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"Bold Riders Out of Santa Fe"

A novel of the Civil War in the West

By **FREDERICK BECHDOLT**

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H. BEDFORD-JONES

FULTON GRANT

KENNETH PERKINS

B. B. FOWLER

•

A Tiny David story

By **ROBERT MILL**

A Northwest Jane story

By **BEATRICE GRIMSHAW**

•

Fully Illustrated

Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS *to illustrate* "BOLD RIDERS OUT OF SANTA FE"

The lugger stood out—tubs sent ashore with a rush. "Ahoy below!" came a voice from the cliffs. "Cutter to the south'ard, reaching in!" (See "Long Tom o' Devon," starting on Page 93.)

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BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1939 VOL. 68, NO. 3

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

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Published monthly, at McCall St., Dayton, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton, Ohio. Editorial and Executive Offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—January, 1939. Vol. LXVIII, No. 3. Copyright, 1938, by McCall Corporation in the United States and Great Britain. Subscription Prices, one year $1.50, two years $2.00 in U. S. and Canada, foreign postage $1.00 per year. For change of address, give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new. Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization. Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in the Blue Book Magazine will be received only on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit. Printed in U.S.A.
Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1897.

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"A Million for John Destiny"

By FULTON GRANT

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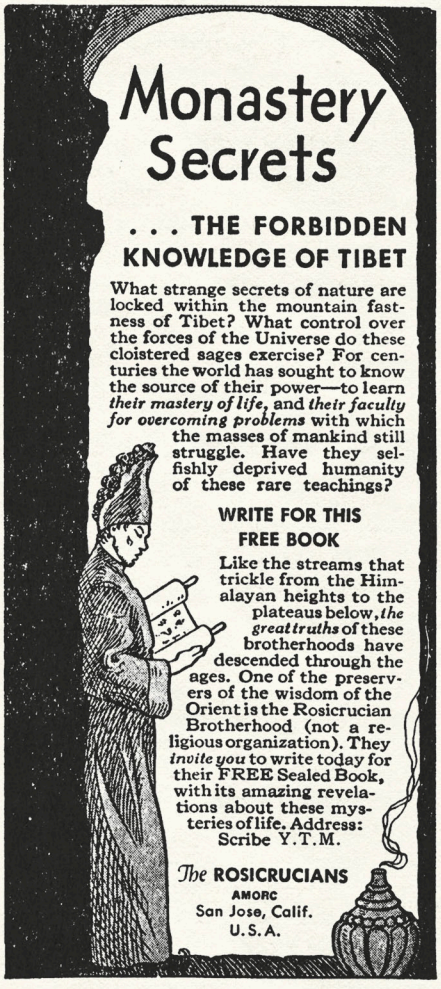

Next Month!

Great stories by:

Peter B. Kyne

Rafael Sabatini

Max Brand

H. Bedford-Jones

Fulton Grant

And many
other noted writers

Cow-Country Christmas

A vivid story of Real Experience

WILLIAM P. LAWSON

DECEMBER of 1910 found me attached to a ranger station on a National Forest in New Mexico, a few miles from a little cow-town. On Christmas morning I started in to town for the holiday doings, which I had been assured would be worth getting in on. They were.

An unusually large crowd, I noted at once, was on hand. The single street was full of saddled horses. Buckboards and ranch wagons stood here and there. The general store was doing a land-office business. Brad's saloon was crowded.

I left my horse in Brad's corral and went into the bar, where thirsty visitors and convivial townsmen were lined up three deep.

"Who shez I can't stand no more?" a young puncher with a black shirt and purple neckerchief was protesting. "Gimme drink, 'fore I bust loose."

Brad shook his head, and the cowboy clumsily drew a revolver. It went off before the muzzle had cleared the bar, and the slug ripped a piece of moulding away and entered the battle-scarred mirror behind. At the same time Brad leaned over and tapped the inebriate smartly on the head with an empty pop-bottle.

"Hand me that feller's gun," he said calmly. "Then haul him outside where he kin git air. And don't none of you men come back till you've got some sense into yore heads."

Brad served me when he got a chance, then leaned confidentially across the bar.

"What you reckon?" he said in a stage whisper. "Word just come that Polk Shattuck is ridin' down from up north to start a poker-game here."

The news was momentous. Polk Shattuck was the gambler par excellence of the region. A visit from him was a compliment, flattering to civic pride.

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"They say," went on Brad, "that Polk's been right hard hit of late. I reckon he's figuring on taking in some easy money. Wisht I could get in the game."

"Why can't you?" I asked.

Brad motioned toward the crowd.

"Who'd safe-herd these loon'tics if I was to leave the bar?" He paused, then added: "Another thing, Polk took me to a cleanin' once, and I can't afford the chance of another. Since I got married, I've sort of settled down."

I could not repress a smile. Brad's "settled" condition, I thought, still contained excitement enough and to spare.

As I started to order again, I became aware of a commotion at the other end of the bar, where a young rancher I knew only as Ted, slightly overstimulated, announced that he was a plumb wolf and could lick any ten men in the place.

At the same moment a small woman with a determined mouth entered and marched straight toward the tall youth. "What's this I hear about you gettin' drunk, you The'dore?" she demanded.

"Jest gossip," muttered her husband uncomfortably, looking infinitely more sheepish than wolflike. "'Taint nothin' to take on about. Nor this aint no place for a woman. You best go home—an' I'll foller directly."

The small woman's face flushed.

"It aint no place for nobody, if the truth was known," she retorted.

(Please turn to page 142)

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

Wrath of the

The world-widespread myth of the dragon is the subject of this brilliant third story in "Trumpets from Oblivion."

WALLACH, who had arranged to drive me to Fletcher's, was a former technical man in Hollywood; his inventions in the way of camera-craft were legion; he was past president of our Inventors' Club, and a dry, active, shrewd sort of man. But he was nervous.

"Confound it! That old Yankee Norman Fletcher has me puzzled!" he broke out. "I don't know what to make of his hocus-pocus. We know he's an electrical genius, a scientist, a wizard with high-frequency and ultrasonic waves; but I can't believe what he shows us!"

I shrugged. "Same here; yet why not accept his words? When he invited the Inventors' Club to witness his discoveries in recovering sound and scenes from the past,—when he lets us challenge him as he does,—he must have something on the ball. He offers to prove that all the great myths and legends of mankind are founded on fact, and reproduces the fact.

Into the very flame of the torch that Red Stone flung aloft, came that incredible beak.

Thunderbird

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Last week, you challenged him to show us what was behind the dragon-myth of early ages. Well—"

"I know. I figured he was tricking us with movies, perhaps. I knew he couldn't get or make a movie inside a week, on the subject of dragons—not, at least, one that would fool me. But now the time has come, I wonder what he'll show us!"

Passing the gates of Norman Fletcher's guarded estate, we joined our friends of the Inventors' Club in the enormous granite mansion where Fletcher resided alone with his work. He had invited us for dinner; a magnificent dinner, sparkling with the finest wines, fragranced with the most inimitable Havanas. Our host, handsome, white-haired, affable, refused to discuss the evening's program; instead, he kept the table in animated talk on technical subjects. His erudition and his flaming genius, his vigorous outlook, his unconventional views, kept us all on the alert.

Not until we adjourned with our cigars to the big laboratory with its walls of cut stone, did Norman Fletcher come to the point. Our seats were ranged facing one of those blank granite walls. There was no projector or other apparatus here. Fletcher sat at his control keyboard, similar to an organ manual, and surveyed us with twinkling eyes.

"Well, gentlemen, I have a confession to make. I began these meetings in order to demonstrate certain experiments of no practical value but of much interest; now I'm the one who finds them so fascinating that I've abandoned all other work, to follow them! You must pardon me for not explaining any process involved.

"You persist in calling this a process of television. It is no such thing, let me insist. It is the overtaking, the bringing back, of sounds, light, scenes, which have passed on into infinity. On one occasion, I recalled the drums and trumpets of the Crusaders at Jerusalem, and this suggested the title of my discovery —Trumpets from Oblivion.... The tubes used in these ultrasonic waves require some time to warm up; one moment, before we discuss tonight's demonstration."

HE fell to work at his switchboard, then turned the room lights low. He leaned back, took a fresh cigar, and bit at it. Wallach spoke up, in his pleasant but keen manner.

"I don't know which to find the more interesting, Mr. Fletcher—your discoveries or your theories. Frankly, I'm a bit skeptical of both."

"I know you are." Fletcher smiled unconcernedly, and lit his cigar. "My theory that all the famous old myths of the world are founded on fact; and my endeavors to prove it, might lead anyone to suspect me of some illusion or trickery. You suggested that tonight I attempt to recreate the foundation of the great dragon myth, common to all mankind. I've succeeded in doing so; and to me, the results have been startling and unexpected. Professor Smythe, I know you've published a monograph on the subject of dragons. Will you give us a brief word?"

Smythe, also a past president of the club, was a college professor whose inventions in certain mechanical lines were noteworthy. He nodded, and complied.

"The belief in dragons was universal, from the earliest ages. We know, of course, that it is probably a survival from the dawn of mankind—a memory of giant lizards which, in different parts of the world, has taken on different forms. Reduced to a common denominator, as it were, the dragon becomes a sort of flying serpent, a carnivorous and frightful racial memory. By the way, I brought with me sketches of the only known prehistoric pictures of dragons. Would you care to see them?"

We would, and we said so. Norman Fletcher, in fact, grew almost excited about them.

THE crude sketches, as the professor explained, had been made before the Civil War. When exploring the Mississippi, Joliet and Marquette had discovered these huge dragons carved and painted on a bluff near what is now Alton, Illinois; the figures were destroyed when a stone quarry was opened on the spot, in the eighteen-fifties.

"But these are remarkable!" cried Norman Fletcher, gazing at the sketches. "They're exactly similar to Chinese dragons, Professor—bearded, horned heads, scaly bodies and tails! I've heard of these glyphs. They're supposed to represent the thunderbird, the American Indian counterpart of the dragon."

"So they undoubtedly do," said Professor Smythe. "Now, I have another picture here, this time a photograph recently sent me. You may recall that last July the Government increased the area of the Dinosaur National Monument in Utah to the extent of three hundred and twenty square miles? In all this region, the fossils of dinosaurs and other primitive creatures abound. But here is a photograph taken by amateur hunters who found something else. Unfortunately, they ruined the site before it could be explored by scientists; yet this photograph—"

At a faint, crackling noise, Norman Fletcher lifted his hand and broke in.

"Hold it, if you please!" he exclaimed, and turned more switches. "Wait until after my demonstration, Professor."

"Very gladly," murmured Smythe, and put away the envelope he had produced.

"Here, gentlemen!" spoke up our host. "As it chanced, I've brought back the happenings of bygone ages in America itself—even, as I believe, in what is now the great desert of the Southwest, and what was then a vast inland sea. Look for yourselves; according to my indicators, we go back four thousand years or more—"

His voice died. I noted Wallach leaning forward, intent and absorbed; upon all of us fell a hush, as a spot of light flickered and grew upon the solid stone wall fronting us.

Before our very eyes, the naked granite wall was dissolving in a glow of light, of white, intense, electric sunlight such as beats down in the great deserts of the Southwest. Here, however, no desert came to view. In the light, things took form and shape, as though we were looking through a window in that wall.

The scene was rounded, in three dimensions; it was no flat picture. These naked, sun-swept rocks fairly radiated heat. Below them was water that rippled off across the horizon. A cliff above the sea—a cliff of peculiar shape, with square angular top, and halfway up, a rounded, jutting boss of black obsidian. Beside this huge black boss was the mouth of a cave. Flocks of birds flitted about the water. Off to the right, at the end of the rocky cliffs, towered a gigantic forest of redwoods.

Something moved at the cave entrance, came out into the sunlight, and stood erect. A woman, a girl, glorious to see. Except for moccasins and strips of hide protecting her, all her body was a golden copper that glinted aureate in the sunlight. Her hair was a reddish bronze and her face was eager with life.

"Red Stone!" she called. "Answer me. I heard you. Where are you?"

Momentary silence as she gazed about; then from a clump of rocks leaped a man, waving exultant hand, and dragged into view a deer, new-killed.

"Gray Snake is losing his influence with the Great Spirit!" he called, as the girl came hastening down the almost invisible path along the cliff. "He swore that we'd starve, but we're still doing well; and here's a fine deer to prove it. Ha, Bright Sky! Luck's with us, and now we can let hunting go for a bit, and get some work done on the boat that will take us across the great water!"

He caught her in his arms; she yielded to his embrace, then pushed him away and looked into his eyes.

"Little Flower hasn't come; something's happened, Red Stone! She promised to be here last evening. Do you suppose she came by way of the swamp? It's the shortest, you know."

Red Stone started, glancing over toward the towering redwoods and the lower land behind them. He too was golden copper in hue. He wore only moccasins, breech-clout, a necklace of huge claws, and a quiver of arrows at his hip. Despite an air of hawk-like alertness, his features were thoughtful.

"She who was, is returned to the Great Spirit."

"Your sister would hardly have been so foolish, Bright Sky. Still, who knows? It thundered last night; and only when it thunders, only by night, does the Thunderbird come. Well, there's food for a few days. Come along and look at the boat."

A smile, another embrace, and they passed among the rocks to where a section of a tree-trunk waited.

LONG miles in the distance lay the village of their people. Bright Sky had been ejected from that village because of her ugliness; she did not conform to the standard of the squat, wide-hipped flat-faced women. Red Stone had been ejected because of his contumacy toward the famous shaman, the priest-wizard Gray Snake. For long weeks, now, they had lived here in the cliff above the sea, and they were content. Bright Sky's sister stole away to visit them occasionally; and if the hatred of Gray Snake pursued them, it caused no worry. For soon they were going farther, across the shining water toward the unknown; and a new life was stirring within the lissom figure of Bright Sky, a new heart soon to beat beneath her heart. Together they were heading for the blue peaks beyond this sea, and a new home.

Red Stone paused at the boat, and ran his hand affectionately, proudly, along its side. Fire had blackened and eaten

"So you walked into the trap, even as my dream said you would do!"

out its heart, to be scraped away by stone knives; the shell was nearly ready for use.

"Not a bad job," he declared. "At a pinch, we could start now; but we'll do it right. No hurry, with plenty of meat in the larder. And Little Flower wants to go with us."

"Yes," said Bright Sky. "She too wants to get away from this place of horror, from the clutch of Gray Snake, from everything here!" Her gaze went to the western sky, where clouds were mounting. "But why hasn't she come? Perhaps Gray Snake found she was coming here and killed her. His power is unlimited. He was able to drive us away. He tried to kill you."

"And could not," Red Stone laughed. He pointed to a huge boulder just beyond, which a dozen straining men could not have moved.

"You see this stone? It's like the one at the village, which he moves a dozen feet away by his magic; he says the Great Spirit does it for him. That old rat, my dear, is no more a wizard than you are! Influence with the Great Spirit? All in my eye! I've been figuring a few things out for myself.

"Now, suppose you take that deer up to the cave, and block the entrance well; then we'll spend the rest of the day taking a look along the swamp trail for Little Flower," he went on. "And before you go, Bright Sky, take a squint at that boulder. By the time you get back, I'll have the Great Spirit move it for me over to those fire ashes. Just to prove that I'm as good a magician as Gray Snake. Get going!"

SHE stared at him, fright and perplexity and admiration mingled in her face, then went back to where the deer had been left. Stooping, she shouldered it without effort, and started up the face of the cliff toward the cave.

Red Stone, chuckling, looked among the rocks and produced a massive staff cut from a hardwood branch. With this he went to the boulder, adjusted his staff, and heaved. The boulder moved. Grunting, he heaved again and again; the boulder shifted position and was at length a dozen feet away, above the ashes of the fire. Red Stone flung away the staff and stood upright: the principle of the lever had been discovered in man's world. . . .

Bright Sky appeared now with spear in hand. Her gaze went to the boulder;

a sharp cry of amazement broke from her.

"It's nothing, nothing at all," said Red Stone, with a grin of delight at her astonishment. "I'm a magician too—a shaman of the Great Spirit! I have influence with heaven, as Gray Snake says. Some day I'll show you how it's done."

"Don't joke about the Great Spirit," she said warningly.

"Right." He nodded, gravely. "I'm joking about that rat Gray Snake. It suits you and me, my dear, to be chucked out of the village, to live our own lives, to depend on ourselves; all the same, one of these days, I'll kill that charlatan. That is, unless we load our things into the boat and go, first."

