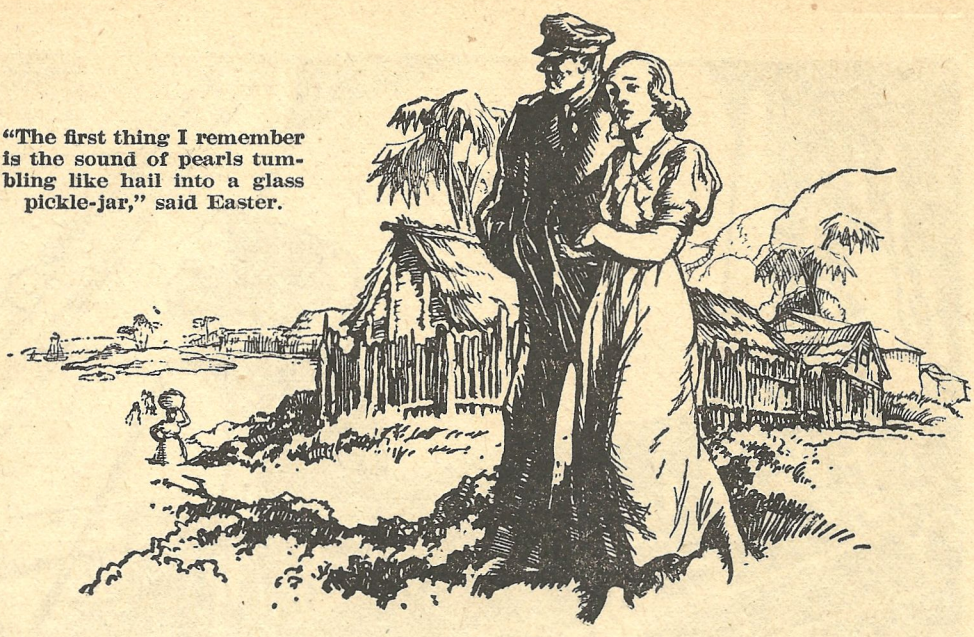
Easter, little heeding the loveliness of the island, saw all its brightness dimmed by rising tears. But she kept them back, and went on talking about Mrs. Judd.

"I verily believe," she said, "that she sees the whole world as her pupils—still."

"I know the kind," Kingdon assented. Mail steamers had not been free of Mrs. Judds.

He could observe, as they walked on, proofs here and there of the good woman's persistent attempts to reform the Benbow natives. As Dutton had truly said, there were "forbid" notices freely scattered about the beach. One or two dusky women, carrying palm baskets, passed by him and began to wade toward a small islet out in the lagoon. "That's a food island," Easter explained. "They like to eat the shellfish they catch out there, because they can do as they please." She indicated one of the painted notices—*"It is strictly forbidden to consume shellfish on Benbow Island."*

"What's the idea of that?"



"The first thing I remember is the sound of pearls tumbling like hail into a glass pickle-jar," said Easter.

"They are inclined to be sickly, and when they eat shellfish, they always spit, so she tries to keep the island safe."

"Old trout," was Kingdon's comment. "I wonder they mind her."

"They're a dying race, anyhow. Benbow once had far more. They are quiet creatures, who'd do anything anybody told them."

The Captain was not interested. Out at sea, in the roadstead, the schooner strained at her moorings. It would be a brave wind tomorrow, when he had to go. Good-by, good-by. . . . A sailor's life. It was harder than ever this time, but he'd get over it.

If only old Moon had left his girl, before he died, some knowledge of the secret that would have laid a path of gold before the feet of Easter and the man whom she might love—

What was the use? He hadn't.

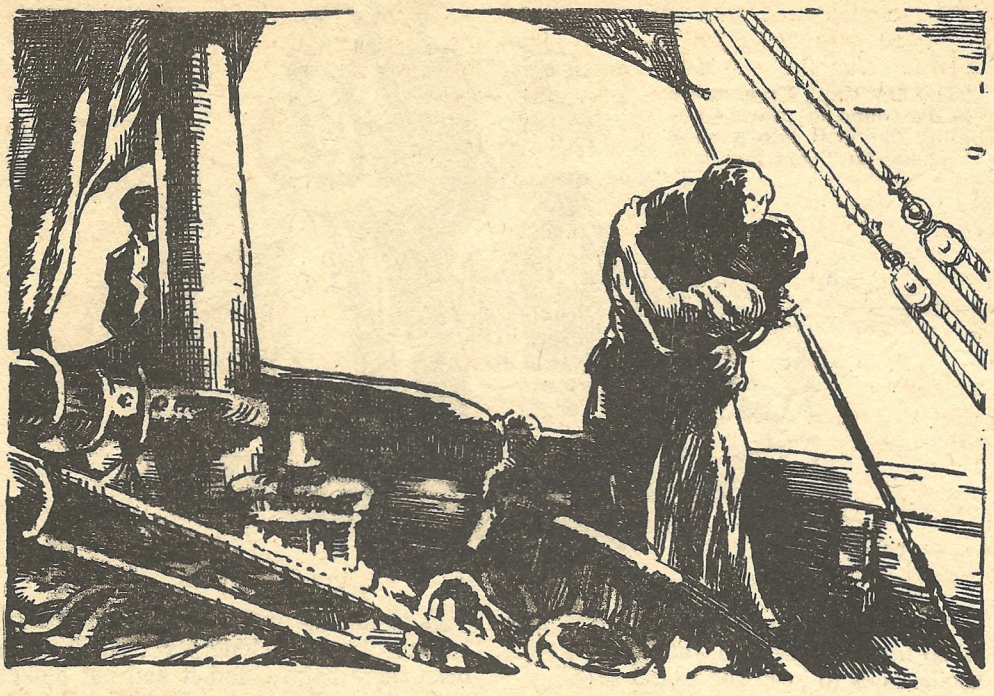
Easter kept from crying when they parted. But that night, lying in her little room with its matchboard walls, she was seized by a wild desire to cry. In the island world, there is no privacy to be found for grief. Houses are mere shells; partition walls, for the sake of coolness, stop far short of roofs. Easter couldn't cry in the Judd official residence; she couldn't run outside and cry on the beach, because it was full moonlight and she would certainly be seen—and heard. "If I do not cry, I'll die, I'll die!" she told herself, as every girl, in the heart of one black night, has said. . . .

She rose from her bed; she put on slippers and dress, and crazy with sorrow, ran out. Kilting up her dress, she walked almost waist deep, to the food island. It was a long way; she'd never been there before, and it had not looked so far from the beach. But here she was at last, and the moon shone down on a tangle of low bush where she could conceal herself, and she was reasonably sure that no one ashore could hear her breaking her heart. Throwing herself prone, she lay weeping.

IT was a good while before she sat up, resting her hands upon the chilly sand. She felt better. It might be possible to go on living, even after those sails, now stowed upon the yards, had spread like butterfly wings and fleeted away. It might be possible, by and by, to go back to bed. She worked her fingers restlessly in the sand. Small pebbles rolled beneath her palms. Idly she closed her fingers over a few of them, opened her hand, let the pebbles fall. They shone like drops of milky dew. . . . They were not pebbles. They were pearls.

"But they can't be!" Easter said aloud. She was of Thursday Island; she knew well the great *Margaritifera* shell, big as a dinner-plate almost, that was the home of pearls. There were no such shells on Benbow.

She gathered a few of the beady pebbles together, and held them up to the clear moon. Some of them were dull, weathered, spoiled. A few were perfect, like drops shed from the very moon herself, Easter was convinced. The lust of the treasure-seeker fell on her; in the moon-dusk, she scrambled and scraped all over the islet, like a female turtle



She half leaped, half was dragged, aboard. The mate saw him kiss her.

making a nest for its eggs. At last she sat up, her lap full of pearls, good, bad, indifferent; some that had been scorched in fires, some that had been left beneath the sun so long that they were "dead," like weathered shells; many as pure, as perfect, as nothing else can be on earth but pearls.

She had a handkerchief; it was soaked through, now, with her freely shed tears. "But a little more salt water won't harm them," Easter thought, and tied her treasure into a ball, with the help of a ribbon from her dress. There were shells lying about—common little oysters—not pearl shell as she knew it; native foodstuff only, they did not interest her. She nursed her precious bundle, and allowed herself to dream.

The power that lay hidden in those tiny, glowing beads! They could buy jewels, furs, dresses, horses, cars. They could buy ships, build houses on beautiful islands where steamers called, and where there were Governments, and gay doings. They could wipe away tears, and they could set wedding-marches to playing. They could—

There she paused, crouching low on the night-cooled sand. They could do more, these grains of magic; more and—worse. She had not lived her days until of late, in Thursday, that metropolis of pearling, without knowledge of the lightnings that struck, the storms that broke, about those foci of trouble, pearls. If Dutton, who had talked of her father, and hinted at cutting throats, came to know—

She didn't understand everything, but she was sure, at least, that she had chanced upon John Moon's old haunt, the mysterious island to which he used to travel, with his ketch and his crew of black Australian boys, who couldn't speak English, and who had died with him. Here, she was certain, he had gathered the pearls that used to roll, rattling, from the brass bank-shovel into the pickle-jar. And here the trader Dutton, if he only guessed what had happened, would cut her throat and throw her into deep sea outside the reef, as lightly as he would have slain a bleating lamb. And—he was walking now upon the beach of Benbow! She could see him there; the moon was down, and day fast coming. He had emerged from some native hut where he had spent the night, and standing on the coral sand, staring straight at the islet. Without doubt he had seen her.

TALES of Thursday Island, little thought about lately, presented themselves to her, vivid as the pictures on Mrs. Judd's drawing-room wall, but far other in subject than those mild views of mountains, of flowers and streams.

Men had died, had been disemboweled, or drowned, throat-cut, on Thursday, for half the value that she held now on her lap. There had been men on Thursday like Dutton; she knew his kind—knew that if she landed with that treasure, he would never rest till the treasure itself, and her knowledge of it alike, were his beyond question. She couldn't conceal her bundle in her thin silk frock. She couldn't hide it on the islet, now that day was coming, and every movement of hers clear to be seen. And Dutton, after that long look of curiosity, had turned away and was making for the inlet—where, she knew, the Judds' small dinghy lay in its boathouse of coconut leaves.

HARES are timid creatures; but even a hare, born to be slain and hunted, will be brave when it loves. Love armed the frightened Easter, made her, in that moment, brave and knowing.

"I sha'n't go back to Benbow," she told herself. "I shall take this canoe that's lying on the beach, and go to the ship, quick, quick—before she sails!"

There was barely time for that. Already she could hear the clank of anchor-chains being raised; catch the deep tones of Kingdon's voice, as he called his orders from the poop. She could see the sails being loosed, beginning to catch the wind —God keep the ship!

It may have been Divine intervention; but it was also the sound of her paddle frantically beating the water, that caused the Captain to turn his head, and for a moment, wonder if his eyes, good sailor's eyes, were playing him false for the first time in his life. Then, being a quick thinker, he called to the crew, took the wheel himself; and as the schooner gathered way, steered lightly toward the struggling canoe, which was making no good fight among the breakers. . . .

He didn't ask her anything. (And that, she thought, long after, was what no other man would have done; but Archer Kingdon was just—Archer Kingdon.) He snapped an order to the mate, left the wheel, and came to the ship's side, leaning far over. The schooner was low in the seas. He said, "Catch—jump!" And with her precious ball tied around her neck, she caught his hands, and half leaped, half was dragged, aboard.

The mate, the bosun, saw him kiss her.

"That's the cabin," he said, "I'll be with you directly."

She sat on the cushioned locker, while the schooner, gathering way, leaned far to leeward, leaving Benbow behind. On the beach the trader Dutton stood frozen "like a pillar of salt," as mission-trained Easter told herself. "And fire and brimstone wouldn't be too good for the like of you," she added, breathing hard.

The blue-and-white port curtains were swaying in the breeze. The companion darkened. Kingdon was coming down.

He sat beside her, took her cold hands in his and said: "What's it about—whose neck have I got to break for you?"

"Oh, nobody's," she said, "because I got here in time. But I must tell you—"

And she told. "I don't understand," she finished. "There's no real pearl-shell about the place, but Father must have got his stones there."

On Thursday, pearls are "stones."

Kingdon knew that her assertion about the pearl-shell was correct; but, it seemed, he also knew a good deal more. "I've been to New Guinea," he told her, still chafing her little, cold, frightened hands. "Did you ever see lapilapi?"

"Never. What is it?"

"Very little in the seas. New Guinea's one of the places. Shell like common little oysters, in shallow water, where the nigs can pick it out and eat the fish—and spit—and spit the pearls out when they get them. Pearls aren't good to eat, you see. The nigs of New Guinea learned long ago what they were worth, but the first pearlers who went to the Trobriands there got a proper haul, though lots had been spoiled, throwing them into fires and leaving them about. Regular Tom Tiddler's ground it was, for a while. And there's where I reckon your Benbow is—and was."

"IT seems to me," Easter mused, "we owe a lot to Mrs. Judd—after all."

The Captain said, "I'd like to go back, if it only was to get that Strictly Forbidden notice, and tack it up on the walls of our blessed home."

Easter made no reply, but her flush answered for her.

She had untied the bundle of pearls. Kingdon asked, with his arm now very tight about her waist, "What are you pulling away for? We're going to be married next port!"

Easter said—"I want a large spoon. And a pickle-jar. I want to hear that sound again!"

Another picturesque story of the South Seas by this favorite writer who has long made her home in the Antipodes, will appear in an early issue.

The Prisoner of

By

GORDON KEYNE

FOR days, Cotterel had been irritable, excitable, given to flying off at strange tangents. A felon condemned to spend the rest of his life behind the bars cannot, perhaps, be expected to maintain a stoic calm; and yet Cotterel's actions worried his cell-mate deeply.

Old Manning, who shared his cell and his life in prison, was a shrewd observer and a very real friend. In the months since Cotterel had come here, a mutual affection had sprung up between them. Repeatedly, Manning had interposed his own knowledge and skill and sage wisdom, to save the younger man from beating himself against the bars, literally and figuratively. And now he saw breakers ahead, unless Cotterel could be brought to see some reason.

"The trouble with you is that you can't forget you were unjustly condemned," he said, as they sat in the cell together, and Cotterel glowered. "You lack poise."

"Poise be damned!" Cotterel spoke aloud.

Manning, who could not speak aloud, who could not utter a sound, smiled gently at him and went on:

"A lifer, and innocent; that's what burns. Well, forget it, Cotterel! You're still dreaming of escape. What chance have you, in your present frame of mind? None. If you're really bent on escape, I'll help you; but not until you—"

"You'll help me? You mean that?" Cotterel was electrified. He leaned forward, a wild light in his eyes. "Manning, you mean it?"

"Of course," said the nimble fingers of the man who could not speak, the older man whose vocal cords were paralyzed. At the gesture of those fingers, Cotterel drew a deep breath and sat back, staring.

"But," pursued Manning, "not in your present frame of mind. You should take a lesson from Vidocq."

"Who in hell's Vidocq?" snapped Cotterel testily.

Manning smiled. He was no hardened gun-swift criminal, but an artist who had forged the best imitation of government engraving yet seen. He knew everything; particularly, he had made a study of prisons and escapes. Cotterel, ignoring his own question, leaned forward with swiftly flying fingers; in these months of prison, he had learned the knack of it, though Manning was not deaf at all.

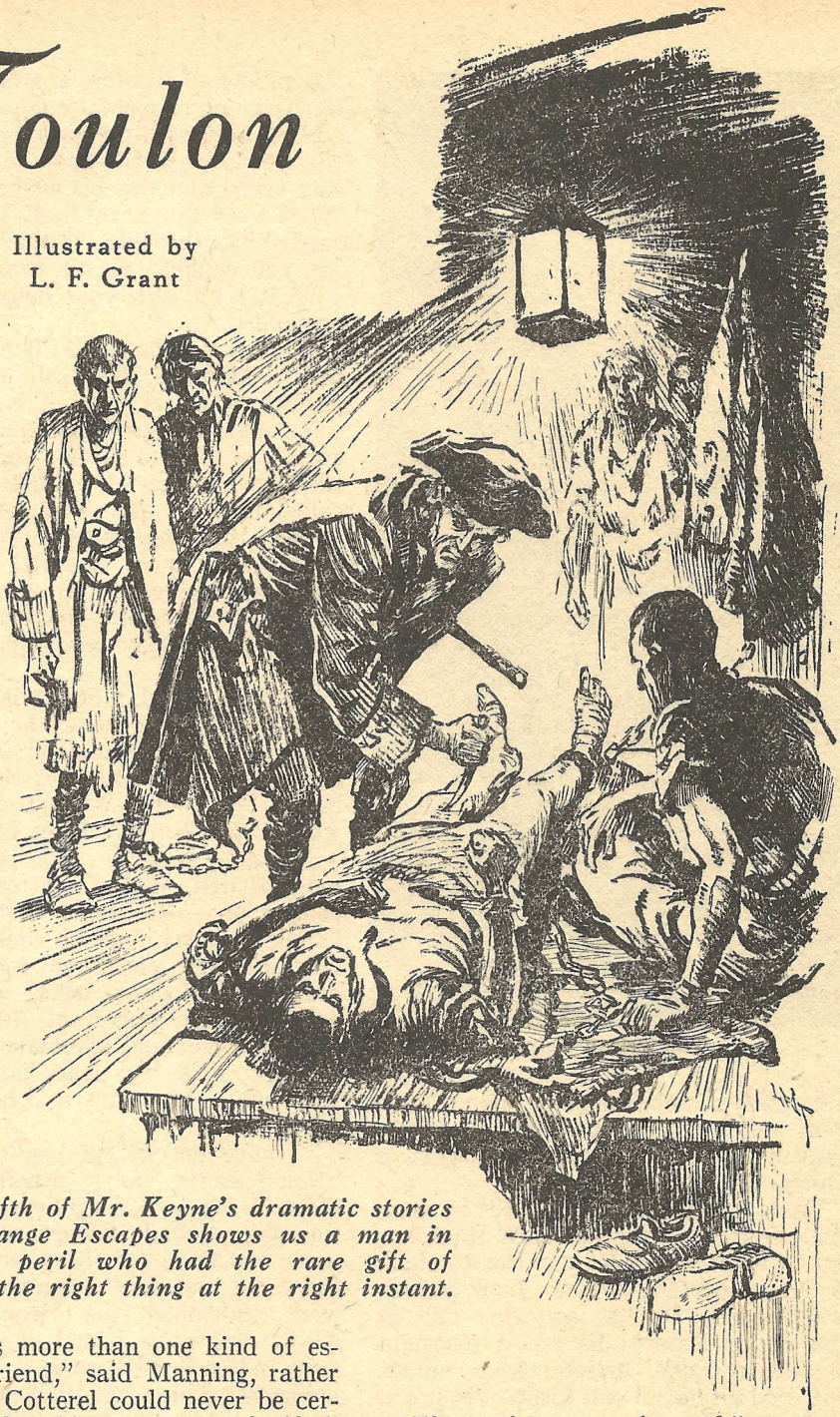
"You're in earnest? You'll really help me to escape?" he demanded again.

Manning assented: "Yes."

"Then it's as good as done!" Cotterel exulted, only to frown afresh. "And all this while, you've warned me against escape, you've stopped me from any break—"

Toulon

Illustrated by
L. F. Grant



This fifth of Mr. Keyne's dramatic stories of Strange Escapes shows us a man in deadly peril who had the rare gift of doing the right thing at the right instant.

"There is more than one kind of escape, my friend," said Manning, rather obscurely. Cotterel could never be certain just what his utterances signified. "Remember, I'll help you only on the one condition: that you get yourself, your brain, in shape. It'll take time. The peculiar thing about Vidocq was that he never lost his head. He was always, in the most acute crises, cool and well-poised and alert. This quality caused him to escape repeatedly from the worst prisons in France."

"France!" repeated Cotterel. . . . "Who was this fellow Vidocq?"

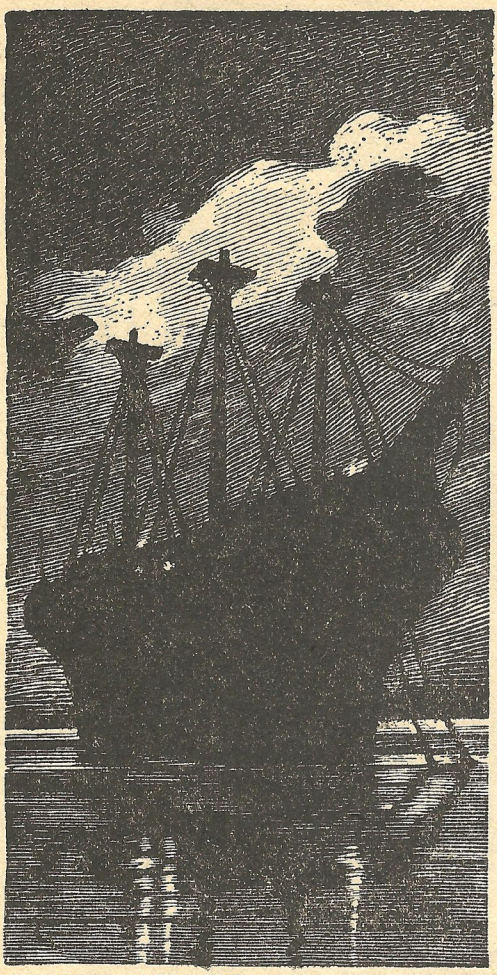
"The perfect type of rascal."

"Huh! When did he live?"

"A hundred years ago and more, much more."

"Why the devil," exclaimed Cotterel petulantly, "do your yarns nearly always go back so far?"

"For the best reason in the world," Manning rejoined. "It was a period of upheaval, of chaos. It is at such times that men do the most unusual, the most heroic, the most startling actions. They



The Prison Ship.

fling aside all inhibitions of law and custom, and become superhuman. Scoundrels become great men, like Barras or Talleyrand.

"It is a peculiar thing, too," he went on reflectively, "that at such times the most important things are lost to sight, the less important emerge. Look at General Menou: He lost an army and an empire for France; he was a renegade, became a Turk, maintained a harem, and died disgraced and futile. Yet it was to Menou that France owes her present tri-color, a fact quite unknown today!"

Cotterel made an impatient gesture.

"I'm not interested in all that balderdash. . . . Forgive me, old chap," he added contritely, "but I'm in no mood for it, that's all. I've no patience—"

"No poise, exactly as I said." And Manning smiled again. "You see? You must become like Vidocq; that is indispensable. When he made his escape from the most dreaded prison in France, the galleys of Toulon, it was by a perfect triumph of mental equipoise; it was a blend of careful preparation and actual wit, yes; but in the end the only thing that saved him was his cool shrewdness. When everything was lost, this quality carried him through. Without this quality, you couldn't escape from here."

"Not even with your help?" Cotterel demanded.

"Unless you have it, I'll not give my help!" Manning shook his head. "The perfect escape is rare; it is, nearly always, due to this supreme quality, which enables a man to do the right thing at the right instant—no matter what he is called upon to do. The more you examine this statement, Cotterel, the broader and more essential it appears. The right thing at the right time, remember—no matter what it is! Really, it's a tremendously comprehensive statement."

Cotterel smiled, a little wistfully. "I'm no great shucks, I guess," he said. "But I'll do my best, Manning; that much I can promise. I don't get this essential quality of yours; I don't quite savvy what it is. Haven't I got brains?"

Manning relaxed. He had what he most desired, now—the attention of his companion. He knew that he could handle Cotterel, once he could get those inflamed and congested lobes of the brain eased—those lobes which dealt only with the horror of life imprisonment. If he could stimulate other lobes to work, as he had done, half the battle was won. And now to keep them at work.

"You've got everything," he replied. "You'll savvy better when you hear about Vidocq and the galleys. Slavery in the galleys had disappeared, but the name remained for the prison to which the worst and most dangerous criminals were condemned—the prison of Toulon, a sort of Devil's Island of that period, only indescribably worse. Vidocq was no heroic figure, comprehend. He was a rogue, an arrant rogue—"

He broke off and sat for a moment or two in reflection, as though seeking words in which to describe his man; then his slender old fingers began again.

VIDOCQ, truly, was no heroic figure. He was just the opposite—so unimpressive, so ordinary and undistinguished in any way, as quite to escape observation. He was the perfect type of person whom you look at in the street

and fail to see. And in this fact lay his adeptness at all sorts of rascality.

For, behind this exterior, his brain was quick and cold and sharp as a dagger. Like one of those Corsican daggers, tapering from all sides to a needle-point, whose penetrating power is incredible, until experienced.

DOUBLE irons were riveted to Vidocq, by wrist and ankle. With the other "desperate" characters, he lay aboard a floating hulk off the arsenal, which had replaced the galleys of other days. None of this gang was ever sent to work, lest some opportunity for escape be found at the harbor; all were chained day and night to their places, with bare planks for beds, consumed by vermin, and exhausted by the brutal treatment of the prison guards, who delighted in tormenting them.

They were allowed no exercise whatever. Their food was a bare sufficiency to keep a man alive. Aged from fourteen to sixty,—Vidocq was twenty-four, —they were a group of the most hardened murderers and brutes imaginable, given over to the most vicious conversation and acts the human form could compass.

In this hell, Vidocq was placed for life —and by grim irony, for a crime of which he happened to be innocent. However, repeated escapes, and attempts to escape, had made him a marked man.

The convicts were chained in pairs. Vidocq's companion in misery was one Jossas, a merry and genial philosopher, who had posed as a marquis and made friends everywhere, chiefly among the ladies. Jossas was no novice at prison life, or escapes either. He gave Vidocq the best of advice and help.

"Never be in a hurry," he would say complacently. "If you make a break and fail, you get an extra three years; or a lifer like you gets beaten to a jelly by the sticks of the guards. It doesn't pay. Me, I am resigned to destiny; I shall remain here one year, then walk out. My plans are made, and require only patience."

Jossas was a wizard with locks, keys, handcuffs. If sliding out of his irons would have done him the least good, he could have been free an hour after they were riveted on.

"If your plans are made," said Vidocq, "mine are not; so lend me a hand. My chief trouble is the leg-irons, which are riveted on for good."

Jossas grinned. "Lend you a hand? Why not? If you escape, or even make a good try, while I stay here, it'll suit my own plans excellently. I'll answer for your irons, if you can figure out the rest. It'll take time, however. I have false rivets, each in two parts which screw together, hidden away. . . . Where? None of your business. They'll not be found, since they've already escaped search. They were supplied to me before I got here, by a friend. I'll give you a couple, if you'll send me back two hundred francs after you make good your escape."

"Done," Vidocq said promptly. "But how shall I get rid of my present rivets? —which are not false, I assure you!"

"Leave that to me; it'll take six weeks of work at night, but I can do it."

Vidocq had already made his own plans, but he was not doing any talking about them, even to Jossas. . . .

A month passed, and two months. By means of a tiny file, no larger than a toothpick, passed to Jossas from outside, the rivets in Vidocq's permanent leg-irons were removed and replaced by false rivets. This little operation required a full six weeks of patient and minute labor, at odd times of the night.

To obtain such a file was not extra difficult. There were plenty of people, even among the guards, willing to furnish such articles, at a price—and later squeal on the unhappy convict. There were others who would not squeal. Vidocq, learning all these things by degrees, made his own contacts.

THE one alleviation of his miserable lot, was that the inmates were kept shaven. This was not for cleanliness, but to further recapture if any escaped. Further, all Toulon knew that a standing reward of fifty francs was offered for any information leading to the recapture of an escaped convict. All this lay at the outer end of the chain—after the escape was made.

Along the inner end, Vidocq perceived the utter impossibility of escaping from this hulk itself. If he could get himself released from the double irons and have his arms free, if he could get sent to daily labor among the less suspect convicts, then he would have a real chance for a break. He figured out exactly what that real chance would be, how it might be turned to advantage; then he put his mind on the problem of getting assigned to a labor gang.

Three months had passed; and Vidocq, even in the eyes of Father Mathieu, had proved himself an ideal prisoner.

Father Mathieu was an old, viciously cruel guard, in immediate charge of the group surrounding Vidocq. Despite age, he was one of those squarely hewn men who never wear out, his face wrinkled and hideous, snuff always on his lapel, cudgel always under his arm, ready to beat the nearest convict at the first excuse. He knew by heart every trick of a convict; he was said to read their very thoughts; and perhaps there was some truth in this saying.

"You are almost as low as pigs," he said to his charges one day. "Not quite, but almost. You are enemies of society. A pig is the most inveterate enemy of mankind. Just a little more, my honest fellows, and you would be in the class of pigs."

A pig, the enemy of mankind? That was absurd. Father Mathieu chuckled gleefully; he liked to propound odd queries, start an argument, then take it as an excuse for a beating all around. This time, however, he had a surprise, for Vidocq spoke up in agreement.

"Father Mathieu speaks the exact truth, boys. Anyone raised in the country knows that if a baby falls into a pigpen, the pigs will eat it. That proves the inborn and instinctive hatred of pigs for humanity in general."

Father Mathieu was so astonished that he almost beamed. His excuse for a beating was gone, but Vidocq had given an actual reason for his haphazard statement.

From this moment, Vidocq cultivated the friendship of Father Mathieu. As he never occasioned the least trouble, never went into a wild insane rage, and accepted his beatings without a curse in exchange, Father Mathieu came to tolerate him to a certain degree.

ONE night Vidocq nudged his companion in misery.

"It is farewell, my friend. Tomorrow I start on my way."

"Eh?" muttered Jossas in surprise. "Not really?"

"Really," Vidocq said calmly. "Have you been watching Antoine, that fellow who cut his wife's throat? Listen; you can hear him groaning now."

"Yes, that infected wound," said Jossas. "The surgeon was looking at him today. He'll probably get a trip to the infirmary about day after tomorrow."

"Precisely. When they work on him, I shall be there."

"So?" Jossas whistled thoughtfully. "I wish you luck, Vidocq. I don't know your plans, but all the same—"

"I have no plans," said Vidocq, not altogether truthfully. "Except for the first step or two. After that, things will take care of themselves."

"You are wise," the other rejoined after a moment. "Yes; you are wise. You are the sort of person who is adaptable to circumstances, who knows when not to hesitate. Ninety-nine out of a hundred here would lose their heads. You'll do the right thing, at the right instant."

"Such as not forgetting my promise to send back the two hundred francs I owe you," Vidocq murmured craftily.

Jossas laughed.

"Well said, and it proves my argument. I might gain fifty francs by betraying you, and I'd lose the two hundred. Correct, my friend. Luck attend you! If you need anything sent in to you—"

"I've arranged for everything to be sent to me at the infirmary tomorrow evening."

"The devil! You certainly have confidence. You'll have a job persuading that beast of a surgeon there's anything wrong with you."

Vidocq chuckled softly. "He's not the man to persuade. He takes the word of Father Mathieu, if you've noticed."

At this, Jossas laughed again, with amused admiration.

WHEN Father Mathieu came on duty next morning, Vidocq lay in his chains, his food untouched, his eyes open.

"Hello!" Father Mathieu walked over and spoke to Jossas. "What's the matter with him?"

Jossas shrugged. "I don't know. He talks queerly."

"Shamming, eh?" Father Mathieu brought his cudgel into play, but Vidocq merely looked up and made a gesture with his right hand. The guard stooped. The words of Vidocq were uncouth and harsh, difficult to distinguish.

"Something wrong. Hard—hard to talk. Can't use left—leg or hand. What is it?"

Father Mathieu straightened up.

"Can't use your left leg, eh?" His stick came down with a thud on the leg of Vidocq, and again on his outstretched left arm. "Feel that?"

Vidocq nudged his companion. "It is farewell, my friend. Tomorrow I start on my way."

"No," muttered Vidocq. "Something wrong. Poisoned, perhaps—"

The stick came down again. Father Mathieu jerked out a knife and prodded Vidocq's left leg. Then his right. At this last, Vidocq uttered a piercing cry and moved his right leg convulsively. Father Mathieu straightened up.

"Poisoned? Not much. You go to the infirmary, my lad; I've seen this before now," he stated. "A seizure, that's what it is. Paralysis. A stroke. Never fear, you'll get over it in a few days and be back at our little tavern; it's only the first one."

An hour later Vidocq's wrists were freed of their irons, he was unlocked from the wall shackles, and was carried ashore to the infirmary. The surgeon had made only a brief examination. Here in the filth and squalor of the prison hulk, he was content to take the word of Father Mathieu.

As they carried him out, Vidocq fluttered an eyelid at Jossas; but so well did he play his part, that it was the right eye with which he winked.

The infirmary, by contrast, was paradise. When Vidocq had been bathed, his prison blouse and trousers were replaced and he was left on a cot; his leg-irons, permanently riveted in place, were assurance that he could not escape even if sound and well. Besides, there was a guard posted at the outer door.

This infirmary was merely a room of some size. Outside it was the office and the room where the surgeon and his assistant, who was a nurse-of-all-work, performed any needed operations.

In this paradise Vidocq lay the rest of the day. Two other convicts were here, tied down to their cots; they had fever, and their babble filled the air.

As might be anticipated, the infirmary arrangements were crude in the extreme. There was no fear of any escape from here, for the guarded walls and yards of the arsenal lay outside. It was from here, however, that Vidocq had planned to escape.

All that day and evening he played his part to perfection. The surgeon, assistant and the guard chatted. Servants came in. Officials stepped in for a pipe and a drink with the surgeon. Talking went on freely. The assistant even talked as he fed broth to the helpless Vidocq. A

new prison commissioner had been appointed and would arrive in a day or so.

Most exciting news was that the frigate *Meuron* lay at anchor close by —due for extensive repairs, having been battered by an English frigate. Her master carpenter and half a dozen more of her men were being brought into the infirmary this same evening, and the place would be filled.

"What about that fellow from the prison hulk, with the old wound?" demanded the assistant.

"Oh," said the surgeon, "go aboard and fix him up there. A convict doesn't matter; we can't bother about him, when we have honest seamen to fill the beds here."

IN a flash, Vidocq's entire plan of escape was all washed up.

He had not, as a matter of fact, arranged to have anything sent him here; he had lied on that point to Jossas. Instead, he had hinged everything on the wound of the man Antoine. While the surgeon and assistant were working on the man in the operating-room, Vidocq had intended to slip his irons, take their garments from the office, and calmly walk out of the place.

No go now. And a new commissioner was coming, would be making inspection visits. . . .

That same night, the master carpenter and others of the *Meuron's* crew filled the infirmary. Even before they arrived, Vidocq had made contact with a servant cleaning up the place; he arranged with the woman for what he wanted, promising payment later. Such a promise was nearly always kept; it was a good gamble. An escaped convict invariably paid such debts. All that Vidocq demanded was a curled wig, a seaman's shirt, and a seaman's cap.

These reached him the next evening and were put under his mattress.

Another two days, and his response to the surgeon's treatment was gratifying. He was obviously recovering from his stroke. And when, next afternoon, the place was tidied up for inspection by the commissioner, Vidocq had recovered his powers of speech.

The new official, a petty politician, was a pursy, solemn person, very earnest in his new position. As he came past, Vidocq made a piteous gesture and begged to be allowed to speak to him.

"Why, of course!" exclaimed the worthy man. "You have some complaint? Make it! I shall do you justice, my word upon it!"

Vidocq, who had appraised his man at a glance, burst into tears.

"Good sir, I beg you in the name of common humanity not to leave me among the wretches on the prison hulk! Load me with chains, place me in a dungeon, set me at the hardest kind of labor—anything but a return to that place! You can have no conception of what it means to be among those men. They are brutes, rather than men, of the lowest type, boasting of their past crimes and excesses, looking forward to new ones when free. I am not guiltless, it is true; I deserve all that the law has given me. Still, I am a man; I have hopes of expiating my misdeeds and regaining my rightful place in society, when the time comes. It is not indulgence that I crave; it is salvation from that sink of infamy!"

He paused, for he was out of breath. The commissioner was obviously touched by this sort of appeal, and turned to the surgeon.

"Is it true? Are they so bad?"

"Worse," said the surgeon dryly; "and this fellow is one of the worst. Still, he has a good record; he's made no trouble, I understand."

"The vilest of men may hope for redemption," Vidocq said humbly. "I ask for nothing except a chance to prove myself worthy. Chains? Load me with fetters! Punishment, as you please. Work, the hardest sort of labor—"

Again the commissioner turned to the surgeon.

"When will this fellow be able to work?"

"In a couple of days, at his present rate of progress."

"Then have him placed on the timber gang in the shipyards adjoining."

Vidocq sobbed out his thanks. The gratified, pompous, worthy commissioner passed on.

DURING the next two days, Vidocq astonished the surgeon, who was a rough and ready practitioner, by his consistent recovery. His recovery was certified; with morning he would go to the timber gang of some fifty convicts.

Long before the dawn, he wakened, stripped, and donned the shirt or jersey that marked him for a seaman. The wool cap and the wig he tucked under his belt. Over all, he drew the flaming red blouse that marked him for a con-

vict, and satisfied himself that it quite concealed the jersey. Then he went back to sleep.

His plans had now reached their end. From this time on, he depended wholly on chance and his own ability to take advantage of it.

The guards came for him early; a bowl of thin soup, and he was off, chewing a crust of bread as he marched between his guards. He was taken straight to the basin where the battered frigate lay warped to the dock, and was turned over to the chain-gang that had just begun work.

VIDOCQ'S sharp eyes took in everything. Up the harbor lay Toulon—city docks and streets that offered, as he thought, complete freedom. Here were the busy arsenal and dock-yards, dotted scarlet with the red shirts of convicts, heavily sprinkled with the shirts and wool caps of seamen likewise at work, but free to come and go.

Recommended for easy labor until fully recovered from his stroke, Vidocq was told off with a puny, knavish Gascon to clear a huge pile of débris—old boards and lumber stacked high—which remained a hundred feet from the wharf at which lay the *Meuron*. The foreman snapped at them to get at the job, and they moved off, dragging their leg-irons.

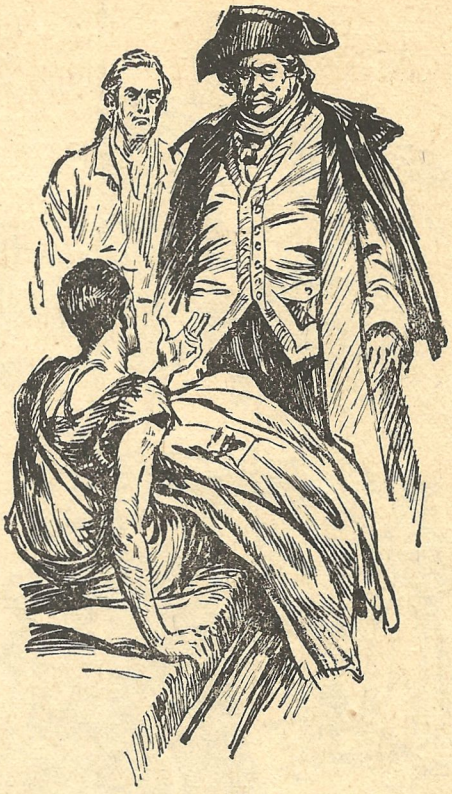
"I've heard of you, Vidocq," said the Gascon. "They tell me you're a sly one, that you've boasted you were going to make a break."

"That was true, before I was ill," said Vidocq, shaking his head sadly. "But not now, comrade. It'll be a long time before I can think of escape."

In a flash it came to him that he must act now, at once; this Gascon was all set to catch him tripping and tip off the foreman. If he waited until the work-gangs knew his face, until he was well known to these convicts, it would be more difficult. And there was the master carpenter from the frigate, now in the infirmary.

"You tackle it from this side," he said to the Gascon, as they came to the huge pile. "I'll clear out the light stuff from the other side. Then we can move the heavier pieces together."

A ring of authority in his voice precluded any objection. He slipped around to the other side of the pile; a glance showed him no one close at hand. He stooped, loosened the false rivets, and was out of his leg-irons. Shoving them



"It is not indulgence that I crave; it is salvation from that sink of infamy!"

in among the lumber, he whipped off his flaming red shirt and shoved it after. He clapped the wig on his head, pulled the wool cap over it and his forehead, and struck away.

"The right thing at the right instant," Jossas had said.

At this particular instant one misstep would have ruined him—literally. Vidocq did not make it. Instead of showing the hesitant, leg-dragging step of the convict, he stepped out briskly, nimbly, straight for the wharf. The curly black hair, the seaman's jersey, attracted no casual glance. Other seamen were going to and fro, sturdy barefooted men with pantaloons rolled up, like his own.

Once on the frigate's deck, he boldly approached an officer and asked for the master carpenter.

"I was told to report to him here, sir," he added.

"He's not here. His mate is forward; report to him."

Vidocq marched forward. Before he knew it, he found himself among a large group of convicts at work here, putting supplies into one of the frigate's barges. Panic struck him; these were men he knew. On the way to Toulon he had

"Suppose," said Vidocq, "you were talking with the very man who had just escaped!"

become acquainted with them all. They could not fail to recognize him.

Like a flash, he turned aside to the gangway, and fell in among a file of seamen going down to the barge.

Once there, he took place beside another man at a huge sweep. Here, once again, a single wrong action would have meant disaster; he had never been at sea in his life. But he watched the other men narrowly. As the barge shoved out, he imitated their actions and handled his oar passably well.

His heart leaped when he saw that the barge was heading toward the city. He put his weight on the oar, like the others. Inwardly he was tense, alert, watchful of everything. His oar-mate spoke to him in a Bréton accent; he responded in the patois of Auvergne, scarcely intelligible to the other man. The barge drew on and on; the arsenal and hulks and dockyard fell away. They headed in toward the city wharves.

"Get this lading ashore, and you have an hour's leave," said the officer in charge. "Any man who's not back at the boat in an hour, gets a flogging. See to it!"

A flogging! Vidocq chuckled to himself. Little he cared for such things now! Once ashore, once in the town, he

was free; all care was behind him. Before that hour was up, he would be past the gates and legging it out into the open country, for the north and Paris!

The barge was lined up, the cargo was unloaded. Vidocq worked like a Trojan; it was the price of freedom.

Suddenly a new fear seized him, and sent the sweat down his face in rivulets. Unless he reached the gates and got clear before his escape was discovered, he might yet be a lost man. When the alarm guns signified an escape, Toulon was searched to its very dregs. With strained senses, he worked on.

The task was finished, the seamen dismissed. Instantly Vidocq was gone. He headed straight for the nearest exit from the town—the Italian gate, it was then termed, Toulon being walled and fortified. With each moment, with each step, he dreaded hearing the alarm signal; it would make each man scan his neighbor.

THE gate at last! About it a throng of peasants, some entering, some leaving. Vidocq, now in an agony of suspense, edged his way among the file going out. Suddenly he caught his breath, as he noticed that those ahead of him handed the guards a slip of green cardboard in passing.

His heart chilled. In reply to some jocular question, the guard officer laughingly said:

"Anyone without a green ticket would have a hard time leaving Toulon, let me tell you! We have too many convicts and deserters trying to slip away, to take any chances."

Somehow, Vidocq edged out of the throng again. A green ticket, eh? Devil take it, he had known nothing about this contingency. Probably it was some new regulation. And how to get around it, with every wasted moment bringing peril, he could not tell.

He wandered blindly, aimlessly along the street. For once, he was at wit's end; this sudden shattering of his plan had left him unable to think. He halted before a shop window and was staring at it with unseeing eyes, when a voice startled him.

"Hello there, sailor-man! Looking for company?"

He turned. A young woman was smiling at him, a not unattractive young woman. Her profession was at once evident to him. Vidocq shook his head, with a grimace.

"Sorry, my dear, but I haven't a sou."

At this instant came the sound he had been dreading with all his soul—the three cannon-shots. The girl clapped her hands suddenly.

"Good! Good!" she exclaimed with an air of satisfaction. "An escape!"

"What's that to you?" Vidocq demanded sourly. "Fifty francs if you catch the poor devil, eh?"

She turned on him with an angry flash of the eyes. "How little you know me! I'm poor enough, but I'd never touch that sort of money. Poor men! They're to be pitied. If I could only save them all, I would. I've saved two or three already."

"Suppose," said Vidocq, "you were talking with the very man who had just escaped. Suppose he was unable to get out of town without a green ticket—"

"Bah! I'd help him gladly," said the girl. "Why, if it were this very moment, as you say, I'd show him how to get out of the city in another five minutes!"

Vidocq stared at her. Every reasoning instinct told him that such a woman, despite her words, would leap at the reward. And yet—five minutes?

"Very well," he said quietly, and pulled off his cap and wig for an instant to prove his words. "I'm the man who has just escaped. Now help me—for if you don't, I can't leave the city."

The right thing, at the right instant! As she stared, he doubted this, cursed his own impulsive action. One cry from her would have him seized. The reward would be hers.

"I thought you were," she said, "from the way you just now spoke! Very well, my friend; you doubt me, you suspect me. I see it in your eyes. You're wrong. And to prove it, there's your way of escape. Quickly! The cemetery is outside the walls."

She pointed to a funeral procession coming up the street, with people uncovering respectfully as it passed.

VIDOCQ comprehended instantly; he seized her hand, gave it one grateful pressure, and was gone into the throngs about the gates.

The funeral, like all such affairs in France, was a solemn business. Behind the crawling hearse with its nodding black plumes followed the immediate family in a little knot—on foot, of course. Behind these, again, came a long line of friends and relatives. Among these were a number of seamen. A navy funeral in Toulon was a common occurrence.

When the procession reached the gates and crowded up at the momentary halt, Vidocq edged in among the mourners. Then on again, trudging along the dusty way, while the guards uncovered in respect to the dead. No one thought of demanding the green tickets from these mourners, who were obviously coming back into the city so soon.

Two minutes later Vidocq was out of Toulon; but the talk, all around him, was of the signal just heard, and the escaped convict, and the reward. The dead man was forgotten. To make off was now impossible, and Vidocq followed on to the cemetery.

There he fell into lamentations with the others, saw the body disposed, and advanced in turn to the edge of the grave, casting a handful of earth on the coffin. Only then did he manage to withdraw among the tombstones, carefully lose himself, and finally take to his heels.

He was free.

NO silence fell in the prison cell to denote the story's end; but Manning's hands drooped motionless, and he smiled at his wide-eyed friend. And Cotterel said, with a deep, sharp breath:

"That's all?"

"That's all," said Manning's fluttering fingers. "Isn't it enough?"

"I think it is," Cotterel answered reflectively. "Yes, I see what you mean, all right; the instinct to do the right thing at the right time, sure. If he hadn't made up his mind on the spot to trust that girl, he might have been in a jam."

"Not instinct, but sharp wits," Manning corrected him. "A cool, balanced brain all the way. Some men call it instinct, but it's not. You have just that sort of a brain, but you've let it get a bit out of control. Now, get it in hand once more!"

"I'll do it!" Cotterel leaned forward, his eyes shining, his face alight. "Manning, with your knowledge about such things, with your skill, with your foresight, we can make the break where anyone else would fail! You weren't speaking lightly? You're in earnest about it?"

"I promised I'd help you escape from these walls,"—and if ever a man's fingers could achieve solemn speech, Manning's did then—"and I'll keep that promise."

"Shake!" said Cotterel, and the two men gripped hands.

Another story in this memorable series is scheduled for our next (July) issue.

BLIND

Two men of the Department of Justice take desperate chances to run down a strange criminal gang.

THERE was a twinkle in the eyes of the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, as he asked:

"Ever go on a blind date?"

Special Agent James Ashby, known to his friends as Duke, chuckled.

"Not since my college days," he answered.

"I have arranged one for you," the Director continued. "In Syrport."

Duke Ashby bowed ironically. "I thank you, sir."

The Director's smile was grim.

"You won't thank me when you hear the painful details."

Ashby brightened. This, he sensed, was no routine detail.

"Isn't she a nice girl, sir?" he parried.

The Director crossed the room, opened the drawer of a desk, and tossed a bit of pasteboard before the special agent.

"A lovely girl," declared the head of the F. B. I. "Take a look at her. Plump, rosy cheeks. Snowy white hair. Makes you think of an old white house with green shutters. Every detail there that is needed to prompt the caption, *'Somebody's Mother.'*"

The bantering note left his voice:

"Then you realize you are looking at a picture of Mother Badby. The brains of the toughest mob in the country. The motherly little soul who smokes black cigars, carries a sub-machine-gun in her suitcase, and who plans and directs the most daring bank robberies that we ever were confronted with."

Duke Ashby shifted slightly in his chair.

"I know I am going to enjoy this blind date, sir. How was it arranged?"

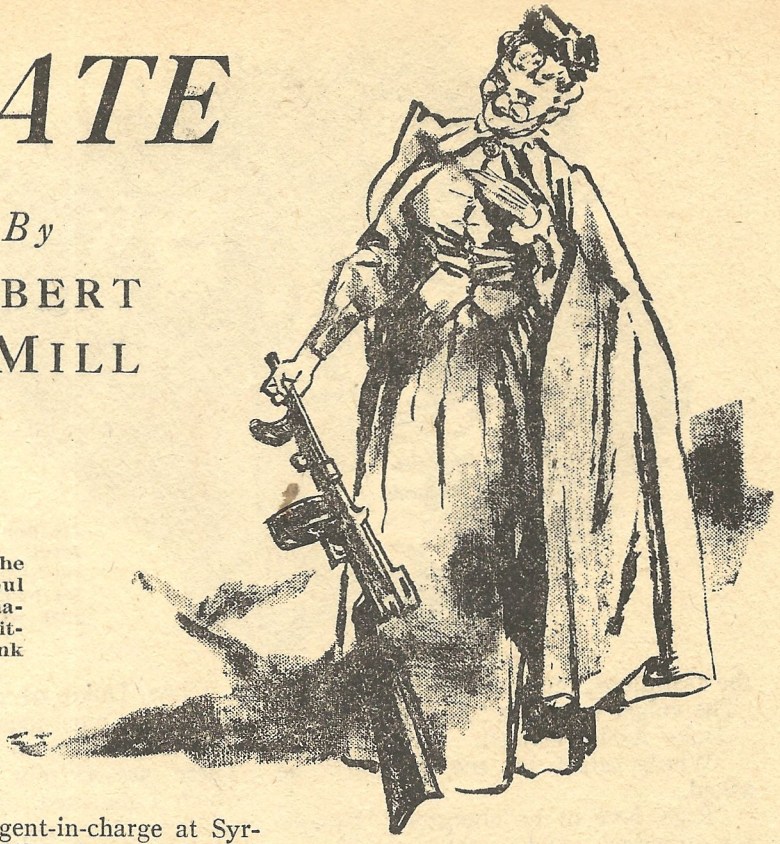
The Director leafed through some papers.