He picked up a bit of charred wood, and with it scrawled on the boulder he had moved. The scrawl was shapeless; frowning, he tried again. In his concentration, his features took on odd lines, the eyes slanting, the firm lips twisting. Watching him, Bright Sky remembered the tales of people with yellow skins from far in the west, who had come generations ago, and were lost to sight.

"THERE!" He stepped back and dropped the charred wood. The scrawl had become a queer creature with long looped tail and wings. "The Thunderbird! How do you like him?"

She laughed, uneasily. "How do you know what it looks like? No one has ever seen it. Besides, Gray Snake makes the thunder, and in answer comes the Thing from the swamp. I don't like it at all; we should not have anything to do with it. Besides, I'm worried about Little Flower, so let's be off."

Red Stone grunted something more profane than polite, and they started off together at an easy lope—she with her spear, he with bow and shafts. Each had a long knife of flaked stone as well.

The western sky was banking heavily with cloud by the time they were past the redwoods and heading downward for the edge of the huge swamp beyond. The miles fled behind fast; the sea vanished. At length they were skirting the edge of the great fen, which held more mud and quicksand than water.

A grisly place it was, and threatening. Stagnant, dark, thick with ancient dead trees, no man could penetrate it, or dared; for slimy things lived there, and above all, the Thunderbird, a creature of horror, like none other known to man, that winged in the air yet did not fly. Rumored to come forth only at night, and when thunder swept the air, it had been glimpsed only once or twice, by old men who told the tale and shivered. Always, far back as the tale of generations went, the tale of this swooping death was the same; its appearance was uncertain, for those who met it died. And always in the same fashion.

Some of the people, afar, worshiped it; all feared it. Gray Snake claimed that it, like all other living things, embodied the breath of the Great Spirit; and he had evolved a strong medicine, a mysterious charm, to protect one against its ravages. None the less, few took chances on his familiarity with the Great Spirit.

Bright Sky and Red Stone pursued their way swiftly, silently, watchfully. By day there was little to fear from the swamp, but alertness was second nature.

Suddenly, abruptly, Bright Sky froze in her tracks, sniffing; the scent of blood was on the air, and with it a queer fishy odor. Red Stone, with a gesture for caution, melted into the shrubbery and disappeared from sight like a shadow.

She stole on, until at length she came to the verge of an open space ahead. Then she froze again and stood staring, and gripped her spear, pallor growing across her face; for there was death, and all she had feared, and more. Her sister, a cold stark thing, face down; killed as she fled, killed after the manner of the Thing from the swamp. Always, the Thunderbird killed in this fashion: terrible pecks with his long beak, shattering the spine of his fleeing victim.

BUT more—a cloud stole across the sun, and the bright day was darkened ominously, both literally and figuratively. Squatted beside the corpse was Gray Snake the shaman, the priest-wizard, clad in his robe of reptile-skins. His powerful body was crippled by one withered leg. His face was like a mask of stone, impenetrable and unchanging.

He had made a tiny fire, and beside it a tiny bark lodge. He was quite alone, and was just concluding the simple ritual for the dead—blowing the smoke of the fire through the little lodge, then setting it afire and fanning the blaze to each of the four quarters of the horizon.

Silently, Red Stone appeared and came forward. Bright Sky trembled a little, then quieted. The shaman did not look up until his work was done; he scattered dust over the embers, and his glittering eyes struck up at the warrior.

"She who was, is returned to the Great Spirit," he said, in the tranquil phrase that expressed death.

"By whose doing?" demanded Red Stone harshly, and sniffed the air. "I smell fish oil!"

"No; the sacred fluid of protection, the great medicine to avert harm." Gray Snake pointed to the dead girl. "She came to me last night and I anointed her with it."

Red Stone jeered. "A lot of good it did!"

"The Great Spirit sent for her; not even the strongest medicine could prevent." The shaman glanced up at the massing clouds, as a mutter of thunder sounded afar. "Who can avert the will of the Great Spirit? When your mother gave you birth, she glanced around, and her gaze fell upon a red stone; that became your name. Into your body entered a tiny part of the Great Spirit that is in all things. When you die, it returns whence it came."

Red Stone sneered. But the watching Bright Sky listened uneasily. This calm speech on the part of the shaman was unnatural; he had adopted his best professional manner, instead of venting his real hatred for the warrior. Why? The girl was suddenly afraid.

"When we kill for food," went on Gray Snake, "or in self-defense, we ask the pardon of the Great Spirit for what we do; he hears us and is content. This girl did wrong, because she came to see you and her sister, as was forbidden. Therefore she died."

"I THINK you had some hand in it," said Red Stone bluntly.

"I? Do not be absurd. I did not leave my lodge all afternoon or evening; all night long I was there, making medicine." The response was placid, assured. Another growl of thunder, as though in assent, came from the darkening skies. Even Red Stone glanced up, startled, then eyed the wizard uncertainly. He too felt the oddity of this poise and self-control.

"Gray Snake, why should I not kill you now, as I've sworn to do?" he demanded. The other looked up with a grim, tight-lipped smile.

"For two good reasons, Red Stone; but speak of them later. Through my magic I have learned that you and Bright Sky are living in a cliff above the sea, a cliff with a square, angular top, and halfway up a huge jutting rounded mass of black stone. The Great Spirit showed me the place in a dream. There you live, with the woman who was cast forth because of her ugliness."

"You mean her beauty," Red Stone said scornfully. "And because she would not look twice at you. Well, what of it?"

"You and she must die," the shaman said in his calm way. "So the Great Spirit has told me."

"Also, he has told me to kill you," said Red Stone. "A dream, eh? I suppose you had the dream in broad daylight, and tracked us from afar, and found us." He shifted his spear and held it poised. "Well, speak up before I kill you; what is to prevent me doing it?"

"Two things," said Gray Snake, and made a gesture.

THE bushes opposite parted; two warriors appeared, shafts notched and bows bent, ready to let fly the arrows of death. Red Stone saw that he was caught, and stood unmoving. Half a dozen more warriors leaped into sight, and with excited yelps closed in around him. They took his weapons, and swiftly bound his wrists.

The shaman cackled with laughter that held no mirth.

"So you walked into the trap, even as my dream said you would do!" With this, he rose and struck Red Stone across the face. "And where is Bright Sky? Answer!"

Knowing that she must be watching the scene, Red Stone shrugged.

"How do I know? At home, perhaps."

Gray Snake gave swift orders. Three of the warriors darted off to watch the approaches lest Bright Sky should come; others dragged Red Stone to a small tree at the edge of the clearing. They lopped the branches from the tree with their stone knives and hatchets, and tied the prisoner against the tree. Then they fell away and stood at a distance.

But Gray Snake, exultant, came close to the prisoner and spoke, low-voiced.

"You chose to fight me instead of helping me; you mocked, you jeered—and now you are where you are. This very night while the Thunderbird is working his will upon you, I'll go to the cliff by the great water, the cliff with the big black stone halfway up its face, and Bright Sky will make me welcome. Now shout aloud your hatred, your scoffs, your jeers!"

Now Red Stone remained silent, aloof, dignified, as though he had not heard.

He was mortified at the way he had been tricked and taken, without a chance to strike a blow; yet the knowledge that Bright Sky's presence was unknown and unsuspected, held him steady.

She, motionless as the tree against which she leaned, watched and listened with aching, fluttering heart; but the hand that gripped her spear was firm. One of the guards had passed within a dozen feet, seeing her not. It was not for herself that she feared, but for the man yonder lashed to the sapling.

A jagged streak of lightning split the sky; the crash of a thunderbolt reverberated; and she quivered helplessly. Night was coming; already the darkness of the storm-clouds had banished the daylight. Men from the village had gathered now, watching the captive, taunting him, but hanging off. Gray Snake had removed his mantle of reptile-skins, had flung it over his head, and was crouched beneath it, a shapeless hulk, making medicine. The purpose of his calm talk about the Great Spirit was obvious now; it had been meant to impress the lurking, hidden warriors, and had served its end.

She saw the body of her sister carried away for burial. She heard her own name bandied about as the gloom increased; ugly she might be, by the standards of the tribe, but more than one of those men had desired her mightily, and hated Red Stone because he had won her.

ABRUPTLY, Gray Snake stood erect, whipped the snake-skin mantle around him, and spoke in a mingling of words and sign-talk:

"This man Red Stone was put out of the village because he had offended the Great Spirit. Now his offense is deeper; we caught him coming armed to seek us. Yet, since he has killed no one of us, it is against the law of the Great Spirit to take his blood. In fact, I will anoint him with the sacred medicine to protect him against harm; thus, if he dies, it will show that the Great Spirit would not pardon him."

He gave quick orders. Men ran in and clumped about Red Stone, who was set free and then faced against the sapling. His arms were put around it and his wrists bound; he was helpless to resist. Gray Snake came to him, and produced a small gourd; over his naked back, the medicine was smeared.

Red Stone's voice lifted in mockery.

"Fish-oil, shaman! I can make that same kind of magic medicine, just as I

"Look! The Old One! The Thunderbird!"

can move great rocks unaided, and do other things you do."

Indeed, the powerful and penetrating odor reached the watching girl; it had the same fishy smell that had clung to the body of her sister.

"Perhaps you can," said the shaman, and laughed harshly. "But your medicine will not save you, your magic will give you no help; it is false, false! When the Old One comes out of the swamp, when the Thunderbird comes at the bidding of the Great Spirit, let your magic save you if it can!"

There was an instant of silence, as the men fell away from the captive. Then Red Stone cried out with sudden comprehension and fear:

"Ah—now I understand everything! Flee from this place, all you who hear me! It's the smell of this medicine which brings the Thunderbird! Flee, flee! This accursed shaman anoints with his fish-oil, not to save but to kill! He caused the death of Little Flower by it, as he will cause mine. Flee, all those who love me, and leave me to my fate!"

"Poor man!" exclaimed Gray Snake with compassion. "The Great Spirit has touched his brain; he utters wild words! Call in the guards."

The others muttered assent, and sent for the guards. Some of the men had already slipped away, for they were far from home and at the very edge of the swamp, and darkness was deepening.

BRIGHT SKY, however, knew too well the ring of fearful despair in the voice of Red Stone; she knew those words were meant for her ear, to warn her, to reveal the deviltry of the shaman, to save her. The truth flashed upon her in full force—with this gloom, with the thunder that muttered unceasingly and the occasional flashes that rent the sky asunder, the Thunderbird, the Old One, the nameless horror, might come at any time. An eddy of the still, storm-tensed air bore from the swamp a fearful breath of sickening, rotted odors.

"Three of you remain here." Gray Snake selected three warriors. "The rest of you, go back to the village!"

They melted away, gladly enough. Gray Snake took his three aside, and with great solemnity gave each of them a little medicine-sack as protection against all harm; what was more to the point, he instructed them to remain in hiding at the edge of the clear space. Their sole duty was to make sure that Red Stone did not work free of his bonds or get away.

"I myself will remain within call," he assured them. "But I must seek a retired spot to make further medicine and pray to the Great Spirit."

He took the bow and quiver of Red Stone, and vanished in the greenery. The three warriors clumped together and took counsel; they were not twenty feet from where Bright Sky stood motionless, and their voices carried clearly to her. She was dismayed to find that they trusted implicitly to the shaman's assurances, for she had hoped they would steal away and give her a chance to release Red Stone. Better to stay in company than to separate was the gist of their talk, for the night was coming, and already one could scarce see clearly across the open space. So, weapons ready, they plunged into the brush and were lost to sight.

At the sapling, Red Stone stood silent, waiting. The fishy odor expanded on the air. Bright Sky relaxed, trembling.

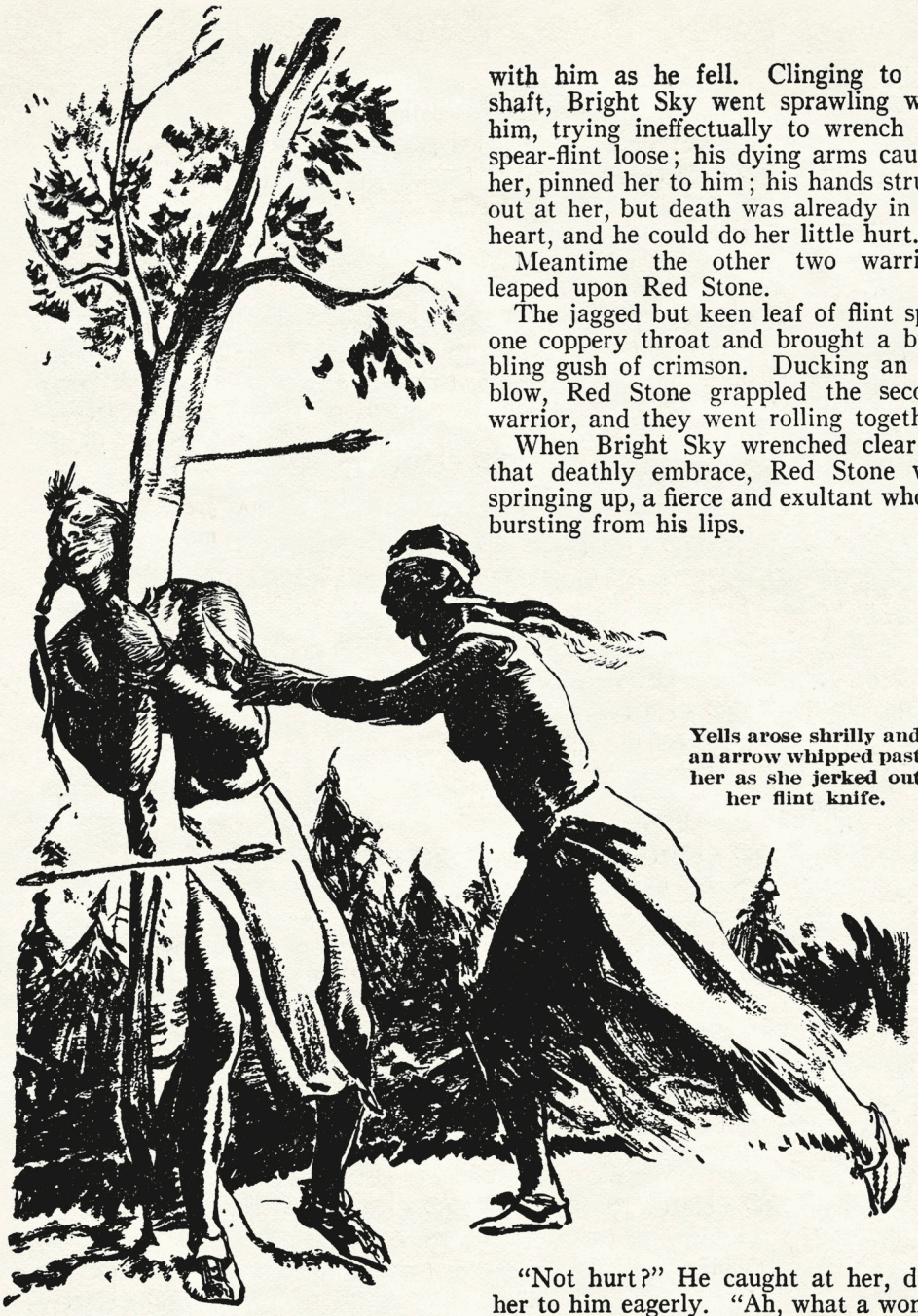
Wait for full night to come? She dared not risk it. Now, at any time, might come swooping the Old One, the Thunderbird. Better the risk from those three men, than from the ancient horror which went back beyond human memory!

She stirred. Spear a-trail, she left her covert and started straight for Red Stone, whose back was toward her. He had begun to sing his death-chant, accounting himself lost; he sang of his deeds, his battles, of Bright Sky and the babe to come that would share her beauty, and his own renown. A wild, fierce pride and joy filled her heart as she stole on toward him.

SUDDENLY a splitting peal rent the heavens, a glare of light filled earth and sky. With a leap, the girl darted toward the tree, knowing that if the three watchers were alert, they must have seen her. So they had; in the stillness after that thunder-peal, yells rose faintly shrill. An arrow whipped past her.

She jerked out her flaked-flint knife as she came to the sapling. The chant of Red Stone ended in a gulp of amazed recognition. She caught at his bound wrists and sawed desperately at the thongs; the knife was slow to bite. In the obscurity, she sighted three dim figures bounding forward.

Frantically she redoubled her efforts. One rawhide strip parted, then the other.



Yells arose shrilly and an arrow whipped past her as she jerked out her flint knife.

At the same instant her voice rose in a shrill scream of terror:

"Look! The Old One! The Thunderbird!"