"A bit of luck. Creighton, of our Syrport field office, had it dropped into his lap. But wait a minute." He pressed a buzzer. "Show Mr. Creighton in," he directed the girl who answered.

DATE

By

ROBERT R. MILL



"Mother Badby, the motherly little soul who carries a sub-machine-gun in her suitcase, and plans bank robberies."

As Creighton, agent-in-charge at Syrport, entered the office, he and the Director exchanged smiles.

"Think he will fill the bill?" asked the Director.

Creighton inspected the special agent.

"Height and build are about right," he conceded. "Hair is the right color. Have to be combed a different way, or rather, not at all. That's easy. Need a bit of tan."

He grinned. "Have to get some dirt under those fingernails, and a few other little touches. But nothing that can't be done."

"That's fine," said Ashby impatiently. "What a particular lady!"

CREIGHTON laughed.

"We won't hold out on you, Duke. Here is the dope:

"A chap I once did a favor for—he's a commercial fisherman on Lake Arnold—hunted me up this morning. He said he had been propositioned by two birds who wanted to hire a boat. They were very particular, and had a long list of requirements, which sum up to this:

"The boat is to be waiting at the foot of the Vine Street pier at one o'clock tomorrow afternoon. The lad who owns the boat must be alone. The two men will arrive with some friends, and they want a quick trip across to Canada. Incidentally, they made it plain that they will search the boat at the start, and that it will be just too bad if there is any excess baggage."

Creighton lighted a cigarette.

"My friend is no rose, but he didn't like this deal. Probably scared. But that is neither here nor there. The point is that he came to me.

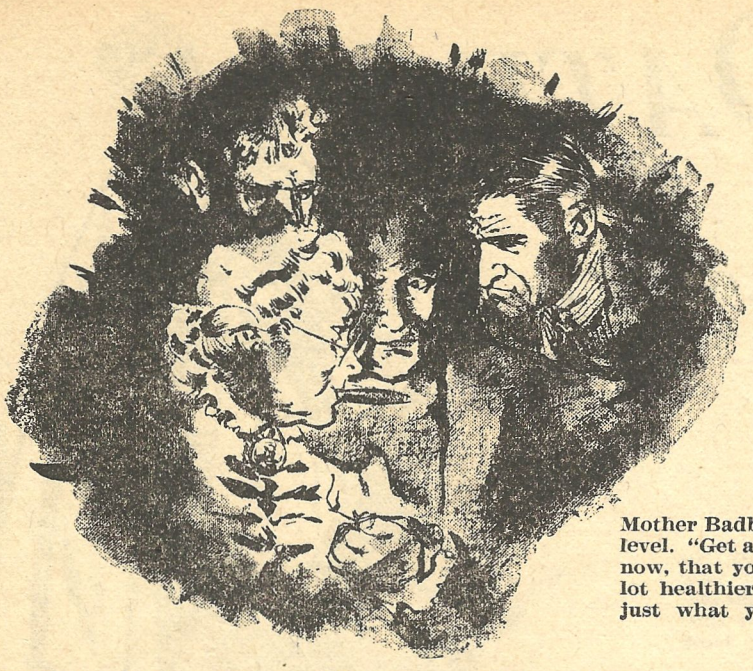
"I showed him some pictures, and he picked out Jess and Lou Badby. He was positive in his identification. I quizzed him some more, and everything that he said checked.

"This means that Mother Badby and the boys are going to pull a bank job in Syrport tomorrow." Creighton's smile was grim. "That's short notice. Ordinarily, I would try to locate the mob, tail them, and pick them up in the act. Here, I don't dare take that chance.

"There are a lot of banks in Syrport," Creighton continued. "We can't cover them all alone. That means calling in the police. Between us, we would be bound to slip somewhere. Then the job just wouldn't happen, and this gift from the gods would be lost."

The Director took up the story:

"By this time you have guessed the answer, Duke. You are to be the boatman." He smiled as his glance took in



Mother Badby's gaze was level. "Get a hunch right now, that you is a whole lot healthier if you does just what you is told."

the fastidious, immaculate special agent. "The vulgar boatman," he added.

Duke Ashby nodded.

"Where can I see the original?" he asked.

"Right here, in the laboratory," Creighton answered. "I brought him with me. We came by airplane. You and I will return the same way. Your double will remain here. It will be safer that way."

They made their way to the great laboratory of crime-detection which is housed on the ninth floor of the Department of Justice Building. There Carl Sherman, head of that laboratory, greeted them. His keen eyes were almost hidden behind glasses with thick lens. He wore a white smock, and resembled a scientist far more than a master detective.

"This way, gentlemen."

Sherman led them to a room where the boatman waited. At a nod from Sherman, Ashby stood beside this man. Sherman inspected them.

"Comparatively easy," was his verdict. He indicated a door. "Step in there and change clothes."

When they emerged, Ashby wore the rough clothing of the other man. Specialists, all experts in their line, appeared and performed their work under Sherman's direction. Ashby's skin became brown. His nails were broken unevenly and soiled. They worked upon his hair.

Sherman studied the result, comparing it with photographs which had been taken of the boatman.

"Good enough," he declared. He turned to Ashby.

"Now, Duke, we come to the hardest part. You must master this man's walk. You must learn to imitate his speech. There are certain little mannerisms, which I detected, and which you must acquire. Then he, you and I will have a long talk. You must learn how to approach that boat without hesitation. You must operate it expertly. Creighton will have you back there this afternoon, so you can take a practice cruise. But the balance must be done here."

"Right, Carl," said Ashby. "It won't be hard about the boat. As a kid, I just about lived on the Chesapeake Bay."

THEY went to work. Several hours later they returned to the offices of the Director.

"All set, sir," said Carl Sherman. But there was a worried frown on his face.

Ashby stepped forward.

"There is only one thing we haven't arranged, sir," he said. "When does the pinch take place?"

The Director traced a pattern on a scratch-pad.

"We daren't pull it at the pier, because I am afraid the mob is watching that neighborhood, and they would take flight if we put men in place. You will be quite alone there, Duke."

Duke Ashby nodded.

"We will have a fishing-boat near by," the Director continued, "but I hope you won't have to use it. A lot could happen before they got to you, and this outfit is desperate. I am hoping you will be able to land them in Canada."

Ashby showed his surprise.

"We want them for a number of bank robberies. In fact," the Director explained, "they are our outstanding bank bandits. If we nabbed them, public sentiment would make it impossible for us to turn them over to anybody else. But Canada wants them for murder. That is why, if it is possible, I want Canada to have them. They will have a fishing-boat along your course, also. They will cover your landing, and make the arrest just as safe as it is humanly possible. We will be with them."

He hesitated.

"But I don't want to discount the danger. The longer you are with them, the greater that danger becomes."

There was silence, broken by the drawl of the boatman:

"Take you 'bout four hours to make the run in the *Betsy*."

The Director nodded.

"Furthermore," he continued, "the minute the Canadian shore is sighted, your usefulness to that mob ends. We must consider that."

Again there was a heavy silence. The frown on Carl Sherman's face deepened.

The Director leaned forward.

"This isn't an order. It isn't even a definite assignment. It is up to you, Duke. Care to take it on?"

Duke Ashby stood up.

"Yes sir." He turned to Creighton. "We better be getting back to Syrport."

Sherman returned to his office at one end of the laboratory. He sat there, checking and re-checking the plans. Spread out before him were the *modus operandi* cards covering the members of this band.

In a certain sense, the cards had much to offer. These men, and the devilish old woman who led them, were ruthless killers. The men literally had been schooled in crime at their mother's knees. Carl Sherman checked a bitter smile as he saw that here was a living contradiction for the criminologists who are prone to blame most crime upon the foreign-born.

This woman, whose outward resemblance to the typical mother only partially hid her fiendishness, had been born in the United States, and she came of pioneer stock. The same courage, the same resourcefulness and the same determination her ancestors had shown in wresting a living from the wilderness and cruel savages, she had carried into the world of crime.

But Carl Sherman put those thoughts aside. The time was very short. The plan of operation, as adopted, gave Duke Ashby slightly less than a gambling chance of coming out alive. The obvious ways of altering that plan jeopardized the capture. So Ashby, rather than risk that, accepted the assignment.

But there must be other ways, safer ways. Carl Sherman cleaned his glasses carefully. Then he bent over the *modus operandi* cards again. One by one, he scanned them. The card devoted to Mother Badby failed to hold his attention long. No weaknesses there; no traits that could be capitalized. She was granite, this devilish old woman—the best "man" in a pack of wolves.

Sherman turned to the cards devoted to the boys. . . . An exclamation escaped his lips. This was a more fertile field, for the boys obviously lacked the rugged traits of their mother. There were four or five possible openings, each suggestive of a plan.

Sherman's sigh was bitter. The time was so short.

Then, with an air of resolution, he picked up the telephone.

"Where is Special Agent Hilton?" he asked.

He held his breath until he heard the answer:

"Here in Washington, right now."

"Good. Tell him I want him."

Five minutes later he looked up as Hilton entered. He was young, this special agent, and almost girlishly handsome. There was an expression of comic dismay on his face as he asked:

"Again, Carl?"

Sherman failed to respond to the levity.

"It means a quick airplane trip, and a desperate risk," he said.

Special Agent Hilton smiled.

"Very well," he said quietly.

ABOUT this same time a little old woman entered the Merchants' National Bank in Syrport. Her black dress was neat and plain, almost to the point of severity. She wore a black hat that resembled an old-time bonnet. Her cheeks were rosy, and her hair snowy white; her smile was a blend of hesitation and trust.

The paying teller gazed upon that picture, and his heart warmed. He was more than pleased to change the banknote the little old woman presented.

She, in turn, was sorry to trouble him. She had no account with the bank. In

fact, she was a new arrival in the city. Later, perhaps. . . . But it was so hard to find a house, particularly if one knew absolutely nothing of the city. But she wouldn't trouble him. He was a busy man.

The paying teller waved that aside. He disregarded the line before his cage.

"Our Mr. Mangin, of the real-estate department—"

She visited Mr. Mangin, whose office was inside the railing. He too warmed to the picture. But he retained enough self-control to head the list of available houses he gave her with a lemon the bank had inherited, and which it was difficult to heat.

"All in nice neighborhoods," he assured her, "and all quite suitable." He bowed. "We hope we may have the pleasure of serving you again."

She beamed upon him as she departed. She had a gracious smile for the nice teller as she crossed the lobby. Then she left the bank and made her way to a room in a hotel, where the management had proved its respect for motherhood by providing flowers.

IN the room, with the door bolted, she relaxed. She was waiting for "the boys." While she waited, she took occasion to unlock a suitcase and inspect the sub-machine gun it contained. The weapon had not been tampered with. So she returned to her chair, opened her handbag and drew forth a long black cigar. She bit off the end, spat copiously and placed the cigar in her mouth. When it was lighted, she puffed contentedly for a minute or two, and then went to work.

Carefully she blocked in the final lines on a diagram of the interior of the bank. The preliminary data had been obtained on previous visits: The location of the cages, their positions with regards to the exits; the number of employees; estimates regarding the probable number of customers.

The diagram would have been quite a shock to the teller and "our Mr. Mangin, of the real-estate department." The visit to the office of the latter gentleman had given her a glimpse behind the cages, thereby furnishing the data for the final details of the diagram. A glimpse was all the lady needed.

She pushed this diagram aside, and picked up a map of the streets of Syrport. Red ink had been used to locate the bank. The same medium indicated a car parked near by. Broken lines traced the progress of that car. Neat notations covered the exact time required between certain points, information that had been obtained by covering the route many times.

The various traffic lights were indicated, with the timing of the lights compared with the speed of the car. The position of each traffic officer along the route was marked by bright red lines. Cabalistic signs indicated a garage, a short distance from the business section, where a second car was waiting. The figures on the map showed that two full minutes had been allowed for the transfer of passengers and baggage from car to car. That, she reflected, was a liberal allowance. From the garage, the route led to the Vine Street pier.

The whole thing was as neat, thorough and accurate as human hands and minds could make it. It was the result of careful and pains-taking effort. Also, vast experience. Many a high-powered executive, drawing a salary in five figures, devotes far less time and preparation to a sales-campaign than Mother Badby did to each of her "jobs." And she prided herself that she did it scientifically, making due allowance for what she called "the human occasion."

She had checked everything three times, when a peculiar knock sounded at the door. She waited. The knock was repeated. Only then did she unbolt the door.

Three men entered the room. They were Jess and Lou Badby, her sons, and one Pete (Fisheye) Glartkey, who had been signed on for this particular job. Mr. Glartkey's alleged knowledge of the streets of Syrport, which he touted highly, was his main asset. Mother Badby, however, carefully checked each of Fisheye's statements, much to the chagrin of that gentleman.

MOTHER BADBY exchanged greetings with "the boys." She put the diagrams aside, almost regretfully. After all, they were works of art, and she an artist. But there were other mundane things to be considered.

"How's everything about the boat?" she demanded.

"Good enough," said Jess, who believed in conserving conversation.

Lou, who was even more saving, contented himself with nodding.

But Fisheye, who had been occupying a secondary position, and who failed to

appreciate that rating, saw a chance to enter the limelight.

"It is, and it aint," he declared.

Mother Badby removed her cigar, and gave this cryptic utterance her undivided attention.

"Meaning what?" she demanded.

FISHEYE expanded. "This so-and-so what runs the boat looks all right. He acts and he talks all right. He—"

Mother Badby snorted.

"What's the matter with him?" she demanded. "Got bad breath?"

Fisheye ignored the interruption.

"To lots of guys, what lacks my ability to see under things, he seems just the same."

He paused expectantly.

Mother Badby took her cue:

"How has he changed?"

Fisheye did his best:

"Hard to say, exactly. But there is a change. I got a hunch there is a change in him." He smiled modestly. "I am a great guy for hunches."

Mother Badby thought aloud:

"This bozo has had twenty-four hours to change. Maybe he is wise enough to know that he has bit off more than he can chew."

She shrugged her plump shoulders. Her smile was a leer.

"So what! He runs us across to the Canadian side. The minute we clap our eyes on that shore, he aint needed no more. A gas engine stops when you throws the switch. If you guys is too ritzy to throw the switch, I aint."

Fisheye was slightly slow on the uptake.

"I aint too ritzy to throw no switch to stop a boat," he declared. "But why aint we letting the guy do all that? He is getting paid for it."

Mother Badby's smile became broader.

"We aint letting him do it, because he aint there no more when it is time to do it. He has left us the minute we sees the Canadian shore." An extended finger was aimed at Fisheye. "That is your job, seeing that he leaves us."

Fisheye drew back.

"I aint counted on nothing like that," he protested.

Mother Badby's gaze was level and unwavering.

"You has said you was a great guy for hunches. Get a hunch right now, that you is a lot healthier if you does just what you is told."

Fisheye sullenly acquiesced. . . .

Mr. Mangin, of the bank's real-estate department, suffered a rude awakening the following noon. Seated at his desk behind the cages, and from which he had a view of the main floor of the bank, he noted the entrance of the little old lady.

Mr. Mangin brightened visibly. Probably back to see about a house, he decided. She might even be interested in the coal-burner, with which he had headed the list. He rubbed his hands in anticipation. Get her name on the dotted line of a lease for that white elephant, and the directors would sit up and take notice. And the directors would meet next week.

But Mr. Mangin sat up and took notice before the directors. The little old lady was not headed in his direction. Instead, she made her way to one of the desks placed for the convenience of customers. There she fumbled beneath her black coat.

At the same time, a man with a rather hard face appeared before the paying teller. A second man stood behind him. A third man halted near the door of the bank.

The man at the window spoke first:

"It's a stick-up! Pass out that dough!"

An automatic gave emphasis to the command. The man just inside the door also drew a revolver.

BUT it was the little old lady who caught Mr. Mangin's attention.

From beneath her plain, almost shabby black coat, there appeared the blunt, ugly barrel of a sub-machine-gun. That gun swept around until it covered everybody, employees and customers.

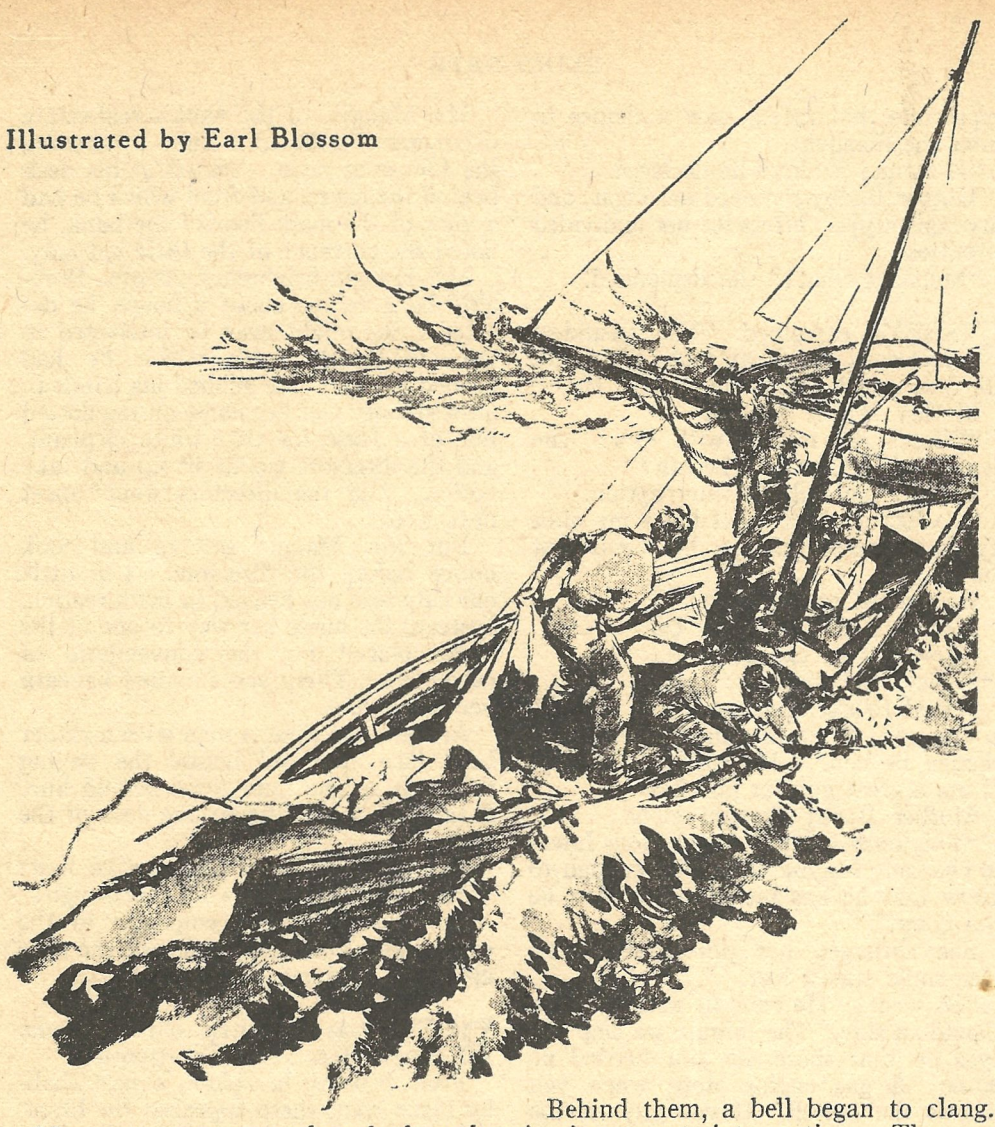
There was a leer on the face of the old woman. Her voice was a harsh cackle.

"Nobody move!" came her order. "My finger is just itching to bear down." The muzzle of the weapon was trained at a vice-president, who sat before a desk in an open space. "Let one of you smart guys kick the alarm, and this bozo gets it!"

Beads of perspiration appeared upon the face of the bank official. A clerk, whose knee was a fraction of an inch from a button, hesitated. The paying teller pondered only a minute. Then he began passing out currency. The man before his cage accepted it, and stuffed the money into a bag, which he had removed from beneath his coat.

The teller moved slowly, stalling for time. "Faster!" barked the man with the gun.

Illustrated by Earl Blossom



More currency was shoved through the window.

"That's enough!" The order came from the old woman.

The man with the money moved away from the window and toward the door. The bag disappeared beneath his coat. The man just inside the door stepped outside and entered an automobile parked near by. The starter whined, and the engine turned over. The man with the money joined him.

One bandit stood in the center of the floor.

The woman walked slowly toward the exit. The sub-machine-gun still menaced the persons in the bank.

"Don't be in no hurry," she warned them. "Lots of people has died from hurry." She went through the doorway.

The last bandit followed her.

The car darted off in the traffic. Mother Badby consulted her watch.

"Right on the second," she gloated.

Behind them, a bell began to clang. A siren went into action. The car leaped forward.

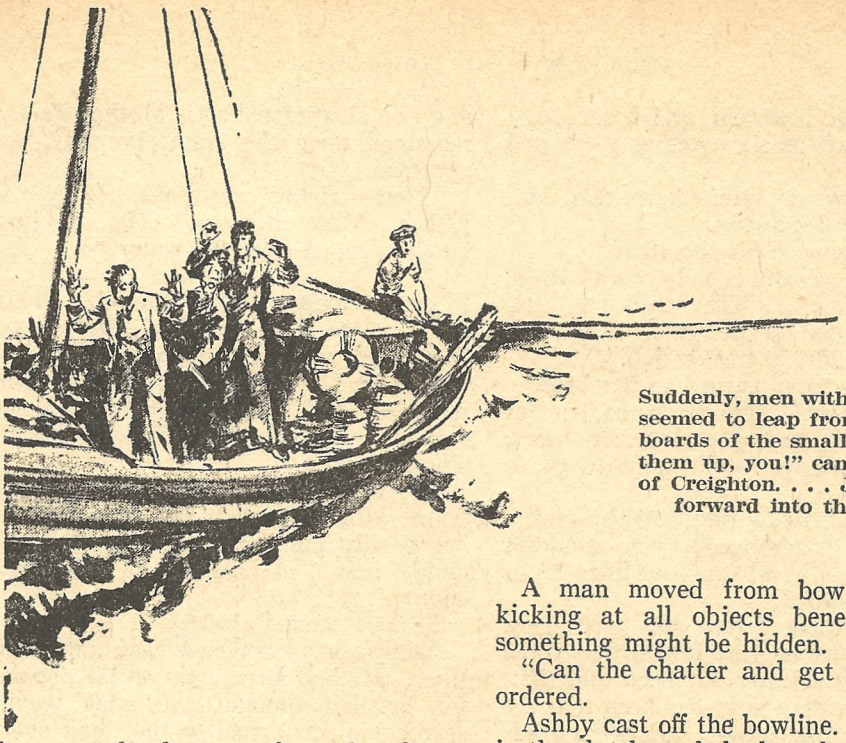
"Not too fast," Mother Badby warned. "We aint done nothing." The cackle-like laugh sounded again. "Stick to schedule."

She nodded with satisfaction when a red light changed to green as the car approached a corner. The timing was perfect.

AT the foot of Vine Street, Duke Ashby stood in the cockpit of a boat tied to the wharf by a single line at the bow. It was a sturdy open boat, powered by a heavy-duty engine.

Ashby, the fastidious, was clad in rough clothes, which were stained with oil and grease. The odor of fish was heavy about the boat, and about him. His hands were rough and grimy. His unshaven face was streaked with grease.

From time to time the special agent glanced at a watch. It was a thick,



Suddenly, men with automatics seemed to leap from the floorboards of the small boat. "Put them up, you!" came the voice of Creighton. . . . Jess pitched forward into the water.

cheap watch, the sort of watch a boatman might carry. At one o'clock he walked amidships and started the engine. He made several adjustments, and then throttled it down to idling speed. Then he walked aft, sat down by the tiller.

The face of the special agent was expressionless. Outwardly, he was just what he appeared to be, a boatman, perhaps not too ambitious, and right now at peace with all the world.

Inwardly, he was rehearsing his part. When the mob appeared, he must be a trifle leary, but not too leary. They would get under way at once. On the run across, there would be little danger. They needed him. But once the Canadian shore was sighted—

Ashby's lips tightened.

There would be a fast boat, standing by. That boat would rush to answer his signal. That, he knew, was only a gesture. Too much could happen before it reached his side.

The special agent shrugged. All part of the game. If you won—swell. If you lost—well, wasn't it better than passing out in a bed with a lot of people bent over you? This way, you at least had a run for your money.

A car pulled up beside the wharf. Three men and a woman stepped out. They made their way to the boat.

Ashby stood with one hand on the dock, steadying the boat, while they stepped aboard. He attempted an ingratiating smile.

"Right on time, aint you?" he asked.

A man moved from bow to stern, kicking at all objects beneath which something might be hidden.

"Can the chatter and get going," he ordered.

Ashby cast off the bowline. He threw in the clutch, and the boat backed away from the wharf. He put the engine in forward speed, and put the helm over. The boat swung about in an arc and headed for a lighthouse about a mile away.

The engine settled down to a steady *chug-chug*. There was the lap of the waves against the bow.

"How about my jack?" demanded Ashby.

Jess Badby laughed.

"Give it to him," he ordered. "It's a loan," he added, under his breath.

Mother Badby reached under her black dress, and her hands explored a hidden pocket. She drew forth two bills and handed them to the man at the tiller. He examined them, and then stuffed them into his pocket.

"Right," was his only comment.

They reached the lighthouse. Ashby headed due north. This would bring him across at Ganold, a Canadian town. There the fast boat would be waiting.

Fisheye stood in the bow, staring ahead, and shifting from foot to foot. Mother Badby sat on a fish crate, which was amidships. Lou and Jess lounged near the steersman.

There was a stiff breeze, which kicked up a slight sea. The boat bowed to it, and occasionally shipped a bit of water. Fisheye retreated from the bow. Lou and Jess became a trifle uneasy. But not Mother Badby.

The old woman gloried in it. A smile appeared on her wrinkled face. She

turned to the boatman, and began baiting him much as a cat teases a trapped mouse.

"Just how do you dope this out, sailor?" she demanded.

Ashby shrugged his shoulders.

"Three guys and a lady wants to be taken to Canada. They pays one hundred smackers for the ride. I dope it out as a hundred-smacker job."

The old woman turned to her brood.

"Smart boy," she approved. "But what is your best guess on why three guys and a lady should want to go to Canada?"

"I wouldn't know that," Ashby said.

"No," she admitted, "you wouldn't know that. But what's your guess?"

Ashby grinned.

"Maybe their doctor has told them that it is more healthy in Canada. Lots of guys in the States has been told that. Lots of Canadian guys has been told the same about the States. Me, I even has had to travel for my health myself."

Mother Badby laughed hoarsely.

"This trip," she declared, "is going to do your health a lot of good."

ASHBY stood up, the tiller between his knees. Dead ahead was a mass of clouds that soon would dissolve into the Canadian shore. The zero-hour was close at hand.

Mother Badby sensed it. She glanced pointedly at Fisheye, who had returned to the bow. Fisheye tried to evade that glance, but even when he turned, he felt the keen, merciless eyes boring into the back of his head. He faced the woman, mute appeal in his eyes.

"This guy is harmless," his glance seemed to say. "Why bump him off?"

Mother Badby jerked a thumb at the distant clouds.

"That's Canada, aint it?"

"Yes," said Ashby.

Mother Badby turned to Fisheye.

"Well?"

Fisheye made no move.

Mother Badby's hands disappeared beneath her coat and emerged with the sub-machine-gun. Ashby drew back in pretended alarm.

The woman's glance was trained on Fisheye, but she saw the motion.

"You needn't to be afraid," she told Ashby. "You needn't to be afraid of *this* here gun."

Fisheye started aft. He walked slowly, unwillingly, as if he was obeying some force too strong to be resisted. Jess and Lou also started aft. Mother Badby remained upon the crate, beaming her approval.

"That's right," she said. "Get together. More chummy." Her cackling laugh sounded over the water.

DUKE ASHBY braced himself. This was the end. Death was very near. It walked with Fisheye, who obviously was to be his executioner. It also rode with Jess and Lou, who stood ready to step into the picture if Fisheye failed. Three to one.

No, four to one. For there on the crate sat the fiendish old woman with her deadly gun, ready to cast the deciding ballot in case of an uncertain ending.

Fisheye moved closer.

Ashby's hand traveled back along the tiller. He had no weapon on his person, for he had thought the gang would search him, a formality they had overlooked. His automatic was slung on a hook beneath the seat.

He might be able to reach it. He might not. At the best, it was just a gesture. But it would be better to go down fighting. His hand left the tiller. Fisheye was almost at his side.

Ashby's hand rested on the edge of the seat. He was about to make the desperate grab for the weapon. Then, off to the starboard, something happened.

An unusually large wave came toward them. Upon its crest was a small but seaworthy boat, which was carried along helplessly. For just an instant a wave of relief surged over Ashby. That feeling subsided as he saw the occupant of the boat.

Near the bow, struggling to keep her feet, stood a young girl, apparently the only occupant of the little craft. In her hands was an oar, with which she tried futilely to keep the boat headed into the seas.

Then she caught sight of the larger boat, and dropped the oar. She whipped off her blouse and waved it frantically.

The distance between the two boats was narrowing. The occupants of the larger boat stood watching the drama. Fisheye welcomed the respite.

Ashby turned to the group about him.

"How about it?" he asked.

"Skip her," ordered Mother Badby. "She got out here alone, didn't she? Let her get in. We got other fish to fry."

But Jess stood watching the small boat approaching, with a leer upon his

coarse face. His moist thick lips hung slightly open.

The girl in the small boat was clearly visible now. She was young, blonde, and even in her disheveled state, beautiful. With her blouse removed, the wind was whipping her thin silken garment against her form, revealing every line.

Jess' tongue moved over his lips.

"Get her aboard," he ordered.

"You fool!" roared his mother.

But Jess stood his ground.

"I can use that dame in my business," he declared. "We got a long time to lay low ahead of us. This dame will be a big help." He winked at his brother. "She can read to me, evenings."

Ashby pretended to hesitate.

A stream of profanity and obscenity came from the lips of the old woman.

"Get that dame aboard," Jess ordered.

Ashby throttled down the engine, and threw the helm over. The boats pulled closer.

"Easy," he called to the girl.

Ashby threw out the clutch. Then the boats were alongside.

"Careful, there," Ashby directed.

They crowded to the side, to hold the boats together and to watch the drama. Ashby stood braced against the tiller, using every ounce of his strength to bring about the rescue, his own plight forgotten.

"Make a jump for it!" he ordered.

BUT the girl, apparently badly frightened, hesitated. Jess was leaning forward, off balance. His brother had grasped the side of the smaller boat. Fisheye also made ineffectual attempts to hold the boats together. Mother Badby stood to one side, a sneer upon her face, watching the drama. The submachine-gun hung laxly in her hands.

Suddenly what appeared to be the flooring of the small boat shot upward. The girl dropped down behind the gunwale. Three men with short, business-like automatics in their hands seemed to leap from the floor-boards of the small boat.

"Put them up, you!" came the voice of Creighton, agent-in-charge of the Syrport office.

The two boats had swung apart a trifle. Jess pitched forward into the water. A special agent grabbed him by the collar, and pulled him aboard the smaller boat. A second special agent grabbed a boathook, and drove it into the deck of the fishing-boat.

Lou and Fisheye raised their hands. Behind their backs, Mother Badby reached for the sub-machine-gun. Her hoarse cackle sounded. The barrel of the gun went up, trained toward the small boat.

Creighton, who stood to one side, fired from the hip. Mother Badby fell forward, and the career of America's leading bank-robber was ended.

THEY bobbed their way into the Canadian port, with the small boat on a towline. A coat was draped over what had been Mother Badby. The three men prisoners were forward, with two special agents guarding them.

Duke Ashby and Creighton sat in the stern. Beside them sat Special Agent Hilton, holding a blonde wig in his hands. He grinned wryly as he tried to remove the rouge from his face.

"Just in time, weren't we?" Creighton asked.

Ashby nodded. He passed a hand over his face.

"It doesn't seem real! Tell me—"

Creighton laughed.

"As usual, one Carl Sherman was the gentleman behind the scene. He realized we were pushing you into a suicide deal. He didn't want that to happen, because for some strange reason he likes you."

Creighton passed cigarettes around.

"Carl realized we had to get to you before the Canadian shore was sighted, and that we had to do it in some way that would disarm all suspicion."

"You did that," Ashby admitted. "I hadn't any idea what it was all about." He smiled at Hilton. "But how did Carl hit upon this plan?"

Creighton grinned.

"The *modus operandi* cards told him Jess was a sucker for girls, and particularly blondes. Thanks to Hilton, we gave him a blonde."

Hilton made a gesture of resignation.

"I'll never live it down," he declared. "My big mistake was admitting on my application-card that while at college I played the feminine lead in the Paint and Powder Club show. Now, when Carl wants a blonde, a brunette or a redhead, he sends for me." He grinned at Ashby. "Not that it didn't come in handy today. And I rather enjoyed keeping my blind date with Jess."

Ashby's hand rested on his shoulders.

"You know how I feel about what you did, Hilton. We both were very lucky on our blind dates."

"Glad I found you Pierre," said Ici, "you're going back, so come along."

Warriors

"Gentleman Royal" gives you the strange drama of an anonymous nobleman of the Legion during its fantastic expedition in Siam.

THE old axiom about meeting all the people you know at three or four of the world's great crossroads has, like most axioms, a certain foundation of truth in experience. One of those arteries is Whitehall, in London. Another, oddly enough, is Westminster Abbey.

To prove it, I was standing in the Abbey one day, looking at the section of that historic floor devoted to the Unknown Soldier, and dodging the flocks of personally conducted tourists, when a man stepped up. I looked at him, and he at me, and our hands met.

"Pierre Dupré, of all people!" I exclaimed, regarding his stocky, grizzled figure in astonishment. We had met in Oran, two years previously. "Why, I thought you had retired with all the honors of a veteran Legionnaire to that little farm in Algeria!"

He sighed and smiled, and wrung my hand, all at once.

"No. So I proposed, but fate disposed otherwise—as usual. I'm living here—or rather, working here. I have a shop over in Whitehall Court."

"A shop?" I looked at him, puzzled. "No shops there, Dupré! That's a club building. I happen to belong to one of the clubs. What kind of a shop?"

"A hairdressing shop," he said, beaming at me. "Or in your American language, a barber-shop. That farm in Algeria—well, it is still waiting. I've never seen this church, so I dropped in to have a look around. I find you. Excellent!"

"It goes double," I rejoined delightedly. Pierre Dupré had been in the Legion since he was eighteen; he had been all over the world, knew everything and everybody, and had a trunk full of medals that would knock your eye out. Now he looked down and nodded.

"The Unknown Soldier, eh? Singular. That reminds me of my first enlistment,

in Exile

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

my first campaign, and a comrade I had there. In Siam, it was."

"Campaign, in Siam?" I exclaimed. "But France was never at war with Siam—"

He snapped his fingers joyously at me. "And I suppose you'll say the lost Dauphin of France does not lie in this very abbey? Come, I'll point out his tomb to you. That's another story, too. Never at war with Siam, eh? If you've time for a bottle of wine and a bit of sole in the genuine Marguery style—"

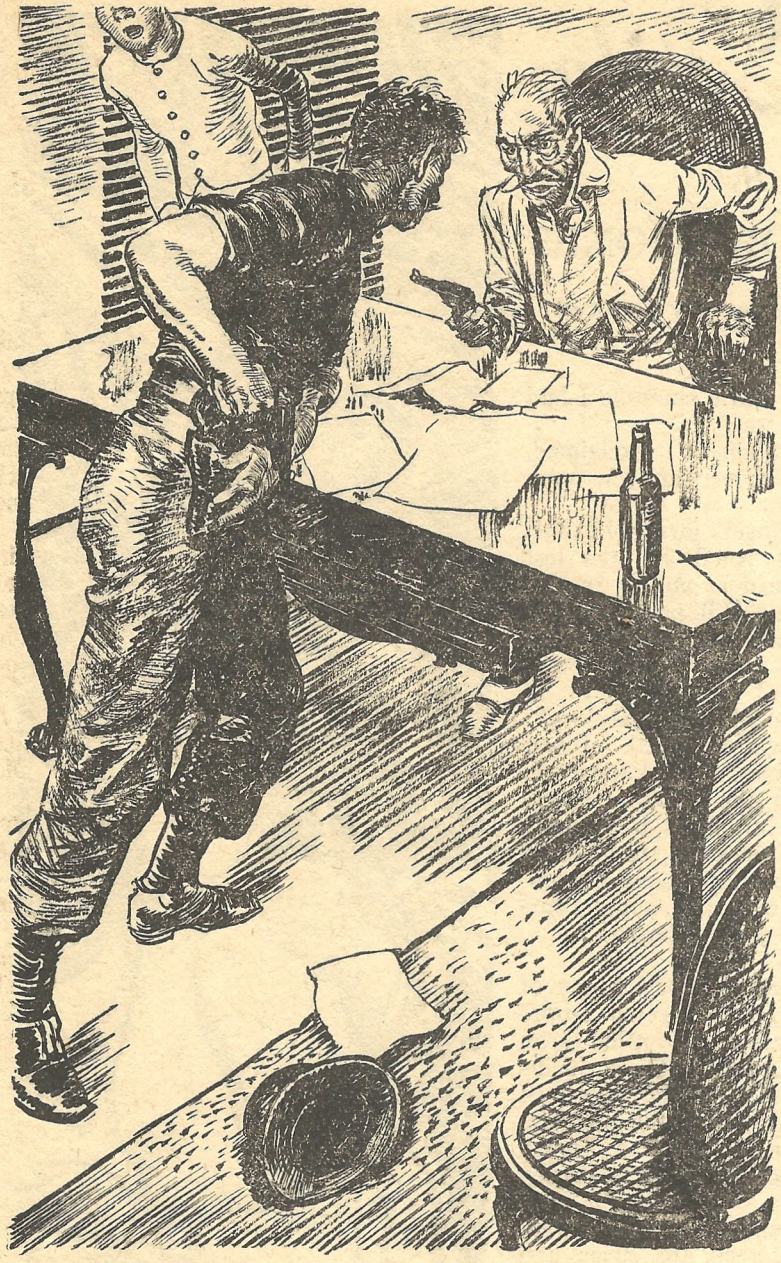
The challenge was accepted. I was curious to know about his unknown soldier, as he called the fellow. Dupré never evades life, but looks it squarely in the eye; and I knew his story would have a touch of the unpleasant, the unhappy, the gruesome—and would come straight out of the world's heart.

IN a little restaurant kept by one of his compatriots, who greeted Dupré almost with veneration, we settled down and shut out all London. There, in his brisk concise manner, Dupré described the incidents along the frontier of Siam, culminating in the killing of a French officer and his escort, which led to French action.

"That was in June of 1893," he went on. "Our fleet forced the river and blockaded Bangkok. By August, the Siamese accepted our conditions and there was no need for our troops who were on the way. The Marching Battalion of the Legion came, just the same, and disembarked at Bangkok along with our peace envoys. I was in the second company, and my chief friend in the outfit was André d'Ici. You may laugh at the name—*Here,* in English; and it was a little comic, being obviously assumed; but one did not laugh at the man.

"Well, there was no fighting to do, but there was a lot of mapping done, and when it turned out that my comrade

"No," rasped Dupré. "We stick, she and I; we'll get married first chance."



"Perhaps you would write such a story, Legrand, being what you are. But you never will!"

André had been an engineer and could draw topographical maps, we were assigned to a survey party up the Mekong River, with headquarters at a place called Nampak, where there was a single white inhabitant among a couple of thousand Siamese. My comrade Ici got me taken along, you see. It was a soft, cushy job."

Dupré smiled reminiscently.

A man of mystery, this Ici. Tall, straight, handsome, with a blond mustache and an odd intent pucker about the eyes, something like Colonel Forey, if you ever met him. Ici never mentioned himself or his past history. His nationality was unknown; he spoke German, French and English with perfect fluency, but not until we had landed at Bangkok did any clue come, and then only to Dupré.

André d' Ici never received any mail, never wrote letters; he was completely wrapped up in his service with the Legion. He never showed his *livret militaire*, which would bear his true name, to a soul. On the first of each month, the battalion paymaster handed out to him a thousand francs, which he received without comment, and which he dispensed in wine for his section—natural-

ly, the most envied group in the whole army.

The day after their disembarkation, Ici and Dupré were walking about the Siamese capital, looking at the temples and the strange sights, when they encountered an officer, an attaché of the British legation. He stopped dead, stared at Ici, then put out his hand with a quick smile. The two talked for a moment. Dupré did not understand their words, for he knew no English. They separated and went on again.

"So, my friend," said Dupré, who was young and foolish, "you are an Englishman!"

Ici swept him an angry glance, then smiled.

"No, I am not," he said coolly. "But I was at Cambridge with that man we just met. You will do me the favor of not referring to this in future, Pierre. Now come along and see if we can find the famous white elephants!"

Pierre Dupré never again referred to the incident.

ANOTHER thing happened on the way upriver with the survey party. Ici had corporal's *galons,* but no point of discipline was maintained up here in the wilds; both he and Dupré were accepted for what they were. Thus it was not strange that one night when the general conversation fell upon the novels of Dumas, Ici took a hand.

Somebody had mentioned "The Three Musketeers," and dwelt scornfully upon the absurdity of such an infatuation as that of *Buckingham* for *Anne of Austria.*

"Much less," went on the speaker, "that the Queen should repay such a feeling! It's one of the major absurdities of an absurd story fit only for popular consumption."

"Your pardon," said Ici composedly. "The point is one of the great truths in a great novel, monsieur. It is not absurd. Parallel cases have happened in history since then; they even happen in our own generation. Today, however, the matter is usually hushed up."

His voice held an inflection of such real assurance, of so profound a feeling, that it startled his auditors.

"But," queried the officer, "what if there were to be a child?"

"Ah!" Ici smiled. "In that case, monsieur, the child would be very unfortunate."

The subject was changed, the argument dismissed; but Dupré remembered it. He was devoted to this handsome, genial, reckless comrade of his. If Corporal d'Ici said a thing was so, young Dupré affirmed it furiously. If Ici drank beer, Dupré would drink nothing else. It was a very real sort of hero-worship; and because the youngster had the right stuff in him, Ici repaid the adoration with a firm, deep friendliness. Perhaps it worried him at times, too. He was no paragon of virtue, by a good deal.

Settled in headquarters at Nampak, Dupré was put in charge of the place while the party worked out their maps. Consequently he had little to do, at times, and it was a bad thing for him, since the others were much away. He began to associate with Jean Legrand, the scrawny, cavernous danger-signal to humanity who was the one white inhabitant here. Legrand lived in a small compound and sold the vilest of imitation brandy to the Siamese, who took keenly to it. Also, Legrand lived alone, shunned other whites, would rant his brand of philosophy by the hour, and in the back room had two excellent rifles. He knew the jungle, the hills, the people, and there was a black devil in him.

Dupré thought the fellow quite a character, missing all the evil portents. Legrand had once been a gentleman—another bad sign which the young Legionnaire ignored.

"Your people will run into trouble yet," said Legrand, shaking his black head and glowering at Dupré from his deep-set black eyes. "No matter if they do have a Siamese escort. They'll run into trouble. Plenty of brigands and dacoits along the border here."

Dupré laughed. "So I've heard, but they'll not trouble our crowd."

HE got into the habit of going over every morning and having a chat, sometimes in the evening as well. Legrand introduced him to a charming native girl, aided him in a score of ways with his accounts and headquarters management, and learned that young Dupré was proud of the Legion but by no means pining to spend his life in uniform. In brief, the East had got into Dupré's blood—the East, with its luxury, its relaxed ethics, its dreamy ambition. Above all, the fact that Europeans could clean up a fortune here in a short time and retire for life. Legrand could retire if he so desired; he painted the possibilities in glowing colors, so far as others were concerned. He showed young Dupré nuggets of gold,

and queer flat gold coins and glittering stones.

"They're to be had!"—and he waved a skinny claw toward the jungle. "Retire? Why should I retire, and whither? Why, my little lascar, you're blind! Here's the true civilization. Back there in the cities, life's a fight, a battle, tooth and claw, and starve to death if you go down! Here, if you're old or invalid, the people work your fields for you, share their food with you, look after you. Here's one price on all merchandise. Suicide is unknown among these people—misery never pushes them so far. Savages, you call them? Well, give me such savages, rather than the civilization of Europe!"

HIS favorite topic was this; he dilated on it at every opportunity, until he had the eager spirit of Dupré in a glow, and the eyes of the young man wandered over the distant jungle which was painted as a paradise, with obvious yearning.

The mapping party came in for a day of rest. Corporal d'Ici listened to the outpoured secondhand philosophy which Dupré had acquired, attempted to tear it to shreds with sarcasm, and only caused the younger man to fall into sullen silence. Then he tried another tack.

"Something's got into you, Pierre; what is it? You won't tell? Well, *mon vieux,* write that mother of yours a long letter. It helps. If I could only write mine!" As he spoke, his eyes warmed. "I appreciate what I lack. You fail to appreciate what you have."

Dupré grunted, and changed the subject to bandits. Ici laughed heartily.

"Bandits? Yes, plenty of them, but they'll not trouble us. They live off your charming savages; they're part of the picture. Raid here, raid there, steal and kill somewhere else—bah! Don't be a fool."

The others were off again, with new supplies. That night Dupré sat talking and drinking with Legrand and another man—a native chief, keen-eyed, hawk-faced, proud. A fine figure of a man. A chief from the jungle and the hills beyond, said Legrand; a free man, lord of his own lands, who was anxious to learn European ways and weapons. Gold was nothing to this man, and to prove it here were nuggets, gold pieces dug out of a ruined city, and half a dozen sapphires that blazed richly blue.

"Take them if you like—trade him a few cartridges," said Legrand, and Dupré effected the trade with shaking fingers, and pouched his wealth. When the chief had departed, Legrand chuckled scornfully at Dupré.

"What, excited about so small a matter? Come, come! If you weren't a slave of your so-called civilization, if you weren't bound to army service and were free to go into the jungle yonder, I'd send you to that rascal and you'd be a rich man in six months! Gold is nothing to him. What he needs is a soldier."

Dupré could not be expected to discern the true flavor of Legrand's philosophy, nor to check it against the action of the man in poisoning these admirable natives at a fabulous price with his vile rotgut brandy. Nor could he strip the sham trappings from the glittering distances opened to his view.

Here, far from the Legion's discipline, with the immensity of the world brought home to him, with the Mekong floods and the unknown jungles and hill country around, he was a ripe subject for Legrand's wiles. He had no fund of hard experience to lend him a cynic's vision; the glitter dazzled him. What one man did was of no moment in this wilderness. And here was the gold for the taking! It was not hard to dream a dream of glorious adventure, under such conditions.

IT was quite true that the hill chief wanted a soldier badly. Legrand was shipping in arms, smuggling them across the border; a soldier to go with them and direct operations would make that chief supreme in the hills. For that matter, Legrand himself was a bandit of parts and knew the dacoit trails well. The two rifles in his back room were not for hunting tiger.

So Legrand amused himself, but youth takes all things seriously. Environment made Dupré lose proper focus. The bare bald fact of desertion took on splendid trappings and seemed quite another thing, with the gleam of gold and jewels upon it. He failed to realize that gold and jewels were just as valuable to Siamese folk as to Europeans, and that most of the alluring vistas were plain and simple lies. How was he to know?

There was another thing. Legrand had evinced a singular probing curiosity regarding Corporal d'Ici. Here Dupré told nothing of what he himself guessed or suspected, which was indeed little enough. Legrand needed no urging, however; his first glimpse of the corporal, he readily confessed, had startled him.

One day Dupré found the man studying some pictures clipped from European magazines, pictures from which the titles had been cut. One of these he selected and handed to Dupré, with a leer in his deep dark eyes.

"Do you know who that is?"

Dupré shook his head. The picture showed a singularly handsome man of forty or fifty years, with a semi-uniform collar which betrayed no nationality.

"No. A Frenchman?"

"Not at all, nor an Englishman." Legrand fastened a glare of hatred on the picture. "Twenty years ago, before I came out here, I was in his service. Six or seven years before that, he had been in love with a queen, and she with him. There was a scandal. It was hushed, and nothing came of it." He struck the picture violently with his fingers. "Today this man is not only high in his country's service, but he is its Minister of War."

"What of it?" said Dupré with a shrug. Legrand eyed him a moment, then broke into a laugh and held up the picture.

"Nothing. Look at this again. Imagine Corporal d'Ici forty-six instead of twenty-six—I think you said he was about that age?"

"I did not say, but I imagine you've hit it closely enough."

"Imagine him with this beard. . . . Ah, you see?"

Dupré started, looked curiously at the picture, and nodded. "Yes, he does look somewhat like your statesman," he commented carelessly. "And I remember," he added with a laugh, "that people used to say my father looked like the Emperor Napoleon; but what of it? Such resemblances are everywhere."

"Even in Siam," said Legrand, nodding cynical assent, and tossed aside the picture. "So your friend gets a thousand francs each month, eh? Lucky fellow."

THIS conversation meant nothing, suggested nothing, to Dupré. His curiosity in regard to Ici was passive; he was not putting two and two together to check up with destiny. He never thought twice about it—just then.

What he did think about was what would happen if he skipped out to join that hill chief, five days' journey away. Nothing would happen to him, of course; he would not be pursued or followed. Nobody would care. He would be marked off as a deserter on the books of the Legion—and if he ever showed his face in French territory again things would be hot for him; but this seemed a small matter, weighed against fortune and wealth.

Three days after the corporal had come and gone again, Dupré plumped out the question flat-footed, brushed aside all evasive words, and got down to business with Legrand—who was delighted, and said so frankly.

"Now you're showing wisdom, my friend! I'm going to the hills myself in another three weeks; I have business there—shipments of opium, and rifles coming in."

"Three weeks would be too late for me," said Dupré, frowning over his drink. "I may be on the way to Tonkin by that time. Then—well, there's the matter of the girl. She'd go to the hills with me. She says so."

LEGRAND laughed to see how Dupré was hooked and netted on all sides. That girl had worked well for him.

"Remember," he said, "there'd be no turning back! Six months from now we'll be the masters of an independent hill district. A bit of fighting, a bit of training from you, and with the rifles I'm bringing in, my friend the chief will be sitting pretty. He needs me, and he needs you, and he'll pay well. When you're ready to clear out, you can always go over the British border into Burma, or up through Yunnan into China, and no questions asked. Do you want to go?"

"Yes!" blurted Dupré; and the die was cast. "But how?"

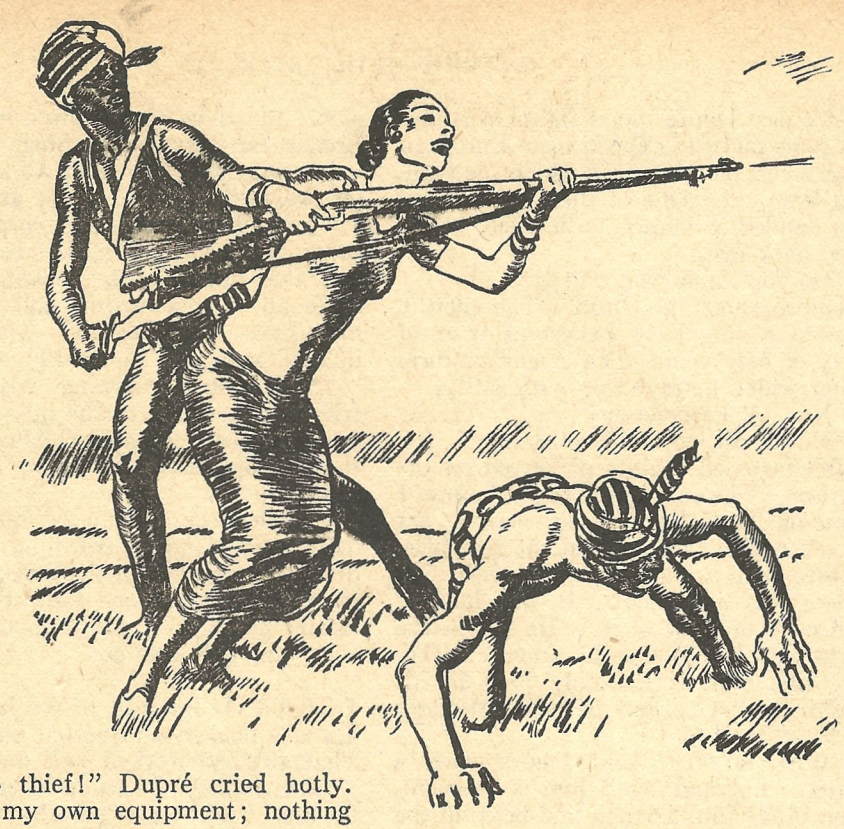
"Simple enough. I'll give you one of the native hunters here, who knows the trails. He'll guide you and the girl, if you want to take her. I advise against it; she'll slow your journey, and there are plenty of girls in the hills."

Dupré would not listen to this, for he was in love with the girl.

"Very well," said Legrand, with a nod. "Then take her. When do your officers come back here?"

"They've been gone three days—not for another week," said Dupré. "They expected to meet another party coming from the coast; ten days, they figured"

"Then," said Legrand, "suppose you get off tomorrow at noon. You'll be at your journey's end before they get back here, and there'll be no hurry about it. You might as well take the spare rifles and such other things as you can, from headquarters—"



"I'm no thief!" Dupré cried hotly. "I'll take my own equipment; nothing else."

"As you like." Legrand shrugged amusedly. "Be ready, then, at noon or a little after noon. Better tell the servants you're going off hunting."

So said, so arranged.

Legrand was going hunting himself, in another couple of days. He had no intention of being here when Corporal d'Ici and the others got back, for he knew very well that the natives would blab and the servants would blab, and he might get into extra hot water. It would be much simpler to go away and stay until the French had departed.

However, he got off a messenger immediately, telling certain brigands with whom he worked to meet Dupré and escort him to the hill chief. He wanted to make sure of Dupré, who would be invaluable to him in a dozen ways. A broken man who cannot go back makes a good servant, and as there were no restrictions on the opium traffic in Siam, Legrand wanted to go into it on a large scale, with liquor on the side and gun-running to fatten out the bank account. It mattered nothing to him that Dupre would be smashed for life.

Early the following afternoon, Dupré and the girl and the native guide got off, all three of them heavily laden. There was, of course, no haste. . . .

It was close to sunset when Corporal d'Ici and a number of his native escort came into town. He had been sent on a hurry-up trip for certain spare instruments. He went straight to headquarters, found Dupré gone, found a short note Dupré had left for him, spoke briefly with the servants, and descended like a whirlwind on Legrand's compound.

Legrand, who had been comfortably swilling liquor, was given five minutes' warning by his servants. Finding that the corporal had returned alone, however, he laughed and laid his revolver in his lap, and waited with cool assurance. When Ici, in his black-covered helmet and black Tonkinese shirt, strode in upon him, he pointed to a chair.

"Welcome, Corporal! Sit down and have—"

"Where's Dupré?" snapped the corporal, breathing hard. His blue eyes were aflame, and that curious pucker of his brows was more pronounced. He was white about the lips, but Legrand disregarded these danger-signs.

"How do I know? I think he went for a little trip—"

"Don't lie," rasped Ici. "I got a note from him. He's my friend, and I want him back. You damned rascal, where is he?"

"Gone." The black eyes glittered. "Here, Corporal,"—Legrand pointed to the cut-out illustrations on his table as he spoke,—"look at these. Upon my

The rifle-butt stretched Dupré senseless; then the girl screamed blue fury and cut loose.

word, you look just like this gentleman! A remarkable resemblance. Perhaps you've seen pictures of this lady before? Of course. A subject always has seen pictures of his queen."

The metallic acid of his voice, the significant thin-lipped smile, spoke volumes.

Corporal d'Ici looked at the features of the statesman, looked at the gentle face of the queen, and stood absolutely frozen for a moment. His bronze features whitened a little more, and his eyes lifted to the steady gaze of Legrand.

"What d'you mean, reptile?" he asked in a low voice.

"Come, be reasonable!" Legrand laughed softly and leaned back. "Forget about this foolish young private. He's gone with his girl—"

"I've heard about that girl," Ici said slowly. "And about your part in it all."

"Bah! Let the matter rest; Dupré has gone to make his fortune. You'd better let it rest, too." Menace crept into his tone. "Your memory doesn't go back twenty-six years or so. Mine does. . . . Think of the pretty story it would make for Paris journals, about a certain scandal now forgotten—how there was actually a child, and how that child, whose father is now minister of war in a certain country, whose mother is queen of that country, is now a corporal in the Foreign Legion!"

Under his bronze, the face of Ici became livid and taut as he listened.

"You'd never write such a story, Legrand," he said, his voice shaken.

"I would," Legrand affirmed with an oath. "And you'd better listen to reason—"

"Perhaps you would, being what you are," broke in Ici. "But you never will!"

Legrand's hand jumped to his revolver, but he was too late. His bullet merely chipped the corporal's shoulder, as Ici shot him through the head. . . .

Corporal d'Ici went back to headquarters. To follow the jungle trails at night was an impossibility, of course. He arranged for two native trailers to be ready to leave at dawn, arranged for the spare instruments to be taken back to the party by the native bearers, and wrote a brief note to go along:

I found the renegade Legrand has been plying Private Dupré with liquor. Dupré is ill of fever, and in delirium has gone off into the jungle. I shall bring him back.

At dawn, he started with his two native guides, in light marching order, rifle slung over his shoulders.

Dupré, meantime, had made a short afternoon's march, camped for the night, and went on at daybreak. What with the girl and the loads and an unhurried guide, he did not make any speed—was not trying to make speed. Toward noon he ran into a dozen armed natives, whom his guide knew; they were the bandits Legrand had notified to meet him. Explanations consumed some time; the noon halt consumed more time. When the march was finally resumed, it lasted only a scant half-hour, because Corporal d'Ici caught up about then.

At sight of the bandits, his two guides hastily vanished. He strode on across a long open glade. Dupré had halted in utter amazement at sight of him. The girl, who was the quickest-witted of the lot and knew what to expect, caught up Dupré's rifle and stood with wrath and fury in her face. Ici ignored her, plowed to a halt, and mopped his cheeks.

"Glad I found you, Pierre," he said abruptly. "We'll get going back, now. Legrand is dead."

"Dead?" Dupré started. "I'm not going back, you fool! Where'd you come from?"

"Never mind. You're going back, so come along."

The brown bandits scattered out through the brush.

"No," rasped Dupré hotly. "I'm done with the damned Legion and all the rest of it. Turn around and clear out. I'm off, understand? And there's reason enough." He put a hand on the shoulder of the girl. "We stick, she and I; we'll get married, with the first chance."

"You will, like hell!" said Corporal d'Ici. "You're coming back with me if I have to drag you by the heels!" He meant it, and showed that he meant it. He added his candid opinion of the girl; and he had learned enough about her to speak the very dark truth.

YOUNG Dupré flew at him barehanded and smashed him in the face. Then the corporal's rifle-butt took him over the ear and stretched him out senseless. With this, the girl screamed blue fury and cut loose. Her first bullet went through Ici's sun-helmet with a spang. Her second bullet nicked his ear. He flung up his own rifle and shot her through the head, as unhesitatingly as he had shot Jean Legrand.

Then he stooped, picked up the senseless Dupré, and started back. And he went at a trot.

Before he was across the open space, he realized that the native bandits were after him. A bullet buzzed past his knees, then another—they were firing low in order not to hit Dupré. At the edge of the brush, the corporal lowered his burden to the ground, caught at his rifle, wheeled, and opened fire.

Those natives were caught full in the open, and before they made shelter in the grass, three of them were dead.

ICI took the rifle-sling in his teeth, heaved Dupré up across his shoulders, and went trotting on along the jungle trail. Vengeful yells shrilled up behind him. Another open glade, and a long one, would have to be crossed after a hundred yards or so of the trail. There was no avoiding it, for he must stick to the trail. When he came to it, his breath was coming in long heaves, his eyes were bulging, but he kept up his steady trot. The yells from behind were closer now.

Straight out across the open space he headed, and was half over it before a gun banged and the bullet spatted through the grass beside him. He could not turn to look back without stopping. He went on. Another gun spoke, and he staggered in his stride, as a hot touch seared his thigh. He staggered again, and pitched forward. The figure of Dupré hit heavily and went rolling; but the corporal snatched at his rifle and came up firing.

One miss—a hit, another hit. The bandits scattered and stayed scattered. Once more Ici picked up his comrade and went on to the shelter of the brush, and then halted. No pursuit now. Dupré, jarred to life by that fall, sat up and blinked at him, as he made a hasty bandage for the bullet-scrape across his thigh.

"The devil!" Dupré abruptly recalled everything and came to his feet, wild-eyed.

"Take it easy, Pierre," snapped Corporal d'Ici. "Your girl's dead. Start anything, and I'll give you the butt again. Turn around—march!"

"Dead?" muttered Dupré.

"A bullet got her, in the scrap. It was a good scrap. March, damn you!"

Dupré broke, and went shambling along the trail with sobs in his throat. The world had gone to pieces for him, but Ici kept him going at a fast clip.

They came back into town after dark and went to headquarters. Dupré, dead beat, disheartened, dropped on his blankets, and Corporal d'Ici stood looking at him for a moment, then spoke.

"I've pulled you out of a dirty mess all around. Ask any of the servants about that girl of yours. Now that she's dead, you'll learn the truth. You're down as having an attack of fever. Now go to sleep and wake up sane! If I'd been a blasted fool, you'd have done the same for me."

Dupré waked up sane, sure enough: sane, disillusioned, shattered—but he had to pull himself together when he found Corporal d'Ici in delirium, struck down by the deadly jungle fever. Infection had got into his wounds, too.

That night Ici died.

Before the end, he was quite lucid. He looked up at Dupré, read the desperate things in the younger face, and the slight brave smile touched his lips.

"Don't think of it, *mon ami,*" he said. "Suicide's a coward's end. It takes a brave fellow to face everything down without a word. You've nothing to die for, everything to live for—I believe in you. I know you'll come through big, a man of whom the Legion will be proud. Do this for me."

Dupré broke down. Ici pressed his hand and spoke again.

"That—candle. Bring it. And my *livret militaire—*"

Dupré brought the candle, and the little book, the military record no eye save that of Ici and a superior officer had ever seen. Ici, with shaking fingers, burned it in the flame.

As it burned, the page with the birth-record curled. Three words written there caught the eye of Dupré, though he did not try to see anything. Three words: *"Pas de mère."* "No mother."

When Ici closed his eyes and died, it was with a smile on his lips. And at the instant of death, his lips opened. By a grotesque and terrible irony, this man who had no mother of record, yet who must have known the whole secret of his birth, passed away with a little fluttering phrase upon his lips:

"Ah! My mother—"

AND that was all the story I heard in the French restaurant close to Whitehall. Dupré told the whole thing quite unconcernedly, as one recounts something so far in the past that its emotional angles are blurred.

"I think," he said reflectively, "that as he died, Ici must have seen and recognized that mother of his who had never dared to own him. That smile on his lips—I tell you, it was beautiful! It haunted me for a long time. So, you see, I've had an unknown soldier in my life, as I told you there in the abbey."

"And you never learned who Ici really was?" I inquired.

HE gave me a queer, penetrating glance, pushed back his gray mustache, and lit a cigarette.

"My friend, in those days I was young and foolish, as you may have inferred from my little anecdote. I might have inquired, I might have learned much; but I respected the secret of the man whom I had loved. It would have seemed a desecration to pry into the matter. Yes, I was young, ardent, idealistic! I vowed to myself over his dead body that I should make his words come true, make the Legion proud of me. Perhaps I've not succeeded very well, but as the proverb says: *on fait ce qu'on peut*—a fellow can only do his best. And do you know what I think?"

At my gesture, he went on to tell me, slowly.

"That smile, as he died—that smile of recognition as he saw his mother and breathed that sacred name—it haunted me, as I said. I don't care a damn for theology or arguments of any kind; but I do believe that when a chap comes to pass on, he sees something that no one else sees. He pierces the mystery. And when I get mine, I don't want anyone fussing around talking about my soul. All I want is to look up, somewhere, and see André d'Ici standing there waiting for me. And I hope—mind you, I don't expect it, but I hope—that he'll be standing at the salute."

Next day I met Pierre Dupré in his shop, and he was fearfully apologetic. He must have told me a lot of rot, he said; when he had a drop too much, he became sentimental—and was terribly ashamed of it afterward.

I assured him gravely that nothing of the sort had occurred, and he beamed again. The old rascal would have been frightfully upset if he knew how much of his own soul he had revealed in those last words of his.

The story of a Legionnaire whose head was cut off and who—incredibly—survived to fight in the Dahomey campaign, will be told in the forthcoming July issue.

Three Were

By KENNETH

A GIRL drove a heavily packed Conestoga up to the general store at Mile High. It was not her usual stopping-place, for her wagon was a store in itself. In it she would drive from mining-camp to cow-ranch, selling needles, sorghum kettles and crockery. General stores were not on her itinerary.

She stopped at this one solely to look at a forlorn tattered young man whose eyes caught and held hers, pleading.

Luella Purdy, as well as the miners sitting on barrels under the store's wooden awning, wondered what manner of man he was. He was not a prospector roaring of a discovered lode, nor a ranger hunting some one; nor was he the hunted. He wore silver dollars for buttons, and his hands were rope-scarred, his knees saddle-bent. He might have been a cowboy who, like many others, was drifting south because of the dust-storms of the Dakotas, or perhaps because of the last blizzard which had cut the herds of Idaho and Montana. They guessed Idaho as the starting-point, because the piebald mare which he led was much larger than the stocky Southern ponies. And her rig was center-fire.

Like others of the jobless riders of the north, he would be on the way for Arizona in time for the spring horse round-ups. It was a long trail, the same which the historic Jebediah Strong had blazed in 1826—the Meadow Valley Wash, the Muddy, the Virgin, the Colorado.

This long-boned tattered pilgrim might have belonged to Strong's century, when men's thoughts went further than frontiers. He had an undaunted air, despite his sodden hat, torn Mackinaw, patched breeches and brass-toed boots. The mystery about him was that mare.

The cow-country did not work mares; not as this one seemed to have been worked. Thick-necked, shambling and shaggy, with her feet wrapped in gunny-sacks and a horse-blanket over her sway back, she plodded behind her plodding master, abject as a dog taught to heel.

Across the street from the store a man in the little land-office called out: "Looks like Red Ridin' Hood's grandmaw!"

From the awning of a saloon a miner said: "Why don't you buy a horse so you can ride, pilgrim?"

"Reckon he can't get rid of her," said a man on a barrel. "She's following him without his holding the reins."

This was true. As the traveler stepped to the arched door of the harness- and feed-store, the mare kept close to him, touching his shoulder with her whiskered nose. It looked as if she actually rested her hammer head because of exhaustion. Or perhaps she was just hungry and was nudging him for oats. Then again it might have been nothing more nor less than the love of a horse for a man, and the fear lest he get beyond reach.

The harness-and-feed man came over from a saloon to see what his customer wanted.

"A couple dollars' worth of corn," the latter said.

"Who for?"

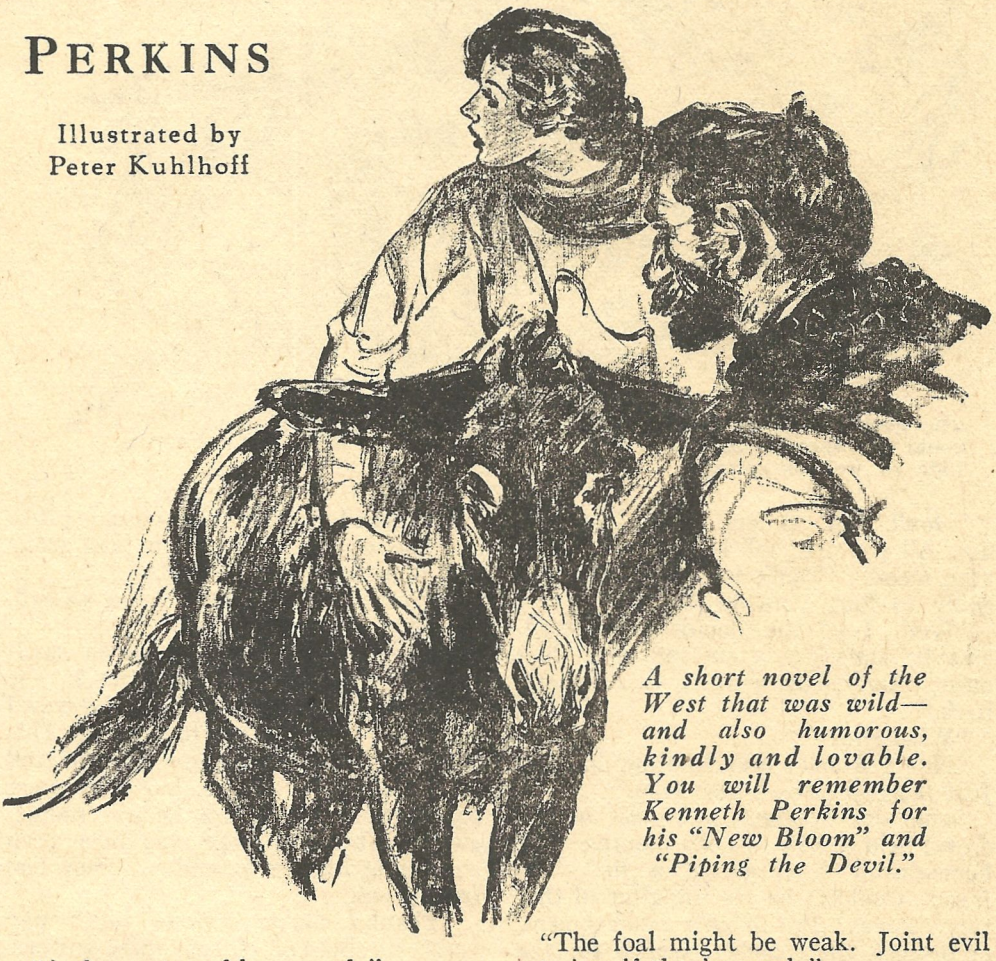
"My pony. Feeding her corn twice a day." He took out what seemed to be his entire wealth—two cartwheel dollars, some four-bit pieces.

"You mean corn for that crowbait?"

Thoroughbreds

PERKINS

Illustrated by
Peter Kuhlhoff



A short novel of the West that was wild—and also humorous, kindly and lovable. You will remember Kenneth Perkins for his "New Bloom" and "Piping the Devil."

"And carrots and bran mash."

"Yes, but listen—"

"Got any horse-blankets?" The stranger sliced one of the dollars off his vest.

The feed man looked at the vest, surmising that it was the end of this client's cash. "I'll get you the feed. But blankets cost money in winter—and at an elevation of one mile."

"Got a vet in this town?"

A leathery, puffy man who was redolent of hoof ointment, stepped out of the gathering crowd. He squinted at the mare, switched his cud and observed: "Looks like she's expecting."

The cowboy nodded. "Need some sulphate of iron to put in the corn."

"Worrying about her milk already?" said the horse-doctor.

"And some soap liniment and turpentine."

"What for?"

"The foal might be weak. Joint evil gets 'em if they're weak."

There were grins.

"Weak, with a dam like that!" the horse-doctor chuckled. "It'll be a bear cub, looks like!"

The stranger flushed, glancing at the girl on the Conestoga's seat. She was the only one who was not smiling. Barkeeps and their clientele peered out of swinging doorways at the laughter; assay men poked their heads out of shack offices to see what the joke was about.

WITH the laughter badgering him, the stranger stepped up to the big horse-doctor and grabbed both his lapels.

"Listen, Doc," he said quietly. "You got this crowd making too much noise. Just quiet 'em by telling 'em the good points you see in this pony."

The doctor gaped helplessly. "But there aint any good points."

The gale had teeth that could bite through horsehide as well as calfskin.

"Don't look at me, Doc. Look at her. All you need tell is the truth." His tone meant: "Don't be afraid, I'm not going to hurt you—yet."

"Well, I—" the doctor stammered, "maybe she's got a shorter neck than most. And high withers, and a long back."

"What else?"

"Not a Roman nose like our bronc's. Just the opposite—a dish face."

Some one laughed, but most of the crowd held smoke in open mouths. The horse-doctor was getting a little too frank. Couldn't he see the glint in that ranny's eyes? But to their astonishment, or disgust, the stranger seemed to take no offense. He was not on the fight, after all. Just bluffing.

The veterinarian may have sensed this, for he became franker: "Her legs are almost straight—below the hocks, anyway. And she's got chin-whiskers and she's cast in the near eye, and goose-rumped."

"What-all's happening?" newcomers asked.

"This hoppergrass has a mare expectin', and he's buying a lay-it for her!"

This topped everything. The whole street cheered and jeered.

"All right, Doc, thanks." The young scarecrow turned on the crowd and drew his gun. "I couldn't hit the Doc on the nose," he said in the sudden silence. "The smell of blood will get any mare nervous. They'll slip a foal sometimes. But this old lady isn't gun-shy at all."

"Better count ten, pilgrim."

He looked up at the soft-voiced speaker. She was a slim girl in blue jeans and a leather windbreaker.

"Here's your blankets," she offered. "What else do you want?"

They were alone in a sudden small silence. Then they were alone in the middle of the sandy street, for the crowd had come to laugh, not to be shot. This rannihan had looked at first like the kind who could take a joke, but they must have rubbed him where he was saddle-galled. This fool mare may have been something like an obsession. They had had enough.

"Thanks, ma'am. Hope this'll pay you." He sliced off his remaining buttons.

"I said, what else?"

He looked at the wagon for the first time. On the ribbed canvas, sun-blistered letters announced:

SANDY PURDY
Pots, Pans, Needles & Pins.
Belts, Bandanas, Bolts Calico & Colanders.
What you need I've got. If not I'll bring same on Return Trip.

Underneath was some neater and newer lettering which read:

Under new Management: LUELLA PURDY.

"You haven't got what I need, ma'am. You aren't a vet."

"I've got turpentine and one bottle of cooling medicine."

He accepted eagerly. "It'll be handy."

"Where you trailing?"

"To the first outfit where the colt won't freeze."

"That'll be the Handsaw Bench. I'm riding through in a few days. Anything you want to order, I'll have it there. Here's some clean sacks for her hoofs. And a bottle of rum."

"Rum! What else do you tote in this wagon?"

"Needles and spools are my long suit. Let's have your vest, cowboy, and I'll sew on some buttons. It's cold over the divide. The rum's for her feed once a day. It's for the mare, not you."

He gave her the vest, and while he packed the blankets, she sewed. A few of the crowd loitered under the awning across the street, studying them through pipe-smoke. The rest had gone to bars.

"I'll tell you something I wouldn't trouble to tell those gaping galoots," he said, tying on the clean sacks. "They thought the Doc was making fun of my mare. He didn't want to look scared. He figured I knew he was picking out her best points—a long back, which means jumping power; straight legs below the hocks, which means a long stride; short neck and high withers—one means power, the other a deep chest; and a dish face means intelligence and nerves."

She started on another button. "It'll be a good foal."

"That's the dam. And the sire—ever hear of Idaho Bob, a cow-man up north? Well, I rode for him. When his kid fell in a crick and I saved him, the old man asked me what I wanted. 'I want my piebald to foal a race-horse,' I said, having my eye on his thoroughbred. You know his famous horse."

He waited for her gasp of astonishment. But she merely bit off a thread. "Don't know much about race-horses. They aren't much good in this burro country. Here's your vest."

He choked. Evidently she had not listened to a word. "Thanks," he grunted. "I just wanted you to know the kind of a horse you're helping bring into the world."

He was so angry he did not trouble to button his vest. If he had, he might have noticed that she had sewed on his silver dollars again.

When he hit the trail, trudging off into the timber, Luella Purdy called to the jury of miners and drummers and assay men. "You gents ever hear of a race-horse belonging to Idaho Bob?"

"You mean Volcano," a whisky-drummer from San Francisco said, "who won two years straight at Tanforan? Fastest horse ever brought West."

"That mare's going to foal Volcano's son," she announced.

"Wow!" every man roared. "And you, Luella, letting him blowfly you like that!" They whooped in laughter, but she did not curl a lip. One of them in sympathy, pointed out what the joke was.

"A cowboy out of a job, and couldn't even buy blankets!"

"What's that to do with it?"

"That old crowbait mare of his couldn't bring five dollars for saddle-soap. And here's the joke: *Volcano's fee is a thousand dollars!*"

She gasped a moment; then her eyes shone. She looked thrilled. The guffawing was loud; she let them enjoy it.

But she said: "You aren't laughing at that ranny. He's laughing at you."

CHAPTER II

A WIND yapped through the tall timber like a dog barking mainly to show its teeth. Then it howled.

Hiking in a tireless slouch, Nick Buckley felt the pangs not of fatigue but of a growing apprehension. When that foal was born, he must have good weather. He was not going to have this little race-horse grow out of form or lose flesh, as they will if exposed to cold during suckling time. He remembered a horse-breeder had told him that they never regain their proper shape.

That was why he risked that long trail down the sierras, instead of waiting at Mile High until his mare foaled. A mining-camp was no place for her after foaling. All she could have was hay. Even fresh-cut rye was not enough. This old dam deserved upland clover!

To avoid a stretch of icebound trail Buckley followed the bottoms, which twisted so that he lost a day. Through a gap in those tumbled cliffs he saw the lower sierras rolling southward toward the bottomlands and warm country. But before he got halfway down, he smelled a blizzard coming. Snow began to slant.

Here was tragedy. It was too late to go back to Mile High. Instead, with the storm snarling at them, hitting them from behind, they pressed on for a black belt of timber.

The flakes turned from feathery softness to ice needles. Horse and man, puffing steam, staggered on while the wind flapped long shreds of cloud, braiding them together so that a giant curtain shut out all view of the lowlands.

Cold bit at Buckley's ears, and he tied down the brim of his hat with a bandana, knotted at his aching chin. He unpacked one of the blankets and cinched it over the mare's back. The gale had teeth that could bite through horsehide as well as through calfskin; the fangs could reach that little foal waiting to be born.

He urged the mare on, for she pounded heavily. He led her with reins loose and with a hand on her nose, speaking to her, rubbing her ears, shoving his shoulder at times against the big neck.

She was jumpy now. She whinnied, then stopped and pawed at the snow. No mare could have given the well-known signals with more finality.

Nick built a roaring fire of the quick-burning pine cones, then held a blanket in the lee of the fire to steam out the dampness. Warmth was the main thing, warmth for dam and foal alike.

He cut down a dozen saplings and made a windbreak. He twined the branches through and stuffed clumps of fir and pine needles in the basket work. Around the bottom he heaped up a mound of snow, drying the inner ground with hot rocks. Before night was half over, he had a good sized hovel, half wigwam, half igloo. And the mare was inside.

When he stopped to catch his breath, it racked his lungs as he drew it in. Then it came out in puffs of steam from pinched nostrils and drawn lips. His face was haggard and gray, his eyes sunken but glittering in the light of the crackling fire. He was exhausted, but he had no time to think about that.

He heated water, enough to take off the chill, poured in some rum and made a thin gruel of corn. For weeks he had followed the rule that a mare in foal must be well corned, but not too much lest it interfere with foaling, not too little lest the foal starve.

All night the snow came in smothering gusts from the draws to the north. Nick made coffee to keep awake while the wind poured against the tepee. The storm shrieked in a sort of frustrated rage, for the more it hurled its snow-clouds, the more it banked up the protecting wall. By morning it had blown out its fury.

BUCKLEY stared at the wan sickly light, his face as leaden gray as the sky but, like the sky, vaguely radiant.

He warmed another mixture of rum and corn and took it in to the tepee.

This time the mare gave a *whoof* of welcome.

Doubtless she was as hungry as she was tired. For there, in the dry warm nest of blankets and branches, was a bundle of wet fur and long shapeless legs.

Volcano's get had arrived on earth.

AT noon a rider drifted a lame, blowing horse up to the campfire and saw the snow-heaped wigwam and the mare inside. He also saw an exhausted scarecrow of a man holding a suckling foal whose knob-jointed shanks were too wabbly to stand under the mother mare.

Nick Buckley looked up from this thrilling work of giving the young racehorse his first breakfast in life, and he gaped at the stranger.

The latter had slid from his saddle and stood at the door—a big man with frightened eyes, the eyelids rimed with frost.

"I'm in trouble, pardner. My paint poked a foot in an ice-crack down yonder and limped the rest of the way here. I got to change horses."

"No chance for that in this neck of the woods. That storm chased everything out of the mountains, including wolves."

"That mare—"

Buckley gasped, seeing a twinkle on gun-metal in the stranger's fist. "But she just foaled! You can't—"

"Get over to the other side of this stall, *hombre.*"

He was ruthlessly calm, seeing Buckley unarmed. The latter opened and closed his fists, staring at that muzzle. When the mare was yanked out, the foal buckled in a shapeless heap. Nick hastily reached for the little critter to help him, then turned, gulping.

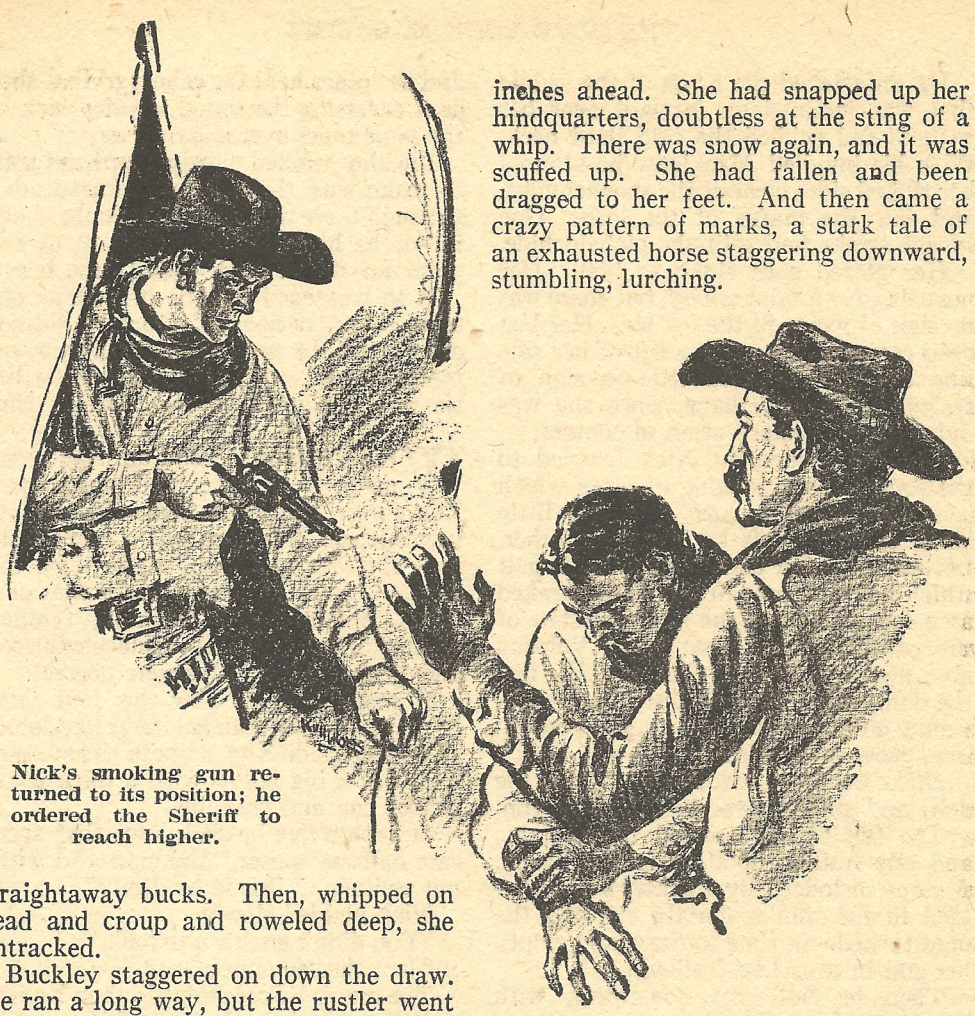
"You can't take a mare from her foal! Even if she can trail! Why, man, how's the foal going to get milk?"

"I'm letting you live, and you talk of milk!" the man grunted, crowding the mare over to his paint, snaking her head close.

Nick jumped to the door of the tepee, but a slug whistling through his hat stopped him.

The horse-thief was on his own paint now, raking him, leading the mare in a slamming trot. When Nick risked dashing out to his dufflebag for his rifle, he saw her rear, wheel and whinny for her foal. But a vicious blow on her head put her on the trail.

By the time Buckley had his rifle and started running, the rustler had changed horses, saddling the mare and raking her to a lope. She pitched, but knowing no sunfishing tricks, she merely humped in



Nick's smoking gun returned to its position; he ordered the Sheriff to reach higher.

straightaway bucks. Then, whipped on head and croup and roweled deep, she untracked.

Buckley staggered on down the draw. He ran a long way, but the rustler went twice as far. The mare was gone. That was his first thought. His next was for the foal. He was thinking how lonely that little fellow would be, back there in the cold forest. Colts, even when they are old enough for weaning, miss their dams. He must hurry back.

But without the mother mare, how could he feed the little mite until his teeth were strong enough to crop the rich grasses of late summer? Until then he must have milk.

Buckley kept on the mare's trail. He had no trouble, for the pine-needles, which ordinarily would leave no tracks, were blanketed with snow. He read sign as he hiked and ran. Somehow the mare must have got her second wind. In flat stretches he saw where she had been put into a lope over and over again. Where blown snow left sheeted ice, he saw how she had pounded heavily, hammering her cleats into the glazed ground. He noticed one hoof had left merely a scraping mark. She was lame.

Farther on, her hind-legs had struck their sign, then struck again barely a few inches ahead. She had snapped up her hindquarters, doubtless at the sting of a whip. There was snow again, and it was scuffed up. She had fallen and been dragged to her feet. And then came a crazy pattern of marks, a stark tale of an exhausted horse staggering downward, stumbling, lurching.

Nick Buckley stopped where the drifts dipped away into blue depths which meant a gulch.

He stopped at the rim to get his breath, for it was too late to hurry now. He breathed deep of the icy air, gasping, staring. Down there in the gulch bottoms he saw a man plodding through the snow. It was easy to guess that he had discarded the mare in the drifts somewhere, after running her to death.

Nick lifted his rifle. His fingers tensed for the squeeze; then his whole body tensed as he heard an almost human moan.

He knew that sound even before he leaped into the snowbank, following it. He had heard it long ago when old Rattleweed, his mare, stood near him all night after he had broken his leg. He heard it again when she jammed against a wire fence while they topped off bronc's at the Circle-Bench. He'd held her head in his lap that time when they doctored her.... And now he plunged into a drift, found her, and once more held her shaggy head in his lap, as she was dying.

He unfastened the cinch of the saddle that was jammed up forward over her withers and rubbed the cold hard neck. With his bundled Mackinaw he scoured her ribbed sides clear of the snow-chunks, and saw the marks of the lash. One savage stroke had split the piebald hide.

Her glazed eyes clung to him. Her nostrils gave a faint *whoof,* but there was no sign of vapor in the icy air. Her last gasp came with a rattling lift of her side like the top of a teakettle—a sigh of resignation and perhaps, since she was dying in her master's arms, of content.

For just a moment Nick listened to the soughing and singing of pines which echoed her last moans. Let the little horse that was left be like his mother. Let him have her endurance and her gait which belonged not to the smooth-raked race-course, but to the stony washes of the cow-country. What could Volcano give, anyway? Speed, that was all. But the dam, which counts most in breeding, would give a deep chest, a great heart, size, "cow savvy," courage to the last.

Nick Buckley scrambled out of the drift and stalked over to the gulch rim.

The rustler had crossed the bottoms and was trailing up the opposite bench. A stone dislodged by Buckley's foot tinkled in the thin mountain air, and the man turned—in time to draw and empty his gun in a useless fusillade.

Then he fell face downward, with Buckley's slug in his chest.

The wild winter forest was like balm, its coolness and immensity a benediction. The forest and its law would condone this deed. For a horse and a man are animals alike, and the life of one had been taken in payment for the other's. The cliffs and the pines held the echoes of that shot as if caressing the sound, calling back in the same tones over and over again.

Buckley walked slowly down the trail to make sure that the man was dead—although there was no remote doubt about it, for he had clutched his chest at the point for which Nick aimed—the heart.

It so happened that no immediate obsequies were necessary. Buckley did not even cross the gulch to look at the remains, for he saw a mounted man a little way off, gazing over the gulch rim.

WHEN the man rode up, something made Nick stare hard at his eyes. The forest had been benevolent in its vast silence. But here was a human being—the first to sit in judgment on the deed. A man's life had paid for that of a horse. What would mankind, typified momentarily by this wide-shouldered and grim-mouthed stranger, decree?

It was incredible how this first sight of a human face branded itself like something hot inside Nick's brain. The horseman was a big fellow with a thick neck, beaver cap and earmuffs.

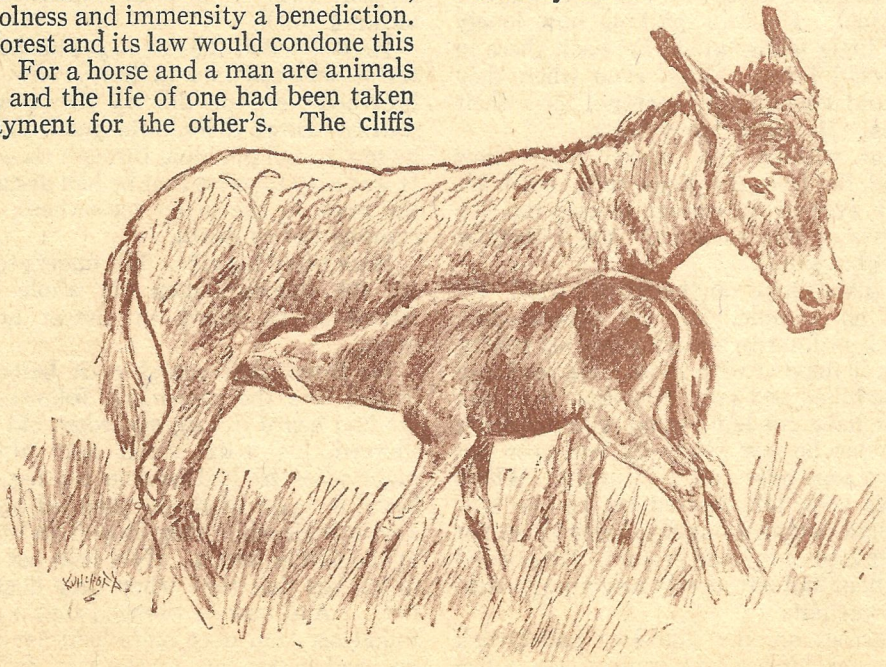
"I couldn't've beaded down that accurate halfway closer," the man said without smiling. "But is he dead?"

Nick nodded slowly.

"You didn't go down to look."

"Just the same, he's dead."

The man's lips tightened; then he said quietly: "Reckon that was his mare in the drift yonder."



"It was mine—the man was a rustler."

"Bueno."

Nick gasped a sigh of relief. This first man had condoned what was done.

"Stranger in this range?"

"Used to ride for some Idaho outfits."

"Then maybe you wouldn't know who you beefed. Bird by the name of Jim Rupple."

"I don't care what his name is."

"Might make it a little different." The man thought a moment. "I can't see how any jury of cow-men would convict you. But you'd have to convince them it was because of your mare. Mind you, I know that fair play for a horse is a religion with some folks. But—"

He studied Nick. Then: "You better slope, son."

"What for?"

"Rupple has kinfolk down in the valley. Texans. Feudin's their long suit." He saw how this sobered his listener. "Just take my advice. Line out."

"It's bad advice. My mare had a foal; he knew it. If I lined out without a trial, folks would forget why I killed him."

"Who's going to tell on you?"

Nick's eyes were eager and hot.

"It's no secret. My mare had a foal. He knew it."

"I'm telling you. Keep mum. I'll cook up some yarn after you leave. You're a stranger. But I'm not. I'll say this man"—he nodded at the black thing in the snowy bottoms—"I'll say he started talking smoky when I asked him about that brand on his horse. I'd be glad to do a favor for a young ranny who shows as much love for his horse as you. You're a longhorn."

"I'd be some shorthorn if I let you take the blame for my smoke."

The man saw a glint in his eyes. "All right, friend. The thing's done. A jury might free you. But I don't think you'd get a trial."

Nick glanced back involuntarily at the body in the snow.

"Don't worry about the remains. I saw an old trapper with a sled and some pelts mushing up the creek-bed. I'll see that he takes the body back to Jochim's post. Sheriff's on the ride over that way. Forget it, and—you drift."

CHAPTER III

A GIRL with big astonished eyes watched that scarecrow drifting along the wind, dragging a travois.

She might have recognized the figure if he had been leading an old piebald mare. But he was trudging alone, pulling two cedar poles, which were crossed with intertwined boughs and packed with a blanket-roll. When he came close, however, she remembered those pleading eyes.

"Any outfits near here where I can get hold of a mare?"

She shook her head, still gaping.

"Then where's the nearest cow? . . . I mean she-stuff."

"Cows, yes. But no she-stuff." She tossed her head slightly toward a spread infinitely far away on the lowlands. A few dots in a round corral would be winter stock.

"Then have you any canned milk?"

"What you got there, a papoose?"

He told her what it was. "You said you were coming to the Handsaw Bench, so I headed this way, hunting your wagon-tracks. Been trailing thirty miles, thinking of you all the time—you and this wagon that you can pull out everything from pins to rabbits. If you can't get this little critter some milk, he's through."

The girl's wind-brown face turned radiant. She leaped down from the driver's seat, ran to the travois and dropped to her knees. Carefully, as if afraid of awakening a sleeping baby, she picked up a corner of a blanket, then finding only another blanket, she lifted its corner too, then another, until she found a vest with dollars for buttons. The bundle was wrapped as snugly as the seasoned tidbits inside the corn husks of a tamale. Finally she found a soft nose and felt the breath of a small hungry snort.

The foal tried to lift his head but he was too weak. She helped him so that a long neck swathed in red wool stuck out of the nest of blankets. Glassy wet eyes blinked at her.

"What happened to his mother?" she asked. Nick told her. But he did not tell her what he did to the rustler. The problem at hand was much more vital.

Again she wormed her strong thin arm under the nest. She suggested crushed corn and oleo.

"He's not a calf!" Nick said. "Besides you have to churn it with separated milk. Where's the separated milk?"

"I passed a nester's shack back yonder and saw a she-burro. The nester said she was moping because he'd sold her foal to a Mex. Maybe—"

"Burro's milk for this little racehorse!"

"A fine time to be particular!" She carried the bundle to her wagon. "I've got a box-stove. Heat's what he needs first."

"Let me carry him," Nick said.

"I'm holding him. You fix the bed."

"Yeah, but let me hold him."

They argued like two children over a doll—two children that have decided to play house. And since the girl was the mother of the family she had the prerogative of holding the baby. She won.

Climbing into the wagon, Nick found a bunk with shelves above packed with bolts of cross-barred gingham, sprigged calico, cotton chemises, denim. Opposite the bunk jars, brooms, decorated china, hardware filled more pine shelves. At the end of the narrow six-foot aisle between bunk and row of boxes, a stove and dish cupboard screened the driver's seat.

It was in the aisle, he judged, that Luella Purdy wanted him to bed down the blankets for the foal, but she said, "Not on the floor. Fix the bunk. He's cold. He's shivering, rattling himself to pieces. And we got to have room to get to that stove."

Nick grinned. Here was a little mother, having the one passion in common with his, to save this wavering life.

"He won't need your vest," she said. "You better put that on yourself. You look cold too."

From the stock of the wagon-store the girl produced an infant's bottle and heated hot water, sweetened it with sugar. Evidently she had everything a frontier life would call for—from teething-rings for infants to spectacles for the aged. The same box that held hairpins for cantina girls held nursing-bottles with red rubber nipples.

She lifted the foal's head and thrust the nipple into his pudgy lips. But it was too late. The soft quivering nose smelled nothing there that would restore life. The foal was far gone.

LUELLA PURDY swung to the driver's seat, kicked off the brake, turned the wagon in the first bit of open ground. Nick sat with the foal, holding the doddering head in his lap, rubbing it anxiously, watching the weak gasps which came more slowly. For an hour the wagon wheels banged on down the rocky road. It would be the last hour, Nick knew as he watched those glazed eyes, unless they found that burro.

They found her—a scrubby, sorry, sore-backed thing, with drooping head and eyes closed, and bur-clotted fur hanging in patches like the ragged hair of a sheep. This was the new mother that was to raise Volcano's son!

A brown old nester came out of his shack and saw a girl prowling up to his burro as if fearing the knob-kneed, sag-bellied critter might run away. And this made the nester smile for Sappho, which was the burro's name, had never troubled herself to run away from anything.

The nester's sun-faded eyes roved to the ragged renegade who followed the girl, carrying something in his arms. It was something apparently dead, left in a dry wash by coyotes that had found slim pickings. But the young *hombre* held it under Sappho while the girl held the burro's head—another unnecessary precaution.

The dead thing seemed dead all over except for reaching lips. His long legs touched the ground as the man stooped and held him, but they buckled weakly.

AND thus Volcano's son drank. The lolling head, held in place at first, began to quiver, taking on the semblance of an old palsied man again, then tensing with the gripping current of hunger.

During the whole meal the burro did not so much as open her eyes. But her owner was quite interested. He even made remarks, although no one had noticed him. "It might work a miracle, folks. Burro's milk is good for consumptives. Won't do that expiring critter no hurt. Thought it was a beaver pelt, but I see it's a foal that's been slipped too early. Sort of an incubator foal, you might say."

"How much do you want for this canary?" Nick asked.

The nester studied the dollars on the lad's vest. "Well, that there now jenny is really in the blue ribbon class when it comes to savvy. That ought to be her name instead of Sappho." He pondered and puffed. "I'll have to charge you three dollars."

He had counted the buttons, as well as the purchaser's entire wealth, accurately.

The old nester watched them carry the foal back to the wagon, rack the jenny in back, then drive off. The aftermath came the next morning when the nester realized that he had not been awakened by the jenny's sun-up bray.

He was awakened instead by the thrum of hoofbeats coming down the wash. He looked through his gunnysack window and saw a posse of riders spurting mud chunks and crowding down for his shack.

That purblind Indian had lost no time in telling what he had seen!

He recognized one easily enough as Stew Moyer, the Sheriff, and two more as Tub Rupple and Bash Rupple—cattlemen who had come to this range from Texas.

The nester was unperturbed, except that he wished it had been old Sappho who had awakened him. He had parted with a faithful companion, even though she was pretty well stove up from ten years of prospecting. But he remembered how she had smelled water once when there was nothing but salt for miles around. She knew a rattler from a gopher snake and shale from lignite beds. And she could pack fulminate and dynamite over a trail that even a mule-deer would slip on. She had the blood of these wild burros that live in the sierras like deer and are much harder to catch. Three plugged dollars was hardly enough.

Stew Moyer, a rusty ball-cornered star on his vest, whipped up into the cedar pole corral. He was a long-bodied, long-headed man, bony and burned, with cheekbones sandpapered to the raw by hard winds and hard liquor.

"See anything of the Purdy wagon?"

"Rolled past here yesterday."

"I'm trailing a bird who was on foot and dragging a travois until she gave him a lift. That's all we could make out of the snow-tracks."

"You're pretty good at reading sign, Stew," the nester said. "He was in the wagon. Bought my burro account he had a foal needed motherin'."

"Too bad you didn't know who he was," the Sheriff said. "Or you might of glommed onto a good reward. He murdered Jim Rupple up in the sierras—and robbed him of a map to his claim."

The old nester looked up at the other riders. Two of them had lynch in their eyes—Bash and Tub. The latter asked, "Is he still sticking to the wagon?"

"Was when they left. You see, his foal needed stove heat till they could get down to warm country."

"Come on, Stew," Bash Rupple said. "We better catch up and tell that girl what kind of a killer she's helping out."

The nester lit his first bowlful of tobacco to stop the shake of his hands. "Didn't look much like a killer to me."