The three, already within striking distance, checked their rush, cast startled glances at the lightning-rent sky. She pressed her knife into the half-useless hand of Red Stone, snatched at her spear, and struck.

The ruse had served her well. To the spear-thrust, one warrior cried out and plunged sidewise, but took the spear with him as he fell. Clinging to the shaft, Bright Sky went sprawling with him, trying ineffectually to wrench the spear-flint loose; his dying arms caught her, pinned her to him; his hands struck out at her, but death was already in his heart, and he could do her little hurt.

Meantime the other two warriors leaped upon Red Stone.

The jagged but keen leaf of flint split one coppery throat and brought a bubbling gush of crimson. Ducking an ax-blow, Red Stone grappled the second warrior, and they went rolling together.

When Bright Sky wrenched clear of that deathly embrace, Red Stone was springing up, a fierce and exultant whoop bursting from his lips.

"Not hurt?" He caught at her, drew her to him eagerly. "Ah, what a woman you are! And I thought, I hoped, you had gone!"

"Don't be silly," she panted. "Of course I didn't go. This is no time for love-making—let's get away from here, quickly! Gray Snake may come at any minute."

"Not he," said the man, with a laugh. "He's gone to find you, at the cave. Somehow he knows about it; he told me so, when he spoke softly to me. We'll give him a surprise. Here, see if you can scrape that accursed fish-oil from my back."

Red Stone swung around, caught a glimpse of the dread Thing.

He visited each of the three warriors, gathered their weapons, tore loose the spear, and came back to her. She rubbed and scoured his back with grass, but only succeeded in making the odor more powerful. He checked her and straightened up.

"All right; let it wait till we get home. You're right. We'd better get gone. I can wash it off when we reach the sea." An oath of angry dismay escaped him. "Gray Snake will find that deer and gorge himself! Well, there'll be some left; we'll have enough to load everything into the boat and get away from this accursed place—"

"And meantime you smell like a dead whale," she interrupted with impatience. "Come on, come on! Every moment you stay here is dangerous!"

With a grunt, he complied, having looted the three dead men of everything from fire-bags to knives.

THERE was no rain; that would come later. It was full night, pitch-black, illumined now and again by distant lightning. Red Stone gave all his attention to following the trail by which they had come; but Bright Sky, with each lucent coruscation, darted anxious glances behind them. So powerful was the fish-scent, so impressed was she by the appalling cleverness of Gray Snake in using it, that fear rested heavy upon her, even after they had left the swamp behind and were climbing toward the giant redwood forest.

"Faster, faster!" she kept urging her husband, though they were loping steadily along. An agony of impatience was upon her. "It'll be safer, once we reach the tall trees—"

A vivid flash swept across the whole sky. She looked back; at her gasp of palsied terror, Red Stone swung around. He caught a glimpse of the dread Thing, far above. Gripping her arm, he drew her headlong into a little clump of pines.

They hugged the earth together; she was venting gasped sobs of sheer panic. They heard that monstrous, incredible shape hurtle through the air, close above their protection, and heard it return, seeking passage through the pines. Red Stone leaped up and shouted aloud, and the sounds ceased. But the death-smell of the creature, the same smell that had come out of the swamp, lingered.

"Quick!" he ordered, pressing a fire-bag upon her. "A fire, and hurry! We must go on, and there's just one way to go—with torches! I'll find a dead tree, while you build the blaze."

With trembling fingers she adjusted the fire-stick and spun it in its groove,

The creature hung in the air above—hovering, waiting.

until the spark came and caught, and a flickering light lifted on the pine-needles and twigs.

In the air above them, there sounded furious squeakings and metallic clashings. Another flash of lightning showed the creature itself—huge wings, a good twenty-five feet in span, a grotesque head five feet long, tipped by an enormous beak and a feathered crest. It hung in the air, hovering, waiting.

Red Stone had ripped loose a number of resinous dead pine branches.

"Here's enough to last us home," he said. "Get two torches alight, while I take a shot at the Thing."

Bow strung, arrows ready, he made his way to the edge of the trees and waited. Another lightning-flash, the twang of the string, a muttered oath, a swirl in the air and a crash of branches. Red Stone was back, breathing hard.

"The Thing has scales!" he ejaculated unsteadily. "The arrow went true, and just bounced. Give me that light! You take the other; bring the rest ready for use. No wild animal, devil or bird or reptile, can stand fire. All set?"

She assented and crept forth.

FOR a moment, her heart utterly failed her; it seemed they were both gone out to certain destruction. The vast, half-seen Thing swooped at them. Red Stone shouted again and waved his torch; her own smoky, blazing brand circled in air. Into the very flame came that long incredible beak as though to drive at them —then a squawk, a scream that fairly lifted their spines, and it was gone.

"Come on!" shouted Red Stone, and she was leaping after him, clutching spear and unlit torches in one arm, firebrand in the other.

They had beaten off the Thunderbird, but this was brief triumph. For they had not beaten him afar; the putrescent odor lingered; the swooping shape followed them, hung poised so closely that at times the torch-glow touched the Thing that floated there. And always the glow was reflected by those great round orbs up above.

They hurried on. Not to watch the death overhead was hard; yet they must watch the trail as well, and the torches. When one burned down, Red Stone lighted another and flung the blazing stump of the first high in air—so high that it gave them a glimpse of the hanging horror, the huge beak a spear-length long that carried death.

On and on through the darkness; the giant redwoods gave no protection, for the Thing swept under the towering branches, pursuing them with eerie and malignant persistence. Rain was boding in the air, but had not come. Lightning had ceased entirely, though now and again a mutter of distant thunder resounded.

"The Thing kills, but does not eat!" exclaimed Red Stone, as they hastened on. "It did not eat Little Flower—it killed, as it killed others, and let her lie. Why? Perhaps it eats only fish. Perhaps that devil Gray Snake knew this; the scent of fish draws the Thing. That was why he put the fish-oil on my back—"

He tripped, went floundering, and his torch was extinguished. Instantly the creature swooped, though it had no wing-beat; it floated down, silent and horrible, until Bright Sky sent up a shower of sparks from her own torch, and got another alight for Red Stone.

IT was an ugly moment, but it passed. They were getting toward home now, and the salt breath of the sea reached them. Red Stone slackened his pace to speak of the shaman.

"He'll be at the cave; let me go ahead," said he.

"No! Don't leave me!" she cried hurriedly, panic-stricken. He, with confidence regained, laughed and quickened pace. They were nearly at the cliff now.

"You have your fire; you'll be safe enough, Bright Sky! Wait down below, by the boat."

A passionate fury seized him, as he turned the corner of the cliffs and caught the gleam of a tiny cooking-fire on the ledge outside the cave. He forgot all else; reassured now as regarded the Thunderbird, carried out of restraint by the thought of Gray Snake up there, gorging on the deer he himself had brought in, Red Stone hurled his torch into the water and leaped at the cliff-path, disappearing from the girl's sight.

If he thought all danger past, she knew better. A terrible cry burst from her, as the light from her own torch caught a vast shape wheeling close, wheeling silently and flitting toward the cliff. She followed, desperately plunging at the well-known path.

She looked up. By the light of the tiny fire on the ledge outside the cave-mouth, she saw the figure of Gray Snake; he had expected her, but not Red Stone. She glimpsed, for one instant, the two shapes. She saw them moving, striking; saw Gray Snake dart for the cave and dive headlong into it, with the figure of Red Stone at his heels, grappling him—and then something blotted them out.

A cry of horror burst from her. The instant or two that she spent climbing that path seemed ages. Whirling her torch, she reached the ledge before the cave. A fetid odor assailed her. Shriek upon shriek came from the cave itself. Spear ready, she held up the torch and slid in.

Something blocked the way. Beneath it, protruding, she saw the moccasins of Red Stone. She seized his foot, tore him out bodily, found him hurt and senseless. In spasmodic rage and frantic terror she plunged her spear into the shapeless Thing beyond that blocked the way—again and again, setting the torch against it, wrenching the spear loose, driving it home afresh. The yells of Gray Snake were mingled with the frantic twittering, chirping cries of the inhuman creature; against the frightful odor of it, fought the crisping stench of feathers burning.

The entrance was narrowed still further by the stone they had placed there. She dropped her spear, darted to the stone, and put her weight on it. As it moved, a tide of blood came rushing forth, dark and noisome, around her feet. The stone blocked the entrance in part; she shoved it with frenetic strength, stumbled back into the darkness, caught up the body of Red Stone and carried him down the path.

SHE paused at the bottom, gasping, to examine him. Gray Snake must have struck him down, for he had two wounds on the head, but he breathed. She lugged him on among the dark rocks to where the nearly finished boat lay, and left him. Horror still hot upon her, she stole back up the path to where the embers of the little fire still afforded light, and the blazing torch she had dropped on the ledge. The deer lay there; Gray Snake had just begun to cut it up. She looked at the welling tide of blood, listened to the dread silence—and hastily snatched up the meat and fled. Whether she had killed the Thunderbird, she knew not, nor cared. The Thing was there safe; and escape beckoned. Nothing else mattered.

Into the dugout she flung the rudely fashioned paddles, dragged the boat to the water, and returned to Red Stone.

He was groaning faintly. She got him to the boat, lifted him in, and shoved it forth on the black waters.

A distant flash of lightning from the lessening storm lit up the shore, the rolling water, the boat, the cliff above with its ominous black boss of rock—then everything faded and was gone as she struck out, and a rush of rain filled the darkness.

THE rush and patter of rain, and darkness. . . . It filled the room around us, then was gone as Norman Fletcher switched on the lights. He leaned back in his chair; and what he saw in our faces must have gratified him, for he smiled as he reached for a fresh cigar and passed around the humidor.

I relaxed, stole a glance at Wallach, and saw that he was frowning, puzzled, intent. Professor Smythe's face caught my eye; he was stammering, trying to speak, unable to find words in the grip of some excitement that shook him. Some one else spoke up sharply.

"Look here, Mr. Fletcher! That thing wasn't any dragon! It was a Pteranodon, a giant member of the pterodactyl family—its fossil remains have been found in Kansas and other places. And it didn't have any tail."

"Others did." Fletcher laughed softly. "I've given you the result of my experiments; obviously, this was one instance of survival. It shows how the dragon-myth persisted, how the extinct flying reptile lingers in man's racial consciousness. Now, which one of you gentlemen desires to propose a subject for our next meeting?"

"I would," I said quickly. Norman Fletcher gave me a nod.

"Very well. What's it to be?"

Professor Smythe let out a squawk. Then Wallach chipped in ahead of him.

"Wait, please! One thing I'd like explained. We've just seen what's alleged to be an actual scene from the lives of prehistoric American Indians. I can vouch that it was no motion picture; I don't know what the devil it was—but *how did they speak English?*"

A dead silence fell. The Professor, purple in the face, restrained himself. Norman Fletcher gave Wallach a quizzical glance.

"Did you watch the moving lips of those who spoke?"

"I did; the words didn't correspond."

"No; they were dubbed in." Our host sighed. "My friends, no one has been able to translate what was said; I had to have words supplied, just as they're supplied on a sound track in a movie—"

"Wait, wait!" Professor Smythe bobbed up, waving something. "You don't know—you can't guess—by heavens, it's absolutely incredible!" He paused to get his breath. "Here's that photograph from Utah you haven't seen yet. Well, look at it! These amateur bone-hunters turned up the greatest thing that's ever been discovered, and let it go to ruin! Human bones mixed with prehistoric bones—the peculiar air-spaced bones of the Pteranodon—like no others! But look at it, look at it!"

The photographs were passed around. When Norman Fletcher saw them, he let out a gasp; and no wonder. I saw the reason when they came to me. For jutting out above what had been the bed of an ancient sea, and now was desert, they showed a cliff: exactly the same cliff we had just seen, with that peculiar black basalt mass halfway up, and beside it the mouth of a cave!

It positively flabbergasted all of us. It drove everything else out of our heads.

AS we drove homeward, Wallach said: "If we're to believe all this—Smythe bobs up with a photograph of the very place we saw in Norman Fletcher's trick picture, and a yarn about the bones of that guy Gray Snake and the Thunderbird having been found! Either it's the most damnable coincidence that ever happened—or it's sheer collusion."

"Smythe isn't that kind," I protested. "Norman Fletcher's too big a man for such a thing to be suspected. Look how he owned up to your question about the language!"

Wallach swore heartily. "Nobody's too big to fall for a good show like that; trouble is, it was too darned good. Coincidence? Not much. Me, I'll put my money on a frame-up! By the way, what subject did you propose for next week? You said you had a good one."

"My, Lord! I forgot all about it!" I exclaimed blankly. "I'll telephone Fletcher in the morning. Yes, it's a good one!" And I told him what it was.

Wallach chuckled. "I'll say it's good! This time, we've got that old fraud on the run, if he accepts your challenge!"

And Fletcher did accept it.

"The Singing Sands of Prester John," another colorful story in this series, will appear in our next issue.

Pilot and Son

KIM AVERY, the flyer's son, stepped nearer the edge of the cliff above the river. He leaned forward, as though to dive, then shrank back shivering in the April wind. It was thirty-five feet to the water. Kim knew the dive was going to be dangerous. If anything went wrong, no one would pull him out of the river. No one else was there. It was a thing you had to do alone.

If he got ashore all right, and afterward said the sentence with the *p's* in it without stammering, the dive would be worth-while. Kim had heard Dr. Knightwood say it was possible for shock to cure stammering. Dr. Knightwood had also said such cruel treatment was discountenanced by the medical profession: that its chances of success were slim, and that it might easily result in serious injury. But for Kim, the possibility of curing his affliction, however remote, was enough. Thus the boy had steeled himself to do the thing he dreaded most—dive from Hendrick Ledge to the river. Kim was eleven.

He stepped again to the outermost edge, his arms chilled bluish in the raw wind, his stomach taut with fear. He let himself lean out. Then, gasping, he gave the little thrust with his toes that toppled him over into space.

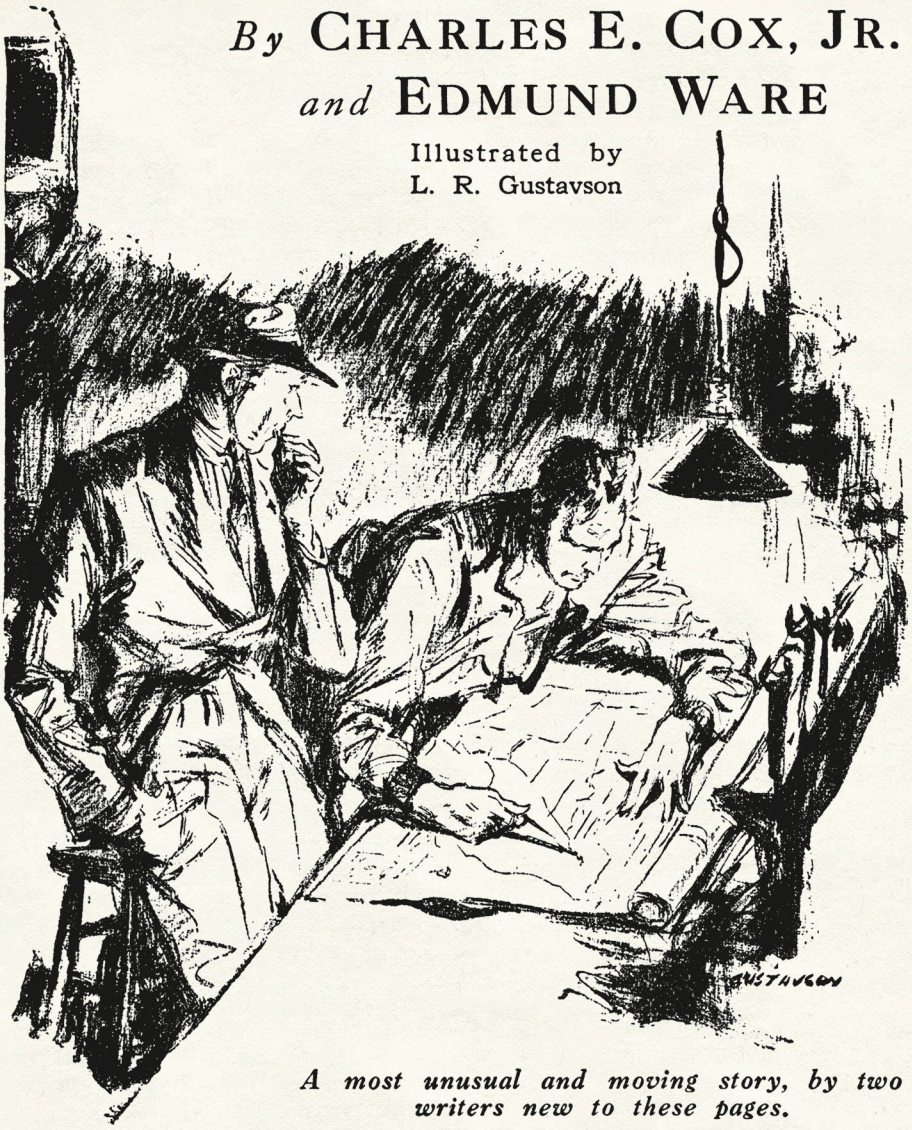
The drop almost sickened him. Wind howled in his ears, and queer noises of fright gibbered from his lips as he fell. He struck on a slant. The impact of the water on his chest was like a blow with the flat of an iron shovel. He went under. Half-dazed, he felt the current wrap around his legs. He kicked downward, came up swimming, and crawled out downstream on a shelf of the ledge. For a time he lay panting and quivering. Then he climbed the cliff, sat down beside his heaped clothes, and tried the sentence with the *p's* in it: "Police plan plenty of parades in Pocatello."

The words came wild and stammering. Kim's throat knotted. Fearful that some stranger might be eavesdropping on his misery, he glanced over his shoulder, and tried the sentence again: *"P-p-p-police p-p-p-plan—"*

No use. Maybe the shock hadn't been terrible enough. Maybe Dr. Knightwood had been right. Maybe a boy was really foolish to take chances like that.

By CHARLES E. COX, JR.
and EDMUND WARE

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



A most unusual and moving story, by two writers new to these pages.

But if you stammered, no risk was too great. The fellows at school mimicked you. The teachers wouldn't ask you questions, because when you tried to answer, the whole seventh grade giggled.

As he began dressing, a wave of revulsion swept the boy. He loathed himself, and the memory of the dive horrified him. It was the worst shock he could think up, and it hadn't worked.

He re-knotted his broken shoe-laces and put on his shoes. His chest ached, and he bent his head to inspect it. There was a red and spreading bruise where he had smacked the water. But the dive hadn't worked.

So now there was nothing but the stammering school, which cost fifteen hundred dollars a year. Kim knew his father didn't have the money, and probably wouldn't for years and years. But the Government Bureau of Commerce might decide to make Pine Springs a first-class airport. If that went through, there would be more business for his father—more student instruction, more hangar fees, more charter business for the big Stinson four-place. Shakily, the boy rebuilt his hope.

Before he turned into the woods, Kim looked once more over the edge of the cliff. He shuddered: "N-not t-t-terrible en-n-nough. Oh, wh-wh-y d-do I t-t-talk l-like I d-do?"

Kim lived with his father in a cottage in a clump of trees which marked the

north boundary of the Pine Springs airport. His father, Brad Avery, was owner and manager. It was dark when Kim got home. But in the warm-lit kitchen, sniffing the supper which his father was cooking on the gas-stove, Kim felt happy. Almost always it was so when he was with his father. In the air and on the ground, his father was cool and precise. Usually his father could anticipate what Kim was trying to say, often answering questions before Kim asked them. The boy knew in his heart that this was because it hurt his father to hear him talk. He never showed it. You could just tell it hurt him.

CRANING his neck toward the stove, Kim said: "Wh-what y-y-you—"

"Cube steak and boiled potatoes," his father answered. "I bought a pie, too. It's in the oven."

"Oh, b-b-boy!"

Two or three times during the meal Kim looked questioningly at his father. He couldn't bring himself to voice the question. He felt afraid of the answer.

At bedtime Kim came into the living-room buttoning his pajama top. He came to his father, who was reading in the chair by the light, and he felt his father's steady gray eyes searching his. His father's hand rested on his arm.

"What is it, Kimmy? Don't you want to talk?"

"N-n-no."

"What's on your mind? Why don't you tell a fellow?"

Eyes averted, Kim eased himself to the arm of his father's chair. "W-w-well, D-d-dad, you s-s-see, I know you must h-h-hate to h-h-hear me t-t-talk. And g-g-gosh, I h-h-hate it t-t-too."

"That's the only thing I hate, Kim—your feeling that way."

His father's hand touched the back of his neck; then Kim felt the lean, strong fingers rubbing through his hair. He smelled his father's tobacco smell, heard the soothing voice he loved so deeply, the low, growling voice, saying: "Take it easy, Kim. Take it easy. Now, what's on your mind, specially?"

"D-d-do you th-th-think b-b-business will be g-good this s-s-summer?"

"Too early to tell yet."

"D-d-d y-you th-think they'll m-m-make P-p-pine Springs f-f-first class, D-d-dad?"

"We'll know in about two weeks. It's between us and Masonville, and we've got a chance. Why?"

Kim struggled with his answer, the cords twitching in his neck: "Th-th-that s-s-s-stammering s-s-school Dr. Knightwood t-t-told us about. I m-m-mean, if we c-c-could afford it—"

"I'm thinking about that too, Kim. You know I am, don't you?"

"S-sure, D-dad, I know, b-b-but—"

"But what? Take it slow, and try to tell me."

"When the other k-k-kids m-m-mock me, I c-c-can't s-seem to st-stand it. I f-f-fought s-s-some of the b-boys, but I j-just k-keep on stammering, and I g-get so t-t-tired of f-fighting, D-dad. I —I—w-w-want them to l-like m-me."

His father's arms came tight around him, pulled him over into his lap. After a long time of quiet there, Kim felt his father grow tense. Then his father's fingers crept down and unbuttoned the top button of his pajamas, then the second button.

"Kim! How did you do that to your chest?"

Kim swallowed hard. "S-s-swimming."

"On a day like this? It never got above forty, and a thirty-mile surface wind at the field all day."

Kim's explanation was an exhausting effort of words, and when he had finished, he looked up. His father's face was white, and Kim had never seen it so. "S-say, what's the m-m-matter, D-dad?"

"I want you to see Dr. Knightwood again tomorrow, and tell him about this. I'll call him in the morning."

"B-but won't it c-c-cost—"

"Never mind about that. That's my job. Dr. Knightwood's is one place we've still got credit. Beat it now, Kimmy—to bed."

"W-w-when are y-y-you c-c-coming?"

"Pretty soon. I want to think a while."

"Y-y-you m-m-mean about m-me, D-d-dad?"

"Everything."

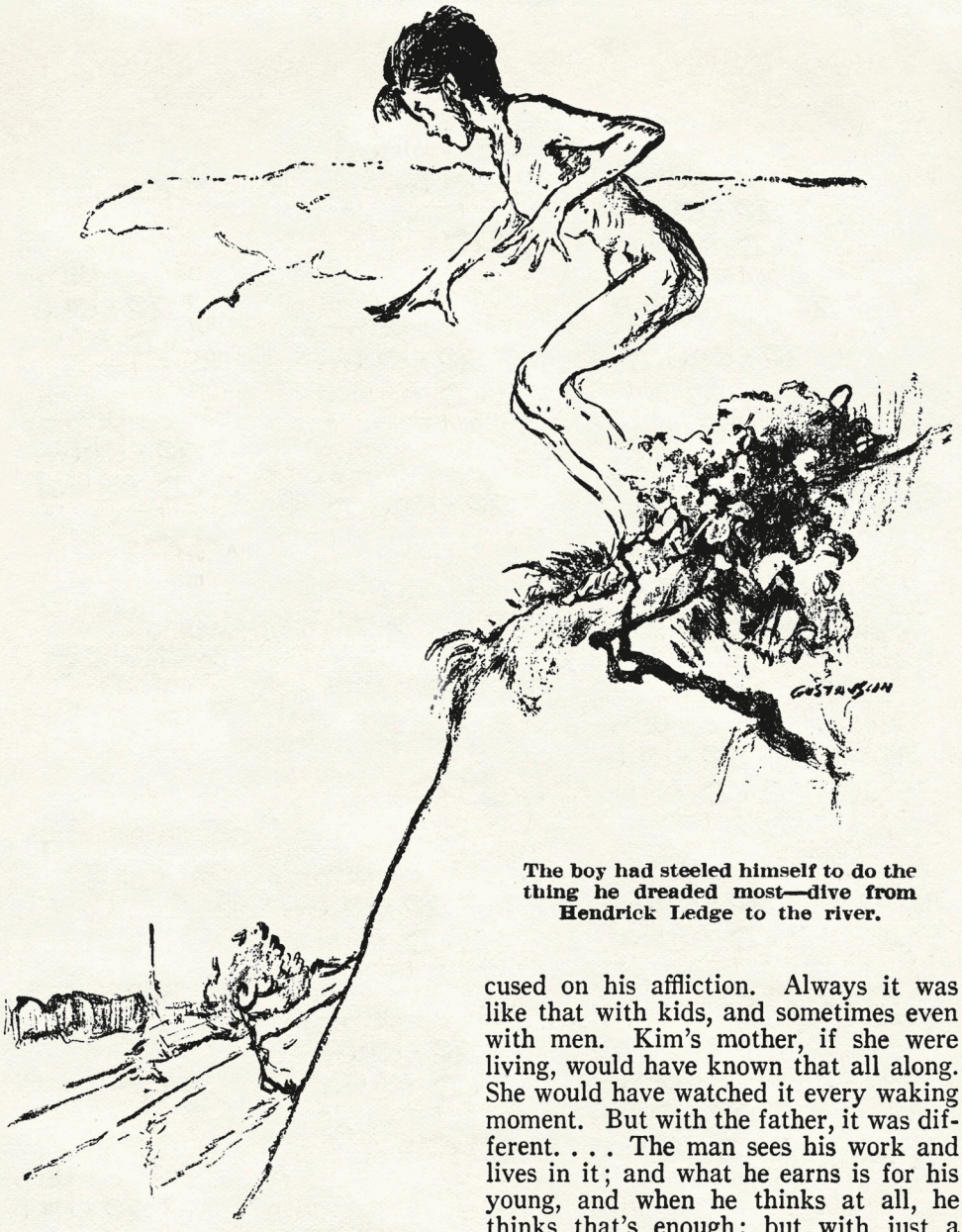
"Well, d-d-don't th-think t-too much about it, p-please d-d-don't, D-dad."

Kim brushed his head against his father's in a kind of good-night kiss, went to his room, and called back: "C-c-can I l-leave the d-d-door open just a l-l-little?"

"Sure."

"O-k-kay."

SITTING quietly in his chair, Brad Avery could not think as he wished to think. But he could feel as Kim felt, feel the desperation that had driven his son into diving from Hendrick Ledge.



The boy had steeled himself to do the thing he dreaded most—dive from Hendrick Ledge to the river.

If he would take a chance like that, he must be half mad with his problem. There was no way you could fight the cruelty of the other kids. You might tell them that to mock a boy who stammered was like laughing at a cripple. But they wouldn't see it that way, even if it were judicious to tell them. It was the utter aloneness of the boy's struggle that got hold of you. If you could only give him some reasonable assurance, instead of threadbare hopes. You thought of him toppling off that ledge, his legs shaking with cold and fright, and you went weak in the knees. A four-story dive, for a one-in-ten-thousand chance!

Brad Avery had not before fully realized how intensely Kim's senses focused on his affliction. Always it was like that with kids, and sometimes even with men. Kim's mother, if she were living, would have known that all along. She would have watched it every waking moment. But with the father, it was different. . . . The man sees his work and lives in it; and what he earns is for his young, and when he thinks at all, he thinks that's enough; but with just a father and a son, it is not enough. It is nothing.

Kim's father closed his eyes and tried to think, as he had tried before in discussing it with Dr. Knightwood, tried to locate the cause of his son's stammering. Kim had not always stammered. From that, Knightwood reasoned it had been induced by some kind of fear, or shock. Whatever caused the peculiar nervous twist was all but unknowable. Knightwood had said that Kim himself might discover it, but that even for him it would be difficult. The mind closed over those things, substituting, sublimating, till the actual cause was smothered.

The other way, the longer and surer way, was the stammering school in Chi-

cago. But what chance did you have of getting your hands on fifteen hundred dollars? There was no more borrowing. The banks had been good, but they had to call a halt on loans on reconditioned planes. Even if the Bureau made Pine Springs a first-class airport, it would take a long time.

There was one thing you might do—if you ran that kind of a show. You might take a chance and fly Chinks across from Vancouver at five hundred dollars a head! Now and then, around an out-of-the-way airport, you got a bid for something phony like that. You could make believe to yourself it was legitimate charter-flying, but there was no fun fooling yourself. It was too easy. And there was always one dead-end question you could put to those boys who wanted to fly at night and land in hay-fields, where it seemed there was always a drum of gas for refueling. Two or three times a year, some one like that would show up.

JUST a week ago, the cold day, when there were just a few people around the hangar, a fellow in a gray fedora and a heavy overcoat had made a play.

Abe Shomberg, the mechanic, had noticed the stranger first. "Hey, Brad," Abe had said, under his breath, "who's that guy?"

"Never saw him before," Brad had replied.

He and Abe had gone on with their work of checking the instruments in the Stinson. When they had the panel back in place, the fellow in the gray fedora had moved up close to them. He was standing on the aluminum step near the right-hand door of the ship. Brad remembered him as the cleanest man he had ever seen. He was so clean, so groomed-looking, that he couldn't be true. He was like some one off a stage.

"Nice ship you got here," the fellow had said.

"She'll fly," Brad had answered.

"Cross country?"

"That's what's she built for."

"Super-charger?"

"Sure—got a ceiling over twenty thousand."

"Landing-lights?"

Brad knew the stranger must have noticed the landing-lights under the leading edges of the wings, but he had said: "Sure. Why? Like to fly at night?"

The man had grinned, and said evasively: "How's business?"

"We're still hoping," Abe had said.

"Not too good, hey?"

"We could stand it better."

"Ever fly to Pocatello, Idaho?"

Abe and Brad had exchanged a reminiscent glance. They remembered a flight to Pocatello over the mountains. It had been at night, and they had run into terrific thunderstorms. Static washed out their beam, and for two hours they had flown on instruments.

"Sure. I know the way," Brad had told the man. "When do you want to start?"

"Well, there'd be three of us," the man had said. "There'd be some real money in it for you. My name is Magnus."

His suspicions aroused, Brad had asked the question that always proved whether the mission was on the level or not. "Well, Mr. Magnus, I hate to cut my own throat—but do you know Northwestern's Flight Six out of Kansas City will get you to Pocatello an hour faster and forty dollars cheaper than I could?"

"Oh," said Mr. Magnus, and then: "Say—you got a two-way radio?"

"Sure."

"Well, maybe we could do business sometime, hey?"

"You never can tell," Brad had said; and as Mr. Magnus strolled away, Kim had climbed into the plane.

"Wh-who is that g-g-guy, D-dad?" the boy had asked.

"Man name of Magnus," Brad had answered, re-setting the altimeter to check with the Pine Springs field.

"He's a phony, Kim," Abe Shomberg had remarked, climbing down with his satchel of wrenches.

"Wh-what's a phony?"

"A guy wants to go some place fast for ten times what it's worth for not tellin' you why."

After Abe had gone back into the hangar, Kim had asked: "D-d-dad, you w-w-wouldn't f-f-fly a phony, w-w-would you?"

"Well, what do you think?" Brad had asked his son.

"Sh-sh-should s-s-say not!"

AS Brad Avery sat in his chair by the light, he remembered the sound of Kim's "Should say not!" He remembered the trust, the adoration in Kim's eyes. Funny about that look. In a way, it was a kind of responsibility. Kim thought you could do no wrong. Maybe you were his ideal, what he longed to be. Whatever you were, he was proud of

your being. Well—what would Kim think if you should take a phony charter job sometime? There was money in it. Big money. What do you suppose a bird like Magnus would hand you for a night flight to Pocatello? A thousand? Twelve hundred? Well, if you ever took a job like that, you'd better not let the kid know about it. What would Kim think, if he ever found out? Would Magnus ever show up again? He acted, somehow, as though he planned to come back. But maybe, the way things were, it would be a mighty good thing if Magnus never returned.

IN Dr. Knightwood's office, Kim sat straight in his chair. He felt warm and quiet in his heart when he talked to the Doctor; and when the Doctor talked, he felt the gentleness in his voice.

"Somewhere, deep down," the Doctor was saying now, "every one of us is afraid of something."

Kim's head jerked. "B-but n-n-not my f-father."

"Yes, I think even your father must fear something, Kim."

"Wh-wh-what?"