"Maybe not," Stew said, mounting. "He told Tex Brandaw he killed Rupple account of a rustled mare. But we found Rupple's vest ripped—*after* he'd croaked; otherwise the blood from his chest would have smeared the inside where the lining was cut. It's my hunch this bird is the same one killed and robbed those two old prospectors in the Coyotero. I mean Henby and Pliny Driggs. Murdering prospectors seems to be his long suit."

He wheeled his horse and spurred off at a run. The rest of his posse, following the blood-hungry Rupples, had already hit the grit for the bottomlands.

CHAPTER IV

THE Purdy wagon trundled out of the foothills into a cliff-bound meadow wash. Sunshine poured on the gentle alluvial fans that spread out from the draw; cottonwoods that were China green bordered the icy creek. For down here mountain dogwood had given way to cañon fern, grizzly-bear cactus and blossoming yucca. This was near desert country, where winter was spring.

Here in the green wash a complacent burro cropped new grass, and a foal gamboled and rolled about her, locoed as a lamb, happy as a lark, gayly rampant.

"Sticks to her like a bur on her tail." Nick Buckley laughed, as he snaked wood for the wagon stove. "Doesn't even know I'm living."

"Gets that from his foster-mother," the girl said. "A burro never looks at you like a horse does. Just dozes or crops sage. He's learned that it's no use noticing humans."

When Nick walked over to see his little race-horse, the jenny did not so much as look up, but stood there as if sound asleep. The foal stretched his long neck and stared, then scampered back behind the burro, peeking around her hindquarters like a small boy behind the skirts of his nurse.

And as Nick got within an arm's-length or so, the jenny stuck up one ear at an angle and the other horizontally. It was a very eloquent semaphore. Her hind-leg hunched so that it was free of her weight. That, Nick knew from experience with horses of the rough string, was also eloquent. The simple change in attitude said clearly: "Don't come any closer, *hombre*. This foal is mine now —not yours."

LUELLA was staring fixedly at the mists which the sun sucked up from the snow patches of the upper draws; she saw something up there moving along the trail the wagon had followed.

"Nick," she said in a queer voice, "did you ever track down the man who stole your mare?"

They faced each other as if a covert challenge were passed between them. She looked hard at his eyes, but he did not flinch.

He nodded. "Yes—got him, too."

"Anyone see you do it?"

"One man—a big coot with red hair ruffled around a beaver cap."

Her forehead clouded. "A man stopped at my wagon a long while back, before you came with the foal. He bought some earmuffs. A big man."

"That's the one."

"It was Tex Brandaw." She seemed worried. "What did he do?"

"Nothing. Said I did right. He said if I felt like lining out, he'd cover my tracks."

Again she frowned. "That's funny! Tex Brandaw isn't the kind of a man who'd understand why you did it. He's not much when it comes to giving horses a square deal. He happens to be a horse-knacker—he sells old plugs for saddle-soap and glue. . . . Come back to the wagon. I want to talk to you."

NICK, following her gaze, saw through a break in the timber, riders shoving their ponies out of a foothill draw.

"Better get in the wagon before they see you," she said.

"If they're law-men, I'll give up." He kept staring as one after another, seven riders crossed the wash. The girl pushed him behind the wagon, as he said: "I'll tell them the whole story. If they ever loved a horse—"

"Stew Moyer isn't a very sentimental sheriff—except after a booze fight; then he gets religion. Better let me prospect him before you give up. How do you know who else is in that posse?"

Nick Buckley remembered what he had heard about the kinfolk of the murdered man—hot-headed Texans who took naturally to feuding. He climbed into the wagon.

The girl went back to her burro and foal, so that she was a hundred yards from the wagon when the riders bore down on her, rocketing chunks of mud.

"Hi, boys!" she greeted cheerily. "Hi, Stew!"

She did not like the looks of their eyes, especially of those two—Jim Rupple's kin. As for Stew Moyer's eyes, the girl saw the misty glare to them, the light of the zealot as well as the hard drinker. The Sheriff was a man who would do wrong to make right. But his sheriffing, for ten years, had made a safe range.

He had no doubt about this girl's integrity. She had been sagebrushed by a road-agent. Everyone in the posse believed that, for everyone knew Luella Purdy. Nevertheless Stew's first question, through habit, was a trap that might catch her in a lie. If it worked, it would save a lot of time.

"Didn't see anything of a long ranny wearing cartwheels on his vest, Luella?"

"Sure, I brought him down out of the mountains," she answered readily. "His foal needed a ride. So I gave 'em both a lift. There's the foal yonder."

"But where's the man?"

"Lined out not half an hour ago. Left the foal with me to raise."

"Where'd he line out to?"

"Said he was hunting for you. He said he wanted to explain how he had to salt a horse-thief."

Several of the posse, led by the Rupples, had drifted their horses over to the wagon, at the same time holding back so as to hear what the girl said. What she said convinced them so completely that they held their horses wheeling. There was nothing in that wagon to interest them. The killer would have lined out anyway, the moment he saw the posse coming down the hills.

Stew Moyer answered her impatiently: "The horse-thief alibi is pretty gauzy. It so happens the salting was murder and robbery."

"Who made that up?" she asked.

"Bash Rupple here, and Tub. They know. Couple weeks ago some saloon men jumped Jim Rupple and found he had a map sewed up in his vest. But his kinfolk here fogged in on the game, and he got away, his map safe. Then this road-agent trails him and gets him. The map was gone."

The girl's face was dead white. "Never figured somebody else might have coyoted around the body, did you, Stew? Or is that too hard?"

Sheriff Moyer's stringy mustache twitched in chuckles. The movement went to his chest, making the brass balls on the edge of his star twinkle. "That would be a good answer, wouldn't it? He kills a man for switching horses on him —not for a map to a gold-mine which disappears! And this two-spot fills in his hand with some sentiment. Like you say, that's a little too hard!"

BASH RUPPLE and Tub were watching the girl's face. Bash Rupple barked at her, "Which way did he trail?"

The girl said readily: "Beaver Creek."

The two Rupple kinsmen swung their horses, untracked. Three more riders, cool enough to be suspicious, held their mounts, waiting their chief's order.

"What kind of a horse?" the Sheriff asked.

"A stray paint we found back yonder." She talked to give herself time to think. "You could trail the hoofprints easy on account of a bar on his off hind shoe—to spread the shoe because he had thrush once, looked like."

"Thanks. That makes tracking plum certain, what with this soggy ground."

"Unless he stuck to pine-needles," she said.

"Maybe she's talking about that lame paint we saw drifting down for the grass country couple days ago," one of the riders said.

Stew Moyer scratched his red jaw, impressed with this last remark. "All right, men," he said. "Head for Beaver Creek."

The posse socked spurs into their bronc's and lined out in a fast run. But Stew and one of his deputies held back.

"You'll excuse me, Miss Purdy, if I take just one look in your wagon."

AGAIN she paled. "Think I'm gold-bricking you, Stew?"

"Oh no, no, no! I was only puzzling over this paint with the spread hoof. Can't see why we didn't notice his tracks along with your wagon which we been trailing."

"The young ranny rode the paint soon as we got him," she said. "He didn't stay in the open with the wagon. Stuck to the timber, which makes what you say about him kind of plausible." This reinforced her story quite adequately. "I hope you boys glom onto him before he gets to the Border. Any way I can help, Stew, let me know." She added excitedly: "I could stick up a *Wanted* sign on the wagon so every outfit I go through will read it."

"A smart idea," Stew said, reaching in his leather coat. "I've been sticking up handbills all over the scenery for the bandit who's been robbing prospectors down in the Coyotero. But they didn't do any good, account I didn't have his description till now. Also one of his aliases he told Tex Brandaw." He took a bill from a rolled sheaf and handed it to her. "Stick that up on your wagon. Reckon more folks will see it there than if I put it in the papers."

As she started for the wagon, she heard the snarling drawl of the deputy.

"Thought you were going to look inside the wagon, Chief."

"What for?" Stew was a chivalrous man in his way. "Luella's a straight-shooter. Think she'd sagebrush me?"

"Still and all, it would be kind of a good joke on us if the *hombre* was just calmly settin' in that wagon."

"Would he be settin' in there with his horse? Where's his horse?" Stew made an expansive gesture toward the surrounding meadows and boulder washes. There was not another animal in sight—nothing but the wagon horses, the sleepy-eared donkey, and the twitchy-eared foal. "I ask you, where's his paint?"

"Maybe the paint's a gold-brick."

The girl hurried to the wagon herself, and as the men watched her, she pinned

He snaked slowly and silently along; darted into a cut, and from here climbed to the rim.

the *Wanted* sign on the isinglass window in the canvas above the driver's seat.

"Maybe," Stew Moyer said off-hand, "you don't deem it impolite, Luella, if I just take a peek inside. You see, being you got that little foal which belonged to the killer, why, I don't want to leave any stone unturned. Just routine, you know." He dismounted and stepped up to the canvas flaps of the door in back.

THAT was just about the time that Nick Buckley had decided to step to the door and give himself up.

He had been on the point of doing it quite a while before this, except for one circumstance that made him stop and think. He had noticed that the posse, except for the leader and one other, had all galloped off, after their first meeting with the girl. This was proof enough that she had lied to them, or else they had not been searching for him at all.

So he waited until the Sheriff and his companion strolled over toward the wagon. Then, just as Nick was about to open the canvas flap, he heard the squeak of the old springs as some one swung up to the driver's seat at the other end. He turned, and through a small square window in the front canvas he saw the girl's hand. She was holding up a piece of paper.

He stepped over to the window softly to find out just what sort of message she was trying to give him.

The *Wanted* sign was stuck there facing inward, toward him.

Underneath the printed accusation concerning the unsolved murders in the Coyotero desert, there were the added words in handwriting:

"Wanted likewise for the murder of Jim Rupple, shot & robbed of a map. The killer, alias Nick Buckley, 6 foot 3, about 20-25 yrs old. Long, saddle-bowed legs, eyes blue green, squinting. Crack shooter. So go easy."

It was clear enough to Nick that the killing of Jim Rupple was added to a list of former unsolved killings, all of them blamed on one bandit.

When Stew Moyer, the Sheriff, looked in through the parted flaps, he found himself blinking red-eyed into a tiny circle of gunmetal.

LUELLA saw Stew's long body stiffen to the immobility and shape of a ridgepole. She saw his lanky arms go up.

The hulking deputy drew, but as he brought his arm down to fire, a slug skinned the back of his fat paw. His hand jerked as if some one had thwacked a crowbar on his sausage fingers, knocking the gun to the ground.

Nick Buckley stepped down out of the wagon. His smoking gun returned to its position two inches from the Sheriff's star. He ordered the latter to reach higher, frisked him of his gun and ordered both men to stand back to back. Unhitching a pair of handcuffs from Stew Moyer's belt, he locked them so that one bracelet clicked shut on the Sheriff's bony wrist, the other on the chunky one of the deputy.

The Sheriff, who was the one who faced Buckley, gave him a long red look. The gape of his mouth closed, as if tied down with the strings of his mustaches.

The girl stood gray-lipped, twisting her hands, her eyes clinging to Nick. He looked murderous, but there was a queer softness to him. "Get the fat boy a drink," he growled.

The fat deputy had swayed, his weight melting down on his barrel knees, like a stuffed scarecrow hanging to the Sheriff.

Enormously relieved, the girl ran to her wagon for a rag and a jug. When she held the jug to the deputy's lips, he drank as helplessly as a bottle-fed calf.

"Better take a swig yourself, Stew," she said, coming around to him.

Stew Moyer drank in the same calf-like submission, except that his swigs, to use the Western barroom term, were cow-swallows.

"Ready to talk?" Nick said, facing him down.

"About what?"

"I smoked up that horsethief Rupple. But I didn't take his map. Some one else took it."

"A good card. So easy, the girl played it before you did."

"You're spreading a big loop, hoppergrass, talking to my face like this. But you're blinder than you're brave. I told you somebody else could have snitched that map."

"There was the prints of one man where Rupple was dumped. That would be the prints of the man who beefed him and went to see if he'd beefed him cold."

Nick gave a queer jerk of his head, his eyes snapping. "A man was there in the gulch when I killed Rupple," he said, half to himself. "He told me to line out and he'd take care of the body." He raised his voice, shouting to the girl. *"Tex Brandaw!"*

The Sheriff tried a dry horsy laugh. "All right," he said without the slightest belief. "Brandaw stole it. You killed Rupple. Which is worse? His kinfolk don't care about no map. They want *you.*"

Buckley nodded slowly, tucking his upper lip against his teeth. "Sure, that's it. You won't believe. No one else will. I get it. But you get this: I was going to stand trial; I'm not going to now. Try and catch me. I'm only warning you, the next time you camp on my tail, I'll gunwhip you."

"Any other—statements?"

Nick glanced down at the girl. She was soaking a rag in red-eye, washing the big deputy's crease, binding it while he leaned back heavily against the lank pole which was the Sheriff's back.

"She had nothing to do with this," Buckley said. "Got that straight? It was me held you up. She didn't know I'd do it. She doesn't know me from Adam's off-ox."

Stew Moyer's eyes shone to the last fine feather of a vein. "I got four girls of my own. They'd've done what she did—get sentimental when they see the rope on a man." He spoke over his bony shoulder. "You hear that, Oleo? The girl didn't do nothing or tell us nothing or hide nobody."

But Oleo must have been in a faint, for his head rolled easily on his fat neck.

"I'll take him to San Remo in the wagon, Stew," the girl said.

IT was in that helpless position that Nick Buckley left the two officers. He went for their ponies, tightening the loosened cinches. He could scarcely afford to leave them for the prisoners, especially as there was no other fast horse for his escape.

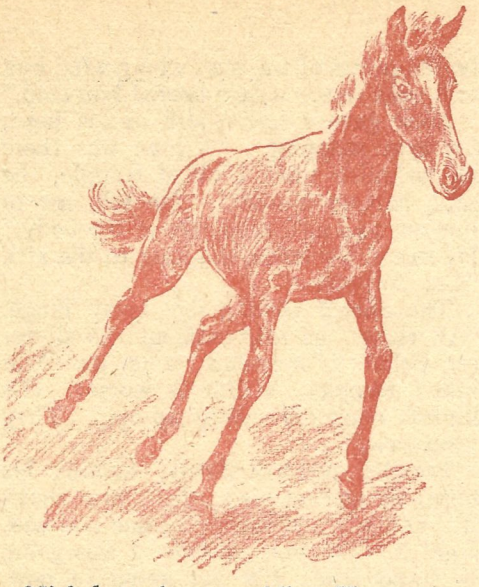
The girl went to him. "Know how to get to the Coyotero Desert?"

"What's there?"

"Tex Brandaw."

He stared, excited. "How'd you figure that?"

"Rupple prospected that desert. I sold him his pots and pans."



Nick leaped to a saddle. He cast one glance across the field to where his foal was standing spraddle-legged, his head lapped against the burro's withers.

"Don't worry about that cayuse," Luella said. "The jenny will take care of him. You go get Brandaw."

CHAPTER V

THE first day of Buckley's flight in the tall timber, he shot a rabbit. He built a fire in a cranny of rock with piñon nuts that would not smoke, skinned the rabbit, and broiled it with wild onions.

How long he would live on this fare he did not know. It would take many days to reach the Coyotero Desert, for he had to go by long detours, keeping always in the timber, following the pebble washes of the creeks where the winter floods had undercut the snow. Here his horse left no tracks.

He watched for quail as he fled; he boiled quail eggs in a tin can he had picked up at a forsaken shack. He slept rolled in a saddle-blanket with his boots on and his gun belted to his thigh. At the slightest rustle of leaves, whether it was the high-pitched, rain-like patter of birch, or the soothing murmur of pine, he always awoke. His great purpose was to find Brandaw; but before that he must remain free.

He reached the Coyotero's rim without ever passing a shack that showed smoke from its stovepipe or lamplight from behind its sack-curtained windows. Reaching the first bench that overlooked the bad-lands, he climbed to a pinnacle of rock from which he could see as far as the skyline. Somewhere in that vast domain of rocks and draws and red mesas, there was the mysterious gold lode which the ill-fated Jim Rupple had discovered. And Tex Brandaw, with the map in his possession and the theft blamed on some one else, might be there even now, working the lode.

With a forlorn hope of picking up some sign in this untracked labyrinth, Buckley started a journey around the rim. He read sign. But the only prints he found were of mule-deer or the unshod feet of wild remudas, the feathery touch of coyotes—and once prints that were shod, which meant a posse. . . .

Spring came to a climax. The Spanish dagger bloomed, cottonwood painted skeins of green along the creeks. Sage purpled in the lengthening sunlit days.

But the hounded man still searched hopelessly and hid in dark gulches, built his secret fires, baked the roots and shoots of the century plant on hot coals, and ate Spanish lettuce like a wild horse.

At last he stopped fleeing. If he were caught and lynched, he could never find Tex Brandaw; but neither could he find him if he remained a hermit.

He picked out the loneliest shack he had seen since his escape; he watched until a bent brown man limped out to a tub to wash his clothes.

Nick rode to him, feeling as if he dived from a great height. His horse would not be recognized, anyway, for he had discarded the Sheriff's ponies long since, and topped off a brushie from a wild *remuda*.

All that he found was an old Walapai Indian hermit, with a cast in one eye. He could not speak a word of English.

Nick said the name Tex Brandaw over and over again. By gestures he described his height, his thick neck, his work, which was killing horses for glue or soap.

The Indian, perplexed, gave him tobacco. That might be what this locoed white man was asking for.

"Guess I'll be hitting the grit," Nick said. He swore, cinched and jogged off.

Next day as he trailed down the benches he smelled risen dust. Riders had crossed his trail. Making for cover, he crawled over a divide and peered into the next gulch. Horsemen churned dust in the bottoms. They loped fast, except at the tributary draws where they stopped to read sign.

That purblind Indian had lost no time in telling the world what he had seen! Nick hid in a hill of needle rocks, from

which hiding he could see the gullies spread to the desert. More dust burned up from the flats. Smaller posses were combing the timber belts. Within twenty-four hours the whole range was alive with riders.

Nick grinned long and hard. He had paid for that snack of tobacco! It would cost him days, perhaps weeks, before he could throw off these pursuers. Next time he showed his face he would go right into a town—Borax, perhaps.

AT Borax the blacksmith was closing his shop. As one of his side-lines he was the town barber as well as harness-maker. He shod ponies or shaved men, according to the demands of trade, and was prepared to roach your own nails as well as those of your horse.

He turned down the wick of the hanging lamp which shed a greenish splash on the board sidewalk because it shone through a large jar of leeches; then he stepped to his door to padlock it.

But a voice behind him said softly: "Don't close up till you give me a grooming, pardner. I'm just in from the desert, and aiming to see my girl tonight."

The barber did not dare to object to the unceremonious entrance, for it was very late, the street was empty and the man's voice, as the barber described it later, "spooked him up a considerable."

Kerosene, lighted again, revealed the two men to each other in sudden and stark yellow. The barber was spindle-necked and bald as a buzzard. The young tramp bore the stamp of desert heat with the glare of desert suns stored up in squinting pale green eyes—eyes that darted about the room like something suddenly trapped. They paused a moment on a sign stuck up in the corner of a mirror, which was festooned with lettering in lard like the mirror in a saloon:

Hair cut, 4 bits. Shave 4 bits. Shampoo 4 bits. Fingernails, the same. Horses shod, four bits a shoe (14 oz.) $2.50 a round (5 nails Cavalry).

It seemed that this barber would do anything to man or horse for half a dollar. Above this tabulation the ragged client read:

WANTED—Nick Buckley.
For the murder of Jim Rupple & etc.

"Set right down in this rockin'-chair, Mister, put your feet up on the barrel. I'll hang your hat here. Kind of need a new hat-band, don't you? Been trailing a lot of thorn country, looks like."

"Been combing the flats for a bird named Tex Brandaw."

The barber showed no suspicious interest. "Yeah, I know Brandaw. Horse-knacker and a penny-ante bum. Drifted through here awhile back. . . . Tough spinach you got on your chin, pardner."

"How long ago did he drift through?"

"Couple years. Maybe longer. . . ."

Nick said: "I figured he might've packed out of here for the Coyotero."

"Not here. Reason I'm so sure is some one else was asking for him. Everybody told her he hasn't been through here."

"Who'd you say was asking?"

"Luella Purdy. You know, blue-eyed sagehen runs her dad's wagon-store. Sold me a shaving compound she makes with borax and bergamot. You ought to take a bottle. Four bits."

Nick's ears, deaf to the barber's prattle, rang with the one word, *Luella!* She was helping him hunt! "Any hunch how I could find her? I'm hunting her too."

The barber was behind him, lathering with huge rocky hands; he looked up to the mirror, and the eyes of the men met.

"You can find her easy. Always on schedule. Why, the womenfolk regulate the seasons by her. She gets to Blue Butte in time to sell crocks and cheese-cloth for gooseberries and currants." He took his razor and started work. "Then when she gets to the 31 Graze, the womenfolk say it's time to be canning cherries, and she sells the cans and sealing-wax."

Again the eyes of the two met in the lard-scrolled mirror, and the client fidgeted slightly, then held himself tense so as not to provoke a slip.

"Come summer, and she gets to the Snake Lode country, and they know it's time to put up quinces and apricots. Right now she's down to Red Horse."

EVERY word was a joy to Buckley. The Snake Lode country, the 31 Graze, Blue Butte—everywhere the girl went, she would be asking for Tex Brandaw. Perhaps she had found some clue already, and was waiting, hoping for Nick to return to her. She must have guessed how he had yearned to see that little race-horse of his!

"When she left this town," the listener interrupted as soon as he had a chance, "did she have a colt in tow?"

The barber honed his razor, thinking. "Seems like I remember she had a desert canary, craziest-lookin' she-burro I ever did see. And likewise a young mule ambling along."

"A what!"

"Well, it didn't look just like a mule to me, nor a hinny, either. Still, the mother was a burro. This must've been a mule colt, although I admit he faintly resembled what you might call a horse."

The client kicked away the barrel with his feet, knocked back his chair and rose to his feet in one leap.

"Say, listen, you pie-eating, lop-eared prune! You call that young race-horse a mule, and I'll work you over a-plenty!"

He sloshed a hot towel into the barber's face. The latter dropped the razor and opened his mouth to yell, but it was choked with lather and a shaving-brush. His hands windmilled helplessly as his crazy client gave him just one shove. He clattered back against a table, tipped it over with mugs, kettles, scissors, towels and a box of horseshoe nails.

When the fracas subsided to the silence of the late hour and deserted streets, the barber-blacksmith picked himself out of his débris and found that his visitor had vanished into the thin night air. He understood now the method in that mad rage. It was merely a ruse to make a quick exit before the barber could be sure of his identity—now that his whiskers were off!

The door of a *baile*-house across the street slammed open, and the stud players looked up to see a spindly man with giant hands, his face and neck and vest bespattered with soapsuds, his mouth gurgling hysterically:

"I seen him! I shaved him! The killer—Nick Buckley! He's headin' down to Red Horse hunting the Purdy wagon. Get the marshal. Put up a posse! Telegraph Stew Moyer! Ride to Red Horse! I seen him! The consarned hellbender didn't even pay me my four bits!"

CHAPTER VI

AT sun-up Nick Buckley racked his pony in a brush-screened wash-out, and crawled to the open to find out why that sag-bellied jenny was alone.

In the dark of the morning Sappho had sensed a vague dread in the air, not only with the sixth sense which a burro may or may not have, but with an equally miraculous sense of smell with which she could sniff water fifteen miles away.

She lifted her drooping head, drooping lids and drooping ears. Her ears, when they stiffened, twisted as if on a socket, so that the open lobes faced one direction, then another, each ear revolving like an owl's head. It appeared that she was not alone after all, for she moved over a few inches and nudged a warm soft thing folded up on the ground and sleeping at her feet. The burro always slept standing, and in standing she practically always slept. But not now.

SHE had nudged the bundle twice before it awakened and untangled four long legs. When the colt stood up, he was taller than the burro herself, but his height did not seem to count for as much. He seemed smaller. Both animals stood, the chunky barrel of one pressed hard against the loose joints of the other, facing in opposite directions.

The burro tensed, her hind-legs stretched out so far that her stomach almost touched the ground. In the dim gray she saw a dark gray splotch moving toward her. She frisked her heels, and without the colt knowing it, she was for some peculiar reason on the other side of him. It was he that generally made this gesture, until she had taught him that unusual sounds were nothing to be kettled about.

There was only one gray splotch slowly sharpening to the form of a man; but the burro had sensed the distant tread, and doubtless the smell, of many men and many horses. They did not sound as riders should. The horses walked in the deep draws, and so did the men, instead of riding. Sappho knew that this was not in the ordinary routine of things.

The gray form close to the ground crept toward them from behind. The burro, whose ears were like periscopes, must have seen the thing behind her; she sunfished and stood, again on a different side of the colt, her shaggy hide flicking as if pestered with heel-flies.

In the growing light Nick Buckley stared at his only possession in the world. The lines of conformation of a great steed would show before weaning time—he had hoped. He had dreamed of a dainty muzzle, of close coupling and a cobby barrel and an arched neck. But his dream was over. He awoke. There was no race-horse here, nor the promise of one. Perhaps the hang of that colt's

head could be blamed on his dam. Old Rattleweed was a Western horse, and unlike the Eastern-bred Volcano, she had held her neck not arched but level, like most Idaho horses. And the colt did the same. But he did it like a jackass.

And he looked like one. His black coat about the ears and flanks had faded to roan-dun, as most colts' will in spring, and by now the change was all over his body. In the spots where he had shed, the hair was a typical burro color, which likewise is the usual program with colts. But in this case Nick was struck with the illusion that his beloved pet had the hair of a horse and, underneath, the mouse-colored fur of a burro!

When Nick stepped to them, the old jenny wheeled and ambled toward the cliffs. The colt followed, aping the deliberate shambling pace. Nick broke into a run and reached the cliffs, where he thought he had them cornered. That is to say, any horse would have had sense enough to know that there was the place to stop. But the jenny suddenly turned nimble-footed—like a wild burro! She leaped up to a narrow ledge and felt with a forefoot to see if the ledge was shifting sand or crumbling rock.

Behind her, lapped on her haunch, the little cayuse followed. And as he followed, he was learning another lesson: that a horse must not frisk about and shy when on a narrow trail, but must feel his way cautiously, with head low and his eye on his feet. Nick gaped. He would not have dared to ride a horse on that bit of narrow ground. But here was his precious colt following that crazy cat-climbing jackass up the cliffs!

Obsessed as he was with that incredible picture, Nick was not off guard. He whirled, gun in hand, at the soft footstep in the sand wash behind him.

BEFORE he could say a word, Luella grabbed his hands, blurting out that Stew Moyer was on the ride. The barber in Borax had told him to watch her wagon. "You've stepped into a trap!"

"It's worth it, seeing you again."

In her next breath she made an equally important statement. "Tex Brandaw packed in for the desert from Hucky Dummy with two months' grub."

"When?"

"A week ago. If he's working Rupple's claim, he may be back for more grub in two months."

"Two months to wait," he said. "Two more months of hiding. But I'll see you again. I won't drop out of sight. I'll follow your wagon—"

"That's one thing you can't do. Whatever play you make, you've got to steer clear of me. You'll need a grub-pack—I'll fix one."

"But wait a minute. I want to talk. I've got lots to say."

"You haven't time!"

"Then forget the pack. First I'm thanking you for keeping my colt. You saved his life and you got a burro for him, and you raised him instead of turning him loose, which is what anyone else would do with such a patchy-looking zebra—"

"He turned out bad, I know," she said hurriedly. "But can't you hear what I'm telling you! The Sheriff—"

"THAT'S another thing I'm thanking you for—helping me ditch that hopper-grass four months ago. And for trying to find Brandaw, too. But as regards the colt—he didn't turn out as bad as he looks." Evidently Nick Buckley could call that colt all the names he wanted, but he didn't like the truth from anyone else—even this girl. "He's got a burro's short back, sure, and big chest. But that's the Arab strain in his sire. Arabs are two vertebræ shorter, and with big lungs. And his coat—well, he rolls too much maybe, which he got from that burro. They do it more'n horses, which shows the breed started in deserts. He'll be good for the desert—a good packhorse, anyway."

"Nick! I'm begging you—"

"All right. Good-by. I won't be dreaming any more of that colt winning races. It's *you* I'll be—"

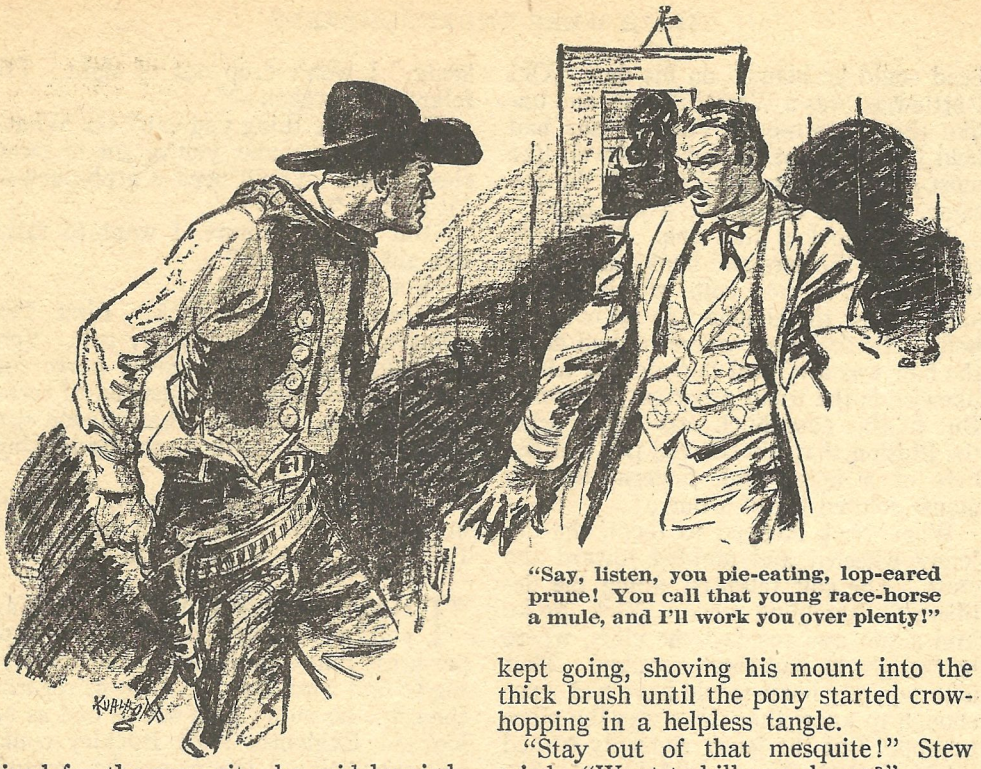
A shot cracked out from the cañon wall, echoing. Considerably to one side of Nick Buckley, dust spurted. The man who had fired had obviously aimed to one side, because Luella Purdy was standing so close to the target.

The girl herself sensed this, and leaped to Nick, clutching him tightly in her arms as if to shield him.

"Take it easy, girl," he said calmly. "I know the way out."

She felt the incredible strength of those iron arms returning her embrace, clamping tight. It gave her a curious sense of relief. . . . Later that feeling of relief, which was something white-faced and trembling, blossomed to a greater thrill. Her face turned hot and radiant.

The riders loped out of the draw from which that lead had spat, and as Nick



"Say, listen, you pie-eating, lop-eared prune! You call that young race-horse a mule, and I'll work you over plenty!"

dived for the mesquite, he said hurriedly: "In two months I'll be waiting for Brandaw at Hucky Dummy."

She replied: "I'll be there."

OUT of another cut on the opposite side of the cañon came four more riders led by a lanky man with a lyre-shaped mustache framing long jaws. Six more riders broke out of the timber at the Cañon's upper end.

Nick Buckley had taken the whole attack as a matter of course. He had been prepared during every moment of the past months, waking or sleeping, for this instant. He had stuck to the edge of a mesquite patch even while chasing his colt. And now he vanished under the intertwined branches and leaves.

Clanging sparks on rimrock, the riders closed in—a nondescript crowd of man-hunters with as many nondescript weapons. For Stew Moyer had put up the quickest posse he could summon when he got news that the fugitive had actually stopped in a town for a shave. Here were a few old cow-dogs, some line-camp riders, a barkeep and the barber.

The moment that their quarry ducked, they threw their shots into the mesquite. The barber's shotgun roared hoarsely, and he was probably the only one who had a chance to make a hit. Rifles cracked; six-guns barked. The posse clattered to a stop at the edge of the patch, raking it with lead. The barber kept going, shoving his mount into the thick brush until the pony started crow-hopping in a helpless tangle.

"Stay out of that mesquite!" Stew cried. "Want to kill your horse?"

He shouted to his men to deploy across the wide bottoms. "And stay out of the brush. Afore you can find the man under that mesquite, you'll be lying under it yourselves. And all curled up, too!"

The men walked their horses, deployed along the edge of the patch.

"There's plenty of time," Stew added, reloading his gun and drifting his horse up to the patch, driving with his knees. "The *hombre's* stuck there all day. You can see he aint got a horse." He shot a quick glance at the girl, who stood alone on a boulder, her face like ashes.

"None of your tricks now, Luella!" Stew warned. "I won't forgive you again. This time's different. Spread out and watch the edge of the patch, men. Take your time."

"Any objections to keepin' up the shootin', Stew?" some one asked.

"Not in particular," Stew said affably, "except how we going to know if he's plugged? Better to just wait here all day and all night too till he tries to worm out. Then salt him."

Again he turned, beaming and triumphant, to the girl.

"Any of that pop-skull you gave me last time?" he asked her.

Luella climbed to the highest point of her boulder, where she tried desperately to see through the carpet of brush. Her failure reassured her. The fugitive was

as completely hidden from her gaze as from that of the pursuers. The blood came back to her cheeks, and her dazed eyes began to shine. She looked at Stew; and as he looked thirsty, she said craftily: "I'm saving my jug in case one of you boys gets reckless and starts hunting in the brush for him."

The warning was well taken. Some even backed their horses a few lengths into the open. And as Stew had advised, they waited patiently, then impatiently. The sun herded the morning shadows back into the draws; the cañon brightened to the red of shale and the gray-green of mesquite.

FINALLY Luella admitted it was first drink time. As she carried the jug from man to man, she listened for the crack of brush or tinkle of rolling stone.

Stew Moyer became confident and genial. "Listen, Luella: we're all here together. We're all friends. So tell us: Just how come did you pick up with this hellbender? Any rancher between here and the Sierra Madres is yours for the asking, and you never look at 'em. You just sell 'em tobacco and tell 'em to put it in their pipes and smoke it. Every cow-dog in the works roaches up likes it's Christmas when your wagon rolls along. And all you do is sell 'em some suspenders. Then you pick up with this maverick!"

"Maybe that's why I picked him," Luella said. "There's something about mavericks that I take to."

"And dragging that thing around that everyone knows belonged to the killer—that so-called horse—"

"Maybe that's another reason I'd help Nick Buckley," she said. "He's like that funny-looking *cuitan*—every card in the deck stacked against him."

In a few square feet of open space on a steep slope some sand sifted down, as if dislodged. But this was no proof that it was a man crawling up there instead of, say, a chuckawalla.

Somewhere Buckley was worming his way along under that two feet of open space between the ground and the intertwined mat of leaves. He went inch by inch, taking an eternity to traverse two hundred yards. Knowing the posse was biding its time, he was in no hurry. If a twig snapped, he congealed and lay there for five, perhaps ten minutes.

He had time now to think of the girl's announcement. It made his heart pound. He must get to Hucky Dummy. The fact that Brandaw had come out of the desert for provisions meant something. The lode or placer, or whatever the map indicated, had to be worked. Since he had come back for more grub, it meant he was still digging and washing and hiding his dust.

Higher up, the mesquite patch ended near a fissure in the rock. Buckley had noticed it when he tried to chase his colt and the burro up the cliffs. Without his thinking of it, the lay-out was photographed subconsciously in his memory. He headed blindly for that crack.

Through the matting he caught a glimpse of the burro and the colt out there in the hot sunlight. Doubtless they knew he was there even though they could not see him. But the jenny had smelled him before and cogitated about it. He was harmless. With a burro's placid and perverse indifference, both she and the colt ignored him.

"You've learned one thing from your wet-nurse anyway, little cayuse," Nick thought. "Acting as if you don't see me is a burro's trick, but it fits into a pat hand this time!"

He snaked along slowly and silently, then lifted an uprooted piece of brush an eighth of an inch, another eighth, another—as slowly as a mushroom growing on a rainy night. He lifted it over the edge of a boulder as his shield. He emulated the Yaquis on the warpath, who can make their own brush shields "grow" under the very gaze of their enemies without detection.

And with this screen covering him, he darted into a cut.

From here unseen he climbed to the cañon's rim, cinched up his hidden horse and walked him noiselessly over grass.

CHAPTER VII

IN the *baile* houses of Hucky Dummy pianolas hammered and clanked. Fiddles ranted. Spurs jingled on boots pounding in heavy cadence. And hoofs drummed.

The obscure sound of those horses seemed to come from three sides of the town, for riders were bearing down at a hell-bent gallop into one end, and two more bunches closing in on each side.

The sharpest rhythm came from a single horseman somewhat in the lead. He galloped his horse across the rattleweed and sand mounds of the main street, checked him to a sliding stop on

his haunches, leaped off and dashed to the nearest door, which he slammed shut behind him.

The other riders closing in from three directions jolted their ponies to a stop, churning starlit dust. They did not follow the man into that door. For one of their number, a lanky pine tree of a man with a star, said softly: "Three shag around in back. The rest split on each side. Watch every window—wait till I tell you, then fan down from all four sides at once."

NICK, once he had shut the door behind him, found he had made a slight mistake. He had chosen a shack at random, except to pick one that was quiet and almost dark. Compared to the tent cantinas whose tops sent out a dull glow of many lights through canvas, this shack seemed empty save for sifted lamplight through shuttered windows. He expected at the worst to find a sleepy barkeep closing up for the night.

Instead he faced a smoke-fogged room and many faces, many eyes glaring darkly from under green eyeshades. It was one of Hucky Dummy's less conspicuous but more sinister gambling dives; having ridden for hours in the starlight his eyes were dilated enough to see each face, each movement of a hand, despite the fog of smoke.

Chips spilled, a chair scraped the floor as those in the back stood up. But this was followed by a moment of death-like silence.

"I'm looking for Tex Brandaw," Nick said quietly. "Don't anyone move, but if any of you gents has seen him, speak up."

A half-breed Mexican and Chinese cook shuffled in from a lean-to kitchen, gabbling that a bunch of riders was surrounding the joint, dismounting and Injuning up—

He checked himself quickly, noticing the tense immobility of every card player, dealer and barkeep.

"Don't try snipeshooting from under your table, gents," Nick Buckley said quietly, noticing a slight reaching movement in the back of the room. "You won't get any reward for me dead or alive, because you won't have a corpse *delicti* to show the Sheriff. If anyone throws on me I'll have this whole *baile* rubbed out. Those riders you saw out there," he said, facing the gulping and greasy cook, "happen to be my henchmen. I got a good gang in my pay now —since I followed that map I got from Jim Rupple."

"What can we do for you, stranger?" a soft voice said at Nick's elbow.

A door had opened quietly—the door to a small room at his left. Nick's eyes darted to it.

A thin pockmarked man stood there, with sleeve-bands on his long arms, brass grabbers holding detachable cuffs, and a metal clasp holding a purple tie in place. An eyeshade divided his sere yellow forehead from the darkened eyes.

Nick asked: "Own this joint?"

The other nodded. "You're in Honest Faringo's place. I'm Faringo."

"Tell the gang to go on playing. I'll talk to you."

He went in, uninvited, to the lean-to room which was evidently the owner's office. His eyes jumped from side to side, spotting knot-holes between the pictures of race-horses, but the precaution was subconscious as well as futile. He knew that guns could be poking at him from all sides without his having a remote chance to spot them or answer them in case they fired. But he was reasonably certain he would not be harmed until they found out that his gang of henchmen was really a posse.

"I heard Tex Brandaw was seen in this town," he said. "He's been dogging me hard."

The thin man nodded. "He was here four-five weeks ago. But he lined out again."

"Which way?"

"Into the desert, is all I know."

Nick's mouth hardened. "Did he act flush when he came to this town? I mean, put any big bets on the wheel?"

"Not so you'd notice it. Just bought some bait and lined out again."

Before Nick could ask the next question, a knock sounded on the door, and he jumped like a gun-shy horse.

"Hold it," he said quickly. "I'm not finished. You help me to find Brandaw, and I'll make it worth your while."

THE knock turned vociferous. And since Faringo did not open, the knocker shouted:

"Stew Moyer's outside, Chief, with a bunch of men. It's them we saw dismountin'!"

Honest Faringo grinned dryly as he saw the helpless stare of his visitor. "Since when has Moyer and his riders enlisted in *your* gang, *hombre?*"

Nick's hand snapped to his holster.

"Better not draw, *hombre,*" Faringo laughed. "My bodyguards watchin' you on the other side of this wall never let a man draw when he's in my office."

Nick's bony hand relaxed. He was trapped. From outside came the sound of the front door banged open. Boots thumped, voices jabbered: "Which way'd he go? Better not try hidin' him or we'll smoke up the whole joint!"

Nick's mind reacted with the desperate speed of a mouse whisking to an infinitesimal crack.

"If I'm bumped off," he said with a deadly calm, "no one will ever find that lode or the map,"—he emphasized his lie,—*"the map I stole!"*

The door vibrated like a drumhead under the pounding, as Nick added:

"Think fast now, Faringo! You find Tex Brandaw for me, and I'll take you to that claim. You can chop the gold out of the washouts with an ax. There's plenty for us both. It's a dicker, and I won't go back on it. I'll need your help. I need hide-outs."

Faringo shoved the table back and kicked aside a board in the floor.

"Climb down and follow the culvert to the crick at the edge of town; there'll be a rider there, and an extra horse."

But when the fugitive got to the end of that culvert, a blow on his head put him safely into a three-hour knock-out. Honest Faringo was taking no chances.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Stew Moyer saw the Purdy wagon roll into town, he grinned at Luella with honest admiration.

"Good to see you and the old wagon again, Luella."

"Been wanting to buy something?"

"Oh, no. I was just thinking it's kind of woolly country out yonder where you been prospecting."

"Doesn't bother me. My dad's taken me through lots of woolly country since I was a four-year-old."

"Which makes it kind of an exception you'd sidetrack your wagon-store in this one town for so long—ever since Nick Buckley got away from us at Faringo's Casino, to be exact."

To all appearances Luella Purdy had spent the last few weeks prospecting the desert. But she never seemed to have much luck, for after a few days she would come back to town and for a few days she would keep store at her wagon and busy herself manufacturing lotions, pomades and freckle-removers for the fall trade.

"Like to search the wagon again, Stew?" she asked, smiling.

Stew kept to his own point. "The way Buckley got out of that place was pretty gauzy. I'm no fool. You know how he got out."

"Cut his suspenders and went straight up, I reckon."

"Faringo helped him," Stew said loudly. "Why? Because Buckley paid him more'n the reward was worth. With what? Gold nuggets."

"I figured that long before you did," she said. "Only, I'm a step ahead of you. Buckley had no nuggets. But everyone, including Faringo, thinks he has a map. So what's the answer?"

"Maybe you can tell me."

MAYBE she could, but she didn't. While Stew spent the days watching her, Luella Purdy watched Faringo and his men. They both knew Faringo was protecting the fugitive, but the girl knew he could not have been paid; hence the protection, to speak accurately, was imprisonment.

And she knew much more. The keeper of the Purdy wagon-store had always known what was going on more or less everywhere. Mexican wives told her. Desert rats told her. A peon who came to her wagon to buy purple suspenders and pink sleeve-garters said that an old henchman of Faringo's known as Daft Jim took grub up to a ghost town over the divide regularly. A desert rat who bought Luella's beeswax compound for chapped lips had passed through that same town and seen a fat-legged, saddle-colored breed whom she identified as another of Faringo's *mozos.*

And a dance-hall girl from the Casino who liked her horse-radish-and-sour-milk recipe for skin bleaching confided that the saddle-colored breed, Dumb Pedro, could tell a lot if he could talk.

Luella pieced all this together. Faringo was hiding Nick in that ghost town with the hope of finding his lode. Doubtless he had tried to torture the truth out of him. But Nick had no truth to divulge. He had no map. He did not know where the gold lode was. All he could do was to kill time until Brandaw was found.

Wisely enough, Luella stayed out of that ghost town. She kept hunting, watching the desert's rim. Tex Brandaw

had come for his provisions and gone again on another two-months' trip. The girl missed him, but she found out the trail. From then on she watched that one pass in the mesas.

On every trip into the bad-lands the colt accompanied her. And during that summer he learned all that a burro ever knew about desert trailing. He also learned to climb boulders like a mule-deer. Incidentally, he learned that anything that grew was fit to eat—for by now he was weaned.

The aspens banking the creeks marked the passing of fall when Brandaw came out of the desert for the last time. A *cantina* girl told Luella that she had seen Brandaw riding into Hucky Dummy late at night on a sag-bellied hinny.

Next morning Luella was waiting for him on the trail between two crags of rock, a gun in her hand, her wagon hidden in the cottonwoods far back before the wash got too rocky.

BUT Brandaw did not pass through that boulder wash. When he packed out from Hucky Dummy, he had six ponies; and the trail, easy enough for a hinny, was too steep for a horse. He merely cut through the divide, choosing the adjacent and longer pass. And before she knew it, he was burning dust for the desert—free again!

Not only that, but his six ponies meant that he was going for the last time. He was not going to pan any more gold. He would not need a cavvy of horses for that! He was going to his cache to get what he had been panning for many months. Those horses meant that he was going to line out of the country for good.

Luella hurried to her wagon, and for the first time turned it toward the desert foothills and that ghost town. . . .

Back in Hucky Dummy, Stew Moyer was taking his first pick-up of the day when one of his deputies, the fat man named Oleo, racked his horse at the bar trough.

"I watched her all night, Stew, like you told me," Oleo said. "And this morning I seen her driving her wagon up to Chloride."

"And Chloride being a ghost town," Stew remarked, "I don't see how she can sell her goods to anybody up there exceptin' hoot owls."

"On the side of her wagon she'd painted some big letters. *'Tex Brandaw took the Blue Butte trail'*—that's what the painting said. If you can make anything out of that, Stew—"

"Nary a thing, except to put up a posse. Maybe that ghost town is going to see smoke again like fifty years ago."

CHAPTER IX

THE Purdy wagon drove over the sand dunes of Chloride's single street, from one end of the ghost town to the other, then back again. Luella saw no sign of life, but she smelled bacon. She had had the impression long before entering town that smoke came from one of the shacks, but it might have been a smoke tree against a cliff bench. When she reached the string of windowless tin-roofed shacks, she saw nothing move except a sage rabbit in the street, a trade-rat in a corral.

The sun beat on her wagon signs, sharpening every detail to an easily discernible clarity:

TEX BRANDAW TOOK THE BLUE BUTTE TRAIL AT SUN-UP. Shingle nails, razors, cough lozenges, corset laces. Time for mince meats. Crocks, cans, jars, wax.

The last lines were a reminder of the time of the year, which was fall. Another mark of the passing of time was that long-legged critter following the burro: The colt no longer hung around Sappho's hindquarters. His teeth and stomach were strong enough now for cropping and digesting his own feed. But what feed! Luella remembered how Nick had once planned for a gradual weaning at the end of the sixth month, with steamed turnips and bran to hasten his growth, as they do with thoroughbreds for early racing. But here was this bangle-eared brushie cropping sage!

Once more the wagon trundled up the street and back again. Then it banged on over the rocky wash behind the rows of shacks. A shag-bearded old coot who looked like a desert hermit came out of one of the old-time hurrah-halls and stared.

"Figure there's a new strike in this town, or what?" he asked finally.

"There may be a strike soon. I always bring my wagon ahead of a gold-rush. It's the Purdy slogan."

The hermit spat impatiently. "No trade here, and you know it! Why don't you keep on going?"

"Own this town?"

"Sure. I'm a hermit. I've lived here fifty years. I own every shack. I'm the mayor and the marshal both. Daft Jim, that's what they call me. So get out."

He was very convincing as the type of character he impersonated. But the girl had seen this "Daft Jim" down in Hucky Dummy at one of Faringo's saloons. She did not bring the point up, however. She drove her wagon into the street again and stopped at a horse-trough.

Daft Jim followed. "It's gyp water. Been bad for fifty years. Your crow-baits won't drink."

"The jenny will."

She was right. The jenny drank, and the colt aped her example. Luella wondered if Nick Buckley could see this!

From the broken door of an old assay shop a streak of light spat out with a cracking whine. The horses shied. The colt whistled in terror, although he should have known better, having a tutor that was anything but gun-shy. Actually his fright was due not to the sound but to a sudden buck-jump of the jenny. He had never seen her act so foolish. It was as if an invisible boot had kicked her on the rump.

A square-faced saddle-colored breed peered out of the shack, a smoking gun in his hand. At the same moment Nick Buckley, his wrists in steel cuffs, ran out of the back door of the same shack, and dived into the adjacent saloon, as slugs chipped off fresh splinters from the gray sun-warped wood.

Luella caught one glimpse of him crawling out of that shack and into the next. She kicked off her brake and lashed her wagon-horses to a run, heading for the same end of town as the fugitive.

Daft Jim was hurdling sand dunes and can dumps, throwing his shots ahead of him. The giant 'breed who had fired that warning shot at the girl's outfit was doing the same.

AT the creek wash the girl stopped her wagon while the two men were frantically combing through empty saloons, dance-halls and *baile* houses. They came out of one of the largest shacks, leading saddled horses. If they could not find the fugitive, they could at least keep him from fleeing the town, for he was on foot. And being on foot, he could not get far, unless he made for that wagon. They started toward it.

"Head across the gully and up that trail for Blue Butte," a voice whispered at the girl's elbow.

She looked down at two manacled hands clutching the wagon seat, then at Nick's face as he swung up beside her.

"There's a gun under the seat!" she said as she lashed her horses to a run.