"I don't know. Maybe he doesn't even know himself. Sometimes, you understand, it's almost impossible for a man or a boy to dig deep enough into himself to find the fear. You see it's like this: he may be ashamed of the fear, and so hide it from himself, because he doesn't like to see it. But no one should be ashamed of fear. A man or a boy who is afraid is *not* a coward, Kim. Do you believe that?"

Kim's face puckered. "M-m-my D-d-dad isn't af-fraid of anything, s-s-so you s-see, *I* d-don't w-want to b-b-be af-fra—" Kim had to stop. The words he wanted refused to come for a moment. Looking up into Dr. Knightwood's eyes, he was about to smile in apology, when he noticed the Doctor scrutinizing him with intense interest.

"Wait, Kim," the Doctor said. "You want to be fearless, because you think your father is fearless. Is that it? You want to be like him. If you were fearless, you would be like him. Is that the way you feel?"

Kim nodded.

"You admire your father a great deal? You can think of him as doing no wrong? You want to be that way yourself?"

"I g-g-guess I d-d-do, all r-right, y-yes."

Dr. Knightwood nodded. He smiled, his eyes bright with gentleness and understanding. Was it possible that sometime, in some crisis, the boy had not measured up, with a resulting sense of guilt, deep-hidden? "Maybe we're getting somewhere, Kim. Maybe we're sort of on the beam, hey?"

"Take it easy, Kim. What's on your mind?"

Kim flushed to the roots of his hair. "W-w-well, I always f-f-feel b-b-better after I t-t-talk to y-y-you."

"I'm very glad. Now that you have said that, I can say a little bit more to you. I want you to try to listen closely, and think very hard. Will you try?"

Kim sat stiffly at attention, and Dr. Knightwood began, choosing his words with great care. He was not a practicing psychiatrist, and he knew he might be on dangerous ground, but he was certain of his clue. "Now, think hard, Kim: can you remember ever being frightened badly, and showing the fright in front of your father? Did he ever rebuke you for being afraid, when you simply couldn't *help* being afraid?"

"N-n-no," came the quick answer.

"I don't mean now. I didn't expect you to remember it now. But it *may* have happened, Kim. You must make yourself realize that it *may* have happened."

The boy's eyes burned intensely as the Doctor continued:

"If you can go back in your memory, bit by bit—association, it is called—you *might* find out something. But remember this: if you find it, don't be afraid. Can you remember that?"

"Y-y-yes."

How could he stop them? What could he say?

"If I f-f-find out, d-d-don't be afraid."

"That's right."

"B-b-but, wh-when d-d-do you think I will f-f-find out, D-d-octor Knightwood?"

Dr. Knightwood stood up and looked from his office window at the afternoon traffic of Pine Springs. "Well, Kim—there you've got me. I don't know, and you don't know. You may find out today, or next week, or next month, or never. Something might happen to bring it clearly and suddenly into your mind. Or that something may never happen. But if you *do* remember, just be ready for it, will you?"

KIM'S lips shook. He steadied them carefully, drew a breath, and said: "If I n-n-never r-r-remember, then m-m-maybe the stammering s-s-s-school—"

"Would cure you?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Yes. The Chicago school is doing wonderful things."

"B-but that's only if D-d-dad c-c-could g-get the m-money?"

"I'm afraid that's it."

Kim stood up and took the Doctor's outstretched hand. He said: "W-w-well, thank you, sir."

Dr. Knightwood tapped him on the shoulder. "Now, no more shock-treatment, boy, hey? No more high-diving?"

Kim grinned, his eyes moistening: "N-n-n-never again!"

The boy went out into the raw light of the April afternoon. Across the street some schoolmates were playing baseball.

He avoided them, ducking through an alley to a back street. On the dirt of the road through the trees near his house, his footfalls were muffled. He walked with his eyes on the ground, wondering: What could it be? What scared me? What kind of thing did Dr. Knightwood mean?

He tried patiently to explore himself; and in his explorations came upon some small undated terrors, but remembering them now, he merely smiled. There was the time he had stuck his finger in the electric-light socket. He must have been less than five years old, because his mother was in the memory. There was another time—at the zoo, when the lion pawed the bars so close to his face. But, too mysterious and elusive, were the other times of darkness, of great trembling noises in the night. Now, in the sun-patched roadway among familiar trees, those things were vague.

Kim could not concentrate long on his remembering. There were too many new birds in the trees and shrubs, and he knew something about birds. He detected the note of a white-throat sparrow, two different thrushes. He saw a robin dart in to its nest. The growing leaves would hide that nest pretty soon. The boy felt cheered by these industrious and singing creatures. He would tell his father about them—birds, not fears; birds were better to tell about. . . .

From the porch, Kim saw his father striding up the road with some packages of provisions under his arm, and pipe-smoke swirling in his wake.

"D-d-dad, a f-f-fox sparrow—"

"I heard him too," said Brad, entering the house with his son. "Reminds me: Have to put on screens pretty soon. Did you see Dr. Knightwood?"

"Y-y-yes, I d-d-did. D-d-did you hear the h-h-hermit thrush?"

"Go on! Too early for hermit thrushes. What'd the Doctor have to say?"

"B-b-but honest, I know it w-w-was a h-hermit, D-dad."

"Okay, you win. Now tell me about the Doctor."

"The h-h-ermit s-sang when I w-was right beside the b-big p-p-p—"

"Pine?" It occurred to Brad Avery that his son's interest in birds had doubled in a day; that Kim was unconsciously using the birds to avoid discussing his conference with the Doctor.

"Y-yes, the b-big old d-d-dead white p-p-pine," Kim said.

Brad dumped his packages on the set tubs and went to the sink to wash his hands. He longed to hear about Knightwood. But he knew Kim didn't want to talk about it. Maybe the boy had had enough attention on his stammering for one day.

"Well, got some news for you," Brad said, whipping the towel on the wooden roller.

"Wh-what k-kind of n-news?"

This time, Brad told himself, the news would be good, or else! "Airport question up for final decision next Friday, week from today. We'll know, then, if we're going to be made first class. Cement runways! Grading! Hourly weather reports! Flood-lights! Something doing every minute, and me doing it, Kim. How'd you like that?"

"Oh, b-b-boy! S-s-swell."

"They moved the date up. I talked to a Bureau man today. I'm flying to Chicago, Friday, and I'll bring the good news back."

He wished Kim would ask to fly to Chicago with him, but supposed it was just as well if he didn't miss any school. Kim acted strangely—nervous, excited. Maybe Knightwood had got on the track of something. All this yammering about birds wasn't quite natural.

PINE SPRINGS was what is known as a cow-pasture airport. Cow-pasture airports are owned and operated near small towns by men with horizons in their eyes. These men fly because any other occupation is unthinkable.

Pine Springs Airways had a corrugated-iron hangar, a wind sock, three oil-drums, and a gas-pump containing 80-octane. There were a Taylor Cub for student flying, a Bird training-ship, and the big four-place Stinson for charter flights. The equipment was rather old, but beautifully conditioned by Shomberg, the mechanic, a tobacco-chewing genius with a musician's ear for motors.

ON Friday, an hour before school let out, Kim heard the sky-filling drone of the Stinson's Lycoming motor. High above the school building, the sound swelled to a thundering roar. Kim glanced furtively around the classroom. With a savage lifting of his heart, he noted the excitement in the eyes of his schoolmates, the patient smile of the teacher, whose voice had been drowned in a twelve-cylinder tumult. Kim remained poker-faced, but he was saying in his mind: "My father! My father! My father!"

"Bet he's traveling a hundred and fifty," whispered a boy near Kim.

Kim looked at the boy. "Th-that's n-n-nothing f-f-for h-h-him," he hissed.

The April weather had broken unseasonably warm. Walking across the landing field at sunset, Kim saw some huge white thunderheads in the west. Over the field a student was building up hours in the Taylor Cub. He landed at dusk, and the few sightseers left the field.

The dead heat hovered. Kim stood beside Abe Shomberg on the cement apron in front of the hangar. At dark, Abe switched on the boundary lights. "Hot, aint it?" he said to Kim.

"Y-y-you s-s-aid it. Is D-d-dad l-late?"

"He said after dark. He'll come, like always. You aint worryin', are you?"

"N-n-no. D-d-do you th-think they d-d-decided in f-favor of P-p-pine Springs, Abe?"

"We're kind of countin' on it, aint we, kid?" Abe said.

Beyond range of the dim light in the hangar, the night was thick black. Occasionally the west flamed with a burst of heat lightning. Kim moved closer to Abe. He watched the match-flare in Abe's face, as the mechanic lit a cigarette. It was dead still, but Abe cocked his head, and said: "Listen!"

Kim tried to catch the first faint sound of the big motor—but there was a closer sound, the scrape of a hoe on the cement, and then a snadowy movement beside them. Out of the dark, a voice said:

"Howdy—is the pilot around? I was over to his house, but it's dark."

Abe Shomberg gestured toward the black sky. "That's him comin', now. What can I do for you, Mister?"

The man came and stood beside them on the apron. "I better talk to him," he said, nodding toward the sky, where the motor sound came from.

"Suit yourself," Abe said.

"I was talking to him, couple weeks ago," the man said.

"Your name's Magnus, aint it?" Abe asked the stranger.

"That's right."

They saw the red and green wing-lights of the approaching plane, then the raking white beams of the landing-lights, sweeping the field. Kim trembled with admiration, as the ship circled the field, and came in with a faint *"o-o-omp"* as the wheels touched. Then the spaced bursts of the motor as Brad taxied up, stopping close outside the hangar.

Kim saw his father's face in the cockpit window. The propeller rocked, and was still—and his father's face was still, and straight. Brad Avery opened the cabin door and jumped down to the apron.

"Well," Abe shouted, running toward him, "aint you goin' to talk?"

"Masonville got it," said Kim's father.

"What the hell!" shrugged the mechanic. "What the hell."

Kim stood quiet, watching his father's face. He saw the quick, sharp look of recognition in his father's eyes, as Magnus walked up. "Had some bad news, boys?" Magnus asked.

Brad nodded; and Magnus, motioning toward the interior of the hangar, said: "Got a minute?"

KIM watched his father and Magnus walk into the hangar, watched their lips move, heard the low sound of their voices. Abe Shomberg had lifted the tail of the ship, and Kim went to help him swing it around into the hangar. "Abe," the boy whispered, close to the mechanic's ear, "is that th-the ph-phphony f-f-fellow?"

Abe smiled with one side of his mouth: "He wants that ride to Pocatello."

"Wh-whe-when?"

Abe's eyes showed a warning, and Kim turned to see his father striding back toward the plane. His father climbed to the cabin, then down again, carrying his map-case. He walked back to Magnus, and Kim watched them spread a map on a bench, and line out a course. Abe Shomberg, watching them from the corners of his eyes, said, "Huh," and went about tugging the ship up the apron.

"Abe!" Kim's father called. "Hold it! Fill her up, and look her over."

Magnus stood around, watching; and while he watched, Kim's father set the Sperry gyro on a new course. Then Magnus left the hangar, and Abe and Kim's father whispered together for a moment. Kim watched silently. He could feel the suspense tightening in his chest. They left the hangar doors wide open, the big ship facing out, and Abe went off into the darkness with a too-casual, "So-long."

Kim was alone with his father. They were walking across the hot, dark field toward home. "D-d-dad," Kim said, finding his father's hand, "is he r-r-really a ph-ph-phony?"

"I don't know."

"N-n-never mind about M-m-masonville, D-dad."

His father said nothing, and Kim spoke again, as they came to the cottage: "Are you g-g-going to f-fly him to P-p-poca-t-tello?"

BRAD'S fingers tightened around his son't hand. He bent close, and said: "Hush, Kim. Some one might be listening. He came in a car with his lights out."

Inside the house, Kim grabbed his father's arm, and said: "Th-th-then you *d-d-do* know he's a ph-phony!"

"Yes, I know," his father answered. "You beat it right to bed, now. It's after your time."

The heat was so oppressive that Kim lay in his bed with nothing over him. When he was ready, his father came and sat down beside him. "Have enough supper money for an ice-cream cone?" his father asked.

"Y-y-yes—t-two." Kim squirmed in the bed. He could just distinguish the shape of his father's head in the dark. "D-dad, th-that's t-too b-bad about M-masonville."

"We kind of counted on getting a break, didn't we?"

"Well, y-y-yes—but D-d-dad—" Kim felt his throat contracting. He waited a moment, then recovered his voice, and went on: "D-d-don't f-f-fly that g-g-guy to P-p-p-p—"

"Sh-sh, take it easy," his father said, close to his ear. "Nothing like that. You go to sleep."

When his father left the room, Kim lay a long time, thinking, his eyes wide open. The heat and stillness seemed to press down smotheringly, singing in his ears. There was something funny about all this. His eyelids drooped, lifted, closed. Something pretty funny. There was Pocatello, and it stayed in your mind even when you were almost asleep —Pocatello, Pocatello. The fellow was a phony, and Dad wouldn't fly a phony anywhere—Pocatello—

A LONG time later in the night, when the clap of thunder brought him straight up in his bed, Kim remembered his father charting the course with Magnus, setting the gyro, while Magnus watched. Why?

A streak of lightning turned the night into a greenish-white glare; and Kim winced, hugging his head in his hands. He felt the house tremble in the thunderclap. It had come close. "Hey, D-d-dad!" he called. There was no answer.

Kim got out of bed, and felt along the wall toward the door. He would just tell his father they ought to close the window. He would know his father was near, then. "D-d-dad! G-g-going to r-r-*rain!*" His voice broke, ending in a shrill, choking sound.

He had crossed the living-room, and was groping in the pitch black toward his father's bedroom door, when the night cracked open in a purple glare. Chair, table, all familiar objects showed weird. The living-room looked long, mile-long, unfamiliar. At the end of the room his father's door stood wide open. In the purple flash, he had seen the empty bed. His father was gone. He was alone. He knew he was alone, and his voice went high, and wavering, as he shrieked: "D-d-dad—D-dad—*D-da-dad!*"

He stood a moment gasping, his dry lips working in his panic. Then he went stumbling to his room and pulled his pants on over his pajamas, and ran back, and out the front door.

The first cold thrust of wind in the young leaves was like ice in his heart. It was like—he couldn't remember, but it was like something. He was on the dirt road, running toward the field, when the bolt hit a tree-top, and shot down into the earth. The light blinded him. In the following dark he thought he would never see again. There was a memory of glinting rain, and all the detail of the road as white as a magnesium flare. The ground rocked under his furious feet, and the deluge came. Pocatello—Pocatello!

"D-d-da-d!" he shrieked, plunging on toward the landing-field.

The lightning bolt had ripped into the dead white pine where Kim had heard the first thrush of spring. It had fallen across the road. A distant flash lighted the black barrier; and as Kim saw it, he covered his face with his hands and banged into it. He hung panting on the trunk, felt the bark rough and wet against his face, and sniffed the charred wood.

The seconds he lay against the fallen pine belonged, really, to another night in another time. But Kim did not then think of Dr. Knightwood. That other night was so intensely alive in him that there was room for nothing more: in the sky, the black, then flaming sky—and his father fighting the controls:

The terrific downdrafts, knocking the ship toward the earth, the reverse currents driving it up again with almost volcanic violence. When it was black, after the lightning flashes of that other night, he saw the ghoulish green light of the instrument-panel on his father's face. He remembered the dark shape of Abe Shomberg's head. Pocatello! Pocatello! The storms had caught them in the mountains on the way to Pocatello. He had screamed that night; and his screaming must have been the last straw to his father. He heard again the scorn in his father's voice, raised high above the thunder of the motor and the turbulence of the sky: "Shut up, Kim! Quit it! *Quit,* or I'll slap your face till it burns!"

THEN the cloud in which they flew had burst open. It had been like the inside of an exploding bomb, and they had come out beneath it fifty feet above a granite peak. He could see again, and feel again the vivid instinct, when his father's shoulders, wrenching at the stick, had pulled the ship away in a steep, climbing turn—and he had screamed again, screamed so it felt like daggers in his ears. In that still moment, his father had turned, and slapped him hard.

Now, hugging himself against the fallen pine, Kim felt the panic leaving him—and he thought of Dr. Knightwood. Had his father, too, been terrified that other night? Or just driven beyond his wits? It made no difference now. His father was going to fly a phony to Pocatello in this present storm—for

him! Whatever happened that other time was nothing, if only there was some way to stop him going tonight. But—had he already gone? And how could you prevent his going?

KIM squirmed underneath the tree-trunk, got to his feet, and ran. Once he stopped an instant, thinking he had heard the rumble of the Stinson, but it could have been the rain. The rain drummed, hurting his head when it hit, roaring in the trees and on the baked earth.