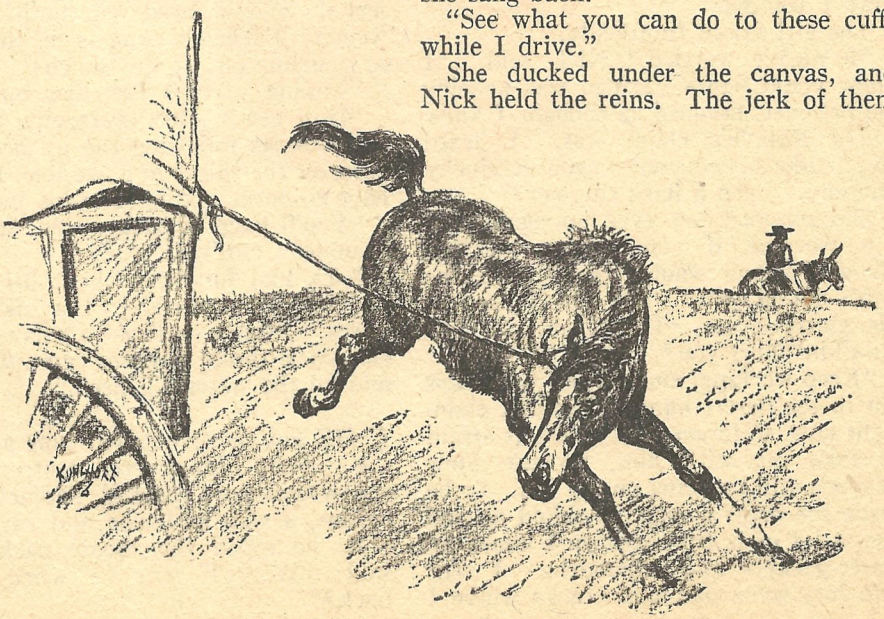
He got it. But he had no immediate use for it except to throw a shot far down the street as Daft Jim and the 'breed cautiously wheeled, roweled to a lope and headed for Hucky Dummy.

"Got a file?"

"About three gross of them, all sizes," she sang back.

"See what you can do to these cuffs while I drive."

She ducked under the canvas, and Nick held the reins. The jerk of them



sent pains stabbing across his shoulder with the rhythmic give and take of the horses' heads, and he remembered that one of Daft Jim's shots had hit. A warm trickle down his back meant that the crease was deep enough to bleed. But he forgot it when the girl started to work, and the squeak of the file across steel bracelets mingled with the clang of iron-rimmed wheels on rock.

"How far is Brandaw on the trail?" he asked.

"We'll see him when we get out of this gulch. He's got a horse cavvy and making lots of dust. What I want to know is, are you all right?"

"Finding you again makes the whole works all right."

BUT she must have sensed the pain in his shoulder. "You sure, Nick? Your face looks like slag."

"Why shouldn't it? I was chained up in a shack all summer. Keep on filing."

"They treated you bad, I reckon?"

"At least they fed me and hid me from the Sheriff while you waited for Brandaw. I knew you'd come. That's why I didn't try to get out. Those two *hombres* knew I didn't want to, so it was easy when the time came." He felt groggy, but he kept talking so she would keep on filing. "They had me chained to two uprights. If I broke down one, they could salt me before I worked on the other. It took me two weeks to cut the uprights loose with a nail. I kept sand heaped up around where I'd picked at them. I was ready for a break any time I wanted."

The girl sawed frantically.

"I wasn't worried," Nick said. "I knew you'd figure Faringo was keeping me prisoner, because he thought I knew where Rupple's claim was. I heard you'd sidetracked your wagon at Hucky Dummy. Been a hard summer?"

She snapped her eyes up again. "I was worried, if you weren't. I was afraid Faringo would try to burn the truth out of you." She stared hard at his glassy eyes. "He didn't, did he? He didn't hurt you?"

"Keep working, and I'll tell you. He's out in the desert hunting for that claim right now, so forget him. He was afraid to take me with him, because Stew Moyer's still camping on my tail. So he made me draw a map. I faked a good one, a lot of it true because I knew the water-pockets and landmarks. I sent him into some bad-land cracks where I got lost hunting for Brandaw last spring. He came back two or three times, and I had to make the map clearer. He gave me the third degree every time."

"You mean he— What did he do?"

"Forget it. Take the reins while I get these cuffs off." Dropping the file, she took over the driving, while Nick, raising his hands, brought the all-but-severed chain down smartly across the iron-shod edge of the dashboard. He was free! Heedless of bruised wrists, he leaned out around the wagon top to make sure they had outdistanced pursuit—in case the 'breed and Daft Jim had circled back again.

"Not a sign of 'em!" he cried jubilantly. Then he added casually: "And if you got any special lotion for fixing bruises, I'd like you to doctor up my shoulder."

"I knew it! You were hit in that scrap back yonder!"

"Only a crease. Nothing to cry about."

Of course she did not cry, but her face went as white as if she felt the burn of the slug herself.

The wagon followed the hard-caked river-bed into a jumble of rock tables. Nick guessed that Tex Brandaw was following this wash, which opened on the desert. Having six pack-horses, he could do nothing else. The river zigzagged in long reaches, its creek flattening inch-deep, then scattering to a string of pools.

She pulled up the panting team, and turned to look after his wound. Then they clambered out, and she reached to the coony under the wagon for a saddle.

"I'm not taking a horse," Nick objected. "You'll need 'em both for the wagon. Faringo's gang is on the loose, so you line out of this gulch!"

"Aiming to trail Brandaw on foot?"

"How else? He's zigzagging through these mesas following the washes. If I cut over the ridges in a bee line, I'll only have to cover one mile to his five."

"You'll have to pack water. And your shoulder's cut."

Nick had forgotten about his crease, but not about water. "I'm taking the burro. There's no time to palaver. She can pack those kerosene-cans of yours, and all the water I'll need."

SHE got the five-gallon cans and half a dozen hide-covered canteens from the wagon-store, packed flapjack flour, raisins, a slab of bacon and cartridges.

As he roped the squaw pack, Nick said: "Where'll you be when I get back?"

"In this wagon, waiting. The wagon can go anywhere you say—and Clodhop will be waiting for you too."

"Clodhop!"

"That's what I call him," she nodded to the colt. "He'll be a good stock horse, better for a ranch than a race-track."

Nick was about to flare up. But he was resigned at last. They could call that throw-back brushie anything they wanted now! He had thought of calling him the Forlorn Hope. For Nick had had a crazy dream of a race-track and big stakes and a sweeping turn of luck from bad to good. But he had awakened long since. He had a dream now with some sense to it—freedom, a home, this girl.

"How about us meeting in the Star Lode country?" he asked.

"I'll stay there until you come."

THE colt had learned during summer that when the burro was packed, a trip to the desert came next. And he always tallied on. But this time they tied a lasso round his neck and hitched him to the wagon.

Sappho got a thwack on her rump, and moved obediently up the steep mule-deer trail.

The man followed her. The girl mounted her driver's seat and sat there staring as burro and man scrambled up the slope of the cliffs.

The colt whinnied. He could climb that cliff if the jenny could. She had taught him how. So why were they leaving him down here?

The burro and the man climbed higher, their forms misshapen in a layer of heat, dwindling to the size of jack-rabbits as they topped the divide.

The colt buck-jumped in frantic misery. The old jenny was leaving him! He gave a whistling terrified snort, kicked his heels, pitched. And when the wagon started, he dragged at his rope like a puppy sliding on haunches.

Way up yonder on the ridge the man waved his last farewell. Nick Buckley saw the antics of his little cayuse, and it probably gave him a pang. If that shaggy little runt had only been big enough, he would like to ride him on this race! The get of a racer out of a wise cow-horse, and with the savvy of a burro—that would make a combination!

Nick turned and crossed the divide. And the burro went before him without so much as looking back; with a heavy pack on her back and a man spanking her through sage, she was in her predestined element, and should have been content. But something was wrong.

In the bottoms Nick Buckley found the tracks of six horses. He could see by the spacing and the depth of the hoofprints that the horses had been pounding at a run.

But a burro must eat; he unhitched the pack and tethered the shaggy runt in a side draw where there was some bunch-grass. She would not eat, however, but stood motionless, oblivious of feed. Back there in the ghost town she had felt a blow which came out of the air before she could take it with her usual trick, the flexing of a haunch. It was not an honest thwack or kick, but something snaky, with a sting to it.

She felt a slow strange agony coming, more than hunger, more than exhaustion. She drifted over to her pack which lay on the sand, and stood there with her shaggy head bowed, her ears drooping.

"What's the matter, old lady?" her master asked as he came back. "Pining for your lost baby? Too bad! Or maybe you smell water in those cans and need a drink? All right." He poured some out in a pan. "Now for the trail. It's going to be a long one."

The burro looked as if she knew it. It was going to be a long trail, with no Indian camp at the end. She shambled on, but the pack rode dead because of the way she lurched. As Nick slapped her, he thought how immune to feelings these critters were. He might have been thwacking a stuffed animal.

She kept going; perhaps she could get away from that invisible driver twisting a finger in her side. Once her former owner had kept her walking when she had a case of colic, and the walking had cured her. Perhaps it would help now.

But the pain spread over croup and back and withers. It grew to a great weight, crushing and heavy—far heavier than her pack. She felt like those little Mexican burros that tote a whole household on their backs, including the master's wood and water and his wife.

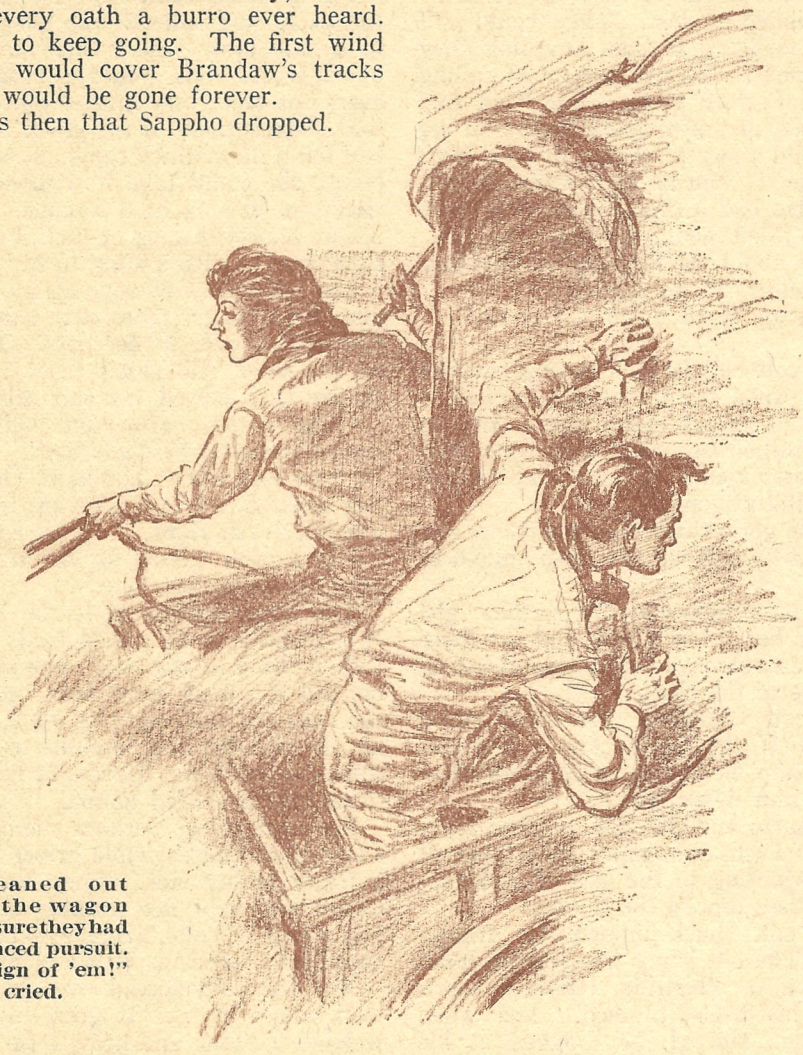
But she plodded on. Perhaps the happy hunting-ground of burros would be just this—plodding through eternity in front of a prospector who eternally hunted colors never to be found. Then she stopped.

NICK stared at the sky-line in a frenzy. They were dropping hopelessly behind, and all because this fool jack had made up her mind to get no farther

away from the colt. That was what he thought. He slapped her, shoved her, banged her rump.

She turned around and looked at him. He had the startled impression that she wanted to tell him something, like Balaam's ass. But it was no time for miracles. Nick was in a hurry, and he swore every oath a burro ever heard. He had to keep going. The first wind to blow would cover Brandaw's tracks and he would be gone forever.

It was then that Sappho dropped.



Nick leaned out around the wagon to make sure they had outdistanced pursuit. "Not a sign of 'em!" he cried.

She dropped while still plodding; the pack crashed to one side when she fell, and when Nick unhitched it, he saw what had escaped him before because it was on the off-side—the gray hair reddened like a roan's.

He stopped just long enough to doctor her with sojuara sap and to bury a can of water level with her nose.

He strapped the canteens and one of the big cans on his shoulders and hit the trail. He looked back just once. She lay like a lump on the ground, the color of sand, pitifully still, pitifully patient.

THAT can on Buckley's shoulders weighed only twenty pounds. But as he started hiking, believing he could trail Brandaw and pack his own water, it kept knocking in little jolts against his wound like the lid of a kettle. His wound under the pack started to throb.

But he had no intention of letting that bother him. Look at that old burro! She had plodded along with a bullet in her side. And here he was with only a cut which was cleaned and bound up.

The murderous dry heat sapped all the moisture from his body, and he knew he was trying something that was practically crazy.

There was no remote chance of his crossing that plain before his canteens gave out. With a burro packing a good supply, and with no weight on his own shoulders, it might be done.

Cowed by the blows of the desert sun, he turned back. He had made his last play, and lost.

When he climbed over a long high breaker of sand, he saw the burro still lying there, motionless, her nose resting over the little well made by the buried water-can. But she was not alone.

A forlorn scratched colt hung over her. His head drooped low. His nose barely touched her, as her nose touched the yearned-for water. It was the most disconsolate tableau Nick had ever seen: that young colt mourning over his foster-mother.

He wondered how the little cayuse had followed the trail so far. But he wasted no time on that problem. The only question was, would the colt carry a squaw pack?

He gathered what he had left of the water and food, emptied his bulging pockets, unslung his canteens. He took everything except one big can of water which he left for the old jenny. He had stopped, precious as the moments were, to kneel by the wounded beast and swab out her lips and mouth and eyes again. He tilted the can up, adjusting it so that her nose could reach the brim. Then he cinched up his pack, wondering.

This particular colt would do anything he had seen his wet-nurse do. He stood as calmly as he had seen old Sappho stand, as the diamond hitch was made. All he waited for was the obligatory slap on the rump, which he took like any burro, absorbing the impact. He had learned that trick very recently, when he saw the burro spanked to the trail by this same man.

That was why when Nick put the halter on him and started to lead him, he would not move. A burro just does not do things that way. Nick felt a qualm. Must he train this fool horse to carry a pack before he could hit the trail? Time was precious. If this useless cayuse would only show one bit of horse sense!

He did show it. But it was burro sense. As soon as Nick found he could not lead him, he got behind and smacked him on the croup.

That was more like it! Horses will follow behind a man, but a burro must lead—according to old established custom. And his training showed. He was a chip off the old block. And the old block was not Volcano the racehorse, apparently, but a little old burro.

The cayuse turned several times to nicker at the shaggy crumpled form lying in the shade; then he seemed to make up his mind, resignedly, patiently. He was grown up now—and starting on his career. He hit the trail. . . .

At sunset Buckley reached the crest of a giant sand hill and in the gem-clear light which came with the fading of the mirages he saw a haze of dust far away to the south. Tracks marked the alkaline dunes in the foreground—tracks which he had followed for hours. They led in a comparatively straight line toward a gash in the battlements of mesas —evidently the landmark which Brandaw had followed all day. The mist churned by his horses in powdery silt hung there barely discernible as a flaw in the glassy brilliance of the horizon.

Satisfied of the exact break in the range which Brandaw picked, Nick was about to make Indian camp, when in scanning the whole wheel of the horizon, he saw another dust-cloud back there in the mesas which he had left; of course Stew Moyer had heard of the girl's trip to the ghost town. And of course he had put up a posse to trail and watch her.

AS that race started, Nick kept under cover for two reasons: because of the man he pursued, and because of those who pursued him. He noticed, glancing back, that that cloud behind him cut its own trail, but it followed Brandaw's direction. In other words it looked like a race to the diggings, with three contestants—Brandaw, Nick and this unknown pursuer.

The little cayuse shambled on, not like a horse, but with the gait which he had learned from his teacher, the deceptively clumsy trot of a jackass.

"You don't look much like a racehorse, I've got to admit," Nick grunted. "But if you want to be a burro like your nurse, go ahead and be one. It's all I need right now. You got me into all this trouble; now get me out."

The little horse was well trained—as burros go. He had ambled ahead of that Purdy wagon so long that he knew a road when he saw it. It did not take him long to understand that this desert road was merely the jumbled prints of fleeing horses in the dunes. He stuck to them without being guided.

And when they came out of the dunes and crossed a giant bad-land crack, he showed another trait of his foster mother. He did not fret himself into a

nervous lather about the risky trail. He took it as a matter of course, except that he went cautiously, feeling his way with a forefoot. It was lucky he was that kind of a critter. For down in the rocky bottoms of the crack, Nick saw a dead horse. Evidently the trail had been too tricky, and the horse had acted up as horses will, and lost his footing.

IT was the first of Brandaw's horses to go.

They racked along across the gully, climbed the other side. As Nick rested to breathe the colt, he had a view of a great mass of cracks and arroyos, as if the flat breast of the desert had been riven by an earthquake which shattered it like a china plate. Through this labyrinth a man with a horse would have to make long detours to cross a gully a furlong wide.

Brandaw was not risking the gulches now. He had learned his lesson. He had skirted one crack which must have taken him ten miles out of his course. Nick knew that the course lay straight ahead, for on the flat ground beyond the crack he saw another discarded horse. The shortcut took about half an hour. The colt did not object. Most mustangs want the high country, where they can see great distances; but this fellow had been taught that there is nothing much to see beyond his own nose. He kept nose and eyes and mind on the trail.

Nor did he shy off when a lizard scurried out of the brush. He had learned that unusual sounds and sights are not something to prance and fret and sweat over. He plodded on, cautious, surefooted. Horses, like cattle, have little sense in picking the easiest trail. But this horse had caught the trick of it from his tutor.

They climbed up the other side of the gulch; and as Nick had expected, he picked up the tracks again on the plateau beyond. Brandaw had camped here, discarded some empty cans, pastured his horses in the dry weeds of a draw. It was doubtful whether they had grazed. The stuff was dry as tinder. But Clodhop had seen the old jenny eat drier stuff than this, and he found it good.

Two hours later Nick found another horse that had been run too hard on the rough ground. He was left behind lamed with scratches, and useless. Now Brandaw had only three left. And from here on Nick noticed wherever there was sand to show a pattern of hoofprints, the horses had walked. The tortoise was catching up to the hare.

At sundown when Nick rested in a crevice, he took stock of his water. He divided what he had with the colt, but this was not enough. He cut a hole in a sojuara cactus, let the sap well out and fill his cupped hands. He held this to Clodhop's hot mouth. It was a drink that horses do not take to. But Sappho had taught this horse that a lot of weeds that are not palatable are good enough to stay hunger, a lot of gyp water good enough to quench thirst. He drank.

Nick laughed with delight. There was no worry about this pack-animal going thirsty. Let Brandaw and his horses worry about that. And let those pursuers worry. This man and this horse were on their own ground!

They kept on long after sunset, for the cool of the desert night gave both new life. Nick camped, awaking as if he had measured the exact hour by the wheeling of the stars.

Before hitting the trail, Nick climbed a ridge and looked to the sky-line. He was astounded at the distance he had cut down between himself and his victim. Down in a deep cañon he saw Brandaw plodding on foot, leading two weary ponies, picking out the easiest trail in the sand wash. It was the journey's end. . . . Looking back to the north he saw a line of black specks—men and burros perhaps, moving along his own tracks, along his own groove.

CHAPTER X

STEW MOYER had discarded his posse long since. It was his custom, when a bunch of riders had repeatedly failed to round up a fugitive, to try tracking him down alone. In this present case the trail of the fugitive had not yet been found, but Stew had picked up another just as good: the tracks of the Purdy wagon leading from the ghost town of Chloride, into the desert.

He came upon the wagon discarded, and saw the tracks of the horses which had been unhitched. Following this clue, he found Luella Purdy far out in the desert, hunting a lost colt.

"Riding solo, Stew?" she asked when he overtook her.

"I am. But I figured you aint."

Her eyes twinkled, sweeping the sand dunes. "See anyone around me, this side of the horizon?"

"Not yet. But I always believed in the rule: 'Find the lady.'"

"If you'd found me a little sooner, Stew," she said frankly, "you wouldn't have learned much. I was only trailing that colt that Buckley let me raise."

THE Sheriff smiled affably. He did not believe a word. "Prospectin' way out here just to find that Rocky Mountain goat? Oh, no!"

She persisted. "The critter wriggled loose somehow and sloped out, hunting the old jenny. The jenny was shot back yonder. I doctored her up, but it wasn't much use."

"I know all about it," Stew agreed. "I found her on a sand dune with her nose in a can of water. But I aint interested in burros."

"Maybe you were interested in my wagon and the sign I had on it about Brandaw. And maybe you'd like to know where Brandaw's heading for?"

"Not that it concerns this-here case. But where?"

"He lined out with six horses—there's the tracks of them right in the sand yonder." She pointed at the clear trail. "Buckley started after him on foot."

"What! Buckley! Now, listen—"

"Those are his boot-marks in the sand, and the hoofprints of the colt. What I figure is, the colt caught up with him, and he's using him as a pack-horse. Are you coming along with me?"

"Where to?"

"To where that map led to. Brandaw has been working the diggings ever since Nick shot Jim Rupple. And he's been doing it without any fear of you or your shotgun deputies bothering him. You were too busy gunning down the wrong man."

Stew's red-veined eyes studied the mass of tracks in the sand. He was bewildered at the girl's candor. He had "found the woman" in the case and—here she was actually inviting him to trail with her!

"Give me your gun, Miss Purdy."

"What for?"

"How do I know you aint hornswoggling me into a trap?"

"You're to be the judge, Mr. Sheriff. That's why I want you in at the showdown. Nick is an outlaw until he proves Brandaw stole that map." Then she added: "Here's my iron, Stew."

"And have you got a drink?"

"We're losing a lot of time with this palaver."

"We got all the time in the world. Tex Brandaw lined into those bad-lands with horses, which is about as sensible as going in a boat. Your boy friend's got neither horse nor jack."

She gave a narrow smile. "He's got both in one critter."

Stew did not get her point. He finished a point of his own. "Now, me and you are trailing over to the reservation at Three Forks and get some burros and pack out from there. How about that drink?"

She proffered one of her canteens. Stew Moyer had a good water-pack of his own behind his cantle, but he hoped, remotely, that the girl would know what he meant when he said "a drink." His throat ached, and so did his soul. He drank from her canteen, and a slow warmth touched him; his eyes shone as he asked:

"How in tarnation blazes did you happen to be toting whisky in this canteen, girl?"

"I figured Brandaw would need it when Nick gets through with him."

A MUDDY water-pocket, a cradle rocker, pickax and pile of slag convinced Buckley that a prospector had been panning here for some time. He studied the lay-out from his hiding-place a hundred yards away. Many fires blackened the rock slab at the pool's edge, and the slag indicated many days of work. From a fissure in the granite cliffs beyond the pool, a man lugged a small sack which, despite its size, must have been almost too heavy to lift.

Leaving his colt tethered in a hidden washout, Buckley climbed down to the bottoms, making no sound except the sound of sifting sand when he had to slide. He made the descent unseen and unheard. There was, however, little doubt but that Brandaw had seen that same cloud of dust which Nick watched so anxiously. Brandaw knew he had no time to lose. . . . He was headed for his pack-horses, lugging that bag, when he saw a sombrero tip poked up from behind a blue rock. Instantly he dropped the bag, drew and fired. Then without waiting to see whether he had made a hit, he whirled back into the crevice.

Nick leaped from the boulder and ran toward the mouth of the crevice, then flattened behind another rock.

Brandaw opened fire between two quartz chunks and Nick beaded down on the flash. He fired one shot which

chipped the quartz a little above where Brandaw's head ought to be. Nick did not hit him. He did not intend to. He wanted this man alive, not dead.

But the latter must have been impressed by the closeness of that shot, for he dropped back farther into the crevice. Nick was satisfied. He had his victim right where he wanted him. All he had to do was to wait until Brandaw was baked out of that crevice by the desert sun.

Then Nick remembered that his pursuers were but a few hours away when he saw them at sundown of the day before. What if they had kept on during the night without a camp? They might be right on his heels, ready to throw a shot into the game before it was started.

Running low-crouched across the gulch bed, he climbed up the side of the cliffs to get a view of that crack from above. When he got there, he looked down over the rim and saw the top of Brandaw's hat. Its wearer was crouched down behind a pile of bags at the mouth of the crevice, waiting.

INSTEAD of killing him, Nick put a slug into the brim of his hat, firing almost vertically downward. Tex Brandaw looked up, gaping and helpless. And Nick looked down, grinning.

"Ready to fold up the deal-box, Brandaw, or shall we shoot it out?"

Brandaw stood with hands held high. "Listen, Buckley," he pleaded, almost sobbing, "don't kill me! I'll pay you. I'll pay you all you want!"

"What with? This dust that doesn't belong to you? I'm taking you back to the Sheriff; but first you're going to write a confession, telling just who robbed Jim Rupple's remains."

"What's that going to buy you, man?" Brandaw asked earnestly. "You killed Rupple yourself. And that yarn about his stealing your mare is pretty cold by now. You'll have to answer for that shooting, won't you?" He jabbered on excitedly: "Listen, I said I'd pay you if you'll let me go. Not with gold, no. But with somethin' that'll do you a heap more good. I'll write a confession that it was *me* that killed Rupple."

Nick Buckley stared aghast at the puffy face, the puckering, whispering lips. The man would do anything, obviously, if he were given half a chance to escape. He would make any promises, tell any lies. It was a waste of time to listen to him. But this offer to take the blame for Rupple's killing struck Nick as peculiar. For it was the second time Brandaw had made it.

"I refused that offer once," Nick said. "And I'm refusing it again. I shot Rupple, and everyone knows it. I'm taking the blame for that, and I'm not shoving it on any corpse-robbing coyote like you. I can clear myself without you writing any of your lies."

He leaped down into the crevice and stood a horse's-length from the pursuer. "Turn around, *hombre*."

Brandaw's shaking lips tightened to something almost like a grin. "All right, Buckley. You can have my gun. Take it."

"I said turn around."

With that same snaky smile, Brandaw's eyes bored into him, staring through him, beyond him. The queer satisfied look on his face was a warning. He was looking at some one behind Nick, some one who had crept up to the mouth of the rock draw.

Nick shot one frantic glance over his shoulder. Instantly Brandaw's gun jerked out, blazed. But Nick saw the jerk first and fired. Brandaw fell, shooting crazily at the ground.

Again Nick's eyes slipped back to the mouth of the crevice behind him. Stew Moyer stood there, his knobbed star catching all the light from the sun drenched quartz. With one bony hand he was stroking a shoestring mustache; the other, of course, held a gun.

CHAPTER XI

BUCKLEY tried to speak calmly but his pent-up breath shouted: "I'm giving myself up, Moyer, for the killing of Jim Rupple."

Stew Moyer gave a tough, long-lipped grin, "If so, why don't you reach?"

"I'm reaching."

"And how about this bird?" Stew pointed a bony accusing finger at the man on the ground.

"I shot him. He's a claim-jumper. I'll stand trial for that."

"Looks like your best play."

Luella Purdy saw it all. She had left their burros at the water-hole and darted up into the draw just a little behind Moyer, although the latter had warned her there would be gun-play. And now, inside the narrow draw, she saw Brandaw stretched and clutching sand. And she saw Stew Moyer's back,

straight as a fence-pole, as he stepped up to Nick and frisked him.

She cried out, almost jeering:

"What are you taking *him* prisoner for, Stew? Can't you see the truth? It's plenty clear if you can think!"

"The clearest being that this young ranny plugged Jim Rupple—and confesses to same without amendments," Stew said, snapping on the cuffs.

"Well, you nap-headed old idiot!" Luella cried. "Nick trailed that coyote to the diggings here. How do you think he got here? There's been panning, hasn't there, or what do you think that cradle rocker was for—patting tamales? And what's he packed in those bags? Punch yourself and wake up, Stew!"

Stew said trenchantly: "How do we know which one did the panning?"

Nick gasped. The girl flew into another tirade, to which Stew was deaf. He was looking down at the wounded man. "Give him a drink," he said to the girl, "and I'll talk to him."

As Luella had announced, her canteen of red-eye was certainly needed when the showdown came. She knelt, poured a drink between Brandaw's lips, then unbuttoned his vest.

Stew was attending to something important. He knelt by one of the bags, unlaced it and thrust in his fist. It came out powdered yellow, dazzlingly bright in the rays of the sun.

Luella meanwhile was intrigued with something she had noticed on Brandaw's leather vest. The lining was sewed with amateur stitching which caught her practiced eye. She jumped instantly to the conclusion that the stolen map was tucked under that lining—in the same spot where Jim Rupple, its one-time possessor, had kept it next to his heart.

She took out her knife and started to rip it, then thought it best to wait until the Sheriff witnessed the act. For here, she was convinced, was the ultimate proof of Nick Buckley's innocence.

Stew Moyer shook his fist so that the dust fell back in the bag in a shower of sparks. He glanced with a sympathetic thirst at the girl who held the wounded man's head up and poured some more whisky into his lips. As Stew watched, he saw Brandaw's sunken lids flicker.

"It'll help you, *hombre*," Stew said, "if you tell me what it's all about. You aint got much time left. Why don't you settle up for all chips?"

But the gray lips stiffened hard.

Stew spoke again, softly.

"The Purdy girl told me all about you, Brandaw. And she talks plausible. Tell me the truth. It won't do you any hurt.

"Listen, Buckley," Brandaw pleaded, "don't kill me! I'll pay you. I'll pay you all you want!"

You robbed Jim Rupple's body. You didn't kill him, but you killed two other old prospectors—Pliny Driggs and Bob Henby. I've posted their names all over the range, wanting their killer, and now I've got you. The game's over. I can't do anything to you, Brandaw, so what's the odds if you confess it all or not? But it'll help clear this young ranny here. Make that one decent play before you cash in, Brandaw. It'll help."

This time Brandaw's lips quivered and his breath came in a choking whisper.

"I didn't kill Rupple. And I didn't kill those two prospectors. I trailed Rupple to rob him, and some one else gunned him down before I had the chance."

"We know that," Stew said gently. "But how about those other two—Driggs and Henby? They were killed about the same time."

The dying man squirmed, trying to cry out, but his words came in hoarse gasps.

"I didn't kill 'em! And I can prove it! This claim here belonged to them, not to Jim Rupple. That's why I kept the proof, when I came here to work the claim, so's their death wouldn't be blamed on me!"

"What do you mean, you kept the proof?"

"Look in the lining of his vest, Stew," the girl said quietly. "Let me rip it open, and you'll find the map."

Another cry rattled deep in Tex Brandaw's throat. "I haven't got that map! I learned it by heart and burned it!"

But Stew Moyer said: "All right, girl. Rip the lining and get it."

The girl did it so carefully and noiselessly that the dying man had no knowledge of what was done. Between the lining and the leather there was a small ragged piece of paper, wrinkled and discolored by sweat.

Luella handed it to the Sheriff.

It was not the map; it was a scribbled note, stained in one spot with blood, almost illegible because of the wild death-scrawl in which it was written. It was signed by Pliny Driggs, and it read:

I'm dying. Jim Rupple shot me & he shot my pard Henby & he took my Map. Whoever avenges us & gets the killer can have the map & claim, being we got no heirs or assigns or—

The note itself was not finished, but its writer had managed finally to scratch down his signature.

That name Pliny Driggs and the name Bob Henby had been on the *Wanted* signs for many months. They had been stuck up in all the cow-camps and towns with the stipulation that their killer was wanted dead or alive.

Stew looked down at the man in the sand. "Where did you get this note?"

Tex Brandaw heaved a faint sigh. He seemed to have taken the Sheriff's advice that he could die in peace if he settled all accounts.

"I stopped at Driggs' shack in Chloride last winter and found him dead—him and his pardner. They hadn't been dead long. The note was on the floor, where he had written it. I went after Rupple. I wanted to get him. But I killed nobody. I'm dying, and I'm telling you the honest-to-God's truth—"

"But you were going to kill Rupple so you could get that map, accordin' to the terms of this here note?" Stew prompted.

Tex Brandaw gave a slight weary nod, his lids drooping.

"Only you found he'd been beefed before you could catch him?"

Again the head nodded.

"But what gets me," Stew said, giving his mustache a nervous yank, "is why didn't you just tell everyone you beefed Rupple anyway? Then you'd have a clear title to the map, instead of stealing it and sneaking off to the desert."

"That's just what he tried to do," Nick Buckley spoke up. "He offered to take the blame for the killing the moment he saw me after I'd shot Rupple down. And he offered again right here when you horsed into this gulch, Sheriff."

Stew was still staring at the gray face. The lids sank shut; the head rocked back. Tex Brandaw was unconscious.

STEW turned to Nick Buckley. "It's clear enough why he hung on to this note to the very end. He kept it so's he could clear himself if he was ever found working these diggings. But it also clears you—a whole lot." He unsnapped the cuffs. "You killed a rustler for stealing your horse and running her to death. And it was a man who I had posted *Wanted* signs for him dead or alive. Not much sense in taking you to trial for that shooting!"

He reached to the girl's canteen for a drink. He gulped and said: "Take a couple of our burros and pack this dust. I'll pack out with this *hombre*. He's not

cashed in yet. And cinch those sacks careful, because, as near as I can figure, what's in 'em belongs to you."

Nick and the girl had already arrived at that conclusion. But Stew deemed it advisable to amplify the explanation.

"The owner of that map was murdered and robbed by Jim Rupple and he gives the claim to the man who avenges him, don't he? Well, you avenged him perfect when you avenged your dead mare. In plain terms, you get the whole works."

One thing pleased Stew Moyer above all else. There were no legalities to this game whatsoever. The game was all played above the table.

CHAPTER XII

LIKE many a covered wagon abandoned by lost Argonauts in our earlier history, the Purdy Emporium stood where the Coyotero Desert heaps its breakers of alkali against the cliffs of the Hucky Dummy hills. Such was the good esteem in which this itinerant bazaar was held on the range, that it had remained there for five days unmolested by wandering Papago, prospector or posse. Its store of purple suspenders, corsets and crockery remained intact. Thus it was found one night by two desert wanderers who came to it by the light of a blue moon.

Luella Purdy climbed into the wagon, and without lighting the lantern which swung from one of the hoops of the cover, she rummaged among her merchandise and came out with her arms full of stone jugs. These were the jugs in which she ordinarily peddled her own blackstrap molasses during the fall.

"I've got two dozen of them," she said, "and with the gold-dust packed in each one half full, and molasses on top, we can ride through the main street of Hucky Dummy itself. And they can search the wagon, for all I care—as long as they don't open these jugs."

"Let 'em open 'em!" Nick cried, delighted. "They'd find molasses, wouldn't they? And who'd figure out that gold-dust sifted to the bottom? They'd just think you'd got a line of new jugs that were extra thick and hefty!"

They unsaddled their horses, unhitched the packs, poured the panned dust from the rawhide bags into their new cache. This done, they hitched up two horses to the wagon and mounted the driver's seat.

Thus the Purdy wagon started as if on its itinerary—through Hucky Dummy to sell pomade to the cantina girls, through the 31 Graze to sell bandanas to the cowboys for rodeo, through the cow outfits north of it to sell calico and needles and thread to the ranch wives. But they went to none of these places. Their destination was unknown.

When Clodhop took his accustomed place where he would not eat the dust, the girl caught Nick's eyes and his queer smile.

"Still laughing at him? And after what he's done?"

"I was just thinking how you first took him up in your arms and mothered him and stuck him in back here and swaddled him with horse-blankets. You were like a little girl playing house."

"You acted like a little kid yourself."

The wagon-wheels rolled on.

"Where'll we head for?"

"Choose the spot and I'll buy it."

She thought a long time, her eyes far away. "I've heard about it everywhere I go—a big cattle-run west of the Powderhorn range. There's miles and miles of upland clover."

"That's what we want! Clodhop's got to have clover from now on. None of this bunch grass and shad scale. Alfilerilla and bluegrass is what he gets. And a big barn and paddock, and hay and carrots and a stable *mozo* to groom him night and morning—"

He paused as he saw the girl looking up at him, her eyes dancing in the moonlight. They burst out laughing at the same moment.

CLOVER and a groom for Clodhop! Why, he had eaten a meal of locoweed that very night!

Nick was sure it was locoweed because the tired little horse had started jumping around just before they got out of the sand dunes. He seemed to want to go back to the desert, and what could be more daft than that? Then he lost all sense of proportion—a typical symptom—jumping chuck-holes as if they were gulches, shying off at shining quartz, prancing, lathering. He even tried to break loose and head for a timber belt and water which was thirty miles away! He had the delusions locoweed will give any critter; it was not until they got to the wagon that the effects of the drug were sweated out of him.

But then Luella said, as the wagon rattled along:

"Nick, are you sure locoweed makes a horse act that way?"

"Thought we decided he isn't a horse."

"But do you remember where he started spooking up? It was far back yonder, somewhere about where you and Clodhop started out together to chase Brandaw. I mean where Sappho keeled over."

"We didn't go near where I left Sappho. I'd have remembered the gulch."

"But Clodhop knew it was somewhere near. He isn't crazy. He's got a sense of direction. He remembered where you left Sappho."

"But she's dead."

This seemed to end the problem. They rode on. They did not talk until Nick repeated: "She's dead. No use going back to hunt for her."

They looked at each other. Of course there was no use going miles out of the way just to bury a dead burro.

BUT Nick said after a long silence: "That old desert rat who sold her to us was right. She was a thoroughbred."

"And she taught your horse a lot of good medicine."

"Why go way back there just to show Clodhop a dead burro?"

"Turn the wagon around, and we'll find Sappho, Nick. No use pretending that's not what you intend to do."

In his usual place up front, the colt had always imagined he was picking the trail. This was the first time he really did it.

And it was the first time—several hours later—that Nick thought he saw Clodhop show the lines of a real horse. Every muscle stiffened, giving a semblance of close coupling. His head went up, arching his neck. He pawed at the ground with straight, fine forelegs. He showed his lines like a dog that sees another. Then he nickered, trembled as if he saw a ghost, pranced, pricked up his ears.

Nick's foot kicked forward at the brake and the wagon jolted to a stop. They saw old Sappho—a gray blob in the moonlight, lying by the side of the road. Her head hung sidewise—but not to reach for weeds, for she was too weak and miserable to reach for anything. She lay there waiting, forgotten and forlorn. To stiffen an ear and twist it in the direction of those creaking wagon-wheels was something far beyond her power or desire.

Nick leaped to the ground and ran to her, throwing his arms about her neck. He lit a match and examined her wound. She had been doctored after a fashion, sufficient at least for a burro's ailments. The shaggy hair was clipped about the wound, the slug dug out, a dressing taped on. But the plaster had been scratched off sometime since, doubtless by Sappho herself, when she indulged in the ancient burro habit of rolling on the ground.

Nick stood back to give her a chance to see and smell Clodhop, for this meeting had something of the drama of the return of the Prodigal Son.

Clodhop nibbled at her, sniffed, squealed. Sappho tried to get up but it was only as if a wind had blown against her patchy skeleton. Her shaggy head, little more than a skull covered with wool, shook and rolled back to the sand. It looked as if she had stayed alive just long enough for Clodhop's return.

Nick picked her up in his arms and found to his astonishment that she was as light as a foal. And like that foal they had held in their arms long ago, they carried her to the wagon and bedded down some blankets. Luella lit a fire and mixed warm water and whisky. They knelt by the old jenny's side and fed her the drink from a baby's bottle.

Once more they were like two children playing house. And Nick's hope was fulfilled. They would always play it both of them together, the girl turning into a mother whenever some forlorn waif turned up at her door, begging to live a little longer.

OUTSIDE, Clodhop stood taking the scene more or less for granted. Far back in the wells of his memory he might have had a glimmering of what was happening. They had taken him into that wagon once when he was dying and nursed him and saved him. That must be what was happening to the hide-covered skeleton they had just carried in there.

It is doubtful, of course, whether Clodhop's memory was quite so miraculous. At any rate he seemed satisfied. For as he waited out there in the moonlight he threw back his head and let out a silent dry gasp, then another and another. It was the first unmistakable trait of a horse he had ever shown. A burro could never give a horse-laugh like that!

THE END

For Glory and the Main!

This eighteenth of the "Ships and Men" series follows the terrific adventure of a British skipper among the pirates of the Spanish Main.

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

Illustrated by Arthur Lytell

"SPORTING dolphins and spouting sea-monsters!" said Cap'n George Dexter. "Want to see 'em? I got me another book today and found something nice in it."

I was visiting aboard his ship; the skipper has a nautical library to knock your eye out. He prowls in every port, for books, and shares his finds with his friends. He laid before me an old French tome on ship-handling, a real old one, and bound in with it was a chart. On the ocean portions appeared not only the usual antique monsters, but also two sailing craft, to indicate deep water.

As a ship-lover I was instantly curious. One of these ships was a true model of the 1665 period, but exaggerated. A blunt three-master with highly steeved bowsprit and sprit boom. At the very tip of the bowsprit was a sprit-topmast, reaching almost as high as the fore yard.

But the other one! There was a ship almost of our own day, a square-rigger with conventional top-hamper. The bowsprit was leveled to an almost straight thrust. In place of the sprit-boom was a spreader and martingale, with the regular bobstays and martingale guys.

"Trying to put something over on me, George?" I asked. "This square-rigger was drawn on the chart a hundred years after the thing was printed!"

My host chuckled. "Want to bet on it?"

I did not. Dexter had been master in sail for thirty years, and was an authority on ships and rigs.

"Look again," he said, and handed me a reading-glass. "Sure it was printed?"

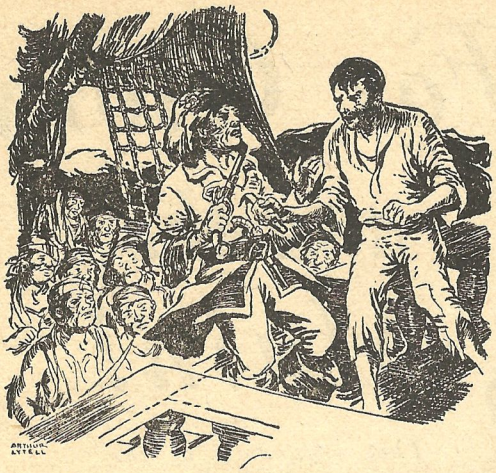
I obeyed, and suddenly got the point—or thought I did. This map was not printed, but drawn. It was an original, a chart of the western coast of Haiti.

Dexter chuckled. "Both ships drawn at the same time, by the same man. This," and he pointed to the apparently modern vessel, "was his conception of how the bows of the future ship would look, in his mind. The other, obviously exaggerated, shows the clumsy bow-rigging, the low sprit or water-sail, of that period."

"And just who was this brilliant genius?" I inquired with some skepticism.

THE skipper, with his chart-reader, magnified the signature of the old-time cartographer. The name was Eli Darden; above it was the inscription "Charte of Hispaniola." Name of romance, this!

Darden? It came back to me after a moment. His career had been curiously like that of William Dampier. Unlike Dampier, however, he had never published any "Discourses" of dubious adventure; nor, after abandoning piracy,



The instant would never come again—Darden was suddenly leaping.

had he been given the command of a king's ship. Far from it!

Instead, he had been cursed and reviled by those very buccaneers who profited most by his skill in navigation. Finally, as a last gesture of thanks, they "wet-marooned" him between Grand Cayman and Cape Gracias á Dios, and left him to perish.

Somewhere I had read about it. Now the picture came back to me from boyhood's days. I could vision the Caribbean of that fateful August morning, lying flat and glassy. Even the dawn-breeze had failed. The boat, old and battered, drifted with what current there was. The sun lifted in a blinding golden maze, promising intolerable white heat.

ROUSED by the warmth, the man in the stern sat up, rubbed salt-burned eyes, and blinked dully at the sea. He held a hand up to the fiery disk, measuring by force of habit its height above the horizon; then his hand fell. Half-crazed laughter struggled on his caked and blistered lips.

"No instruments here," he croaked dully. "No nothing. Nothing."

With the hopeless word, he sprawled again, and retrospect overwhelmed him. What a fool he had been to counter the insane ferocity of those buccaneering wolves who had elected him captain!

Against his will, voting him down, they had laid a Portugal aboard in a blustering, futile fight, only to be beaten off as Darden had foreseen. Licking their wounds, frenzied with disaster, blind with rum, they vented their rage on "Mad Eli," as he was too often known, on him who loved beauty in a world of fury. He could still hear the voice of Tighe, Red Tighe with his one eye, the master's mate:

"Cast him loose, wet-maroon him! Let the sun fry the addled brains out of his noggin—the Jonah! It's bad luck to all he does."

Tighe wanted to be captain, yes. That red Hercules had ambition. And now Eli Darden drifted in an empty boat, his beloved papers and instruments lost; another day or two and he would go mad with the dry-flesh prickle of thirst.

He stirred, shook himself, and stood up, a slender wiry man in ragged drawers. His face, bronzed, hawklike, caught the imagination; hard and strong, but the eyes lacked shrewdness. They were wide set, open, the eyes of a dreamer.

Nothing in sight, three ways; the other direction was closed by sun-dazzle and glare. Eli Darden slumped again, staring vacantly at the one other thing in the boat—an empty jug rolling in the bilge. These two days he had stared at nothing else, striving to keep his sanity by fastening attention on the thing—yet it was only now that he noticed the bottom of the jug. He stiffened suddenly, sat up, rubbed his eyes.

Suddenly he reached out, retrieved the jug, and muttered in astonishment. Yes; here were scratches on the bottom of it. He squinted, slack-jawed, at the rude words:

"Yr papers safe. Knife inside. K."

He could not comprehend at once. Papers safe, his beloved papers safe? He must be dreaming. "K." would be Willy Kirk, the cabin boy; yes, the lad could read and write, for a wonder. He held up the unstoppered jug and shook it. Something moved. He held it bottom up and shook again. An object protruded and he tugged it out.

A slim, deadly knife, eight inches long, tightly wrapped in torn silk. A grim smile cracked his lips as he fingered it. Bless the lad! A knife to end his thirsty life when he could endure no more, eh? Well, he was not yet at that point.

He thumbed the blade, his brain acrawl with bitter thoughts. Upon what evil days and low estate had he fallen, he who had been a gentleman once! Guide and companion of sea-wolves, lowest of the low, unable to comprehend thought or discretion; mad outcast wreckage of humanity, men who savagely destroyed all society, religion and the lovely things of life in their insen-

sate lust for plunder and women they were not men enough to gain honestly. Aye, there was the simple truth of it.

He sat with head bowed and torment creeping upon him as the sun drew higher. He could hold his own among these wolves. He cherished a snarling hatred of them all, a hand quicker to strike, a brain quicker to grasp; yet here he was, a man doomed. This was the end of things for him, a wasteful end. Ah, with what he knew now, if he could but get out of it all—

"Ahoy the boat!"

THE voice reached him, shook him, lifted him erect with ghastly face. Had madness come to him so soon—ah! There against the sun-dazzle was something; or was it a vision come to plague him? No; it must have been there all the time, and he blinded by the sun. Trembling, he caught his breath. A ship, a real ship, drifting down on him, overhauling him with the current.

Even in this desperate moment, Eli Darden could admire her as she crept from the sun-glare into his clearer vision. A ketch, probably some Frenchman from Martinico; a trim and splendid thing, helped along by some faint breath of air that did not touch the sea. Against the vivid blue of the still water, against the sun-filled sky, she stood clearcut and serene. Only one thing to spoil the picture; this was the absurd bowsprit with its sprit-topsail sticking up like a sore thumb.

Voices hailed him in French and Spanish and English. He recoiled as he comprehended; buccaneers! Wolves like those he had left. His own name was uttered. They knew him, some of them. Laughter and jeers and oaths poured at him. A line was flung, and he caught it. All the while, he knew his desperate plight, once he was aboard her. He must think fast, act rapidly, or he was a lost man.

No mercy here; survival of the fittest, and nothing else. No hesitation if he meant to live. Catch at opportunity or perish! His tumultuous, rioting brain was at work as he came alongside, was hauled aboard, was given sips of water. Scavenger wolves, these; not even honest buccaneers. Riffraff buzzards of the sea, hated and despised by the bold blades of Tortuga, stealing women, murdering fishermen.

As they passed him toward the poop he counterfeited a weakness he did not feel. His quick glances appraised everything; a sweet, fast craft, four guns to a side, in hands unspeakably evil. Filthy decks, filthy men. The knife pinned by its own blade under the waistband of his drawers, lent a touch of comfort.

Here on the poop was a moon-faced rascal in bedraggled velvet, Spanish top-boots, and gold-laced hat. Eli Darden knew him: Hog Huber they called him along the Main, and spat upon the name.

"Well, if it aint Eli Darden!" Huber slapped a fat thigh with a roar of mirth, as he eyed the unshaven gaunt derelict. "Cast adrift by the *Florencia,* eh? That's luck for me, right enough. Glad to have ye, Cap'n. Mind the day in Port Royal when you damned me for a lousy dog and rammed your fist into my belly? Ye don't scorn me this day, eh?"

A vicious glint in those piggish eyes. Leaning against the poop rail in assumed faintness, Eli Darden's brain was racing. Filthy decks and filthy men, below his sight; a crying shame for so splendid a ship to be in the hands of swine. And this man hated him bitterly.

He thought of Willy Kirk, saving his beloved papers, scratching on the jug's bottom, daring greatly. He had cherished that boy like a son. It was Willy Kirk who had given him the knife; and now Eli Darden must have manhood enough to work out his own salvation. But it could be only in one way—such a way as these swine would understand.

ALL this in a split second, a flash, as Huber took the long pistol from his shoulder-sling and cocked it.

"Now, ye dog," said the jackal, licking his thick lips, "bang goes a ball through your blasted hand! That'll pay you out for the blow at Port Royal. Then I'll have you keel-hauled—you'll scrape the barnacles down below, and come up in ribbons. And all the while, keep Port Royal in mind, and your scorn and your blow. Fine gentleman, huh? There'll be little enough o' that left when you've been hauled under the keel and the barnacles 've slit your blasted skin. Ho—Diego! Lay aft with a pair o' the lads!"

There was the moment. They were alone on the poop; Huber's little eyes flitted to the deck below, and the mate. The instant would never come again—

Darden was suddenly leaping, one hand streaking from his waistband, the other striking the heavy pistol aside.

The needle-point of the keen knife sped upward and drove home, pinning the velvet coat to hairy chest. Huber's jaw slacked and his knees buckled; he clawed at the rail, and sank down, death-driven to the heart.

The pistol did not drop from his hand. Darden wrested it away, then leaned forward and plucked its mate clear of the sling He straightened up, a long and heavy weapon in either hand, and faced forward.

Staring bearded faces, eyes rolling at him, a shocked and amazed silence. Then a yell burst from Diego, the mate, and straight for the ladder he came springing, with two men lumbering at his heels. Eli Darden let him come, looked at his olive skin, his gold hoop-earrings, his flashing knife—and fired point-blank. Diego flung out arms and collapsed atop his two men, bearing them back to the deck below.

"Who's captain now?" said Eli Darden through the belch of smoke. "Vote on it, ye scabby dogs! Vote on it—or come get the next bullet!"

Irresolute, they gawked at him, held by the spell of his ringing voice, his personality, his actions. Here was something they could comprehend. One of them swung around; John Oreb, the gunner. His voice broke the silence.

"A good job done seamanlike, says I! Who's for Cap'n Darden, the smartest navigator on the Main?"

HARD eye and hard jaw and pistol-mouth above, unloved men dead, the spur of a voice to prod acceptance—there was no easier way out for any of them. With the gunner's hoarse roar, the crisis was past. A murmur arose, a murmur that lifted into a roaring assent. They stared up at the sun-blackened thing they had saved from the sea and Eli Darden stared back at them, grim and gaunt.

"The vote's took, sir!" bawled John Oreb "It's you to work ship!"

"More than that," said Eli Darden. "Captain, d'ye understand? And the first men to question an order gets his ear nailed to the mast. Mind that, my bullies! And now look alive—look alive! Brace yards around for the wind!"

Wind? They looked suddenly at sky and sea; a shout arose. Darden's voice stilled it and swung them into action.

"Look alive! A squall's making up. Alow, there!" He drove sharp words at the helmsman in the whip-staff hutch. "Larboard—hard over! Larboard!"

A squall it was, with wind in the sky behind it. Men jumped to stations; Eli Darden had brought them wind and luck, said they. And the wind, Eli Darden knew, had brought *him* luck—if he could keep it.

So the *Claribel,* once the pride of a thrifty French shipmaster, went scudding for Cape Maisi and Nuevitas, the buccaneer keeling grounds on the eastern coast of Cuba. And Mad Eli, the only man aboard who could navigate, ruled her with an iron hand. After two bloody nails in the mainmast, and two men nursing sore ears, his grip was sure.

THEY had a master, and knew it; strangely enough they came to like it, or most of them did. Too long lazy, idle, rum-sodden, they came to life under Eli Darden's harsh voice. The gunner, John Oreb, aided much in this by example and good will. The ship was cleaned and burnished from stem to sternpost, the rusting guns were furbished, the Irish pennants trimmed away; most astonishing of all, the men smartened up their personal appearance.

A week, two weeks, and never a sail to break the horizon, with Nuevitas still long leagues away. And now the men muttered that Mad Eli was himself again.

He had the long bowsprit sawed off, just abaft the spritsail yard; this did away with the complicated mess of rigging needed to handle the spritsail. Gone was the yard with its dipping water-sail, the gammoning, the spritsail sheets, pendants, lifts, clewlines and halyards.

Next, Darden had the bo'sun bring the foretopmast and foretopgallant stays down to the shortened jib-boom. The head lead thus shortened took practically all the slack from the stays, giving them a steeper angle and forming a stronger brace for the mainmast. From the topgallant stay he then had rigged an old lateen sail for use as a jib, and spent hours teaching his men how it must be handled.

Mad Eli, eh? So they said at first, grinning behind his back; but when he began experiments in tacking, their grins died. He developed a trick of having plenty of way on the ship before easing down the helm and hauling the jib amidships. As the sail stopped driving her, he would ease off on the fore and head

sheets, having hauled the weather pennants over the stays. To the utter amazement of the buccaneers, this caused the ship to tack readily, with a minimum of labor.

When he made fast a light boom to the loose foot of the sail, there was even less work. Seldom did the ship miss stays or get in irons, and with the wind on the quarter she was steadier and steered more easily. Their jests changed to cheers, but Eli Darden only smiled thinly and went back to his figures and sketches below. When the pinch came, it might be otherwise. He had called one Shark Haslam to be mate under him, a man rough with authority who could make himself obeyed. The new rig, vowed Haslam, would sweep the old out of existence when news of it spread abroad. Darden but nodded, and hoped luck would stay with him.

To Nuevitas for overhaul, eh? The ship careened for scraping, one-eyed Tighe and all hands drunk, and Eli Darden walking in on them! This was the purpose flaming in all Darden did, these days. Take off Willy Kirk, get his instruments and papers all back, make the rogues pay up a bit for their fun—and then what?

"Why, out of it!" said Eli Darden to the silence of his cabin. "A gentleman adventurer once more, away from this muck and blood and fury! I'll back to Bristol town and take Willy Kirk with me. We'll put our brains to use for honest mariners, egad!"

Thus ran ambition and desire; but crop-eared Shark Haslam and his mates were to be reckoned with, if one ran afoul of destiny.

FAIR winds, good winds; another three days, Darden calculated, and they would make their landfall. And then, in the sunrise, a barking hail from the maintop:

"A sail! Sail ho, bullies!"

Eli Darden had dreaded such a cry. The stamping, the wild voices, brought him on deck with pistols in their sling and a cold despair in his heart. He joined Haslam on the poop, and the mate bawled gleefully at him:

"A galleon as ever was, cap'n! A triple-cursed Spanisher, aye!"

The men were at work, snatching tampions from gun-muzzles and weather cloths from priming-pans, fetching powder and ball, loading muskets. But Eli Darden lifted his spy-glass and gazed in long silence on the cloud of sail to the northward.

Something queer about her—aye, he had the focus now! A galleon, sure enough, with one mast knocked away and a jury rig in its place, with holes gaping along her high bulwarks, with things that had been men dangling from her yards. These, as he looked, were cut away. Metal flashed aboard her; soldiers. And beyond her, a farther shred of sail just breaking the horizon.

"Get them swabs and rammers ready!" Haslam roared. "John Oreb, look to the slack in your gun-tackles!"

"Look to the Spaniard," and Eli Darden handed over the glass. "Ports triced up, soldiers aboard, and a second ship off to the north'ard of her. Look well."

Haslam looked, and cursed savagely. "Aye, she's been in a scrimmage, too. Be damned to her! We can lay her aboard afore t'other can come up."

DARDEN called the men together. No force would avail him here; only the vote, by buccaneer custom. He looked down at them from the head of the poop ladder. Whites, negroes, swarthy Latins, Frenchmen; hard-bitten rogues, all, living for but one thing ere their tarred carcasses swung high above Execution Dock. A little loot, a little rum, the smiles of soiled women. He felt a queer compassion for these hopeless men, wolves though they might be. Thieves, and worse than beasts. Yet Eli Darden would swing as high as Shark Haslam if it came to capture.

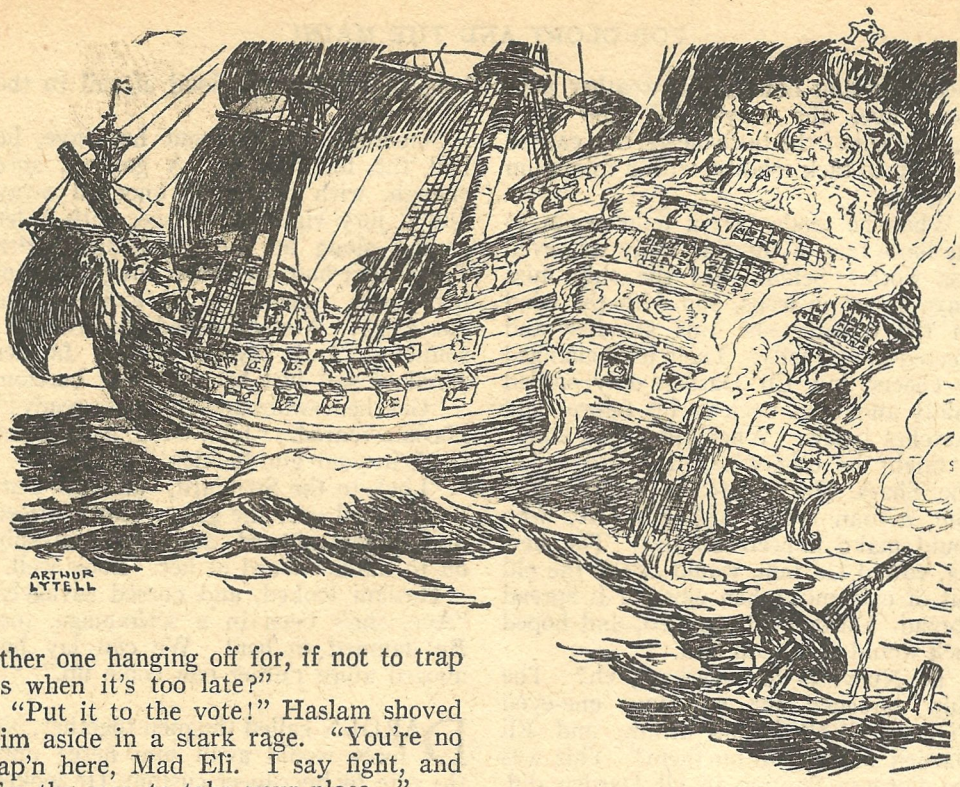
"Vote, bullies," he said, running his eye over the upturned faces. "I say to hold our course and leave her be. Two of 'em there. Soldiers aboard, guns ready; and by her course she's outward bound from Spain, with no gold aboard—"

"She has women right enough!" yelled Haslam in sudden fury. "I've heard ye called a bloody coward afore now, Mad Eli, but I didn't believe it of you! Lay off like cowardly sculpins and let her pass, you say? I say no!"

"You'll say too much one of these days," Eli Darden told him coldly. "Lads! By the rules, it's your say. Vote on it! If you say fight, I'll fight; but I advise you to lay off. We've got Nuevitas ahead. Here's hard knocks and no gold—"

"Gold be damned, where there's women!" howled someone.

"And two Spaniards," went on Darden. "Mind that, lads! What's the



other one hanging off for, if not to trap us when it's too late?"

"Put it to the vote!" Haslam shoved him aside in a stark rage. "You're no cap'n here, Mad Eli. I say fight, and I'm the man to take your place—"

The pistol in Darden's hand thudded down across his skull and dropped him in his tracks. Over him stood Eli Darden, smiling thinly.

"Aye, vote!" he said to the staring men. "While I'm cap'n here, none of you dogs dare say me nay. Now vote—fight or run?"

"Fight!" shrilled up the wild, fierce cry, and not a voice to oppose. Eli Darden knew they would rush him did he go against the vote. He had no recourse.

"Fight it is, then, and God help the lot of you!" he said grimly. And true too, he thought; if ever a man got anything away from the upper dog, he must fight for it. "Stand by to wear! Jump to it, bullies! Up wi' the mainsail; brail the jib! At the helm, there, luff ship!"

A yell, a chorus of oaths, and they were about their work with a will. Darden cast off restraint, thrilled to the tingle of it all, gave himself up to it since he must. A strange, furious stimulus gripped him as he ranged the poop.

"Hard up the helm! Brace the main yards in—lively about it!"

As if the devil himself had taken a hand, the breeze suddenly freshened. The *Claribel* had luffed around until the leaches of the topsails began to sing and shake. The Spaniard was drawing close, and Darden eyed the high-castled poop with two stern gun-ports beneath.

"Hoist fore tacks! Shift head sheets over!" rang his voice. "Haul in your main braces—look alive, blast you!"

He had forgotten Willy Kirk now. He remembered rescued galley slaves, their backs a mass of livid scars. He recalled a fellow Englishman who had escaped from Cartagena. The man had been a walking skeleton, all enlarged joints and pulled tendons; a living symbol of the rack.

"Where'll you have me, Cap'n?"

Haslam was up and at his side, eager now to obey, unmindful of the blow that had felled him.

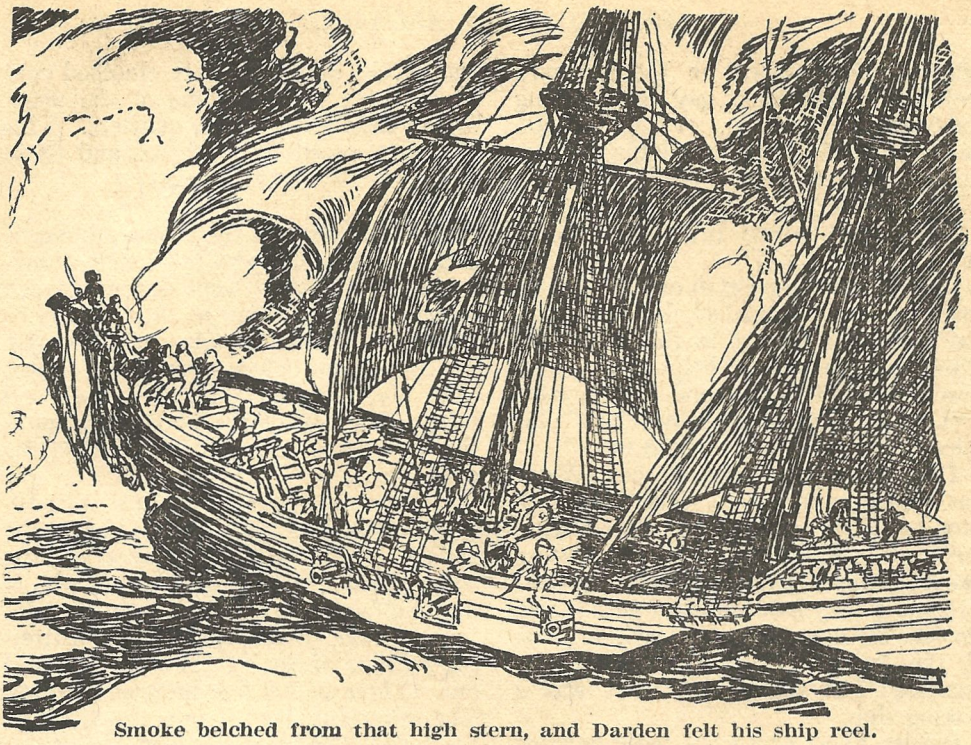
Eli Darden gave him a glance.

"Take charge for'ard. All hands below except men to work the lines, and John Oreb's gun-crews. We've but sixty men and none to waste."

Haslam grinned, touched his forelock, and leaped for the maindeck. Gun-crews labored with tallow kegs, powder-kegs, canvas bags of bullets and scrap-iron. Others broke out the devil's claws—grapnels, bending on chain. Pistols and cutlasses were being passed around.

Some of the men were got below under cover. Gunner Oreb came aft at Darden's hail and squinted up at the poop.

"Starboard guns, Oreb," said Darden calmly. "Load with ball; plant every shot at her rudder-post. Then stand by the larboard guns when we tack. Same load."



Smoke belched from that high stern, and Darden felt his ship reel.

Gunner Oreb darted away. Yelps of delight broke from the men; there was the cap'n for you! The same old trick —lay under her stern, smash her rudder, cripple her, then board at will!

Eli Darden paid no heed to the cheers, but surveyed the galleon with sardonic eye. These tactics were the only ones possible; the ketch, scarcely larger than the pinnace towing under the galleon's stern, could not dare venture within range of these heavy broadside guns. Those little stern guns would do her scant damage, however. She could cripple the proud Spaniard and then finish her with impunity.

"Ready about—stations for stays! Weather sheets to windward! Ease down helm—"

Darden's orders rang along the deck. He glanced at the second Spaniard; she was coming, but without haste. He wondered about those men who had been hanging at the yardarms, about the signs of battle the galleon showed; but she plowed along her stately course as though disdainful of the trim little ketch. She fairly invited the disaster that was so close upon her.

THE ketch sped down from windward, making across the galleon's stern. Morions and breastplates were glinting on the high decks, gunners and crossbowmen were ready. At the ketch's guns crouched Oreb and his mates, smoldering linstock ready, eye to sighting notch.

And then, in the instant ere spark took powder, an oath and a cry of dismay rang out. Darden saw it happen, though helpless to avoid it. He saw two stern ports in the galleon's high carven and gilded poop enlarge and fall away—false ports, these! Beside them, close to the water, opened two more. Heavy guns, four of them in all. No spindling little falconets, but smashing heavy metal—

John Oreb let fire, and his mates with him. Almost on the instant, answering smoke belched from that high stern. Heartsick, clinging to the poop rail, Eli Darden felt his ship reel as her guns bellowed and recoiled against their breeching; he felt the shuddering crash as the heavy twenty-pound balls of the Spaniard smashed into her.

Incredulity, stupefaction, seized him and his men. Here was a trap indeed! None of the Spaniard's usual inability to sight guns, but deadly fire, deadly work. Crash upon shuddering crash. The bowsprit and part of the bulwarks were gone in a mass of wreckage. Missiles from small arms were sweeping her deck—a deluge of bullets, arbalest bolts, stones from slingers.

In this frightful instant, Darden saw vanish all his dream of swift seamanship, swift tacking, sharp and brainy

fighting. The women on the galleon's deck had become men, gay dresses flung overboard and floating. A trap, a trap! And now the Spaniard was luffing, to get her broadside to bear.

From up forward came one wild yell:

"The bow's stove in! She's going down by the head—"

Darden left the poop in one leap, came down on the quarterdeck by the whipstaff, gave his weight to the helm. Another man rushed to help—the helmsman was dead. Only one chance now.

"Lay her aboard, get into her!" his voice lifted. "All hands stand by—"

They knew it as well as he. Water was pouring into her. The broadside from her little guns had not failed, however; all that splendid galleon's stern was a splintered ruin, gun-ports knocked into one gaping hole splashed with blood. No fear of those big guns now. No fear of the galleon, with her rudder-post smashed; but under their feet was a sinking ship.

Darden knew now what those hanging figures had meant: Some other buccaneer had fallen into the Spaniard's trap.

No time to think, no time to give orders. Gallant to the last, the little ketch came slogging sluggishly under that towering stern. Already she was down by the head as water poured into her broken bows.

A staggering crash. Grapnels were flung, caught, made fast. A storm of shot poured down from above. Pistols answered it. Like cats, like madmen, the buccaneers went pouring aboard—up the carved and gilded work, in at the wrecked ports, up to the stern walk. Most of them, however, streamed in by those smashed lower ports. The trap of the Spaniard had become his ruin.

Not a soul was left aboard the doomed ketch, save the dying.

DARDEN, stripped to the waist, sword aswing, went in with the first of the boarders—a lean, tanned devil, apparently immune to bullets. With his men, he had at first a clean sweep. From those lower stern cabins, the buccaneers hewed into the bowels of the huge craft before the Spaniards really knew they were there.

With Shark Haslam and a dozen men sticking close, Eli Darden fought his way through the cabins that gave egress on the main deck below the poop. And these Spanish men fought; there was no panic, no surrender. With each passing instant, the dread certainty clutched cold at Darden's heart. None of the usual luxury here in the cabin quarters. This ship was meant for business, and those aboard her—a trap, a trap!

A WILD lurch of the decks, a burst of voices; that was the ketch plunging under. Haslam went down, a dozen bullets through him as a number of Spaniards loosed pistols. Eli Darden was into them before they could reload. Cold steel clicked. Pikes lunged and tore. The fury of the buccaneers burst the way clear. Sunlight ahead, and the open deck!

Five men behind him, Eli Darden emerged, and halted. He blinked in the sudden glare of light, blinked at the sight ahead. Here, a wild tumult of fighting figures, a swirling chaos of men; but beyond, rank upon rank, glittering soldiers of Spain! A volley crashed out. Three of his five men went down. The other two leaped into the thick of the fury. The poop was won, the cabins were won, but beyond lay the whole deck and the forecastle untouched.

All this at a glance—and the curl of smoke coming from the main hatch, which was open. Smoke, a sudden mushrooming burst of it; a low muffled roar as powder let loose below. The decks heaved. The Spanish ranks recoiled into the bows. A few of them darted into the chaos. Morions gleamed, breast-plates flashed through the smoke. They struck upon Darden and passed over him. One of them pitched on top of him; with the shock he lay senseless.

"Fire!"

The loose powder, the kegs below decks, had gone up in smoke, making all the waist a blackened ruin. Panic seized the Spaniards now. Those of them who remained aft, finished the remnants of the buccaneers, struck down the wounded with point or butt, and went scrambling forward. The other galleon was bearing close.

Fight the fire? Not they; not with powder everywhere about the decks, with a magazine of it aft in the stern! Their work was done, the buccaneers were finished to a man, and flames were licking through the open hatch. A few of their own wounded were hastily rescued as the flames drove them forward again. There were no boats—only the little pinnace towing under the quarter, and they could not get to it now. Nor was there any need; the companion ship

was almost aboard, lines were being flung. Presently was a crash, a rocking lurch, as the two ships touched and clung, and the Spaniards went aboard their consort in frantic haste.

She sheered off, set her canvas to the wind, and went booming away from the doomed galleon.

Eli Darden, blood-smeared from the dead Spaniard atop him, moved and stirred and writhed clear of that dead weight. He sat up, rubbed his eyes clear of smoke, and looked at the decks where only dead men lay. Smoke was pouring from the main hatch, and the red glint of flames pierced through it. A wounded man, caught there, screamed for a moment and then died.

Coming to his feet, Darden found himself unhurt, save for that blow over the head. There was the other galleon, standing away and pausing not. A yard away one of his own men, a brawny Scot, was gasping out his life.

"They dirked me, Cap'n, they dirked me!" he cried out, and sank on his face.

Aye, the wounded had been dirked or battered down. Darden, blood-covered and hidden, had escaped. He caught up his sword from the deck and darted back into the cabins. Dead men here, one or two dying; that was all. Only a mortal hurt could stretch those sea-wolves on the deck. The cabins and passages were a reek of smoke.

Darden plunged through it. He came into the main cabin. Not even a corpse was here. The table was set for a meal, jugs of wine stood racked and ready. Darden caught at one of them and quaffed deeply. The wine revived him. Then he checked himself, his head cocked, his eyes glinting about. Somewhere a voice.

"Help! Help! Brethren of the Coast!" A voice and muffled pounding—where?

A bolt in the deck—ah! The lazaret!

Darden flung himself at it, and lifted the hatch, after loosing the heavy bolt. As it swung up and back, he recoiled with eyes bulging. A monstrous red thatch of hair, a face scarred, one-eyed, set in ferocity—Tighe!

IF Darden was stupefied by this apparition, no less astounded was Tighe the one-eyed, at sight of Darden. A roar burst from him.

"You! Mad Eli! In the devil's name, out o' my way—"

He roared and rushed, and Eli Darden stood aside to let him pass. Then a second figure came up through the trapdoor, and with a shrill cry hurled itself at Darden.

"Kirk! Willy Kirk!" gasped the amazed Eli. "Are ye real? How came you here, lad?"

"Oh, sir! They took the ship and sunk her—killed all of us! They kept me for a slave, and Tighe for hanging at Cartagena—and—I hoped you'd come to rescue—"

Eli Darden folded the boy in his arms, convulsively.

"Praise God!" said he slowly. "Rescue you? Poor lad, take heart! My ship's gone, my men are gone, we're afire—"

A gush of smoke came swirling through the passages, half filling the cabin. With it, like a furious demon, came Tighe, a Spanish rapier in his grip, his eyes wild.

"Fire!" he roared. "Oh, ye damned Jonah, if water can't hurt you, then fire will, or I will—"

"Quiet, you fool!" barked Eli Darden, but his voice was unheard. Big Tighe was upon him with a rush and a torrent of oaths, and the rapier driving in; frenzied, a mad-dog froth on his lips, Tighe wanted only to kill this slim man whom he hated.

HE was close to doing it. Darden backed and backed, frantically parrying that long Spanish steel; only his agility saved him now, and all the while his harried brain was playing with the thought of fire and the powder magazine below. Of a sudden, through the smoke he saw the figure of Willy Kirk appear, shrilling something at them that went unheard.

The blades clashed anew. Coughing sobbing for breath, Darden backed into a corner. Then, like a flash, his chance came. His wiry body uncoiled—his sword, like a prolongation of his arm and hand, shot to the mark. Tighe took one staggering backward step, clutched at his throat, and went to the deck with a crash.

"Quick, quick!" Darden, in a red haze, felt Willy Kirk tugging at his arm. "A boat! A pinnace under the quarter, sir—*quick!* I know the way—I saw her—"

Darden coughed and stumbled after.

They came out at the smashed and crimsoned after ports where men lay staring dead. The fresh live air revived Eli Darden on the moment. He clam-

bered along the stern walk after the boy, and dropped into the pinnace, and fell exhausted.

After a moment he staggered up. Willy Kirk, in a blaze of excitement, had cast off the line. The galleon was surging away from them under such of her canvas as still remained. A column of flame and sparking smoke was belching up from her 'midships into the sunlit heavens.

"Saved!" And Darden caught his breath. "Saved, by the love o' God! Lad, we're two poor creatures to have such work done for us."

Willy Kirk looked up at him, the boyish cheeks pinched and wan.

"I'm sorry, sir. About your papers and instruments, I mean. If—"

A huge laugh broke from Eli Darden, as his arm went about the boy.

"All's well over the horizon, lad! We're but fifty leagues south o' Pinos, and I've friends there. England beckons us, and Bristol town, where the ships come up among the houses with the tide."

THE thought of the old story, the memory of it, faded out of my mind. I looked at Cap'n Dexter and his book, the reading-glass in his hand, the chart under his finger. How long had I been standing here adream—half a day? No. The brass clock screwed to the cabin bulkhead told me the truth. Only a minute or a trifle more. A dream in sober truth, when half a lifetime passes in the flash of a split second.

"You seem interested," Cap'n Dexter chuckled. "Aye, you well may be. You know, this Eli Darden is said to have invented the bow rig that the buccaneers used, which replaced the old spritsail and all that mess—"

"When did Darden die?" I asked abruptly.

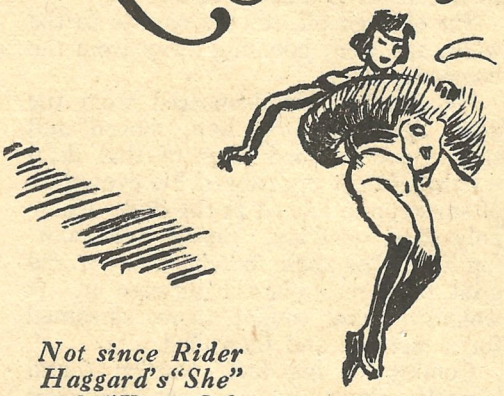
"Can't say." Dexter shook his head. "The last heard of him was somewhere in the Caribbean in 1672. But he certainly drew this chart. And just as certainly he drew this sketch—look at it!"

He turned over the chart. On the other side was a sketch, a ship stern-to in perspective, sailing away before a breeze. He held the glass over it; there, magnified, I could read the legend on the ship's counter:

WILL KIRK
Bristol, 1678

Another colorful story of this fine series will be a feature of our next issue.

Kioga of



Not since Rider Haggard's "She" and "King Solomon's Mines" have we had so fascinating a novel of fantastic adventure.

The Story Thus Far:

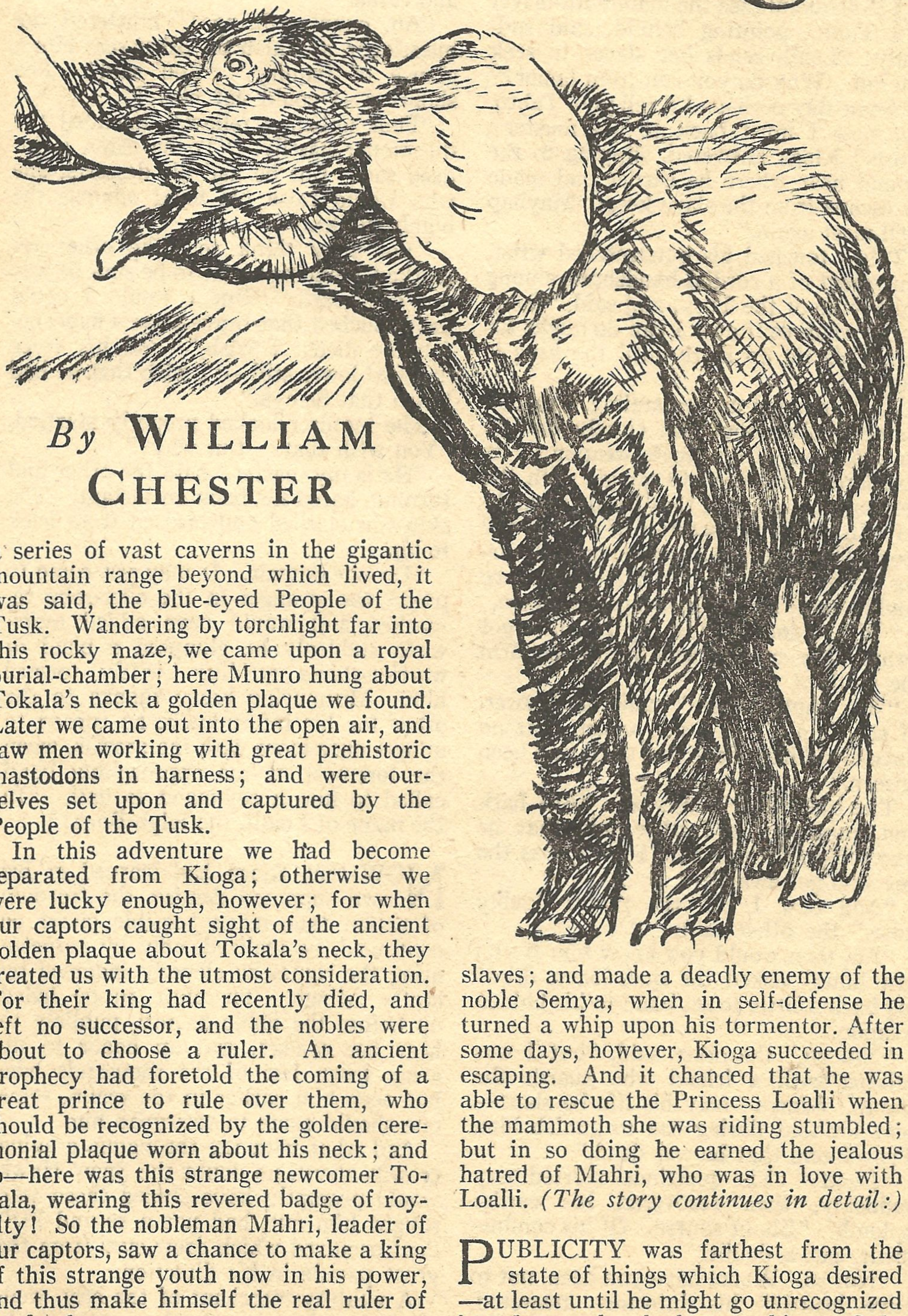
WE had been wrecked, John La Salle, Captain Scott and his sailors and I, upon the rocky coast of Nato'wa—a strange forest region north of Siberia, warmed by volcanic fires and inhabited by progenitors of the American Indian. We had come upon a desperate venture: the rescue of other castaways—the scientist James Munro, founder of the museum of which I was curator; Beth and Dan La Salle, daughter and son of the wealthy man who had financed Munro's expedition; and Lincoln Rand, better known as Kioga the Snow Hawk, who had grown to powerful manhood among the Indians of Nato'wa after his missionary parents had died.

A marauding crew of gold-hunters, we knew, had made a safe landing ahead of us; we must be on guard against them and the hostile Shoni Indians.

I set out alone in search of our friends, and found one of them, Kioga the Snow Hawk; and he led us to the others.

A happy reunion of our party followed with Beth La Salle and Munro and his quaint factotum Flashpan; but Dan La Salle had been captured by the Shoni, and we rescued him from them only after he had been tortured. For this expedition our party had been divided. And with Kioga, Munro, Flashpan and the Indian boy Tokala, I was trapped in

the Unknown Land



By WILLIAM CHESTER

a series of vast caverns in the gigantic mountain range beyond which lived, it was said, the blue-eyed People of the Tusk. Wandering by torchlight far into this rocky maze, we came upon a royal burial-chamber; here Munro hung about Tokala's neck a golden plaque we found. Later we came out into the open air, and saw men working with great prehistoric mastodons in harness; and were ourselves set upon and captured by the People of the Tusk.

In this adventure we had become separated from Kioga; otherwise we were lucky enough, however; for when our captors caught sight of the ancient golden plaque about Tokala's neck, they treated us with the utmost consideration. For their king had recently died, and left no successor, and the nobles were about to choose a ruler. An ancient prophecy had foretold the coming of a great prince to rule over them, who should be recognized by the golden ceremonial plaque worn about his neck; and lo—here was this strange newcomer Tokala, wearing this revered badge of royalty! So the nobleman Mahri, leader of our captors, saw a chance to make a king of this strange youth now in his power, and thus make himself the real ruler of the land.

Kioga's fortunes, however, were far different. He was imprisoned with the slaves; and made a deadly enemy of the noble Semya, when in self-defense he turned a whip upon his tormentor. After some days, however, Kioga succeeded in escaping. And it chanced that he was able to rescue the Princess Loalli when the mammoth she was riding stumbled; but in so doing he earned the jealous hatred of Mahri, who was in love with Loalli. *(The story continues in detail:)*

PUBLICITY was farthest from the state of things which Kioga desired —at least until he might go unrecognized by those who had seen him. Only by remaining unknown might he escape the consequences of the enmity he had

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aroused among the powerful, for in one momentary glimpse he had seen hatred in the face of one who stared upon him from a balcony and recognized another foe, whose cause for enmity he knew not.

HIS acquaintance the mammoth-driver Tahro, pointing behind, said suddenly: "Loalli sends her slaves to seek you out. Why do you run from honor?"

"Some day perhaps I'll tell you, Tahro. But now I must back to my master's house," Kioga answered, slipping to the ground near where he earlier had made his escape from the slave-keep. "Mayhap we'll meet again."

Tahro touched his outstretched wrist, equivalent of a cordial handshake among the People of the Tusk, and said, "Come to the wharves if ever I can do aught for you. We tie up there until the king is crowned."

Kioga nodded understanding, wrapped his over-robe about him closely, saw to the looseness of his single weapon in its scabbard and turned to mingle with the heterogeneous crowd that lined the highway, listening to ascertain if any of the people had observed a slave escape. Hearing nothing untoward, to make assurance doubly sure, he spoke to another slave.

"'Tis rumored that a captive slave got away. My master sent me to confirm the truth of that."

"'Tis empty rumor," came the answer, "I saw it all, and I will vouch that no slave could have done this thing and been unseen."

The questioner persisted. "But hark you, brother, 'tis further said that he who whipped the noble, Semya, was the one who got away."

"And now I call the rumor doubly false," the other said.

"Eh, then would you know him if you saw him?" asked the questioner, drawing back a little to set hand to his hidden weapon.

"Not so," the other said, "but I was talking with a friend who guards the slaves. Semya—may his life be short—sent for that daring one to punish him. They found that he was dead."

"Dead!" The questioner started very suddenly, then recovered his earlier aplomb. "Eh, of course. Of his confinement, not a doubt."

"Not so. Where have you been, not to have heard?" his informer answered, flaunting his superior knowledge proudly. "The other slaves devoured him. The guards forgot to bring them food."

The persistent inquirer paused, digesting this astounding piece of information. "But is it certain? He was as tall as I, and strong besides!"

"Certain as may be. Mingo, the truth-teller, told them he had seen him killed and eaten."

"Ah, cunning Mingo!" muttered the questioner, at which the other sent him a glance of inquiry. "You said? The shouting—I could not hear."

"Poor unhappy fellow," amended the questioner hastily. "To be eaten is indeed sad. But he had his desserts, one who would raise his hand against the highborn Semya."

"You may think so," the other remarked, glancing about to be sure he was not overheard. "But I would I could have touched that brave slave's hand before he died. I wish,"—and his voice dropped lower still,—"I wish that he had killed that Semya."

The inquirer looked properly startled. "You wish that? But why?"

"He is my master," said the other and turning, bared his back an instant. The skin was slashed and bruised from neck to hip.

"Do not despair. It may yet come to pass," the stranger in the over-robe remarked and would have added more, when suddenly he glimpsed a band of warrior-slaves striding swiftly toward him. Murmuring hasty thanks to the other for his information, he turned to mingle once more with the crowds, when the foremost of the approaching band called to him a command to halt. "In the name of Loalli, the High-Born!"

NOW that Kioga had learned of his own supposed demise, the freedom of action thus made possible could be continued, he realized, only by perpetuating the rumor so cleverly indorsed by crafty Mingo. Therefore to be haled up before the noble beauty, publicly to hear her praises, was an honor to fly away from, lest of the thousands who had seen him earlier in the realm, some one should come to recognize him.

And what with the thronging, craning crowds about, no doubt the Snow Hawk would promptly have eluded those who sought him out, had not a second incident occurred which drew eyes from the great parade in his direction.

A wealthy merchant of the city, well-shod in gleaming leather and richly robed, cried out in anger: *"Ho wai!* Stop, scum of all thiefs! *Stop!"*

Scurrying close past Kioga went a familiar form in tattered garb, the nimble-fingered old pocket-picker, plying his light-handed trade anew upon a different corner. Seeking now to hide behind this taller stalwart, who shunned the limelight equally with himself, he but involved them both in greater publicity.

"*Ss-s-st* there! Away!" Kioga growled. "Can you not see that I am sought as well as you?"

"You are a slave and not a thief," the other answered hastily. "They seek to honor you who saved Loalli's life. They seek to cut the throat of me, Ameeg. I hide perforce, but why should you?"

"Must I account to you, sly-handed one? Quick now! Since you will not begone, we'll run together. You have the cunning and know the runways and the hiding-places. I have the strength to guard you. So, away!"

AND with a mighty surge Kioga cleared a pathway through the crowd, along which Ameeg slyly darted with a speed belying his years. After him, Loalli's minions close at heel, Kioga sprang. The chase led swiftly from the busy thoroughfares and in among the lesser buildings of the city, toward that poor section infested by such as Ameeg, who now doubled on his tracks like a hare seeking to evade pursuing hounds.

But two of these, more subtle than he had expected, lay waiting to ambush the thief along one of the paths on which he so confidently sought escape, and rose to seize him as he came near. Squealing in his fear, Ameeg cried shrilly to his companion in the flight:

"It is a trap! Help me, my friend. Help! *Help!*"

One of the pursuit, aware of danger from the rear, wheeled round and raised his blade to strike. But like a flash Kioga disarmed and threw him stunned and helpless to the ground, and with his falling sword engaged the second warrior-slave.

This adversary counted much upon his skill and not at all upon the lightning quickness of the Snow Hawk, whose cut upon the forearm sent his weapon clattering. Before he could recover and snatch out his dagger, Kioga overbore him and rushed on behind Ameeg, overtaking the thief just as the remainder of pursuit swung round the nearest corner.

"*Azik,* but you are strong and quick!" the little brigand panted. "Remain with us and be a thief. We have great need of such an arm as thine."

"First lead me to your burrow," came the Snow Hawk's answer.

As if in answer, Ameeg made a sudden turn into a space between two buildings, thence down a crooked stair into a kind of cellar, and through the cellar to a room down lower still, whose door, invisible to the casual glance, fell open inward at his signal. Into this room Ameeg entered, blown and weary, followed by the Snow Hawk. who heard the pursuit clatter on by.

Seeing only in this tall stranger the foe whom Ameeg fled, a dozen dark-visaged fellows, clad in little more than rags closed in behind the returning thief, preparing with their shining daggers to make short work of the pursuer. In time, but only just in time to avoid bloodshed, Ameeg intervened:

"Sheathe, brothers, sheathe! He is my friend. Touch wrists with— Eh, but my memory fails with age. What did you call yourself, my friend?"

Kioga had recourse to fresh invention. "My name is Akra. I am a potter from the north, seeking in these parts my brother's slave, who has escaped. The better to cause his return, I dress and act as slave myself." He heaped invention on invention: "The one I seek is broad and strong, the father of two hundred, therefore very valuable. He has a brand upon his neck and two great scars across the face. Has any one of you seen such a man?"

THEY had not seen such a slave, they said. They were poor laborers more given to industry and toil than wandering idly in the streets. Here in this humble dwelling they had gathered for a day of rest from toil, to play a round of *oka,* the chess-like game, popular with noble and laborer alike. Thus in their turn they lied to him, and watched him furtively to see if he had been deceived.

But what Kioga saw convinced him that those brown uncalloused hands of theirs were far more skilled in wielding dirks than tools, and that the game they played had more to do with plunder than with entertainment. He answered dryly:

"Ameeg was also playing *oka* when interrupted by a merchant whose pocket had been picked."

Perceiving that no good would come of falsehoods, and having earlier betrayed his occupation to this Akra any-

"We have great need of such an arm as thine," the little brigand panted.

way, Ameeg turned to his associate thieves indignantly. "Have you no pride? Will you deny your trade? Are you ashamed of taking such a little from them who possess so much? Ah, bah! That you should lie to this dear friend of mine—you whom I taught to be the nimblest pack of thieves in all the city! Uncover what you took today, that Akra here may share my admiration. Eh-eh,"—turning to the Snow Hawk,—"no lock is strong enough, no pockets are too tightly sewn for them to pilfer. It is a trade which takes one many years to learn." And Ameeg puffed out his little chest. "But I, Ameeg, am master of the art. Abide with me, friend Akra. You have an honest face, which goeth exceeding well with nimble fingers in our occupation. You'd soon be rich enough to have your own pocket picked!"

Pleased with this fresh thought, the leader of these banditti laughed, and the Snow Hawk laughed with him. "How do you dare betray to me what I might easily betray to others and so endanger you?"

Ameeg glanced at him out of slyly narrowed eyes. "No fool am I, Ameeg. We keep no evidence around. What comes to me is gone forever. And furthermore, I think you need Ameeg, as earlier he needed you." The thief's voice fell lower, and leaning near, so that his henchmen might not overhear, he added: "Escape from Loalli's messengers was not all you sought. A thief I may be, Akra, but I owe my life to you. Therefore I will not betray to anyone that when a grate was torn up from above the slave-keep, there was a slave who came up with it. Ah, it was quick, yes—quicker than the fingers of a cutpurse—but old Ameeg has eagle-eyes. Nay, reach not for your weapon, friend." Ameeg there paused to show the dagger which had been Kioga's, now held in his own hand. "I took it from you when you entered. Ten men stand ready to cut your throat at a word from me."

"Then speak it," Kioga answered, knowing his deception pierced and prepared for any eventuality. "See how few shall remain before I am laid out."

Ameeg raised a pacifying hand and handed back the dagger. "*Zik*, you grow hot for nothing! My life is yours, and I do not forget. Look you, friend; you tread on rotten ground. Your face will presently betray you."

"All life is fraught with risks," Kioga answered. "I must accept them as they come."

"Well said; he who would change the world must be a fool," quoth Ameeg wisely. "But *faces* may be changed, and ere you go abroad again, Ameeg will make yours uglier, safe even from the eyes of fair Loalli, who knows a handsome slave at sight."

"You saw her accident?"

"And more," said Ameeg, pursing up his thin slit of a mouth. "And so did a certain high-born one who haunts the gardens when she treads in them, and is in twenty places, just to see her pass and win the smile she gives to—Akra, the slave." Ameeg chuckled long and deeply.

"What mean you, brother?" demanded Kioga uneasily.

"Loalli is a willful wench," the other answered irreverently, "as willful as she's beautiful. And powerful besides, with many slaves to do her bidding. She'll not forget thee, friend, if I am any judge."

Kioga pondered that, thoughtful of Loalli's long, deep, admiring glance. He turned to Ameeg. "To work, then. Make me ugly as a toad if need be. For I must move about with freedom. There is much to do."

Ameeg obeyed. With grease, to which a pigment had been added, he rubbed in shadows underneath the Snow Hawk's eyes, and from the cheek-bones to the lower-jaw-lines, next did the same, to give Kioga's face a haggard look. The jaw itself he made to seem less square and forceful by sparing use of brownish color from another jar. Now round Kioga's head he bound a kind of fillet in the fashion of the middle classes of the country, and under this drew taut the hair back from one temple, thus giving to the nearest eye an odd and upward slant. The Snow Hawk's sound white teeth he easily discolored here and there by application of a kind of stain derived from berries. The nostrils he broadened by inserting bits of wire which did not show nor interfere with breathing. The upper lip was made to bulge and overhang by introduction of a bit of leather, the which, by interfering with enunciation, made even Kioga's speech sound thick and different.

Beholding his strange handiwork, he added little touches here and there, achieving from a handsome manly face, the appearance of its opposite, a hungry-looking sullen expression having something sinister about it. The work of change complete, he held before Kioga a mirror of polished bronze, set with dully gleaming stones—part of the store of objects stolen during this day.

Kioga looked and started, so cleverly had old Ameeg labored. Not even those who were his friends might now identify him from a stranger. "'Tis magic, Ameeg," the Snow Hawk averred admiringly. "I do not know myself."

"Keep these about you," Ameeg replied, handing Kioga a little packet containing pigments and a smaller mirror. "Be vain. Look often at yourself. Renew my work from time to time, as it is needed. Now listen well to me, for any empty-headed fool could prick your story full of holes. It too must change."

Kioga listened intently as the old thief spoke: "No potter, which you claimed to be, bears arms. You are instead a warrior, serving whoso pays you highest. You keep the same name, Akra, which is a common one with slaves and freemen. You have no relatives; some one might ask their names. You have no home; some one might ask about a neighbor. For the rest, depend upon your wits. If trouble come, wear this upon your ear, stone outward. My men are everywhere; some one will see and make himself known to you. Help will come." Ameeg gave to Kioga a tiny ear-ornament, and he screwed it to the lobe, stone in.

THUS it came about that he who had entered Ameeg's den of thieves as Akra the slave, stood among them now as Akra the mercenary soldier, to all appearances as great a rascal as any of the rest. No longer attempting to conceal their pillage, they spread along a rough table the products of their stealthy activities.

The items for the most part were small enough to have been worn upon the persons of the victims; gold and silver jewelry, with here and there a precious shin-

ing stone set in copper-bronze. A pile of ivory coins grew higher as from the secret places on their persons the thieves produced and added each his take.

With glittering eyes Ameeg surveyed the plunder, then scanned his men with swift but searching gaze. "Maro!" he said at last, fixing him of that name with a piercing stare. "Art holding back, dishonorable wretch!"

The one called Maro started as if stung. The eyes of all the others leaped to him with anger in them. Before he could protest, a dozen hands fell on him, stripping him down to bare and dirty skin. Within a little hidden pocket, fashioned in a fold low down upon the lining of his over-robe, four jeweled trinkets came to light, secretly withheld. Discovered in duplicity, Maro turned pale, his long eyes sliding weasel-like from face to face, and reading there the penalty which he must pay. Then with the quickness of his apprehensions, he sprang toward the door, to escape.

He was anticipated by a move on the part of the nearest thief, one Daki, so quick that even Kioga's hawk-keen eyes scarce perceived it. And Maro clutched his chest and sank upon his heels without a sound, stabbed to the heart.

Dishonesty found out and punished, Ameeg now made twelve piles of plunder on the table. Eleven of these he then divided into approximately equal parts, and placed an arbitrary value on them, asking each if he were satisfied until all his cohorts had accepted his figure. The twelfth heap—Maro's take—he added to the share of Daki, who had slain the guilty thief.

Dealing out payment in the ivory disks, Ameeg received the stolen articles in their stead. And the thieves set forth again to seek fresh plunder while the crowds still swarmed.

With them went Kioga, while ringing in his ears were Ameeg's final words of advice: "Listen much; talk little—and remember the earring."

THANKS to Ameeg's skillful handiwork, the Snow Hawk passed easily as a nondescript soldier, albeit having the appearance of a rogue besides. Taking leave of his companions, he turned in the direction the parade of nobles had taken, intent upon finding us, who had been his companions on his entry into the realm of the tyrant kings.

Along his path he came upon a crowd, collecting about a gated wall before the carven dwelling of one who, someone told him, was named Mahri of the noble blood. Who Mahri was, Kioga had no least idea; but rather than make himself conspicuous by betraying ignorance and inquiring, he sought instead to move amid the throng the better to inform himself by listening to the talk of others. But very soon he found himself confronted by several men, suspiciously demanding to know his identity and business.

"I am a warrior, as you might know by looking at me," he answered to the nearest. "My name is Akra, and my strength and weapons are for sale."

"Why does he not seek a warrior's employment at the walls?" demanded one whose eyes were fixed on Kioga mistrustfully. "He means no good, mayhap some harm. Lay hold upon him then! We'll have him up before a wiser one. Let Mahri question him."

CHAPTER XI

KIOGA would have been the last to realize how near his meeting with the friends he sought impended, for he knew nothing of the fortunes which had followed us who had been separated from him.

Had Tokala, for example, wearing that plaque of royal inheritance about his neck, come into view less spectacularly, when first seen by the nobles or their priests, the keen edge of a priestly knife would most effectively have put an end to his pretensions, along with his life.

But this return, supposedly of the last of the Ru, had found the people more than willing to accept him. And since an old woman among the people had discovered his supposed royalty and sent the word like wildfire among the crowds, and since the people had displayed such great enthusiasm, summary action by the nobles could not be undertaken without grave risk. Swift to grasp that fact, swifter still to ally himself with one destined to become the popular favorite, was Mahri, under whose roof Tokala had been kept, surrounded by the noble's bodyguards and loyal slaves.

And Mahri, whether or not he doubted the young Tokala's *bona-fides,* had none the less perceived the power to be gained by backing a promising pretender publicly, in order to stand near him when he exercised great power as boy-king of the realm.