He went on, running across the landing-field between flashes. His hair fell dripping over his eyes, and his sleeves clung heavy on his arms. Then, in the instant of another lightning-flash, he saw the hangar outlined. What could he do now? How could he stop them? What could he say?

He heard the clangor of the rain on the corrugated-iron roof of the hangar. The plane was there! His father sat in the pilot's seat, hunched forward over the wheel. Kim leaped to the step, and caught at the door, shrieking: "Dad! Police! *Police!* They're everywhere!"

His father looked toward him, face tense in astonishment. He reached down, and pulled him to the seat. "What you doing here, Kim?"

"Police! *Police!*" the boy gasped, his chest heaving with exhaustion.

"They've been gone half an hour, Kim."

"Don't—don't fly that phony to Pocatello, Dad! Don't you do it for money, or me, or anything at all."

"I didn't, Kim," his father said, gazing curiously at the boy's white face. "I almost did it—but I didn't. I called the police myself, after you went to sleep. They were here when Magnus and his friends arrived. On the way in from Chicago, I heard on the plane radio—all about it."

"About what?"

"Some convict escaped from the penitentiary. I figured Magnus was back of it, the way he acted tonight. He and another fellow been planning it for weeks."

"Then—then you weren't going to fly them to Pocatello?"

"No—Mexico City. That was where they really planned to go."

"But you—you mapped a course, and—"

"I had to make it look right to Magnus, Kimmy."

Kim turned his head away. He put his cheek against the cabin window, and his hand over his face, and sobbed: "I woke up, and you were gone, and I thought you'd gone to Pocatello, Dad. I'd rather keep on stammering forever than have you do that."

Kim's eyes were hidden. He felt his father's fingers come along up the back of his neck to that place where it made you sleepy if he rubbed long. The fingers rubbed, and his father's voice came low and growling:

"Kim—listen to yourself: Did you know you weren't stammering?"

He hadn't known! Yet he could remember the sound of his own voice, hear again the words running smooth from his lips. He thought dreamily of Dr. Knightwood. Dr. Knightwood!

His head came up suddenly. He stared wide-eyed at his father. "Say—Dad! Thunderstorms! You know I used to be scared of thunderstorms—but not any more!"

Brad Avery was afraid to speak. It would be so easy to say a wrong thing now. He kept his fingers curled around the back of his son's neck, kept rubbing gently.

Kim leaned still closer. Maybe sometime he would tell his father what he had remembered. Maybe—a long time later, but not now.

"Were you ever afraid of anything, Dad?"

"Sure—lots of things."

"What? It's hard to find out what you're really scaredest of, you know. You have to hunt quite a while. So be sure."

"I came so close to flying to Mexico City tonight that I've been sitting here shaking for half an hour."

"Well, don't let it get you down, Dad."

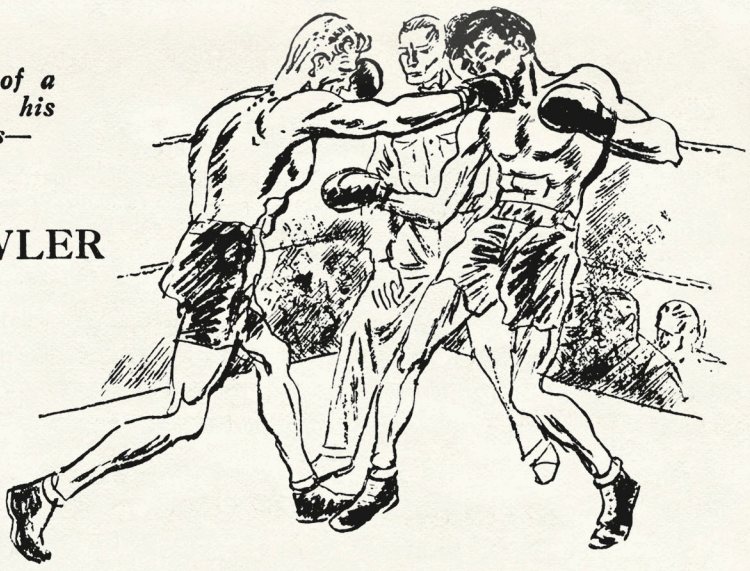
ONCE in a while, in the future, in moments of uncertainty, Kim's stammer returned. But it never lasted long. Always he knew he would learn again to control it. Now, in the big plane beside his father, he exulted. The rain whanged on the hangar roof, and out in the dark beyond the west boundary a jagged streak of lightning ripped downward to the earth. The noise, coming a second later, pounded at their eardrums. When it rolled off, lost in its own far echoes, Kim said: "Pooh! Police plan plenty of parades in Pocatello!"

His father bent and kissed his wet hair, saying: "Boy—you—*said* it!"

The drama of a fighter and his two worlds—

by

B. B. FOWLER



A Sock for Granny

BILL SANDLIN leaned forward in his seat until his chin almost rested on the iron rail that fronted the mezzanine seats. He gripped it with both hands and stared down at the square of canvas under the white blaze of light.

The girl beside him was so tiny that the elfin cone-shaped hat she wore just cleared his shoulder. She put her head on one side and gazed at him with bright concentration in her big brown eyes.

Bill patted her hand. He smiled, and the eyebrows lost some of their thickness, and his mouth softened. "Well, Joan, what do you think?"

Joan smiled and said: "You tell me, Billy."

He let his gaze travel swiftly over the half-filled Garden. "They know," he said with a jerk of his head at the crowd. "The only reason they've got as many here as they have, means that Cortez has his following who will turn out for anything."

"Is Cortez so good?" Joan asked.

Bill shrugged. "Yes and no. He has dynamite in each hand. It'll take a puncher to stop him. Prado couldn't break an eggshell with either hand. I took Prado in three easy rounds. Cortez knows all about Prado. He'll just wade in and sock. Watch."

Joan leaned over till her head was beside his, staring down at the ring as the gong for the opening round sounded.

Buck Prado came out fast at the bell, his wine-colored gloves moving in swift blurred passes. He was tall and slender, graceful as a ballet dancer.

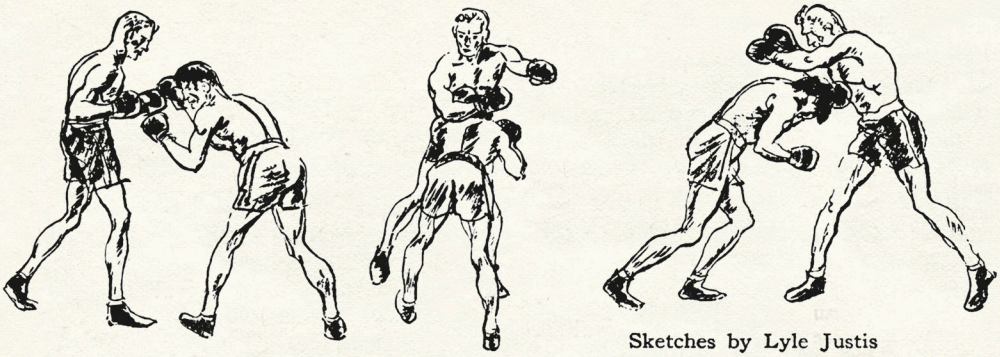
Cortez came out more slowly, his flat coffee-colored face expressionless. He weaved from the hips, crouched, deadly sure of himself as a poised snake. Prado's gloves spatted on Cortez' shoulders, arms. Two or three of the slapping, flicking punches found his jaw. Cortez shook his head, almost impatiently. He seemed bored and contemptuous.

Bill sniffed and said: "See! Slapsie-dapsie, Prado. It won't do. It's not good enough. Cortez will eat that stuff. Pinwheel Prado. He got by on his speed for a long time. Now his speed isn't good enough."

Cortez shook off another flurry of blows, and feinted with head, shoulders, elbows; and snakes of supple muscles rippled across his shoulders. He was inside Prado's guard. Then he struck, left and right, smashing, clubbing blows to the body. Bill grunted as he saw Prado's body jerk. . . .

At the beginning of the third round Joan said with her eyes on Cortez. "He's as relentless as a machine. He's scornful of Prado."

Bill started to nod, then said, "Ah!" with a quick rush of breath as he jerked erect. Prado came out of his shell in a swift flurry of gloves. Cortez swayed like a wind-tossed reed, went down and



Sketches by Lyle Justis

under, and came up to nail Prado with a left that threw Prado back on his heels. The following right was like a thunderbolt. It slammed Prado almost off his feet back against the ropes.

Cortez slipped sidewise and let Prado fall on his face. He swung on his heel and walked away without glancing back. While the referee counted above Prado, he leaned against the ropes in a neutral corner and stared out over the crowd in impassive indifference.

Joan let her breath out in a long, slow sigh. "I'm glad you're not going to fight him," she said softly. "He's inhuman." She glanced at Bill as she said it, and got only a quick, abstracted glance and an equally abstracted shrug.

They went out with the flow of the crowd, Joan clinging to his arm. As he walked, Bill was conscious of an aloof, alien feeling that filled him. It was as if he didn't belong any more. He threw a last glance down at the ring. If he had belonged, he'd have been down there at the ringside.

A man beside them rolled a big cigar in his mouth and said to his neighbor. "Brother, you saw the next champ in there tonight."

"Nuts!" The other man said in a tone of disgust. "Cortez is good. I'm not denying that. But Prado smells. When Cortez meets Sandlin, it will be a different story. Then we'll see just how good he is. Me, I think Sandlin will pin the brown boy's ears back and take him to town."

"Maybe," the man with the cigar said. "But I don't think Sandlin will ever meet him. The champ has gone high hat. He wouldn't fight a killer like Cortez. Sandlin is through."

Bill glanced at Joan to see how she took it. He didn't smile. It was all too serious for that.

She tightened her grip on his arm, and smiled brilliantly. "Billy is through," she said. "He's through being battered around. There are more important things to do than that."

Bill didn't answer. He was thinking of the things that were more important. He had met Joan a year ago, before he had fought Prado. He remembered the sharp elation that filled him that night. He was making his last fight. In her he saw a new world. She was one of the real folks of the earth. They had become engaged after he had beaten Prado. He was going to be a business man.

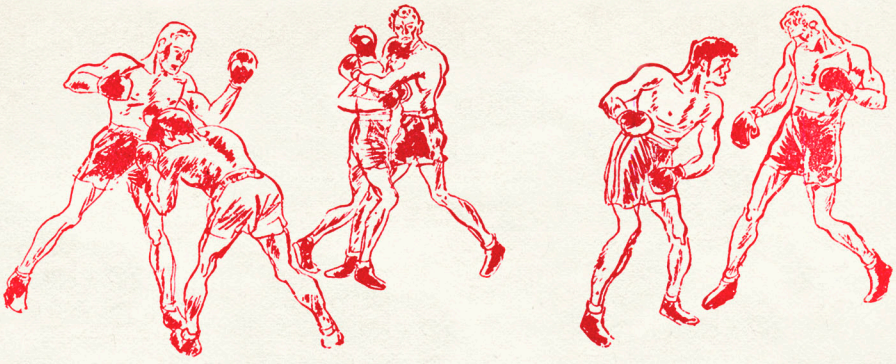
He felt a little better as he thought of it. Every morning now he went to Fran Peake's office. Fran was Joan's uncle. He had taken Bill into the firm. He was teaching him the business. When he had learned the ropes, he was going to invest his ring savings. Fran was that kind of a square shooter. He wouldn't take any of Bill's money until they were both sure that he was going to fit, and that the business warranted the investment. If he could only have felt sure of himself, everything would have been all right. But he wasn't sure.

SANDLIN threw a lingering glance around the wide hall in the old Peake house. Here was the thing that worried him, in reality and substance. He always felt alien and aloof in this house. He saw himself in the long mirror, a wide-shouldered young man, with a rugged, homely face. At the same time he could see his own uneasiness and lack of surety.

Joan caught his arm and said: "Come on, tough guy. Granny is waiting."

Bill grinned. Joan was the one thing in the house he understood. She gave his heart a lift and made him feel hopeful when she caught his arm and spoke in that gay and lilting voice.

At the end of the big room he stopped and gazed for a brief second while Joan danced the length of the room, calling: "Here we are, Granny. We were very good. Didn't keep you up too late."



At the far end of the room where Granny sat, ruddy flames danced in a fireplace, chasing shadows over the oak-paneled walls, glinting hotly on the brasses beside the hearth, winking on the huge silver bowl on the long refectory table. He followed the dancing shadows up the far wall to the row of long-dead Peakes in their tarnished gold frames, and it seemed to him that the shadows made the painted faces frown down at him.

Granny watched him come the length of the room with her brown eyes that were so incongruously youthful and alive in her thin aristocratic face. She closed a book carefully with one frail, blue-veined hand, and the dove-gray silk of her dress rustled as she moved. She looked squarely at Bill and said:

"Well, young man, you are early. Your fights usually keep you out later than this."

The way she said "your fights" made them seem a personal possession of Bill's. It was as though she were reminding him that the prize-ring was his world, just as this was hers.

Bill murmured something. He felt incoherent and uncouth before this old aristocrat who called him "young man" in that tone that chilled him. He felt inarticulate, because somehow he couldn't bring himself to tell her that both semi-final and main bouts had ended abruptly with knockouts. He had no words with which to talk to her.

Over coffee and sandwiches she fixed Bill with her bright gaze and said: "Young man, what is behind all the mysterious doings at the office these days? Fran has been in Connecticut for a week now. His letters do not tell me what it is all about. But I feel it is important."

Bill shook his head slowly. "It's something about some changes in the factory." He felt angry that he was not able to tell her more definitely. He wanted so desperately to be able to talk easily to this old lady, to chat with her and call her "Granny" as Joan did.

"Oh, well," Granny said lightly, "Fran will be home soon, and then we'll know."

Bill winced a little. Across the fireplace he saw Joan looking at him gravely, a little speculatively, and he felt even more uncomfortable. . . .

He walked home slowly with the weight of his loneliness upon him. He had walked out of a world of his own, and had failed to reach the one to which he aspired.

He was at his desk in the morning when Fran came into the office. Fran's breezy greeting, the warm grip of his hand, lifted a little of his gloom. He found himself studying Fran to see what it was he himself lacked, and felt baffled. Fran was big, a little paunchy, with gray eyes made strangely light by the high color that the golf-links had given him. He was breezy, easy in his manner, a regular guy. And he belonged.

After the first greeting, Fran said: "Come into my office, Bill; I want to talk to you."

Across the wide desk Fran said to Bill: "It's come, Bill. Our big chance is with us."

Bill nodded, and Fran went on: "I've been at the factory for a week with an expert who has a new process for us. It means a complete re-tooling and re-designing of the whole plant. When that's done, we'll be miles ahead of any competitor in our field. I'm not guessing now. I'm sure of this."

He paused, fixed Bill squarely and said: "The only drawback is that it comes at a bad time. You've been in the office long enough to know our troubles. The strikes last year cost us plenty."

"Yes, I know," Bill said. It made him feel better suddenly to realize that he had learned a lot here at his desk, had grasped something of what this business was all about.

"I'm glad you're not going to fight him," she said.

"I'm putting it up to you squarely. If we can raise the money, our future is assured. But I've got to be careful who I let in on this. I know where I can get money. But because of our position, I'll have to make too many concessions, pay too much for the cash."

"I've got a hundred thousand you can have," Bill said sharply. "You know that, Fran."

Fran smiled warmly and said: "Yes, I know. I've got a couple of hundred thousand I can put my hands on. That's enough to go ahead with. But we'll need another hundred thousand cash to get into production."

He stared at Bill again for a few minutes, then went on. "There you have it. We have everything but the money. Another time in the past, I'd have been willing to go ahead. But there are too many jitters in the financial world. I don't like to gamble your money and mine, and wind up behind the eight-ball later."

Bill let his gaze wander through the window. He could see the sign atop the Daily *Express* Building. It said in huge letters: "READ JOE BARKER'S COLUMN FOR THE BEST IN SPORTS."

Bill thought of Joe Barker, the shrewd-eyed, sharp-tongued sport columnist, and his decision came to him. He turned slowly back to Fran and asked: "How soon would you have to have that last hundred thousand?"

Fran's eyes narrowed. Bill could see the question behind his answer. "By early summer we'd be all set for production. We'd have to have it then."

Bill stood up. "I know where I can get at least a hundred thousand by that time."

"Where?" Fran asked.

"I'll go out and do a little scouting. Then I'll let you know."

He closed Fran's office door softly behind him. His decision made him feel a little cold and tight inside. It was fraught with so much of importance to himself and his life.