Nothing, therefore, was left undone to assure the boy's protection: And when a host of men among the joyous populace acclaimed him at the doors of Mahri's fortlike home, Mahri was the first to bid them welcome as a guard of honor, and to see that their enthusiasm was kept high by gifts of food and drink, sent out by slaves in the name of the youth Tokala.

And we of Tokala's party enjoyed a like protection and all the freedom of Mahri's home. Flashpan, quick to put a finger on the cause, explained it thus: "Two words from us, spread to them other muck-a-mucks, would give the ammynition to bring Mahri's cyard-house a-topplin' down round his ears. Mahri holds a dang' good hand an' hopes to fill it with a king—meanin' Tokala. . . . I'd sure like to hev Kioga here 'longside of us to see us through."

"Then let us remind Mahri of him again," I interposed. "For any one of us to go in search of him would be next to impossible with that mob outside the gates."

It chanced that to remind Mahri would be unnecessary, for he joined us in our sumptuous quarters, after the parade of nobles had gone its way into the city proper. Troubled of eye and long of face, he squatted down among us with the air of one who knows not how or where to begin telling evil tidings. At last:

"I fear some ill has befallen him you call Kioga. One of my messengers has been about with open ears. Kioga was taken down beyond the city and thrown among the slaves. Semya, whom you saw among his fellows in the hall of state, went there to play with him—he loves the sight of fear, this Semya. But from the gossip my messenger brings, Kioga seized the whip they used on him and stroked Semya on the face, so sharply that he'll bear the mark for all his life—may it be short! Then Kioga turned back into the slave-quarters. Sending for him later, Semya learned that during a hunger-riot among the slaves, who were forgotten when the nobles came, Kioga had been slain."

MUNRO went white; Flashpan's jaw fell slack, his mustaches quivering as he turned to me, who felt as if some mighty prop had been removed from under me. The miner looked back to Munro, sitting speechless, then turned to Mahri with a question: "If he be dead, they have his body somewhere. I'll not believe it till I see the proof."

Longer still grew Mahri's face. "There is no body," he answered. "The slaves were hungry."

And he went on to explain how one Mingo, for decades a captive in the slave-keep, had volunteered the information that he had actually seen Kioga killed.

"Semya himself is tearing his hair in anger," added Mahri. "He had prepared some further entertainment for him who left that mark upon his face."

Who would convey the news to Beth La Salle? Whatever must eventually be told, at least the manner of Kioga's end should always be known only to ourselves. Nor would we break the news to Tokala, whose boyish idol Kioga had ever been, until it could not be avoided longer.

Now more than ever, were we dependent on Mahri; and we were, therefore, constrained to make the best of every opportunity to prolong our present safety until such time as those vast borings in the southern mountains should pierce a way to liberty for us and for the people of this hermit kingdom. With that vast engineering project, labored at for generations, now nearing completion, and the impending elevation of a king, the realm seethed with double excitement.

NOW came a clamor from without, the sound of challenge and of answer, the creak of gates that opened, then clanged shut, the tramp of footsteps on the flags. Now on the bronze doors of Mahri's fine dwelling came a heavy knock. A servant looked forth through an opening before throwing wide the door to a little company who entered, in their midst a tall and sullen-looking ruffian, with shoulders on him reminiscent of the Snow Hawk himself.

The leader of the troop which guarded him had made obeisance and was speaking now to Mahri.

"We found him, High-born, loitering in the streets without excuse. He comes from far, he says, to sell his weapons to the highest bidder. But would a warrior not go to the walls and look for other warriors there?"

Mahri's eyes were on the captive a little wearily. That earlier rebuff by Loalli in the city street had both depressed and angered him. The smile bestowed upon a valiant slave had been as salt rubbed in an open wound.

"Is it then a crime to pass my house?" he asked with a trace of impatience.

"We thought—it seemed—" began one of the self-appointed vigilantes lamely. "He meant, perhaps, some harm to the little Ru—else what would he be doing near the dwelling of a noble?"

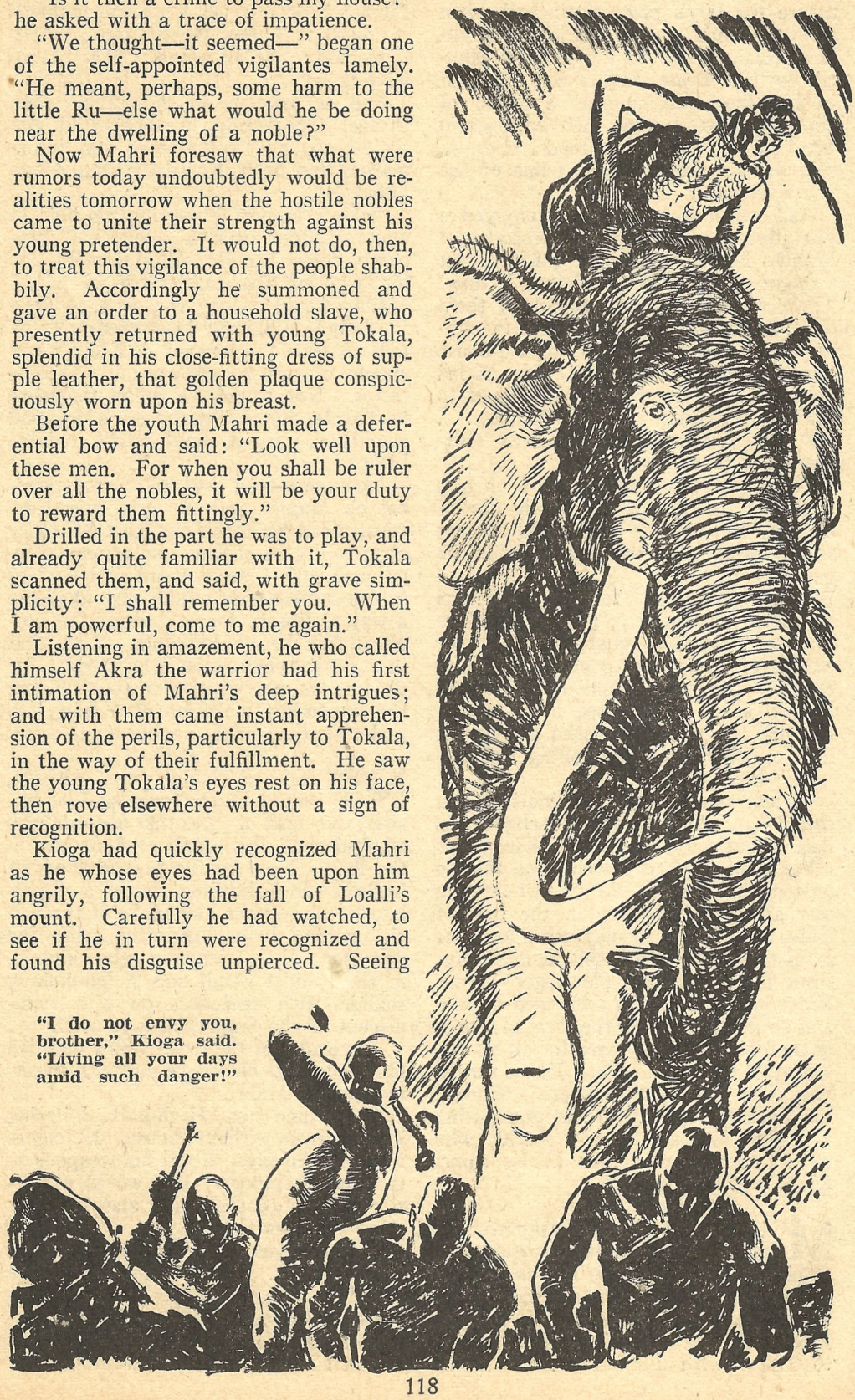
Now Mahri foresaw that what were rumors today undoubtedly would be realities tomorrow when the hostile nobles came to unite their strength against his young pretender. It would not do, then, to treat this vigilance of the people shabbily. Accordingly he summoned and gave an order to a household slave, who presently returned with young Tokala, splendid in his close-fitting dress of supple leather, that golden plaque conspicuously worn upon his breast.

Before the youth Mahri made a deferential bow and said: "Look well upon these men. For when you shall be ruler over all the nobles, it will be your duty to reward them fittingly."

Drilled in the part he was to play, and already quite familiar with it, Tokala scanned them, and said, with grave simplicity: "I shall remember you. When I am powerful, come to me again."

Listening in amazement, he who called himself Akra the warrior had his first intimation of Mahri's deep intrigues; and with them came instant apprehension of the perils, particularly to Tokala, in the way of their fulfillment. He saw the young Tokala's eyes rest on his face, then rove elsewhere without a sign of recognition.

Kioga had quickly recognized Mahri as he whose eyes had been upon him angrily, following the fall of Loalli's mount. Carefully he had watched, to see if he in turn were recognized and found his disguise unpierced. Seeing



"I do not envy you, brother," Kioga said. "Living all your days amid such danger!"

Mahri disposed to belittle his importance as a dangerous character, Kioga uttered that which brought the noble's gaze upon him sharply.

He spoke in tones of simulated indignation and appeal: "This is a hostile city to a warrior seeking only to serve an honest master. Arrested now for passing in the street, struck down earlier by that cursed slave who played the hero to Loalli—ah, by my father's bones, better had I stayed in my own country!"

Overlooking the first and last, the noble seized upon that center of Kioga's talk which mentioned Loalli and the slave: "You saw that daring fellow? Which way did he go? Did you recognize his companion?"

Kioga answered in the order of the questions: "I saw him running toward the kennels of the thieves, in company of one who seemed to be a thief."

"That much my servants have discovered. What they did not find out is where he went thereafter."

"They must be lazy," quoth the warrior Akra. "Strange that they could not smell down a common slave within their own home city. Now, with a nose like mine—" He paused and rattled several ivory disks deep in the pocket of his over-robe.

"Think you you might produce this slave?" asked Mahri, leaning nearer and speaking in a lower tone. The warrior Akra shrugged, answering:

"I am a homeless soldier, ragged and poor. Such works require more than mere enthusiasm." Again the disks clicked against each other with a broad suggestiveness.

"You shall have home and money in my service," said Mahri softly. "And

if you find this slave for me, rewards yet greater."

"He must be valuable—much hated or much loved," remarked the warrior Akra, with the tolerated boldness of his class.

Mahri's face first flushed, then paled. "Yours to obey, and not to question," he said sharply, "—particularly when the pay is good." He flung a pouch to the other, containing money of the realm. "Find me that slave, and you shall have as much again. *Hé,* Ilo!"

A slave came running as his name was called.

"House this man below, with leave to come and go at will. Give him to wear the badge of those who serve your master," said Mahri, and turned, to find the men who had brought this loiterer staring in amazement at these developments. The noble smiled and ordered yet another slave to serve them refreshments below in return for their vigilance. They filed out, amazed but none the wiser about their captive's sudden change of fortune and employment in Mahri's services.

Decently lodged in a lower chamber of the splendid dwelling carved in the rocks, Kioga counted the hour well spent which brought him under the same roof, unknown as yet to those whom he had sought with little expectation of finding them so quickly. Akra the slave, of course, would never be brought before the jealous noble by Akra the warrior; but for appearance' sake, he must seem to make an effort to locate the slave whom Mahri desired. And the search should be both long enough and wide enough to familiarize him thoroughly with the City of the Kings.

OSTENSIBLY departing in his search, Kioga went by a roundabout way toward the den of Ameeg the thief. His path led through the narrow crooked streets choked by the dwellings of the middle classes, through some of which a mammoth might scarcely pass. Here dwelt the workers in creaking, strong-smelling leather, makers of rich housings and trappings for the royal mammoths. Here toiled the armorers at their ringing anvils and roaring forges, beating out *kuris,* long as rapiers yet heavier, the common sidearm of every warrior, used to cut or thrust; and *okals,* weapons in the form of clubs, long in the handle and heavy in the ax-like head, for wielding against foot-warriors from mammoth-back. Here too were long keen-bladed spears, with hooks upon one side, for use in foot-warriors' hands to thrust at mounted foes and drag them to the ground.

Upon the stones were ranged two-handed, two-edged swords, broad toward the point for defending the city's walls; and oddly-shaped, short-handled throwing blades, sharp at every edge, so thin a man might carry half a dozen, hurling them at need without thought of retrieving.

For forty pieces Kioga bought a *kuri* suited to his height and wrist, slid this into its sheath and buckled it at waist. Ten pieces more bought a vest of copper chain, fair proof against small-arms, with double thickness at the back. Armed now as were the other warriors in the city, he left the place, having seen but half the common weapons of the T'emaho.

BEYOND were the marketplaces, filled with cries of price and offer by scolding women and haggling hucksters. Farther still, deep in the concentration of their work, ivory-carvers bent above their intricate designs, working in their doorways; just as for uncounted centuries their fathers had carved before them in an art that is the oldest on this earth, the carving of the mammoth tusk.

A crowd of warriors gambled in an open-fronted public place, consoled when they lost, by copious drafts of *lohe,* the beverage-drug favored by the warlike brotherhood. The topic everywhere was the assembling of the nobles for the crowning of the newest king. Debate raged hot between those who foresaw the rise of Semya to that important office, and others who foresaw with equal certainty the crowning of the youth Tokala, whom they referred to as Ru the Last.

"I thought, perchance you came to tell me of some treasure waiting to be stolen," said Ameeg when Kioga had reached the rendezvous of rascals. "Instead you do not speak, but are silent as a stone."

"Ameeg, my friend, you daily risk your neck to pick the pockets in the streets, when at your very feet a mine of gold lies waiting to be had with half the risks. You cut thin purses and overlook the riches of a king."

"Eh, now, what's this?" Ameeg demanded, pricking up his ears at all this talk of riches. "Shall an honest man teach Ameeg what to steal?"

"I do not speak of stealing. Thieving has paid you well, but not as richly as

would honesty pursued with equal cunning. You have, you said, men everywhere who are your ears. They must have told you that not later than tomorrow week the young Ru will occupy the highest seat in M'Anda. But have they also said Semya plots his death?"

Ameeg's wide eyes had narrowed suddenly. "What boldness! How come you by the knowledge?"

"No matter how. I say that it is rumored, not that it is true. Now, whoso assists Ru the Last upon the throne will be a favorite when he sits in power. 'Tis said he'll have, of gold ten thousand *kuls,* and of ivory coins a hundred thousand pieces to give away, to mention nothing of slaves and other gifts he will distribute or bestow upon his favorites."

"Ten thousand *kuls!* A hundred thousand pieces!" Ameeg muttered the words like one dazed. *"Azik!* I did not know the realm contained so much. All this is news. How do you come to know what is a secret to Ameeg? Will you tell me that Mahri who protects the youth has told you?"

Kioga showed the insignia of Mahri's household beneath the fold of his robe. Ameeg looked his astonishment, expressing what first came to mind: "An honest man turned thief! You stole the robe."

"Not so," Kioga answered, "I am in Mahri's warrior-service."

"You are in Mahri's ser—" Ameeg blew out his sunken cheeks without completing it. "What do you here, then?" he asked uneasily.

"I seek that slave, sought also by Loalli, who was last seen in company of Ameeg, the famous thief."

"YOU seek yourself!" cried Ameeg, between amazement and amusement. "Ah, that is capital. And shall you find yourself, think you?"

Kioga laughed. "Mayhap I shall, if the reward be great enough! But that can wait. As you can see, Ameeg, 'twere better that you be an honest man for a little time. They watch the entrances to your street. They watch the men known to consort with you. And why? Because that slave they seek is thought to be in hiding here."

"Why did I begin with you, friend Akra? You bring me naught but trouble."

"Use me, Ameeg, and you shall gain a hundred times what I have cost you. Help me to protect the young boy king; ally your men upon my side; and when all is done, you shall be pointed out as the thief who rose to high nobility in the service of the Ru."

Ameeg's keen eyes were on Kioga sharply. "You have a great ambition, you who were a slave."

"I crave my liberty," Kioga answered, and in this told nothing but the simple truth. "And if you toil with me—"

"I will," Ameeg said, on a sudden, "You have a long head, Akra. And since you will not join Ameeg as a thief, Ameeg will join with you as an honest man and answer for his own. What is to do?"

"First," said the Snow Hawk, "accept this purse as token of what is to come." He threw the purse received from Mahri —and lacking only the fifty pieces expended for his warrior's outfit—before Ameeg, who snatched it up, emptied it, and counted avidly. "Half of the price I am to have if I produce Akra the slave. This is to pay you for having harbored him. Now in the second place, contrive to place one of your men in every noble's household, to listen and report all plots against the little Ru."

"'Twill not be easy," responded Ameeg, with a frown.

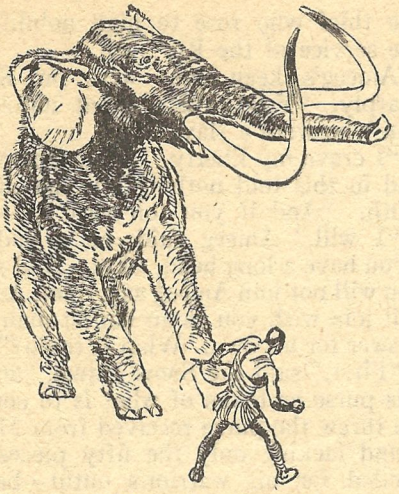
"To make a king was never easy," said Kioga simply.

UPON the realm of M'Anda the endless northern night had fallen. Yet in the sheltered hermit kingdom of the T'emaho there was no long-continued frigid cold, save on the higher mountains. A piercing chill came with the rains, of which this was the season, but robes of mammoth underwool sufficed to warm the people. A little snow fell now and then, but swiftly disappeared, unable to exist on ground so close to sources of inner-earth heat.

Along the mountain-sides, across the valley of the near-by river, steam-spouts were as countless pale ghosts in the darkness, where thermal springs ran boiling hot beneath a cloud of heated vapors. The river, swollen by the rains, and having sources far in glacial mountains, alone was bitterly cold, and on its surface mists collected, enveloping the city now and then in dense gray fog, which hung like hanks of white wool in the streets, obscuring everything ten feet ahead.

The warmth of Mahri's dwelling was most welcome; and seeking him at once Kioga told of this day's developments. The other looked at him in approval.

"Well done, well done indeed! I have for some time suspected Semya. But saw you nothing of the slave I sent you for?"



"I pressed him very close, I am confident," Kioga answered, "but until now I have not quite come up with him."

"The search must wait. And we will deal with Semya. First I have another task for you. Go to my stables; select my tallest mammoth. Go then down among the slaves within the mountainside. Seek out an overseer named Tali. Bring news from him how many days must pass before the tunnel is cut through. When that is known, I can know how to proceed."

SO to the noble's stable Kioga went, choosing from its stall a tall but active animal, equipped with blanket and pad for riding. Then mounting to its high broad back, he passed out leisurely into the city proper, slaves and freemen afoot making way for him.

He passed between the crowding dwellings of the middle classes, able from his lofty perch to glance into the upper stories and see the people at their household tasks of weaving cloth of mammoth-wool and plaiting cords and ropes of bull-hide.

He rode along the ancient wall toward the east, upon that route by which he and his friends had first approached the hall of state; and presently he saw the entrance of that monumental feat of M'Anda's engineers, the work on which they based their hope of spreading all their tribes about the outer world.

His stately mammoth strode like some mighty rolling ship above that sea of humanity which was the army of toiling slaves, contending with the loads of rock drawn rumbling from the mountainside. He came without accident through the sweating, yelling press and entered the vaulted tunnel.

Generations of slaves had labored and died in the achievement of the present advanced state of the excavating operations, so Mingo had informed him. Observing as he passed along the endless twisting vault, he could well believe it. Two separate roads of thirty feet in width had been constructed. Along the one his mammoth trod, the armies of slaves and their laborer brutes passed inward toward the bowels of the mountain. Along the other, in an opposite direction, went the thundering sledges laden with another several tons of stone each. Thus down uncounted decades had the piercing of the mountain been accomplished.

Where it had been deemed necessary, great trees, hewn in the forests of the middle kingdom, had been employed to shore up rock which threatened caving in. As Kioga proceeded ever deeper toward the far end of the man-made tube, the heat became excessive. Now and then there passed him in an opposite direction, a sledge containing dead—slaves who had succumbed while digging in this overheated, overcrowded and almost airless tunnel. Frequent passages leading off to either side and blocked with stone and rubble, were borings which had collapsed, entombing countless laborers at their toil.

In one place the carcass of a mammoth bull lay waiting to be hauled away and put to use; for among the People of the Tusk, the mammoth was as the buffalo to the plains tribes of America in the long ago. All measurements of length were based upon the mammoth's tail—about a yard; of weight, upon that of a mammoth's grinding tooth, about a pound. His shoulder-skin was toughest leather for their shields and footgear. His hair and wool were woven into rope and garments. His ivory was used in art and industry; his belly formed a water-bag; his meat was eaten after his death. The drums the people beat were of taut intestine from the mammoth; his bones were handles for their weapons; his very ribs were set on wooden stands and beaten with sticks, to give forth weird hollow music. . . .

Thus, sometimes bending low upon his mammoth's back to dodge the overhanging cornices of rock above, the Snow Hawk neared the far end of the tube, and nearing, sensed the high excitement of the toilers and their overseers. For never in their history had the People of the Tusk so deeply pierced the barrier which hemmed them in their prison-king-

dom. Always had some catastrophe come to rob them of the toil of centuries, of which those blocked-up openings were grim examples.

Shouting down inquiry to a slave for Tali, he was directed to the solid wall, the most advanced point of these heroic burrowings. A tall and surly fellow responded to the name, desisting from his hectoring of the sweating slaves to answer the question Kioga brought from Mahri.

"The middle of another moon should see it almost done," he said. "We work according to the calculations of the priests. But even they could not foresee the death-rate of the slaves. Tell my lord that if their ranks be not refilled, it may take longer. They die like flies—three hundred in a single moon. Tell him, too, that once again the roof has cracked and must fall in, unless they send us forty trunks of heaviest timber to strengthen it. We wait on that, and on fresh men to replace our dead."

Another litter passed, a body on it, wet and dripping. A slave came rushing to the overseer. "Again the water comes! We shall be drowned like mice!"

Tali reached for his whip. "What if you are? Back to your toil," he answered gruffly; and as the slave obeyed: "Fear makes them bold."

"Fear of what?"

"Today the rising water from a stream somewhere in the mountain. Yesterday a caving of the ceiling. Before, it was the coming of the gas. Tomorrow it will be fear of the whip—I'll see to that!"

"I do not envy you, brother," Kioga said. "Living all your days amid such danger! What shall you do, what shall become of you and all these slaves, if what they fear comes true? Catastrophe has come before."

Tali the overseer laughed, to cover an uneasiness of many weeks. "It almost came a moon ago. We raised the timbers just in time."

"You miss a deal, amid this sweat and filth. The nobles came but yesterday. They crown a new king soon. There will be revelry and rejoicing. The streets are filled with the wealthy, and slave-girls from the distant cities may be purchased very cheaply."

"Poh!" growled the other on a note of envy. "These things for you, one of the lucky ones. For me, no end of this." He gestured to the dusty, evil-smelling tunnel, lighted by the smoking torches and racketing with the sound of wielded tools, and human shouts, and mammoth trumpetings, the clank of chains and rumblings of the wheel-less carts. "What slave-girl could I bring to this?"

"Then go and seek one in the outer realm."

"My head would sit upon a pole in punishment."

"A hard life, yours," said Kioga sympathetically. "Does Mahri know of such privation?"

"Tell him when you go forth, and I will be your friend for life. Say that I would wish reprieve, just long enough to cheer his elevation to the kingly seat."

"It shall be done, friend Tali," Kioga answered, and having laid down the groundwork of acquaintanceship with one who knew the details of the excavation, he set forth on his return.

Less easy in his mind than when he had left the house, Kioga slowly made his way back to Mahri, informing him of the state of excavations in the tunnel.

"Well done, warrior," Mahri commented. "And now I have another mission for you." Mahri's long face was more animated now than usual, as in Kioga's hands he placed a hardwood box, carved with great skill, with clasps and hinges made of cold-wrought gold. "Within there is a collar, two pendants and a jeweled buckle, fashioned by my goldsmith and fit to deck the person of a queen. Bear you them with my respects to fair Loalli, who occupies the nearest dwelling to the Hall of State."

"I am a warrior, High-born," muttered Kioga, "not gifted in conveying tender sentiments. Why do you not send a household slave, with cunning tongue and winning smile, on such a mission?"

The noble laughed, displaying all his teeth. "You are a modest fellow, Akra, truly. Your gifts are greater than you know. And only you can tell Loalli of our search for that fine slave who saved her life. Away, then. Lose no time."

The warrior Akra showed odd interest in Mahri's words. "Then did I hunt that slave to be a gift to Loalli?"

"So let her think," said Mahri, "if you observe it pleases her."

CHAPTER XII

NOW it came to pass that in a corner of noble Mahri's stables, three heads were put together.

One was that of Tengri, chief of those freemen who worked for Mahri, and

overseer of all the slaves in Mahri's household service. That he should be ignored in this selection of a fresh employee struck heavily at the foremost trait of this officious underling of royalty, his vanity.

"He comes and goes, this rascal Akra," said Tengri, with a display of fierce contempt. "Who knows who he is or whence he comes, or whether he is not a spy?"

"Coming or going, spy or not, he always has a bag of money," commented one of Tengri's subordinates.

"Money of which we are deprived that he may roll in richness," cried Tengri. "But there's a way to put him in his place. Have I the need to tell you how?"

The others slapped their hilts by way of answer. Thus did it come about that as Kioga mounted the city wall and strode along, on his way to Loalli's house, three silent shadows fell in behind him, pausing when he paused, and hiding to await a favorable chance to do away with him.

The Snow Hawk paused to glance along this wall, which antedated the Great Wall of China by two thousand years, noting where the sentries were stationed and by what mechanism the gates were controlled. And he paused near the highest point along the wall to sweep the river below with one long speculative gaze, leaning far out the better to see the view.

IT was the moment awaited by his stealthy followers, who sprang from their concealment. Apprised by keen and well-trained senses of their movement, Kioga whirled, but not before the first one was upon him, dirk agleam and plunging toward his breast.

Well for Kioga that he wore that vest of copper chain. Although the hard-driven weapon pierced, it did no more than prick the flesh. Before the assassin could withdraw and strike again, he took a hooking blow upon the jaw which laid him out.

Almost before he fell, the second of Kioga's three assailants darted in, but checked abruptly, just in time to avoid impaling himself upon the point of the *kuri,* whipped like lightning from the Snow Hawk's scabbard. Falling back a step in turn, the other's blade came out, and quick to bolster it, the *kuri* of his companion flickered into action, passing not an inch below Kioga's chin in a slash which must have cut his throat agape had it gone true.

Not knowing who his foes might be, the Snow Hawk found them none the less of practised skill in wielding their keen *kuris,* a weapon strange to him but recently possessed of one. Against their superior knowledge of its usage, he pitted now his greater strength and pantherish agility, in spite of which the point of one passed through his guard to graze his shoulder.

THAT instant wit which hitherto had operated to reduce odds, suggested instantly a move more useful than a return lunge. His hand protected by a twist of his own over-robe, he seized and held the *kuri* which had touched him, then passed his metal quickly through the other's forearm, from wrist to elbow, before his opponent could divine his intention.

The action left him wide for the thrust of the third shadow, delivered with more vigor than accuracy. Passing close beneath Kioga's armpit, the weapon struck the stone behind him and broke off near the hilt, the blade then ringing at his feet; and with that, the enemy grappled —which gave immediate advantage to Kioga, far the stronger.

He hurled the man back with great force, himself sustaining but little more damage than the disarrangement of his hair. A blow upon the knee apprised him of some treachery by his first assailant, the which he foiled by setting heel upon the hand which sought to cripple him by stabbing—and with that aim prevented, by causing him to fall.

To disengage himself in readiness for further assault by the others Kioga seized him by the scruff and flung him to one side. Groping for the wall, the man encountered only air, and with a yell fell headlong down the steep side of the wall, his voice stopped by a heavy thud below.

So far had matters gone, when Kioga turned to find the others staring at him in astonishment. At one quick word from one to another, they turned and fled along the wall, and with the familiarity of city dwellers clambered down its rough inner side and were lost to view.

Accounting it an adventure ended to his credit, Kioga suddenly realized what had made them stare. The rapid action had undone some of Ameeg's disguise. Although he had sustained but little physical injury, the armor which until now had served him was pierced. Some one—he knew not who—had knowledge of his imposture.

That knowledge, if conveyed to Semya, must instantly dispel the myth of his

death in the slave-dungeons and betray him to the noble as the slave who had struck back and left that lifelong wheal upon his face. Made known to jealous Mahri, it must equally result in his unmasking and exposure as the slave who had saved Loalli from trampling beneath a mammoth's feet. The face of Akra the warrior seemed now about to become a greater liability than it had been an asset. . . .

But at the gates of Loalli's sculptured dwelling—once the private palace of the king, set like a lustrous gem deep in the rock that formed the cliffside—Kioga put away the thought of Mahri and Semya, aware that he would need all of his wits in dealing with Loalli.

A warrior challenged him at the gate, but a female slave opened to his heavy knock, admitting him who came with gifts from Mahri into an inner court. At her command a second inner door moved open, revealing an ante-chamber hung with heavy drapes and sweet with smoke of incense rising in a slender column from an urn of gleaming gold.

Before a covered doorway there sat four female slaves, who rose to block the doorway on Kioga's entrance. Each wore a buckle at the belt, bearing the hawk's head emblematic of Loalli's service. Each wore a woman's dagger at the girdle, which supported a clinging skirt, split to the knee on either side. Each walked in open sandals; and each above the waist was bare. For as his shoelessness proclaimed a man a slave, so those enslaved among the other sex could wear no upper garment, indoors, save the plain golden collar and the ornaments in hair and ears.

Between them passed the one who had admitted Mahri's messenger, returning presently to stand aside, and signal him to wait. Time passed, but presently a gong was sounded musically. The slave-girls drew aside, parting as they did so the hangings of the doorway which they guarded; and at a gesture from them Kioga passed between the heavy curtains, which rustled to behind him.

UPON that threshold to Loalli's chamber Kioga checked, taking in the splendors of the noble lady's household.

She sat upon a long carved chair, raised well above the level of her surroundings, backed with heavy cushions and soft with rich brocades, and dappled skins of animals.

Before her knelt two chamber slaves, themselves famed for their beauty. Each tapped, with pairs of little mallets, the keys of a small instrument not unlike an xylophone, which in response gave out a pleasing wavering music in a minor key. In time to this the slave-girls improvised short stanzas on the beauty of their mistress.

Perceiving that her visitor stood waiting, she waved them silent and fixed her gaze upon Kioga, who bore it watchfully, more apprehensive now of recognition than at any other time since assuming his false identity. Belatedly he thought to make obeisance, and rising, drew near.

"YOU come from Mahri's household, I am told," Loalli said, her eyes upon him steadily.

"I bring these gifts, with Mahri's compliments," Kioga answered, holding forth the carven box, which Loalli took, a little puzzled frown upon her brow. To his dismay, she was apparently more interested in the bearer than in the tokens he brought. But now she dropped her eyes, the long black lashes covering their expression, the while she unclasped the cover of the box and raised it, to behold the pendants, collar and jeweled buckle.

"You bring some message, doubtless, with the gifts?"

"A message of regret that Mahri may not also send the slave who saved Loalli from the great bull's charge."

Her eyes flashed suddenly, then were veiled again by dusky lashes. "He seeks him, then?" she asked.

"Throughout the city, every hour," came his answer.

"And he is still unfound?"

"As if the earth had swallowed him."

"As well for him," Loalli said. "Think you that Mahri would send him to me? Do you not know that he would brand and disfigure one whom I had smiled upon? Know you not the heart behind that smiling face?"

"I have not served him long; and should a warrior fear disfigurement?" Kioga answered cautiously.

"So, you have not served him long? Well, you shall learn the truth of what I say. . . . But look you—" her voice changed, echoing the interest she earlier had displayed in Mahri's messenger. "Doubtless you are brave, judged by that graze upon your shoulder. How came you by it, warrior?"

"A thief delivered it," he answered with a ready wit.

"Ameeg, perchance?" she inquired; and at the words Kioga felt his heart bound

"You come from Mahri's household, I am told," Loalli said.

in him, though his face betrayed no hint of that. But she continued, not waiting for him to reply: "He is the greatest thief found in the City of the Kings, and quick to wield a knife. Yet never mind. I will not question one who bears the gifts of Mahri. Since you have brought them, warrior, 'tis fitting that you put them on."

"I with my warrior's blood-stained hands to touch the sacred person of a High-born?" he answered, loath to approach so near, in fear she might scrutinize him still more closely, with those clear eyes which had detected already, instinct told him, some part of the falsity of his identity.

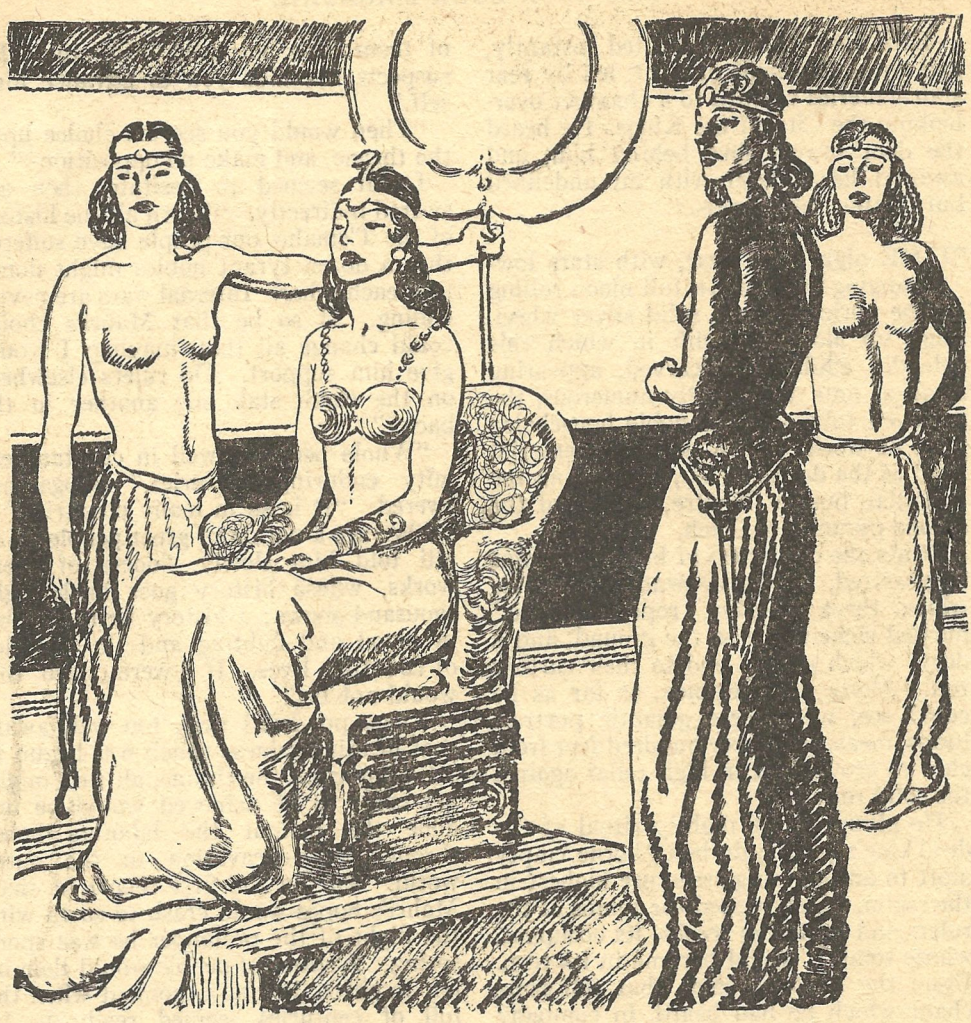
She showed insistence. "Come now, when I command! Put this pendant round my neck."

Since to delay afresh would be to rouse suspicion farther, Kioga took the pendant from the box, spread its chain and placed it round her neck. To do so, he must come within short inches of her. And coming thus close he heard her whisper: "You fear Loalli, when there is naught to fear. I know you, slave who saved my life, and I am not ungrateful. Return tonight, unseen, when I will leave instructions to admit you. Now we are overheard. One of my slaves, I know not which, is faithless."

A protest formed upon his lips. She cut it short. "Obey—or would you be betrayed to Semya and to Mahri?"

That was an implied threat he dared not challenge. "My master will be pleased that you accept his gifts," he said aloud, to which she answered for the benefit of other ears:

"Convey my thanks, both for the gifts and for the messenger. . . . *Io*, Sari! Sing again to me."



"I bring these gifts, with Mahri's compliments," Kioga answered.

The minor music of the *tara* and the slave-girl's sweet voice followed Kioga from Loalli's presence. Upon the street again he breathed more freely, although still conscious that in the lovely noble lay potential peril. This and the encounter on the wall caused him a grave anxiety. The robe of anonymity which he had worn was wearing thin, and with it his security. He said as much to Ameeg, entering his den in search of the old thief's shrewd counsel.

AMEEG puffed out his wrinkled cheeks, in thoughtful mood. "Then shall I give you yet another face with paint and stain?"

"Eh, no! To play two people is more than enough."

"For you to say," Ameeg replied. "But go with care, and tread softly. That Mahri is subtle as a fox, and Semya—"

"Of Mahri I am sure—almost," declared Kioga. "But what will come of seeing Loalli again? She's subtler than he."

"A woman," said Ameeg contemptuously, "with a woman's weaknesses. So that you play upon them rightly, all will yet be well. And when another moon is gone, we shall divide those ivory pieces and those *kuls* of gold." With that thought Ameeg rubbed his palms together; and leaving him to anticipate, Kioga returned to the mansion of Mahri to make report.

Kioga's noble employer was abroad however; and the Snow Hawk, grateful for the respite, went back to Ameeg's lair, refreshed himself with food and drink, then slept awhile before his nocturnal visit to the dwelling of Loalli, and the meeting he feared but could not well avoid.

This time he was admitted instantly, and without benefit of light, led by rear stair-galleries upward to a chamber overlooking the City of the Kings. He heard the door drawn shut behind him, and awaited her arrival with an undefined but distinct uneasiness.

THE night was clear, with stars low-hanging in the sky, a full moon rolling on the horizon like a solid silver wheel. High up along the cliff in which this splendid edifice was carved, appearing small as ants and equally numerous, the enslaved toilers of the noble households were at work upon a portrait memorial head of the deceased Ru, larger than the Egyptian bust of Khafre, builder of the second pyramid of Gizeh.

Again the cheapness of human life was emphasized, for as he watched a little while, three workers, roped together, hurtled sickeningly to the ground, and a death which put an end to their earthly toil. Along the precipice, as far as he could see, were these gigantic portrait heads, measuring three hundred feet from chin to crown, cut in high relief against the solid rock.

He glimpsed the nightly ritual of the dead king's palanquin being borne empty aloft to an imposing structure highest in the realm, which topped the tombs of the rulers and waited to receive its occupant, whose tomb it would become in its turn. From the distance came that self-same chant which he had heard, in company of his friends, on the occasion of their emergence into the hermit kingdom. He wondered whether with all their efforts, this boy whom Mahri sponsored would ever ride on that conveyance.

Came then Loalli, rustling through the darkness, preceded by her fragrance. She saw him there and came to stand beside him, gazing forth awhile in silence. He waited until she would speak. At last:

"You wonder why I summon you by dark, like any common wench who walks the streets below and smiles upon the warriors," she said, her voice pitched low as if she feared some one might overhear. "It is because I know whence you came into our kingdom; because I know you are not one of us; and because I fear for you and those who entered with you."

If this were said by way of threat, Kioga had a ready answer. "Knowing that, why have you not informed the nobles?"

"Because your lives would pay for desecrating the royal tombs. And one of them does not need informing. He suspects but aids you to advance himself."

"Then would you see his choice upon the throne, and make no opposition?"

Loalli seemed to hesitate, then answered indirectly. "Down all the history of the T'emaho, our people have suffered that a dozen tyrant nobles might domineer each other. Internal wars are never-ending. If so be that Mahri's choice could change all that, mayhap I would give him support. Do rulers elsewhere on the earth stab one another in the back?"

"Whole peoples dwell in constant enmity enduring centuries," Kioga answered. "It is so in many countries."

"We are a nation of great people," Loalli told him slowly, "doers of great works, whose history goes back eight thousand snows; a history written down in blood and fighting and the sacrifice of countless lives. If I were queen, this would not be."

Kioga pondered that, too well aware that in this business which was begun to set a boy upon the throne, all that might yet come to be achieved would be undone the instant the laborers holed through the excavation to the outer world. For on the first report of that, Mahri's hopes would crash to earth with the flight of the pretender he was sponsoring. A splendid people would then be left in chaos, just at a moment when the toil of centuries seemed ready to be realized. He took no pride in this deception which he and his companions practiced to preserve their lives; but now he glimpsed a way to make amends. In this Loalli, young and beautiful, and of them all the only noble with a thought for a people's welfare, he saw the most desirable successor to the throne.

"Why should you not be queen?" he asked her quietly.

LOALLI started, then turned to face him. "Because I stand alone, not seldom wooed, but still not won by any eligible noble. Our law demands that to be queen, a high-born woman must have a consort."

"But surely of the several nobles there is one, perchance my master Mahri—"

She answered scornfully, interrupting him. "Not Mahri, nor the highest of the others stirs my blood a beat beyond its wonted pulse."

"But somewhere, some one in the land there must be—" He checked there,

conscious that continuing might give offense. But she resumed where he left off.

"Some one, yes!" she answered swiftly. "One who until a little while ago I never saw before. One who rose up before me like a meteor."

"Well, then—" began Kioga in perplexity.

"Not well," she murmured, moving to his side before the railing, "when I must search for him who will not come to me, and speak where he does not."

"*Ei,* then, is the man created out of stone, which cannot speak?" he asked incredulously.

"Not so," Loalli returned. "He is of flesh and blood, yet seemingly bound about with bronze which will not pierce." She gazed up at him. "All that I am could easily be his," she whispered. "Behold me, warrior. Look not away. Am I not good to look upon?" No man with red blood in his veins could have beheld Loalli and denied that.

"Aye," Kioga answered. "Very good to look upon."

AND now she set aside all pretense; her next words came so swiftly that he understood with difficulty:

"I said his armor would not pierce. Oh, has he not two eyes, and wits to understand? Does he not see that all this kingdom might be his, his to command; that all our people stand in need of rulers who will free these slaves; that glory, riches and vast power await the man who takes Loalli for a wife? Has he no eyes or thoughts for what goes on among the nobles, who think but of themselves and see no duty to their people?"

Her hands went to his arms, as if impulsively, then slid up to his shoulders, gripping hard the while she looked up to his face almost entreatingly.

"I ask. But you do not reply," she whispered, leaning toward him. "Oh heart of flint! Am I a woman, young and full of beauty, or just a lifeless stone which hangs about thy neck?"

Her hands were closing the circle of her arms about his neck. "You see at last!" she murmured softly, "*Ei,* then, will you take the night to answer me?"

Her quickened breath was on his lips, her splendid eyes on him. And Kioga, like Loalli, was of savage upbringing. . . . But suddenly Loalli started, drew swiftly back, and with her head averted, seemed to listen.

"I heard a sound. The nobles' spies are everywhere. Go now! Remember all that I have said." She led him quickly to the door above the rear stone stairway leading downward. "Do not return before my messenger informs you all is well." She stood aside to let him pass; and with sensations as of one escaping, he came upon the street.

He had not gone above a hundred paces, when a barefoot slave approached him on the run. He recognized the man as one of those who served the noble Mahri and heard the order which he bore: "Repair at once to Mahri's house. He bade me neither eat nor sleep till you were found."

The Snow Hawk gave the man a coin, paused in a side lane to survey himself in Ameeg's mirror, and confident that the countenance he saw still bore little resemblance to his own, presented himself before the noble—whose face, as always, was a mask as he demanded a report on Loalli's reception of his gifts.

One of the household slaves confirmed Kioga's story that he had once presented himself to report. And he excused his failure sooner to return by a brief account of the attack upon him. Loalli, he reported further, had seemed delighted with the gifts, though apparently disappointed that they had not been offered by Mahri in person. Mahri made little comment, but seemed preoccupied. And after a moment, he ordered:

"Prepare to make a journey. Reports have come that in the northern cities the slaves have risen in revolt, and journey now upon the City of the Kings, to seek revenge upon their owners for fancied wrongs. A strong bull awaits you at the fourth gate, outside the city wall. Mount and go thence. Move among the people quietly. Discover who has hatched the plot; and when you find him,"—Mahri produced a long and wicked-looking knifelike weapon,—"plant this in his heart. It bears my seal, that all may know I am informed of every traitor in the realm." As Mahri spoke the words, his long eyes brooded on the face of this servitor. Beneath his false exterior Kioga bore the scrutiny watchfully, unable to read the noble's mind, but sensible of some suspicion in it as he nodded a dismissal.

DEPARTING from the house, Kioga turned toward the city gates. First he would search for one who knew the currents of activity among the slave-class throughout all M'Anda. Tahro, who had dubbed him Akra and taught him the

signs by which to guide a mammoth—Tahro would be able to inform him of the truth or error of Mahri's rumor.

Along the river wharves he sought his friend among the slaves, and found no trace of him. But in his search a crumb of information came before him from a laborer on the river boats. Another slave, named Mingo, had vanished from the dungeons. There could not be a doubt, said Kioga's informant, that he had escaped, since, had this famous old slave died in his prison, word would certainly have gone about to that effect.

Thus disappointed in his search, Kioga went to the appointed place outside the wall, found waiting there a tall rangy bull, provided for his use by Mahri; saw to its girths and mounted up.

Since in its nature his mission was intended to be secret, he could not now avail himself of boat transportation across the river, since on the wharves there would be eyes to note his crossing. Under cover of a thick night fog which hid the moon, he therefore put his reluctant mount to the swim through the chilly currents.

He was not gone the quarter of an hour when behind him at the city wall the shrunken, active figure of Ameeg the thief appeared, seeking with anxious eyes the tall form of the Snow Hawk, known to him as Akra. Grave tidings must have been the burden which weighted Ameeg down until he seemed to bear the world upon his narrow shoulders. As he turned back to the city proper, his chin was on his chest, and his steps were slower. The street fogs then enveloped him as they had enveloped Kioga, now far out across the river on his strongly swimming mount.

CHAPTER XIII

WE who had by now become somewhat accustomed to Kioga's loss, thought daily of escape; and of some means of notifying our friends beyond the mountain barrier that we were safe and still alive.

But those tall ramparts which had held back an entire race of men from an outer world they knew existed, just as effectively imprisoned us.

The great doors of the tomb-rooms, through which we had come, all locked inside. Thus on the last day the resurrected dead might let themselves out for judgment, so the T'emaho believe. And beyond them was the water-trap, impassable.

Such small smoke-signals as we might contrive would quickly dissipate among the high winds of the mountains. Such sounds as we could make would by no stretch of the imagination be audible through rock miles thick. No carrier pigeon, no message-hawk that flies, could overpass those half-airless altitudes, save by the freak of wind or storm. No missile we had power to launch could carry in its shell a message to our friends; and even had we such a thing, the odds against their finding it were staggering.

YET our captivity was not without its compensations. For my own part, the charm of this strange City of the Kings was on me. Its gleaming houses and temples carved in the rising reddish cliffs, one atop another, all white as marble in the moonlight; the fine mansions of the wealthy classes whose walls of solid rock, richly veined and multihued, threw back the torchlight from the streets—all cling in memory.

Up from the streets there rose the gay songs of the weapon-smiths, timed to the metallic beats of hammers on their busy ringing anvils; the deep sad chant of slaves by day or night at labor everywhere; the chiming of the household bells, of water-gongs which rang the hour from the inner courts; the intermittent signals of the watchers on the city walls, street-hawkers calling musically; the trumpetings from the mammoth-pens afar, like horns on New Year's Eve; the smells of roasting mammoth meat, of tanning leather; of smoke from coal-veins that had burned deep in the mountains for a thousand years—to this hour I recall the scents and sounds of M'Anda as they were, and as they doubtless are tonight.

But of us all who were the captives of a strange environment, I think Tokala found the situation most bewildering at the start. As Mahri's choice to occupy a throne, he, a simple Indian youth, was being groomed to play a king.

Slaves waited on him hand and foot, saw to his every comfort, leaping to his service if he but raised a finger. The people brought him gifts from everywhere throughout the realm. Small weapons suited to his age hung at his belt. Upon his shoulder was a leather pad, and on the pad a young hawk perched, trained to bear messages from any point to Mahri's home.

Daily Tokala rode upon the streets in his palanquin, borne on the shoulders of strong carrier-slaves who are the coolies of that northern realm. No move he made was supervised, and he might come and go at will anywhere within the walls of Mahri's dwelling. But everywhere he went outside them, a company of skilled sword-and-dagger-men must follow at a little distance, in order that his safety be assured; and to explore beyond alone was not permitted. The ragged urchins in the street had liberties that he, a king to be, did not enjoy.

Wherefore the wish to roam outside grew in him, until his life was one great plot to outwit his several protecting shadows and go alone into the fascinating by-ways of the city. Especially he wished to track down the hornlike blasts betokening the mammoth-pens; and learn what had been done with all the beasts and slaves whose entry he had witnessed recently. But Mahri's walls were guarded, the gates studiously tended. No exit or entry was possible save before the eyes of those who would prevent his leaving. Betraying nothing of his discontent, Tokala considered and rejected several plans of freedom until he glimpsed at last the means of an excursion and a safe return, with none the wiser. Down in the tackle-room where the equipment for the mammoth mounts were stored, he found a length of serviceable rope, the which he smuggled to the upper floor beneath his cloak. With fingers that had learned their cunning from Kioga, he made quick knots to form a noose and cast it from the topmost balcony of Mahri's dwelling to that of one adjoining, until the loop fell true. Then making fast his own end to the balcony, he hastily withdrew as an attendant's voice sounded from within. Now at the earliest opportunity he might go abroad.

A CHANCE came that night, when Mahri's household was asleep, excepting those who stood on guard down at the lofty gates. Hand over hand Tokala passed agilely across the rope, finding foothold on a decorative ledge between the dwellings. Mounting the far balcony, he flashed a glance below, but he had not been seen. Without mishap he entered the neighboring house, found it unoccupied, and passed downward by its inside stair of stone.