BILL found Doc Sayres in his cubby-hole of an office, feet on the battered desk, the old derby pushed far back on his bald head. He glanced up as Bill came in, and his little black eyes popped wide. He said, "Huh!" in a surprised voice.

His feet came down on the floor with a bang. He heaved to his feet and began to pump Bill's hand. "Hell, kid, I was just thinking about you. Did you see that fight last night?"

Bill nodded. "Yeah. What is my title worth for a fight with Cortez?"

Doc rubbed his hands together, and his face creased in a hundred smiling wrinkles. "Now, kid, you're talking. I knew all that quitting stuff was the baloney."

"It wasn't the baloney," Bill said sharply. "But there've been a few changes in my plans. I'm going to need some money by early summer. How much can I get for a fight with Cortez?"

Doc leaned back in his creaky chair and grinned. "Now, listen, kid, you don't have to worry about that. It's a natural. I'll have all the promoters fighting for it. I can get us a guarantee of a hundred and fifty grand, easy. It'll pack any park in the country to open the outdoor season. A cut on the gate would maybe bring you more. But a hundred and fifty grand we could get positively."

"That's all right by me, Doc," Bill said. "I've got to have a hundred grand, clear, by early summer. You go ahead and fix things."

Doc rubbed his hands together and reached for the telephone. He kept chuckling to himself: "A natural! A natural it is."

"I'll leave everything to you, Doc," Billy said slowly. "I'm not in bad shape right now. But fix a few tune-up fights to pay training expenses and get my timing right."

"Sure, sure," Doc said. "I'll do that. I'll get you some boys who are good enough to make you step. I'll fix that. You just leave it to me."

Doc was dialing a number when Bill left the office. He stood outside for a moment in the bare corridor of the old building. He felt no excitement over the step he had just taken. Granny's face floated in front of him. He thought it strange that at such a time he should think of Granny instead of Joan.

Back in the office he walked straight in to Fran. He stood, hands in his pockets, feet spread, his blue eyes hard and bright as he told him about it.

"Listen, Bill," Fran said harshly; "you don't have to do this. "You're through with all that. Think what Joan will say about it. Think what Mother will say."

"I know what I have to do," Billy said. "I can do my own thinking. I'm going through with it. There's just one condition: You'll keep it, because you're a square guy and I demand it. Don't tell either Joan or your mother why I'm taking this on. I want it that way."

For a long time Fran met his gaze, then shrugged. "Okay, Bill, if that's the way you want it. But I think you're being foolish."

"I'm not being foolish," Bill said. "I've heard you say yourself that you didn't want your mother or Joan worried about business. Tell them why I'm doing this, and they'll really worry. So keep it to yourself. I'll handle my end. Even with taxes and expenses I'll have a hundred thousand to turn over to the firm. You go ahead and start things. I'll do the rest."

HE turned on his heel and walked out of the office. He walked down to the street and strode briskly downtown. He didn't know where he was going, and didn't care much. He had a tough job on his hands, facing Granny and Joan. He wanted to think awhile.

He called Joan on the phone before he ate dinner. He wanted to give her time to tell Granny and prepare herself before he called. He could feel the brightness flow out of her voice as she talked, leaving it tight and hard: as tight and hard as he felt inside.

It was in her eyes when she met him at the door that evening. But she had recovered her composure. He felt her hands tremble as he caught them, but her voice was steady, very low, but steady.

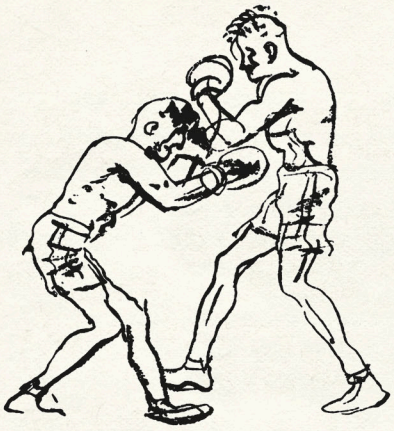
"I don't know why you've done this, Billy. You know how I feel about your fighting again." She managed a wan smile. "I'm not just a managing woman, Billy. I love you so gosh darn much, I hate to think of you getting hurt. Why are you doing it, Billy?"

He met her eyes squarely. "I can't tell you that, Joan. But it's a good reason. Can you take my word for that? Can you take my word and let me stand on my own feet and work this out in my own way?"

She nodded slowly. "Yes, I can do that, Billy. I can wait, and maybe find out later what your reason was. But it's asking quite a bit, I'm afraid." Her voice caught. "I'm afraid it's going to make a big difference."

Bill nodded. "I've thought of that." His jaw tightened a little. "It's not just the fight and what it means. There's something else. There's something I've got to find out about myself."

There was a depth of understanding in Joan at that moment that moved him strangely. He realized then that there



was a wisdom in her that he had never plumbed. The realization came to him as she said: "I know how it is, Billy. I've been praying that you'd get used to us. I'm still praying, Billy."

He felt her tremble in his arms as he drew her close. The fragrance of her kiss remained on his lips as he went in to face Granny.

She was standing beside the fireplace, an imperious little figure. Her dove-gray silk dress rustled stiffly as she turned to meet him. There was something almost quizzical in her bright eyes. There was something strange and mystifying in her voice as she said: "Well, young man, I hear you are going back to your profession."

"Yes," Bill said harshly. "I'm going back to my profession."

He shifted on his feet, tried to do something with his hands to make them less conspicuous. He felt half angry, altogether confused.

The anger made him say: "At least it's a profession I know. At least it's something I understand."

He turned away quickly so that she wouldn't see the misery in his eyes, and strode through the room to the door.

As he swung the door open, he heard her voice, with a strange little note in it that puzzled him. She was saying: "Well, that's the first time I ever heard that boy speak right out."

The words were understandable. It was the note in her voice that puzzled him.

Afterward Joan stood in the hall and said. "We'll just let it ride the way it is, Billy. I can't do anything else until I know for sure. Because I love you, tough guy."

Bill grinned slowly. Then he said: "I don't believe I ever told you just how swell I think you are. I never told you, because I never really knew until this minute."

As he closed the door, she said shakily: "So long, tough guy. I'll be pulling for you."

Later he was honest enough not to feel martyrdom. If he had told Joan why he had taken the fight, she would have felt differently perhaps. But there was something deeper behind it all. He had to win into the new world on his own. He had to be accepted for himself, not for what he had done for the Peake family.

HE fought four times during the winter and spring, eight- and ten-round bouts with men who were just good enough to make him step. Two of them were tough fights, with youngsters who were coming, and went into the fight to win quick recognition by stopping the champ.

He took all four bouts by knockouts, and the sport writers raved. Only Doc Sayres looked at all worried. Doc put his finger on it when he said: "You're trying too hard, kid. You used to be as loose as a sieve full of ashes. Now you're all strung up like a banjo. I don't like it. Relax, kid. Relax and loosen up."

And Bill knew that Doc was right. Something had gone out of him since that last fight with Prado. Something had gone out, and something else had flowed in to replace it. Whatever it was, it was there now, making him tense and taut inside.

He tried to shake it later in the spring when he went out into the country and settled down to real training. He knew he was going to be all right. He was a natural lightweight. He wouldn't have to sweat himself to death to get down to 135. So as the days pulled along through the spring, he tried to loosen up, tried to get the old effortless drive into his punches. And all the time he knew he was failing.

Joan wrote regularly. One part of him lived on her breezy, chatty letters that were like messages from another sphere. There was that same something in them that baffled him in Joan. Fran wrote occasionally, begging for permission to tell the reasons behind the fight. But on that point Bill was relentless. It would spoil everything if it came about that way.

In every letter Bill asked about Granny. Even in his letters, he called her Mrs. Peake. He didn't dare take the

liberty of calling her Granny. Joan and Fran both sent him word of Granny. She was as well and as active as ever. But he gathered from the letters that she did not ask about him. The omission hurt more than anything else. Granny was a symbol of the world to which he aspired. She stood for all of it, its background, code and laws. If he could understand Granny, he felt, and stand before her once on her level, his victory would be assured.

Oddly enough, Bill thought of Granny as he crawled through the ropes on the night of the fight. He heard the roar of the crowd about his ears, stepped into the white glare of light, and thought about her in the long, dim room with the flicker of firelight on the walls amid the oil paintings of bygone generations of Peakes. He had a swift picture of her in her rustling dove-gray silk; he visualized her quick bright eyes and her frail aristocratic hands.

He looked at his own square, strong hands encased in layers of tape before the gloves were put on, and smiled thinly. They were the hands of his profession, a world removed from Granny and the old house off Washington Square.

He gazed out over the sea of faces in the darkness beyond the lights while his seconds laced the gloves on his hands. Myriads of fireflies danced up in waves toward the sky. Those would be the cigarettes. The noise of the crowd was like the hoarse murmur of a restless sea. Closer to him he could see the rows of faces, white, upturned toward him. The clack of the typewriters at the ringside was sharp and staccato.

He glanced at Cortez' flat, expressionless mask quickly and impersonally and without feeling, as they stood in the center of the ring listening to the referee's instructions. Then he walked back to his corner and slipped out of his bathrobe. The muscles along his shoulders and arms rippled easily. He shuffled his feet on the canvas, and knew that he was in shape to go the route. He had never felt better. At the same time, he knew that he was not right. He was still strung too tautly inside.

WITH the clang of the bell, he came swiftly to the center of the ring. There was no wild rush to battle. That was not his way. He was the fencer till he saw his opening. The right was held for that. When it came, he would hit thunderously.

He stabbed with his left, and found the target of the impassive face that bobbed and weaved before him. Cortez shook his head as he had shaken it when Prado had found him with his flicking gloves. But this time there was no bored contempt in his manner. He was the panther, but this time he was stalking dangerous prey. That knowledge was written in his manner, in the way he moved tonight.

It took one round to find out that Cortez was as tough as he was credited with being. Stabbing lefts halted him momentarily but did not stop him. He shook them off and came everlastingly boring in, weaving, feinting, looking for an opening to the body to strike his clubbing, killing blows.

It was in the third that he reached Bill with left and right to the ribs. Bill felt the dull shock of them. They didn't hurt. He heard the changed roar of the crowd, who sensed a swing in the battle. Up till now it had been all Bill's left. But now Cortez was finding him. And having found him, Cortez would keep boring in, slowing him down with his body punching until he got the range for a knockout. That was the Cortez method of battle.

Bill took the clubbing lefts and rights again in the fourth round. And again in the fifth. In the sixth when he took them, they hurt. He found himself jerking back with them. And he saw the gleam of triumph in the dull black eyes.

In his corner Doc Sayres' voice was almost broken with pleading: "For cripes sake, kid, relax. Relax and let yourself go. You can take this guy. You can take him. But relax and start throwing leather like you can."

Bill knew Doc was right. But it was no use. Something inside him wasn't

working as it should. Something was there which would not let him relax. He tried desperately to fix in his mind what it was and failed.

In the seventh round he found Cortez with an uppercut that lifted the little brown man on his toes, and the crowd howled. He stepped in, punching fast, and Cortez went into a shell. He retreated across the ring with Bill on top of him. Bill was trying desperately now. This was the time to finish the job.

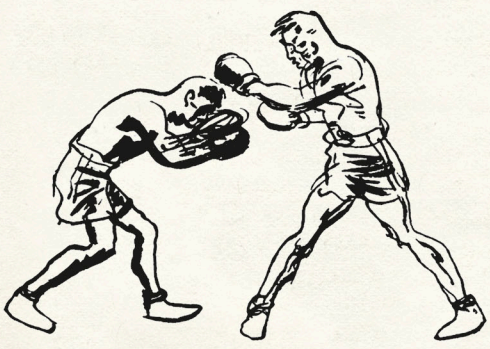
Back of him, some one was shrieking. Afterward he knew it was Doc Sayres who saw what he saw. Only Bill saw it too late. Left and right exploded on Bill's ribs, and he felt as if he were caving in. Lights exploded before his eyes, and he went down; that would be the Cortez left and right to the jaw.

He shook his head to clear the mist from before his eyes, and watched the shadow of the referee's arm. At seven he came up on one knee. Cortez was leaning forward in the neutral corner. He was ready for the kill.

SOMEHOW Bill covered up as Cortez rushed him. His left stabbed, and stabbed again. He scored twice and set Cortez back on his heels. But only for a second. Bobbing and weaving, the little brown man came in. He shook his head as he took another of Bill's lefts, sidestepped, bobbed—and then the bell.

He didn't listen to Doc. He was trying to figure something. He knew Doc was trying to warn him, but it didn't sink in. He was groping for something else, something about himself that lay out beyond the ring.

He went out with the bell to meet Cortez. He stabbed him with a left, then tried the uppercut again, and saw how clever the little brown man really was. He had changed his stance; one shoulder blocked the uppercut. As he blocked, he stepped in fast, and scored twice again to Bill's ribs.



A warning bell began to beat in the back of Bill's head. He knew he was slowing down. The body blows were doing their work. There was something he should do, but he didn't know exactly what it was.

He walked soggily back to his corner. He knew the timbre of the voice of the crowd. They were waiting, waiting for the kill. And it would be a Cortez kill.

He dropped onto his stool, and something jabbed him in the sore ribs. He glanced down, and knew that he was dreaming. It couldn't be. He blinked, but there she was—Granny, in her dove-gray silk that rustled when she walked. She was holding a gray silk umbrella in her hand and looking up at him with her bright brown eyes that were so young and alive.

"Young man!" she said, and Bill blinked. "Young man, why don't you get up on your feet and really do something? I didn't come all the way here to see one of us fight like a milksop. You do something to justify my coming here. Do you hear me, young man?"

Way down deep, Bill felt something melt. The thing that he had been groping for was so clear that it startled him. He had wanted these people to accept him for himself, and he had never been himself. He had tightened up inside and tried too hard—just as he was trying too hard tonight.

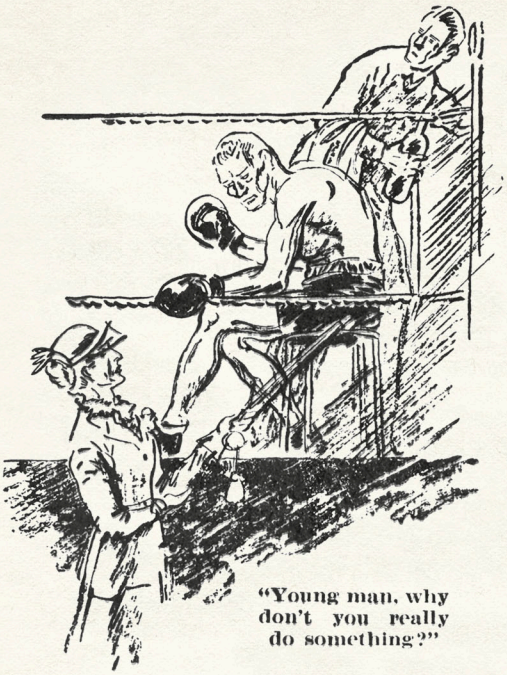
The knowledge swept his mind clear. He felt strength flowing back into his body, rippling in warm waves along his arms. He put one hand on the ropes and smiled down on Granny, smiled broadly, his eyes shining.

"Granny," he said, "I'll knock him into your lap for you."

She smiled back, her bright eyes dancing. "Now," she said clearly, "you're talking, Billy."

He stood up as the warning sounded. In the sudden hush he could hear the stiff rustle of Granny's dove-gray silk as she turned around and started back along the aisle. Some one in the press row laughed. Then the gong rang.

He didn't come roaring out of his corner this time, either. He went swiftly. His muscles felt like liquid. All the tightness was gone. It was as though some one had squirted oil in his joints. He didn't stab with his left this time. It lashed out of its own accord. And there



"Young man, why don't you really do something?"

was steam behind it. It set Cortez back on his heels. The right came ripping in after it—Cortez caught it on one shoulder and it turned him half around. The left lashed again and spun him back. The three blows were split seconds apart.

Bill saw the quick gleam of something approaching fear in Cortez' black eyes, and grinned thinly. He stepped around the brown man with the roar of the crowd changing again, rising in the swift elation of the mob who sees a quick and unexpected shift of battle.

Cortez bobbed, weaved, feinted, tried with left and right again. Bill stepped away, swayed from the hips and nailed Cortez with a left. He stepped around the brown man again, throwing punches with the abandon of a boy throwing snowballs. He could see Cortez' eyes grow blank and dull again, the thin brows pulling down in a frown of worry. The complete reversal of form and action had him puzzled.

When he came back to his corner, the crowd was cheering. Doc Sayres slapped him on the back and said: "See, I told you to loosen up. Now you're slapping his ears down."