A small front window gave a view out on the street, where the customary crowd camped on Mahri's doorstep. Peering forth, Tokala chose a moment when no one seemed looking his way and slipped out, mingling with the crowd of older folk and urchins, who, unlike a king-to-be, roamed where they would at any hour of the long northern night.

BUT now, by reason of his rich apparel, Tokala must beware discovery. Slipping through the streets, he came upon a boy of his own age, clad in a tattered skin, and neared him with a sign for silence. Anticipating some adventure, the other beckoned to a shadowy side-lane into which Tokala entered at his heels.

"What is thy name?" the stranger asked.

"Tokala," was the answer. "What is thine?"

"Jemmu," said the other with a friendly smile.

"You shiver," said Tokala suddenly.

"'Tis cold, but I am used to it," Jemmu replied. "The sons of slaves are born to suffer."

"Thy father is a slave?"

"He tends the mammoth-pens by night."

"The mammoth-pens!" The words came from Tokala sharply, who saw adventure for the grasping. "And may you enter there with him?"

"With him or by myself—I and my friends," said Jemmu with a superior air.

"If you will take me there, I'll give you—I'll give my fine thick robe," Tokala offered eagerly.

"For that I'll take thee also where the tigers and the wolves are kept and starved before the carnivals."

Excitement burned in Tokala's eyes as he made the exchange, donning Jemmu's tattered robe in place of his. And Jemmu's eyes were also bright with pride of new possession. Together they passed through the twisting lanes and alleyways.

The deep hoarse trumpeting of the mighty beasts grew in volume as they neared, until at last they stood beside a wall of stone. Now Jemmu led the way. All eyes, Tokala followed through a gate which opened into the pens.

Tokala's eyes went wider still at what he saw within. Crowds of the towering animals moved about the great enclosure. No lean gaunt toil-scarred creatures these, but fat, well-cared-for brutes, their heavy coats all brushed and groomed until they gleamed. An active barefoot man who waved was Jemmu's father, and in among the herd moved several

feed-boys, fearless pygmies surrounded by the tall forms of their charges.

Now by a ladder put there for that purpose Jemmu climbed down into the pens. After him, with apprehensive glances, came Tokala.

JEMMU was known to the herd. But long prehensile trunks reached toward the young stranger, scenting him and gently shoving him about as if to satisfy themselves of his apparent harmlessness. Then one gigantic trunk curled round his waist and gently lifted him in air.

Jemmu looked on expectantly. A dozen other mammoths, drinking at the troughs, now turned, and as if driven by a single impulse, raised their dripping trunks and hosed Tokala thoroughly until there was no dry spot on his body. Next, the beast who held him gently dipped him in the trough and set him lightly back upon the ground. Nor was his odd baptism ended yet.

The mammoth young, no higher than his chest, now solemnly came forth and gave a perfect imitation of their parents; spraying him anew. Jemmu, seated on a calf's low back, laughed heartily. "It is their way of saying that they like you," he declared and laughed afresh.

"Then they must like you also," retorted Tokala, as suddenly one of the older cows sent forth a heavy jet that toppled Jemmu from his perch.

Discomfited and streaming, Jemmu rose. "'Tis time we visited the dens," he muttered uncomfortably, leading the way past his father's fire, where they dried off, and partook of some simple fare.

The dens, Tokala found, were near an open theater set just inside the city wall, The urchin Jemmu, who knew all the guards and slaves, inveigled an admission to the old and unused slave-dungeons, where the beasts were quartered underground.

A heavy smell of predatory animals was in their nostrils. The quaking roar of tigers and the terrifying growls of bears and howling wolves reëchoed in the passages, mingling with the earsplitting screams of hunting eagles and the shrieks of lesser hawks used in the chase.

Each barred grating which they passed reflected gleaming pairs of eyes, bright and hot as incandescent disks; white fangs flashed and grated on the bars, seeking to be at their throats. Answering Tokala's question, Jemmu said: "They are not fed. They must be fierce and hungry for the battles when the king is crowned."

"Battles?" echoed Tokala.

"The combats of the animals with slaves who have turned thieves, and freemen whom the nobles do not like. Some slaves who survive will be made freemen. The rest will die. That night the beasts will snore. Their bellies will be full."

"And why is this? 'Tis cruel!" Tokala cried.

"Cruel or not, when kings are made, there must be sport for them and for the nobles."

"And does the king-to-be know this?"

"No doubt. Nobles are born cruel. But why are you so quiet—art afraid?" demanded Jemmu.

"Yes," Tokala answered quietly, "for I have friends among the slaves, who soon shall be my subjects."

Jemmu started suddenly. "What say you—*subjects?* Who are you anyway, Tokala?"

"I am Tokala today. Tomorrow I'll be king," he answered.

HIS newfound friend and guide drew back dumfounded. Tokala did not give him time to speak. "Listen, Jemmu, listen well. When I am king, I shall forbid such things. I'll free all who are enslaved. Think quickly—do you know who is to die?"

"I do," said Jemmu faintly, all but overcome; "one is my older brother."

"They are here in these dungeons?"

"Not far away."

"Then lead me to them, Jemmu, we shall give the nobles a surprise. Look, now—how many friends have you among the city boys?"

"A score at least."

"All brave and stout of heart?"

"None bolder than the sons of slaves!"

"'Tis good. We shall have use for them."

They had arrived before the cell of those condemned to sport before the king's and nobles' eyes. There was no guard. A small grating was the only opening, through which no man could crawl. The single entrance was through the rooms in which the beasts were quartered. No slave would seek escape that way.

Tokala rapped upon the grating. A haggard face appeared—that of a condemned slave. "What do you want?"

"How many are you in that dungeon?"

"Two score and three. Do you bring food? We starve."

"You shall be fed. The king-to-be commands it."

"The king-to-be?" A gust of grim sardonic laughter rippled through the prison-dungeon. "Since when do M'Anda's nobles bethink themselves so kindly of their slaves?"

"When I am king, all men shall be freemen," repeated Tokala solemnly, exposing as he spoke that golden breast-plaque below his inner shirt, the symbol of high birth which was known to every soul in all the realm.

The man behind the grate fell back. Another took his place. "The little Ru!" he cried. "The boy-king comes to visit the condemned!" A shout of incredulity arose. Face replaced face behind the grating, until each man had looked upon Tokala and the badge of royalty on his breast. The hum of disbelief died down. A bitter and reproachful voice spoke forth. "You come to mock us, who must die to make you laugh. We thirst and hunger, yet you talk of food and freedom!"

"Food shall be brought, and drink. When I am king, my first act shall be to forbid these fights of beasts and men. Now I must go. I move less freely than the slaves of Mahri who guard me. Do not lose hope. Come, Jemmu!"

"Save us, and we shall give our life-blood drop by drop to serve you!" cried the voice, and all the others shouted their approval, as Jemmu and Tokala departed.

Still dazed by knowledge that his friend was of the royal house, Jemmu was mute. Together they came through the streets, pausing near the house that neighbored Mahri's. Tokala pointed out a window near the level of the street.

"In two hours come and bring your friends. Let one by one come near that window and take what is put through."

PARTING from Jemmu, Tokala threw his ragged garb aside and returned as he had come, passing softly back to Mahri's house by way of his rope bridge —and none too soon: a soft gong announced the breakfast-hour; the household was astir. A slave came with a golden tray and shining service, bearing steaming food and drink of which Tokala partook hungrily.

His first adventure was unsuspected, even by myself and Munro who, with Flashpan, occupied the chamber which adjoined his own.

At the first opportunity Tokala wandered as if idly to the commissary cellars. Working swiftly, he shifted mammoth-cheeses, wickered jugs of *lohe,* jars of pickled sweets and long strings of dried vegetables near the window at street-level.

Glancing forth, he saw the form of Jemmu loitering there on the pretense of play with others who were with him. Tokala thrust a jug out through the opening. Jemmu chanced to pass and slipped away with it. Others came, each to depart with food and weapons, destined to refresh and arm the starving slaves who were to face the fierce beasts of the carnivals.

Tokala heard his name called from above and hastily emerged, some sweetmeats in hand, as if caught in the act of pilfering the cellar stores. His slave attendant laughed indulgently, conducting him above. Tokala also laughed, within him, finding cause for secret amusement.

THIS was to be the day of coronation. Events moved swiftly for Tokala now. His body was anointed with a scented unguent. His hair was dressed and brushed until it shone, and gold and ivory ornaments were bound in it. Today, as Mahri's puppet, he would mount the throne.

I could detect excitement but no apprehension in the boy. Munro and Flashpan were both moved to comment on his good bearing. We all could hear, down in the streets, the mounting voice of gathered multitudes, assembling on the line of march between the house of Mahri and the hall of state.

Mahri betrayed signs of his high excitement. Tokala's crowning would mean for him a power which as a lesser noble he never could have hoped to wield. Possessed of that, he might yet win the heart of sable-haired Loalli, whose hand and and favor meant more to him than any other conquest in the realm.

What with the tumult in the streets and preparation for our long slow march, we gave but little thought to rival nobles' plottings, rumblings of unrest among the slaves, or contact with the outside world.

But ever in the minds of us who had intruded on this hermit kingdom, there were thoughts of Kioga and of our friends beyond the mountain barriers, whose lofty ramparts held us prisoners.

A lively climax in the next installment. Don't miss it.

Deep-Water Landing

By JIMMY DARLING

WE were at the Grand Central airport in Los Angeles, when for the tenth time I asked Doc Phillips to come along, and as many times before, he politely refused. "You can't trust those darn' things, Jimmy," he said. "Suppose a wing should come off, or the motor stops, or you have to land, with nothing to land on. No, thanks, I'll do my flying with one foot on the ground." That one stopped me, so with an, "Okay Doc, I'll be seeing you," I ran to the waiting ship—a big, four-place, dual-control, cabin plane. With good luck we should land in Oakland, our destination, a distance of approximately four hundred miles, in four hours.

Lee owned the plane and was at the controls. Frank, Earl and I were passengers. A short run, and we were in the air. After clearing the field, Lee turned the dual controls over to me and went sound asleep. Being about ready to try for a pilot's license of my own, I was grateful for any opportunity to fly, as it would help when the time came for my tests. After an eventless ride of three and a half hours we approached the last mountain range over which we would have to pass. Darkness overtook us; and—with the darkness came fog, oceans of it! More treacherous and forbidding than any I had ever seen. To escape being caught, we would have to get above it; so up we went, climbing steadily for several minutes. At six thousand feet we came out in the clear, only to discover that a solid blanket of fog, beneath us, had shut off any landmark by which we might determine our position.

Somewhere below was the Oakland airport, San Francisco, the Bay, lights, people and home. Impossible as it was to see, we had to try to land the plane. There wasn't a hole in the mess of fog large enough to pour water through. How could we take our ship down?

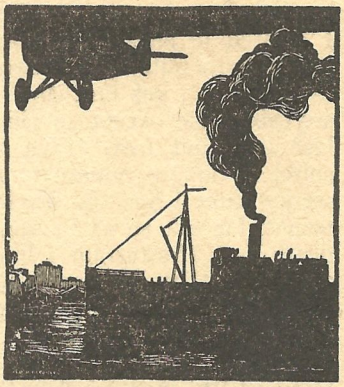
Several moments later, having failed to see a single light, the suspense of it all got me. I awoke Lee. He immediately took over the controls and continued the search in ever-widening circles. In about ten minutes we got our first break. The fog had thinned momentarily, and we could now see a few lights below—not many, but enough for us to make a dive for them. We went almost straight down, and so rapidly I nearly lost my breath. About half-way down, the lights, our only guide by which we had hoped to find a landing-place, faded from view, and fog filled the gap in, for the remaining distance to the ground. Though we could no longer see beyond the propeller of our ship, it would be well worth the risk to keep going straight down, to try to get below the fog. If the fog happened to be low, or on the ground, that would mean trouble. And trouble it was! Lights on the ground now became visible, then buildings. We were almost down! If we were going to crash, it would only be a matter of seconds. At the thought of what might happen, I shut my eyes and grabbed the sides of my seat. A moment later I felt the ship bank crazily, then flatten into level flight. Somehow, I just had to see what we were going to hit. Less than one hundred feet below, was Mission Street, San Francisco. . . . Cars, people, everything but a place to land.

The noise of our exhaust seemed to attract the attention of everyone below. Automobiles slid to a stop, wherever they happened to be; people scattered in every direction, in their haste to get under cover. Others seemed to freeze in their tracks, terrified at what might happen if we should hit a building, or be forced down in the street. We were giving them good reason to be frightened; for twice the fog had forced us so low that we barely cleared the trolley wires beneath us. Surely all the saints were for us, as it was only by fractions that we succeeded in clearing some of the smaller buildings, and at the same time dodged or circled the taller buildings that would suddenly loom up directly in our path.

Before thirty seconds had passed, it seemed as though we had completed al-

REAL EX-

The truth that is sometimes as strange as fiction makes the stories contributed by our readers in this department specially noteworthy. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see page 3.) First a flyer whose plane ran out of gas in a fog tells what it was like to avoid crashing in a San Francisco street, only to plunge far out in the Bay.



most every maneuver known to aviation; then Lee finally managed to get the ship into a position parallel with the street, about fifty feet below, only to find that a wall of towering buildings held us captive between them. Being just under the thickest of the fog, to pull up right then, would have been suicide. It was so low that at times we could not see the tops of the taller buildings as we passed between them.

At last, apparently out of immediate danger, I managed a sigh of relief; but so short in duration that it amounted to little more than time wasted. I glanced at the instrument-board, and what I saw left me speechless. We had less than two gallons of gas left in the tank, about enough for ten minutes more in the air. If we had been in trouble while high above San Francisco, it was nothing compared to what we would be in for, soon!

Climbing steadily, for what seemed an eternity, we finally came out in the clear. Six thousand feet in the air again, having attained this position in not more than three minutes, there came a series of short sputtering explosions from the motor, and a second later, it was as dead as an Egyptian mummy. The last of our gas was gone.

LEE spoke, for the first time in several moments, just as we entered the fog. "Well, fellows," he said, "I guess we are all through. Better fasten your safety belts. They might help a little—no telling what we'll hit."

Lee was again busy with the controls, and I watched, as he moved them into position to prevent a spin; whereupon the ship settled into a slow easy spiral, reducing our present speed to a minimum. With a dead motor it would be difficult to remain in the air more than ten minutes, at the most.

The next minute or so found me actually trying to picture in my mind, the kind of baskets they would use to put us in, and wondering whether or not they would find all the pieces, and be able to tell who they belonged to. I imagined I could already hear the ambulance sirens, also that I could see the big headlines in all the newspapers. And then Frank saw fit to remark that he hoped we would land close to a restaurant, as he was hungry. I can usually appreciate a good joke, but if it would have saved us all, I'll be darned if I could have laughed right then. I did, however, open a window, with the intention of looking out, only to be rewarded with a blast of cold wind that hurt my eyes and stirred up a lot of dust from the floor of the cabin, for which I got a general cussing all around.

The controls I had used were still in place before me, and several times when Lee had banked pretty steep, or pulled the ship's nose up a little too far, I had unconsciously grabbed for the stick, only to get a dirty look, and immediately let go again. I finally took the stick from its socket and tossed it to the rear of the cabin, afraid of what I might do right at the last. When I again looked at the instrument-board, I wished more than ever before, that I could be any place but in that plane. It wouldn't be long now!

The pointer on the altimeter, which three or four minutes before had shown our altitude to be six thousand feet, now pointed to three thousand. My gaze seemed to be glued to the thing after that. Two thousand five hundred—two thousand—I could hardly resist smashing the thing with my foot. Would it never stop? One thousand; there was about a minute left to go! I found myself again clutching the sides of my seat, and pushing desperately on the brake-pedals with my feet. Of course, the brakes could have no effect until our landing-gear came in contact with the

ground, but that mattered little to me. I wanted to stop right where we were, take a parachute, (only there wasn't one in the ship), get out, and walk, fly or anything else except to ride down that last thousand feet. Five hundred! I could no longer remain in my seat. A second later I had the window open and leaned far out so as to see directly beneath us. The instant I looked down, I could see that we were going to get a break, for we only had a hundred feet of fog left to go down through, after which I could see we would have around four hundred feet more of clear sailing before we crashed. We had a thousand-to-one chance left, after all. At least we would be able to see what we were going to hit.

AS we came out under the fog, Lee took one look and said: "What the —What is that down there?"

"Water. The Bay," I answered. "We are over about the center of San Francisco Bay." And I remembered having heard it called a pilot's graveyard.

"Then get those safety-belts off, and get ready to swim," Lee snapped. "It looks like at least two miles to the shore, either way, and I can't keep this thing up more than half a minute more."

The lights I had seen, a few seconds before, were those of the many boats that are generally anchored, or traveling about on the Bay. I was still at the window, when Lee asked me about some lights almost directly beneath us. I told him I thought it was a ferry-boat, but that I wasn't sure. We were still too high to tell.

"All right," Lee cut in, "let's hope it is, for here we go! I'll set her down alongside that boat if I can." He hesitated for a moment, as if to steady his voice, and added: "If we nose over when she hits the water, she'll probably go to the bottom and take us along; so from now on, it's everyone for himself."

Some form of fright had possessed me every moment of the time since we first ran into the fog. Twice while dodging those buildings in San Francisco, and only missing a crash by inches, I had been so badly frightened I could neither speak nor move. For a second or two after our motor had stopped, I had the same feeling again, as I stood looking down that last four hundred feet, with less than thirty seconds left to go.

The possibility of escape from drowning, or being killed outright, was so remote that I became completely resigned to our fate. I was ready, but certainly not willing. There still remained the power of thought, however, and that predominated, for I kept repeating over and over again, those last words of Lee's. "Everyone for himself—everyone for himself." If the ship was going to nose over and go to the bottom, then, I reasoned, the best place to be was on the outside, when it hit. Thereafter, every feeling attributed to the word fear was gone. There still remained an urgent need for haste, however, if I were to be successful in carrying out the plan I had in mind. It was only about three hundred feet to the water, when calmly, but slightly doubtful as to the feasibility of my intentions, I stepped to the cabin door, turned the handle, and explained, as I pushed the door open, that I was going to get out on the wing. I heard Lee and Frank's vigorous protests just as the door slammed shut behind me.

After considerable effort, I managed to work my way to the top of the large monoplane wing, and then well out toward its center, where, if I were not blown or thrown off, I intended to remain until just an instant before we would crash. If my plans carried, when about twenty feet from the water, I would slide to the rear edge of the wing and jump.

But the best of intentions often go wrong; I learned when I again had time to look, that we were within a stone's throw of the ferry and practically in the water. I had neither time for thought nor action, before our landing-gear had struck the water with a sickening thud. We were shot back into the air at least thirty feet before the ship turned nose down and a second later struck, with a deadly crash, head-on into the water. I saw water shoot skyward, caused by our sudden and terrific impact with it, and heard the hissing of steam as the cold waters of the Bay engulfed the still hot motor of our plane.

WE had hit the water at about sixty miles an hour, making as much noise, and stopping as quickly, as if it had been a brick wall. At that instant I found myself hurtling through the air, but fortunately, head first. When I hit the water about forty feet ahead of the ship, I went down so far, that honestly, I should be adjudged the champion deep-sea diver of the world. When I finally came up, I was about one hundred and fifty feet from the ship, which had set-

tled into the water until only the wing and part of the rudder remained above the surface. If Lee, Frank, and Earl were still in the cabin, and not unconscious, or killed outright, they would surely drown, as the cabin was almost completely submerged in water.

THEREAFTER my only desire was to help the others—but I was at a disadvantage because of the heavy clothing I wore, and also because of the strong tide against me. Swimming that hundred and fifty feet to the plane seemed a mile before I at last managed to reach it. Though I had watched constantly, and had called out many times on my way, I had seen and heard nothing. They must still be in the cabin. I called out frantically, "Lee, Frank, Earl! Answer me! Please, where are you? Answer me!" I still had a half length of the wing to go before reaching the cabin, and I called out repeatedly as I went. I hoped against hope that they were still alive. In any event, I would need help; and then recalled that we had landed almost at the side of a ferry-boat. But even that chance was now gone. The ferry was nearly beyond sight in the darkness. Evidently no one aboard had seen or heard us crash.

As I was thoroughly familiar with the ship, when reaching the cabin's side I soon located the small door and forced myself under the water so as to reach the door handle, and was successful upon the first attempt. I turned, twisted, pulled and jerked at the thing, until I could no longer hold my breath. The door was hopelessly jammed!

When I came to the surface, I heard the splashing of water and voices on the other side of the ship. Lee was already on the wing, standing, and helping Earl to get up. Frank was still in the water, but not for long. By the time Lee and Earl had pulled Frank aboard, I was sitting about the center of the wing on my side, too exhausted to mention my presence. When they first saw me, I must have appeared to them as a phantom, for immediately, they wanted to know where I had come from, how I got there. They hadn't expected to see me again, and they told me so.

Lee told me that both doors of the cabin had jammed and that they had crawled through the window on his side, or rather he should have said that they swam through the window. All but a small space near the ceiling of the cabin had filled with water to a level far above the window top. Had the ship nosed over or gone down immediately, escape from it would have been impossible. However, except for a very light bump Lee had received on the head, we were all a lucky lot. That is, we would be, if we could find some way of getting to the shore, about two miles away. Lee couldn't swim at all, and admitted it. Frank, Earl, and myself might get about one-tenth the way if still lucky. Regardless, a few minutes later, it seemed we would have to try. Water was already ankle-deep over the wing. The ship was gradually but surely sinking.

Sensing this new danger, I undressed down to my shorts, advising the others to do likewise. We were soon ready for the worst. It wasn't a pleasant feeling to know that at any instant the ship might suddenly start for the bottom. We stood at equal distances apart, along the full spread of the wing, so that the ship would not roll over in the water—cautious of every movement, fearful that a misstep might puncture the fabric and leave out what little air the wing still contained. If that were to happen, the ship would go to the bottom like a rock.

FOR the first time during the twenty minutes we had stood there, it seemed as though we might at last be saved. A ferry-boat, barely discernible through the darkness, seemed headed directly toward us, but when it had finally come within its closest approach, we could see that it was passing us by. Believe me, no hog-calling contest could possibly equal the yowl we set up! The ferry's decks were brightly illuminated and we could see a dozen or so people standing along the rail. We hollered still louder, wondering why the devil they didn't do something.

It looked as if we would miss this chance also, and desperately we put everything we had left into one shrilling call for help. It got results! Almost instantly a powerful searchlight, its rays penetrating far into the darkness, swept out over the water, in a great half-circle, that soon came to rest with us in its center. Within ten more minutes, a lifeboat from the ferry had put in at our side—and well that it did, for Lee had made a threat to stay with the plane, unless rescued, until it went down. We had just succeeded in pulling him from its tail into the boat, when it slid from view, to the bottom, where it still is.

Bandits at

As the wife of a famous soldier of fortune Mrs. Richardson saw excitement in Mexico.

THERE was a time when I didn't understand why I could not accompany my husband on all his trips. It took a short vacation with him to enlighten me. Now I sometimes live alone and like it.

My husband had become part owner and general manager of a gold mine in southern Mexico. When he left New York to take charge of the mine, he said to me: "It's too tough for you; there isn't a thing near the mine except an Indian village; the nearest white woman is over fifty miles distant; there's no road, only an adobe shack to live in, and everything has to be brought in on men's and mules' backs. When we get things going, you can come down for a visit; but not till I can fix a place for you to live."

After a year I thought he should have a place fixed up for me; so when he wrote that he was coming to the States on a short business trip, I made up my mind to go back with him. I wanted to see why it was all right for him, but not for me. I had heard a lot of stories about American men in Latin countries, and wanted to see things for myself.

Bag and baggage, I met Tracy in Texas. He just grinned when I told him I was going back with him. He pointed to my full-sized wardrobe trunk: "What are you going to do with that?"

"I have to wear clothes down there, don't I?" I asked him.

"Well, I guess you'll just have to wait and see for yourself." And that was all the satisfaction I got.

I enjoyed the trip to Mexico City. The train was modern. First through the desert country, then into the mountains. I had accompanied my husband through Cuba and Central America, and so the people and customs were not entirely strange to me.

Two cars of soldiers were attached to the train—guards, I was told, against the Christeros who were in rebellion against the Government's curtailment of the activities of the church. I didn't appreciate this until I wakened in the morning to find the train halted and Tracy gone. I dressed, and thinking we were at some station, decided to take a walk.

As I swung down from the steps, I saw we were in a narrow valley, but no station was in sight. A soldier politely ordered me back into the train. I saw Tracy talking to some men and called to him; he came on the run. "Better get back inside, honey; we'll get some breakfast."

"What's it all about?" I demanded as we seated ourselves in the diner. "And why are you wearing your pistol?"

"The Christeros burned a bridge last night and shot a couple of the guards. We're just waiting for the bridge to be repaired; it will be done soon, now."

I had slept through the fight—as, it seemed, had most of the other passengers. The train pulled out while we were still at breakfast, and through the car window I saw why Tracy had not wanted me to go down to the ruined bridge. Hanging to the cross-arms of several telegraph-poles were the swinging bodies of several Christeros. My breakfast suddenly went stale. . . .

Mexico City was beautiful, the hotel comfortable, and the notorious Thieves Market was most interesting. I saw a bull-fight, visited the Fronton, the floating gardens and the famous woods and castle of Chapultepec. In the evenings we danced, and I was glad I had brought a large trunk along. As we came in from a late party, Tracy said to me: "Lay out your shirt, breeches and boots, and try to get an hour's sleep. We leave at four o'clock for the mine—got a hundred miles to go by auto and horseback, and we want to make it before dark."

I took two bags and stored the large trunk. Four A.M. in Mexico City I found was plenty cold, and I was glad to use the heavy blanket he threw around my shoulders. The car was an open touring, piled high with bags and boxes. When I put my feet on a burlap sack, it clinked musically. "What's that?" I asked. "Ten thousand pesos I'm taking to the mine," Tracy told me.

"Ten thousand silver pesos! But I thought there were bandits here?"

the Mine

By MARY RICHARDSON

"There are, but we'll hope they don't know about this money."

The road to Toluca was a fine concrete highway, cut out of the side of the mountains, steep and winding. We made good time, and I wondered why we had to get such an early start to make a hundred miles in one day.

At Toluca we ate breakfast, the most delicious little trout I ever tasted, and beer. It was the first time I ever drank beer for breakfast, and I wondered why Tracy urged me to drink more of it, for as a rule he does not approve of drinking. "It may make the road smoother," he told me; but I noticed he abstained.

We repaired four punctures and were stuck three times on the next stretch of road. In some places the dust was a foot deep, and we crossed a pass over ten thousand feet high. My nose bled. In the distance I could see the snow-covered volcano Popocatepetl, and the beautifully snowy outline of Ixtacihuatl, or the Sleeping Virgin.

We left the flat plateau and entered heavily wooded mountains, where the road, so called, clung to the cliffs, and a single slip would have sent us rolling down a thousand feet. There were places where Tracy got out and walked ahead, gun in hand, while the driver sat, shotgun ready, until motioned to come ahead. We got stuck in the middle of a small mountain stream and had to unload everything and push before we could get out. Tracy said it was a very quiet trip.

At three-thirty we pulled up beside a mountain stream and were surrounded by a crowd, mostly women. While Tracy was shaking hands all around and introducing me, the men were packing our things on pack-animals, and I was being showered with flowers. The Indian girls, shy barefooted things, carried palm-leaves and orchids, which they presented to me with much giggling.

Saddle-horses were brought, and off we went—five miles, Tracy told me. "Just hang on tight, leave it to the horse, and you'll be all right," he said.

"Where are the horses for these girls?" I wanted to know.

Tracy laughed. "Don't worry about them; they never rode a horse in their lives; they'll walk." And they did. That five miles of trail was a revelation of just how rough a trail could be. Up and down, along the side of cliffs, over narrow log bridges and through swirling streams. From a high point on the trail we sighted Ixtapan del Oro, and it was beautiful—the red-tiled roofs, the gleaming white walls of the little church, the green patches of growing things all along the river. From this distance it looked like a perfect Arcadia.

Our home was an adobe house with a flower-filled patio. The whole town turned out to welcome us. Pola, a black-faced fat Indian who was housekeeper and cook, threw her arms around me and patted me on the back. She led me to my room, where she pointed proudly to a tin object in the middle of the floor, and said: *"Su bana."* And it was filled with steaming hot water. I had to call Tracy and have him get rid of the giggling children who crowded the door, waiting to see me use the tub. Tracy had ordered the tin bathtub by telegraph, and it had been brought over the fifty miles of mountains on a man's back.

A WEEK passed. I was supremely happy. Everyone was kind and everything interesting. I visited the mine and picked out rich specimens of gold quartz, took long trips into the hills to make pictures. I sat on a hill and watched twenty Indians on foot run down and kill a deer. I watched the Indians hauling a two-and-a-half-ton motor over the trail by hand. The Indian cook taught me how to prepare Mexican dishes, and I taught her to make cakes and pies.

My room was constantly filled with flowers. At times there must have been a thousand dollars' (New York prices) worth of orchids, more beautiful and exquisite than any I had ever seen before.

Then one night there came a pounding at the door. It was the watchman from the mine; blood was running down his face. He gasped:

"Señor, bandits are at the mine; they knocked me down. I came for help."

Before he had finished speaking, Tracy was pulling his boots on over his pajamas. He buckled on his gun-belt, placed a shotgun in my hands and told me to stay in the room; he'd be back shortly. A dozen Indian women came into the patio and sat there. I noticed that each carried a machete, wicked-looking weapons, curved like a grass hook. They smoked cornhusk cigarettes and chatted in low tones.

The mine was half a mile from the village, across the river. I waited and waited until I could stand it no longer. I was fully dressed by now, and I started for the door, shotgun in hand. Without a word the Indian women closed in around me, and we headed for the mine. The night was pitch black, but the women seemed able to see in the dark. Their bare feet did not make a sound; there was only the slight noise of my boots against stones.

One of the women grasped my arm and drew me to a halt. I strained to hear or see something, but to me everything was black and silent. Then with a suddenness that was as startling as it was unexpected, the women were in a swirling mass all around me. I could hear blows, grunts and groans.

A beam of light sprang out of the darkness and showed a disordered pile of women pummeling some object underneath. Tracy and his men came on the run. "What's the meaning of this?" he demanded. *"El bandido, señor!"* exclaimed half a dozen voices as they began to untangle themselves.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Tracy as he turned the beam of his searchlight on the prisoner. With *Ah's* and *Oh's,* the women looked; then they turned and fled into the darkness, for there on his back, his clothes in rags, his face clawed and covered with blood, was the *Jefe,* the mayor of the town.

The mine had been robbed, all right. Two sacks of high-grade ore and the balances from the assay office were missing, but there was no trace of the bandits. Two days later they were captured in a town forty miles away, and executed.

I STAYED in the village ten days longer, during which time they celebrated the birthday of Santa Maria. As *Maria* is Spanish for *Mary,* they made me the patroness of the celebration. All day long they feasted. They prepared huge bowls of pulque, a native drink made from the maguey plant, mixed with pineapple and orange juice. I only had a few small drinks of the beverage but it put me in a daze. I could not understand how they could drink all day long and still have enough balance to dance. All night long they marched around our house, singing and playing a three-piece orchestra, and I was glad when daylight came and sent them off to their beds.

I had definitely decided that things were not quite ready for me to live at the mine, so we started back to Mexico City. This time we went by another route. We rode horseback fifty miles to Zatacero, where we could catch the narrow-gauge railway to the City. The pack-animals had been sent out the day before, and we expected to take two days for the trip.

After we had been on the trail a couple of hours, we came to a place where the road was covered with water. The native with us rode into it, and we followed. The first thing I knew we were in deep water, the horses swimming with the swift current. We were carried downstream over five hundred yards before we could get out on the other side, and I was wet and cold.

"Cloudburst somewhere up in the mountains," was the laconic explanation Tracy gave me. "We didn't think the bridge was washed out, or we wouldn't have tried it."

THAT night we camped alongside the trail. We roasted green corn, taken from a field near by, ate cold roast chicken and tortillas. I didn't think I could sleep on the bed of vines they fixed for me, but Tracy gave me a big drink of *tequila,* and after a few minutes by the campfire I fell asleep and never knew a thing until he was shaking me the next morning and offering me an eye-opener of strong black coffee.

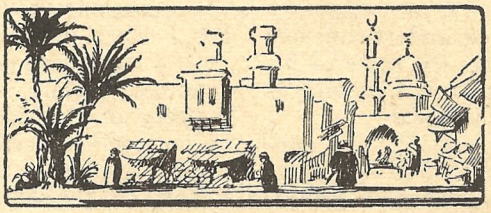
When Tracy put me on the train in Mexico City, bound for the States, I breathed a sigh of relief. But at daylight after the first night out, the train was stopped by Christeros. There were no guards on this train, and they searched every nook and cranny, looked everyone over, then apparently disappointed, let us go on our way.

From there to the border I was tense, waiting for I knew not what, and for once I welcomed the Customs officials at the border, for they meant that my "quiet" vacation was over.

Trucks for the Turks

A British officer in foreign service foils a plot of the enemy.

By MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER



I WAS walking down Hasta Hane Han, or Hospital Street, in Galata, the banking and business section of Constantinople (now Istanbul) one day in 1912, bound for the private banking-house of S. & J. N. Pervanoglu, bankers. Turkey had lost out in a war with Italy the previous year, and was then engaged in another war with Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece combined against her. I was covering this new war as a free-lance journalist, and incidentally, on account of various active-service war experiences in several campaigns during previous years, and the possession of certain technical knowledge, and possibly because of my personal friendship with Enver Bey, who was one of the most influential members of the Young Turk political party and a high army officer, I had been offered and had accepted a commission as *bimbashi,* or major, in the Imperial Ottoman-Turkish Army.

I was handling transportation. The transport and supply service of the army was poorly equipped, in bad shape, and utterly inadequate both in personnel and conveyances to supply the needs of the several hundreds of thousands of men at the front. Whilst we had a few hundred mule-teams, the greater part of our food and munitions supplies were being transported by slow and lumbering ox wagons. I had contracted through the Pervanoglu and other banking houses for the purchase of between two and three hundred three- and five-ton motor trucks from English, German and American manufacturers; and it was because of delay in the shipment from abroad and delivery of these trucks at Constantinople that I was on my way to have a heart-to-heart talk with the Pervanoglu partners.

Intending after my business at the bank was finished to make a call at the British Consulate regarding some private affairs of my own, I was not in uniform that morning, and probably because of this was not recognized on my immediate entrance into the banking-house. Waiting for an attendant to take my name in to the principal partner, I was immediately in front of and not more than four feet distant from the desk of the chief accountant, a Mr. Pappas, who was earnestly engaged in conversation with a well-dressed bulky individual sitting opposite him across the desk; they were speaking in Greek, a language of which I know very little, but I recognized the words "army trucks—steamships expected few days—Greek cruisers—intercept—divert Piræas—one hundred and twenty-five thousand drachmas!"

My mind got busy putting two and two together, but somehow the simple addition would not tally; there seemed to be a suspicious equation in the wood-pile. One hundred and twenty-five thousand drachmas? What for? At that time the Greek drachma was of the same value as the French franc, five to the American dollar, twenty-five to the English pound; a hundred and twenty-five thousand drachmas meant twenty-five thousand dollars or five thousand pounds. Army trucks? Greek cruisers? Intercept? Divert Piræas? Piræas was the port of Athens, the capital of Greece. I was interested in army trucks, very much interested; in fact, I was impatiently waiting for army trucks; what a pity that I understood only a few words of Greek! I felt sure that the conversation I had partly overheard had a great significance to me. Suddenly the thought gripped my mind

that it was my trucks, or rather the Turkish Government's trucks of which I was or would be in charge, that had been referred to; that Mr. Pappas was arranging to double-cross his banking employers and the Turkish Government by selling information to the enemy that would enable them to intercept either in the Mediterranean or the Ægean Sea the steamships conveying our badly needed trucks, and take them as prizes of war into an enemy port; that the hundred and twenty-five thousand drachmas was the price of his treachery; that the bulky individual was an enemy secret-service agent.

I was kept waiting possibly five minutes before being admitted to the bankers' private sanctum, but though I strained my ears I did not get the meaning of any further part of the conversation. Mr. Pappas and the other man did not even notice my presence.

I RECEIVED good news. The bankers were beaming; they had received cabled information that four steamers laden with our trucks had passed through the Straits of Gibraltar the previous day, and could be expected in the Dardanelles in about five days. They themselves, whilst speaking Turkish, Greek, Italian, French and German, did not speak or understand English, but they had a young nephew in their employ who had been educated in England, who acted as interpreter. First making sure that the door of their private office was well closed and that no eavesdroppers were outside, I told them of the few words I had understood of their accountant's conversation and of my opinion of same. I emphasized how badly we needed those trucks, and that everything possible had to be done to insure the safe arrival of the steamers in the Dardanelles. I warned them against showing any suspicion of their accountant, as it was imperative that he remain at his post and be allowed to play a free hand; in the meantime I would immediately report my suspicions to Army headquarters, and the Intelligence Department would take all necessary steps not only to counteract the loss of the ships and their valuable cargoes, but to catch the traitor and the enemy secret agent red-handed.

Leaving the bank, I postponed my visit to the British consulate, and hurried to Army headquarters; this matter was too urgent for delay, for those trucks meant a stream of life-blood to the army at the front. Gaining the ear of Enver Bey, who immediately recognized the urgency of the situation, the matter of trapping the traitor and the enemy agent was turned over to the Intelligence Department, and steps taken to safeguard the arrival of the ships in Turkish waters. This was a difficult matter; Greece possessed quite a decent little navy for a small country, while the few ships of the Turkish navy were obsolete. The Ægean Sea separating the Greek peninsula from the Turkish mainland of Asia Minor is quite a large body of water, studded with countless islands; the Greeks held the mastery of the Ægean; it would have been a useless sacrifice of ships and men for the few vastly inferior Turkish ships to have left the shelter of the Dardanelles to pick up and convoy the merchantmen.

But there was hope of insuring the ships' arrival; the usual course from the Mediterranean to the entrance of the Dardanelles ran through the center of the Ægean Sea, and many ships bound for Constantinople since the war began had safely run the gantlet of the Greek warships. The danger was that in this instance, through treachery, the Greeks would know of the approximate time the ships could be expected in the Ægean, and their warships would be lying in wait the full length of the usual navigational course. Fortunately, the merchantmen were modern vessels and possessed wireless; however, orders sent through the air to them by ordinary code would have been intercepted by the Greeks; on the other hand, the wireless operators of the merchantmen would be unable to decipher the Turkish Government's secret code. To obviate this difficulty a cable was dispatched to the Turkish consul at Malta, instructing the ships' commanders to lay a course south of the island of Crete, and from then on to hug the Turkish coast inside the islands, and put into the port of Smyrna, instead of coming through the center of the Ægean; and the ships were wirelessed in ordinary code to call at Malta for orders. We had thousands of tons of supplies in Smyrna which we were bringing through by rail to Constantinople, and then dispatching by road transport to the front; by landing these trucks at Smyrna, they could take full loads direct to the Adrianople front without transshipment.

CONSTANTINOPLE had a population at this time of around eight hundred thousand people, and including all the suburbs the figures mounted to over a mil-

lion. But this population was not all Turkish; the Turks numbered possibly seven hundred thousand souls, but there was a Greek population, the descendants of the Greeks of the Byzantine Empire, of around two hundred thousand. This fact made it a comparatively easy matter for Greek spies and agents from the Hellenic Kingdom to operate in Turkish territory.

THE intelligence officers arranged with the cable company for the delivery to the bank at twenty-four-hour intervals of a series of fake cables purporting to give the movements of the ships; Turkish secret-service operators watched the bank, and the next morning trailed Mr. Pappas' mysterious visitor to the Grand Hotel de Pera, where it was found that he was registered under the name of M. Demetri Michaelis, of Karagatch, a small town south of Adrianople, which if true would have made him a Turkish subject. Unknown to himself, he was trailed every minute of the day and night; his apartment was searched in his absence, and faked passports and other documents of Greek, Bulgarian and French origin were found in his baggage; also, much more interesting from our point of view, a copy of the one faked cable that had already been delivered to the bank. We had more than enough evidence to convict him of espionage fifty times over; but we wanted Mr. Pappas to fall into the trap too; two more cables were yet to be delivered, the last one announcing the purported arrival of our ships in the Ægean; we figured that Mr. Pappas was so eager to lay his greedy hands on the promised blood-money that the delivery of that third and last faked cablegram would bring about the dénouement.

Naturally, being the one who had surmised the first suspicion of the unpatriotic and nefarious conduct of Mr. Pappas, I was extremely interested in the march of events and was working hand in hand with the intelligence officers to bring about the arrest of the two guilty persons. And besides, the receipt of those trucks meant the world to me; they meant justification of Enver Bey's and the government's faith in my ability as a transport officer; they meant the speeding-up of deliveries of food, hospital and munitions supplies to the half-starved troops at the front; they were to be under my command the one instrument that might yet save the day for the hard-pressed Turkish army; they meant my faith in myself, my very soul. I had been working eighteen and twenty hours daily organizing and breaking-in men to operate those trucks; men who had hardly seen a truck before; men who didn't know a clutch from a carburetor. I had forcibly requisitioned a score of trucks from business and industrial concerns—all the motor-trucks that were owned in the city, in fact, and I had worked day and night with relays of men teaching them how to drive those trucks and imparting to them some little mechanical instruction as to their care and upkeep. And with the hoped-for delivery of the trucks almost at hand, I had a body of nine hundred men able both to drive and take reasonable care of the motor mechanism, three qualified chauffeurs for each truck in the shipment, as the result of my month of hard back-breaking labor. And if those badly needed trucks were prevented from reaching a Turkish port, all my toil would have been in vain. Is it any wonder that I was interested in the capture of Mr. Pappas and his enemy associate?

On the fourth afternoon of this strict surveillance of the Messrs. Pappas and Michaelis, the last faked cable was delivered to the bank. Two Turkish secret-service men were watching the building from outside, and another one was cashing a check that required the accountant's investigation and endorsement at the time the cable was delivered. I spent the evening at the Intelligence Department, so as to be on hand when the arrest was made. At nine o'clock that evening we received word that Mr. Pappas had taken a public cab to the Grand Hotel de Pera. Immediately some seven or eight secret-service officers accompanied by myself piled into two departmental automobiles and sped through the streets of Stamboul and across the Golden Horn Bridge to Pera, the high-class residential section where the foreign embassies, legations and large hotels are located.

WHEN we entered the lobby of the Grand Hotel de Pera, we found on inquiry at the desk that Mr. Pappas had only the moment before gone up in the elevator to the apartment of M. Demetri Michaelis. Two officers walked up the grand staircase; the others and myself ascended in the elevator. Arriving at the proper floor, we gave the conspirators five minutes' latitude to enable them to reach the gist of their business. I had arranged with the secret-service chief that I should be the first one to knock and enter the apartment. The intelli-

gence men flattened themselves in other doorways trying to keep out of sight, as I walked, outwardly unconcerned, to the apartment door; I knocked and at first obtained no answer; on knocking a second time a voice asked, "Who is there?" I replied: "Bimbashi Glenister! Sorry to trouble you, but I believe M. Pappas is with you, and it is important that I see him at once!"

After a moment the bolts were withdrawn and the door opened. I entered a large sitting-room from which a door opened presumably into a bedroom. Mr. Pappas was seated at a large round table on which rested a briefcase, and rose leisurely on my entrance; he introduced me to the other man as a friend of his from Karagatch. He asked me to be seated and sat down again himself, but Michaelis remained standing against the frame of the open bedroom door.

AFTER the usual conventional remarks, Pappas asked what it was that was of such importance as to bring him the honor of a visit from the Government's transportation expert at that hour of night; he seemed extremely nervous. I looked at him with a smile and said: "Only a little matter of a hundred and twenty-five thousand drachmas!"

The man's face went white, and he started to stammer, but Michaelis reached inside the bedroom door and withdrew his hand clutching a small automatic pistol; I was prepared for something like this, and had already loosened my revolver in its holster; almost before Michaelis had cleared his hand of the door-frame, I had fired and shot him through the hand, his automatic dropping to the floor. Covering Pappas with my revolver, I opened the door and the secret-service officers rushed into the room and took the two into custody.

ON searching Pappas, we found notes for the exact amount of one hundred and twenty-five thousand drachmas; on Michaelis a receipt for the money for services rendered. And in the briefcase a copy of the last faked cablegram delivered at the bank that afternoon, and copies of the two previously delivered.

I said: "Well, M. Demetri Michaelis, or whatever your proper name is, your government has paid for worthless information. Those cables are fakes. Your warships are on a wild-goose chase in the Ægean. Within a few hours our ships and trucks will in all probability be safe in Smyrna. The two of you had better make your peace with God, for you are likely to get short shrift here!"

The officers herded them away to the military prison. They were tried the next morning; Pappas was found guilty of treason and of aiding the enemy in time of war, and Michaelis of being a Greek Government spy. Both were sentenced to be hanged the next morning. . . .

Four days afterward, escorted by a crack Turkish cavalry regiment, I headed in my big Mercedes car a grand parade of two hundred and eighty big army trucks loaded to capacity with supplies of all kinds through the streets of Constantinople on our way to Adrianople and the fighting front.

From a Ranger's Scrapbook

(Continued from page 5)

up the creek a way, who might help me. I was losing confidence in myself, but I determined to hold on, go it alone if I could not get any help. I didn't dare go back to Austin and report a failure to the Governor, after having been given such positive instructions.

I decided to see Hughes and talk it over with him, so one day I rode up to his home on his ranch. He greeted me with the usual "Howdy. Get down and come in."

I had never seen Hughes before. He had the usual cow-man's frankness and hospitality. I liked his looks, so I just opened up and told him my whole story. After I had finished, Hughes said in his quiet, mild, sympathetic manner: "I will go with you and help you."

You can imagine my feelings. I knew I had found a new and worthy friend. We sat down and outlined our plans and then he said: "Come on, I am ready to go."

Under his leadership and advice, all was easy.* After this incident I induced Hughes to join the Ranger Service. He stayed in the Service twenty-eight years, twenty-two years of which he was Captain. Every promotion he ever received was through his superior being killed by outlaws.

From this introduction grew a friendship that has steadily ripened as the years passed. Not only that, but this incident was the beginning of a life of service to Texas given by Captain Hughes.

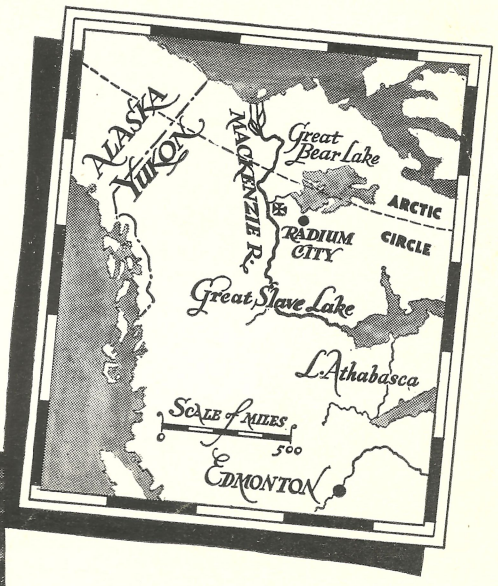
(*Mr. Aten doesn't boast of his triumphs when they ended tragically. From other sources we learn that later he again shot it out with this outlaw, and won the duel.)

ADRIFT WITH DYNAMITE on STORM-TOSSED BARGE!

MACKENZIE ON RAMPAGE, SENDS LONE BARGEMAN TOWARD ARCTIC ICE

"My home was the barge, anchored in the middle of the Great Bear River, which we used in transhipping freight for Radium City into the small high-powered rapids boats," writes T. H. Inkster, F.R.G.S., writer, explorer, British war time flyer.

"One night, with the barge loaded with freight, including hundreds of cases of dynamite, a terrific storm blew up, my anchor dragged. Bobbing like a cork the great barge was swept down toward the broad Mackenzie. It pitched against the bank with a force that threw me off my feet, and started on again.



"Once in the Mackenzie I'd be Arctic-bound! Somehow I must get a line on shore. It seemed impossible, but I yelled at the top of my lungs... I heard dogs barking. Then as I flashed my light on the shore, a trapper who was camping near by came running down to the water's edge.

"I heaved the line for all I was worth... the trapper got it! Then I focussed the light on a big tree while he made it fast. Later, we had a good laugh over it... but right then I fully realized that but for the trapper's help and my *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries I would have been drowned or blown to bits when my barge drove on the rocks downstream!

(SIGNED) T. H. Inkster"

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

SHE COMBS THE WORLD FOR PICTURES THAT THRILL!

What Margaret Bourke-White, famous photographer, said when Ralph Martin inquired if she thought one cigarette was as good as another

"Cigarettes seem alike to me. Do you find some difference between Camels and the others, Miss Bourke-White?"

LUMBER CAMPS, dams, mines, subways (*as above*)—appeal to Margaret Bourke-White. She has gone all over the United States, to the Arctic, to far countries. Her photographs are famous. They're *different!* And that's just what Miss Bourke-White said about Camels at the New York World's Fair grounds (*right*).

"Camels are very different, Mr. Martin, in a *lot* of ways. My nerves must be as trustworthy as a steeple jack's. And Camels don't jangle my nerves. When I'm tired—I get a 'lift' with a Camel. At mealtimes, I like to enjoy Camels 'for digestion's sake.' There's something about Camels that *agrees* with me—all around! I think that's what counts most."

PEOPLE DO APPRECIATE THE **COSTLIER TOBACCOS** IN CAMELS

THEY ARE THE **LARGEST-SELLING** CIGARETTE IN AMERICA

A matchless blend of finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic

Copyright, 1938, R. J. Reynolds Tob. Co., Winston-Salem, N. C.

ONE SMOKER TELLS ANOTHER **"CAMELS AGREE WITH ME"**

Expert growers tell their preference in cigarettes—it's Camel!

"We smoke Camels because we know tobacco," tobacco planters say

Floyd Smither, who grows tobacco, says: "Last year I grew a handsome crop of tobacco. The Camel people bought the choice lots. I smoke Camels—so do most planters. I *know* the quality tobacco that goes in them."

Harry C. King, a successful grower for twenty years, says: "Camel bought the choice lots of my last tobacco crop—paid more for them. So I know they use finer, more expensive tobaccos in Camels. That's why Camel is my cigarette."