Bill said nothing. He leaned forward on his stool. All his weariness had left him. It had gone with the taut coldness that had possessed him for so long. All he had to do now was be himself—now and forever.

He punched his gloves together with nervous energy and waited for the bell. With the clang, he came out of his corner fast, ducked, weaved, shot a left that nailed Cortez again, and followed it with a right that caught the brown man on the shoulder and spun him half around. Bill stepped in fast, and spun him back with a left hook. Cortez ducked behind his hands, and his chin met an uppercut that threw him off balance.

Bill felt cool, poised, ready. He didn't hurry now. At least, he was not conscious of hurrying. Footwork, punching and timing were all part of the coördinated whole. He measured Cortez with the left, a driving left, then shot the right over squarely on the button.

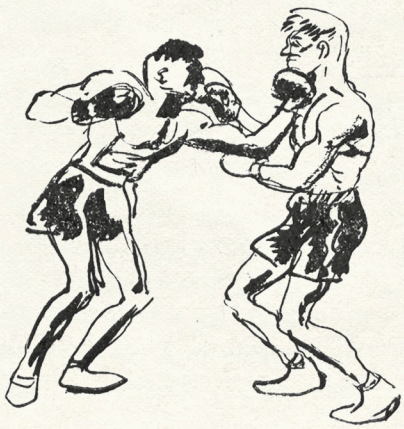
"That," he said as Cortez dropped, "was for Granny."

Cortez tried three times to get up while the referee counted. Then his seconds came out to pick up the dazed little brown battler who had seen victory riding on his gloves a few minutes before.

Bill walked to his corner and looked down into the ringside seats. He saw Fran, with Joan on one side, Granny on the other. He wondered if Fran had broken his word, and did not care. Later he was to know that Joan and Granny decided on their own to come. Even then it didn't matter. He had won his own victory. He knew now how to walk into his new world. He had opened the road himself.

He looked down into Joan's eyes and saw the same knowledge. Then he faced Granny. He smiled down at her for a second, then joined his hands over his head in a gesture of victory.

Granny's silk umbrella fell to the floor and rolled down the aisle unnoticed. She was smiling up at Bill, her eyes twinkling. She sat primly upright, put her two gray gloved hands over her head, and gave him back his salute.



Jimmy-the-Rag and Nor'west Jane fight through deadly peril in this stirring South Seas story.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

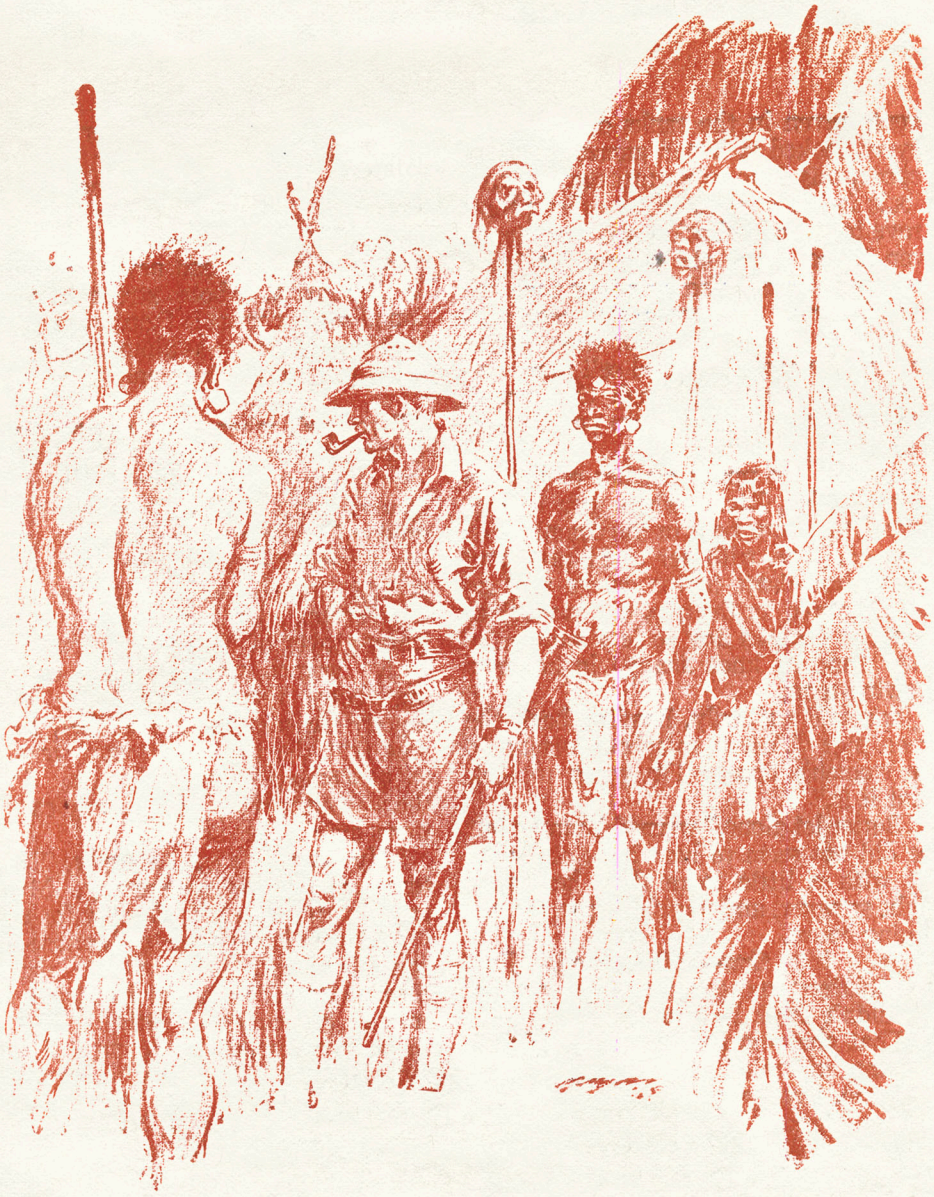
Illustrated by Austin Briggs

The Devil

IT was not exactly a pig; but then you could hardly have called it anything else—unless you said it was a fish; in some aspects it did resemble a fish. And also it was a little like a nut. And it was green, or nearly so—carved from a lump of the jadelike stone that the New Guinea natives use for club-heads. Lying in the palm of Jane—Jane of Nor'west Island, wife of Jack Williams, who wasn't there; who never was anywhere except in his bed, or in a hospital ward, since Jane's disastrous wedding-day, several years ago, when the whaleboat had capsized, with Jack underneath it.

Jimmy-the-Rag, Jane's faithful follower, was there. And Barnet, from Melbourne, an oil expert. And the sorcerer Kitoko, expert of another kind: expert in human nature, like most sorcerers, black and white.

It was so hot there ashore, with the river half a mile away, that you felt at first you couldn't possibly live through it for another ten minutes—until you looked at the crowd of fine upstanding savages who were milling about the doors of the sorcery house, and remembered that they had managed to live there all their lives; then you thought perhaps you might manage it until tea-time.



Always Cheats

Jane wiped her wet face with her dripping arm, and said, rolling the queer object about in her hand: "Jings, I'd like to have that; it gets ahold of me."

Jimmy-the-Rag, that lean brown man about whom nobody knew anything (in the Territory, it is considered clever to say, when you are introduced, "Glad to meet you; what were you called before?" but nobody had ever dared to do it to Jimmy)—Jimmy-the-Rag said: "You've got a hope!" The hands, the slim dark clever hands of Kitoko, that had killed, that could paint and carve, do juggler's tricks and pull a seven-foot bow, hovered about the pig like dusky butterflies. The eyes of Kitoko, black and inscrutable, watched.

"Take it back," said Jane. "We're not collecting curios; you needn't get up the pole about it." She spoke with perfect confidence, although the Solok River languages were as unknown to her as English was to the sorcerer. "Them jokers—" she explained to the exquisite Barnet, standing beside her in a soaked white suit that had cost pounds to the shillings of Jimmy's rough attire, "understand what you say well enough, by and large; I reckon it's the tone they go by."

Barnet, the graceful young man whose keen nose for oil had placed him at

twenty-seven in the ranks of super-taxpayers, looked at her in amaze. She was pepper, this Jane, who ran teams of cannibals in her own island as other people drove teams of bullocks; she was ginger, even to her hair; she stirred his jaded feelings as no one else for a long time had stirred them. She had never been educated, but (he thought) for sheer native ability, she could buy and sell most university graduates. Though that wasn't much of a compliment, when you thought about it!

Here, in the upper reaches of the notorious Solok River, where you carried your life at your belt, in the chambers of your .45, Jane, with her tough crew and her shallow-draft motor cutter that he had chartered for the trip, was as much at home, as cool, as any society woman he knew (and he knew many) in her own drawing-room.

Jane said suddenly, handing back the green pig: "There's somebody crying in the women's house; I'm going to look what it is."

"Better let alone," warned Jimmy; but she did not seem to hear him; she went out with a little more than her usual slight swagger, and vanished into the adjoining house.

"She's like that—soft-hearted," Jimmy explained to the young oil-prospector. "Wouldn't think it, would you?"

"That she was soft-hearted? No!"

Jimmy chuckled at his tone. "Been there too, have you?"

"Too?" asked Barnet with malice, and retired, as he thought, victorious.

The sorcerer, reclining lazily on a pile of mats, chewing betel-nut and spitting scarlet, did not seem to be troubled over the noise in the women's house. It had now died down, a curious silence taking its place.

"Jane's gone off," stated Jimmy-the-Rag, shaking out his pipe and pocketing it. "Something up. Come on."

THE sorcerer lay on his mats, watching them with drugged unpleasant eyes. He was a handsome man, but evil. The richest man on the river, to all appearances, with his two houses and his eleven wives, his jewelry of pigs, tusks and carven shell, his stores of beads and cowries and shell-money; a millionaire of the Solok, and even less agreeable in manners than are millionaires in other places.

The two white men were not thinking of him, as they hurried together toward the river-bank. Jane might have gone there, might have taken her cutter out on some mad business or other—you couldn't tell; she was prudence itself as a rule, but fire and fury when trouble threatened woman or child. This deprived wife, who had never held a child in her arms, whose strength perforce found other channels than those of childbearing and love, was almost passionately chivalrous to mothers and to babes.

IT seemed, when they came upon the gently flowing Solok, that peace possessed the world. Like an exquisitely ordered park was the landscape; sharp green of sage-palms standing out against blue-green of grass; little silver runnels coiling through the brushwood toward the stream. On the banks, above the water-groves of nipa palm, a number of native women were standing or roaming about; they seemed to be looking eagerly for something, and their faces—now that the two white men were near enough to see—showed distress. One of the women was crying. Jimmy caught a word amidst her sobs.

"My oath," he said sharply, "it's the sorcerer's boy kid gone astray. My decorated oath, somebody'll roast for that!"

Both men knew already (because somehow, Jane had found it out) that the river millionaire's family consisted, hitherto, of girl children, with but one boy. Girls, of course, did not count. The boy was the jewel. And he was, apparently, lost.

"We might help to look for him," Barnet obligingly said. He was not adverse to assisting in any philanthropic activity that included Nor'west Jane.

"We might—the devil!" Jimmy surprisingly replied, breaking into a run.

Barnet followed him, looking where Jimmy looked, where most of the women now were looking, and screaming out the while; but he could see nothing except what he had seen before in these crocodile-infested waters—an armored monster quickly swimming down the stream with a village pig in its jaws. The pig squealed. It—

"God," said Barnet suddenly, "it's the baby—and she's after it."

Jimmy had seen that first. He was first, too, to see that Jane had got ahead of him and could not be checked. She was standing down among the roots of the wild sugar-cane that bordered the stream, taking aim with her .45 navy revolver at the crocodile. The women yelled. The revolver spoke—once, twice.

Out in the stream, a dragon suddenly uprose, flinging its full twenty feet of crest and paw and tail into the air. A sound like the last screech of a steamer siren exploded. The crocodile fell again with a splash that sent ripple after ripple rushing toward the banks; its creamy belly showed; it rocked, dying, upon the wave that its last struggle had aroused.

And Jane—Jane, ignoring the shouts sent after her by the wildly running men, had dashed into the crocodile-infested stream; had seized the child, and dragged it out to safety, cut and torn, but not dangerously hurt. It was screaming, with fear more than pain, as she carried it up the bank, gave it in charge to its sobbing mother, and paused a minute, all dripping as she was, to scold the woman in terms that nobody could misunderstand.

She had torn a strip off her blouse, bandaged the child, and given it back to the mother, by the time the men came up. Before they opened their mouths to remonstrate, she was ready.

"I suppose you want to say I shouldn't 'a' shot with the kid so near. Well, I done that because I reckoned it was better for it to be clean killed than dirty killed anyhow, and you see it was all right. I'll go and put a dressing on it directly. And you needn't give me any of your chat about it, neither, because what I engaged to do was to take you a hundred miles up the Solok, and not to listen to no sermons. I told Lombard, when he was on my island, that I'd take anyone to the hearthstone of hell and back for a pound a day; and so I will, and so I done, haven't I?"

The good-looking Barnet said daintily: "This is about as near as anyone is likely to get to it, I agree."

Jimmy remarked: "If it's any sort of hell you're looking for, you're liable to find it where Kitoko's about."

Jane, wringing out her soaked skirt, said: "He's a bad one; but I reckon he'll be feeling bonzer about getting the kid back again. See you later."

She whistled to the launch-boy, and went on board to change.

The men did not meet her again until after dark, when they came aboard, in order to make ready for an early start. Barnet's prospecting was done; they had only, now, to find their way back safely.

Jane met them with all her fine teeth showing, and her blue-green eyes asparkle. "Look what he give me," she said, holding out her hand. "Sent it

just now with a message; there's a bit of pidgin English knocking about here, and by what they say, I reckon this is what you call a luck-piece, bring me good luck. Jings, I want it, too."

Jimmy was not surprised to see the green pig in her hand.

"If you take my advice, which you won't," he said, "you'll chuck it in the river."

"You've got a hope of that," Jane indignantly said. "Don't you believe in luck?"

"I believe so much in it," Jimmy said gravely, "that I'd like to see that back where it belongs."

"Oh, now," Barnet remonstrated in the throaty clipped tone that he affected. ("All but says 'My good man,'" Jimmy thought, looking at him out of half-shut eyes.) "Oh, now, now, you don't believe in magic and all that?"

Jane cut in: "These sorcerer blokes, they know a bit, same as the blokes in the Bible done; I reckon you don't say the Bible isn't true?"

Jimmy-the-Rag, unexpectedly, countered with: "Yes, and what about Saul and the witch, and all the row he got into with the Lord about it?"

Jane, tossing the green pig in her hands, only answered: "It's my luck."

BARNET, as they rode downstream next morning, the little motor working nobly, cool air at last caressing their scorched faces, was thinking quite a lot

about Jane. Strange, how she seemed, a handsome young white woman, to fit into this extraordinary and even sinister environment of sorcerers' castles, head-hunting chiefs, furious heats and flogging rains, perils by land and dangers on the shoaling rapid-strewn Solok. Strange how her tenderness to little things and weak was barred round by iron courage, unnatural, almost, in any woman; even more so (he thought) in one who could have chosen—husband or no husband, education or none—whomever she chose to take, among men of standing and property. It was with just such men that Jane would have been a success; men tired of the fluffy gold-digger class, sick of sweets. It was because she had never met such men (he thought, watching her out of the corners of his brilliant, desirous dark eyes) that she had had to develop this protective armor, waste her character and her strength in running needless risks. Give him a chance, and he'd show her what the world, the big world, was really made of; what a woman like her could make of herself. . . .

Jane said, from the bow of the boat: "God's-rod, Jimmy, this luck seems a fair cow, after all!"

Jimmy-the-Rag was smoking as usual; as usual, he seemed to consult his pipe, confidentially, before he replied. Looking down the stem of it, he answered:

"They say the devil always cheats people of their reward. If you believe in devils."

"I don't believe in no such things; and anyhow, I done nothing like what you mean; I never sold myself to nothing; I've only been doing good to that Kitoko bloke."

"Then maybe," Jimmy allowed, "your luck will come along. Catch hold." He tossed her an envelope, worn and dirty. Opening it, she found inside a New South Wales lottery-ticket.

"Thanks a lot for nothing," she told him, putting the ticket in the pouch of her cartridge-belt. "I've took lottery tickets till I'm as sick as a poisoned rabbit, and nothing never came of it; and anyhow, this must 'a' been drew weeks ago."

"Likely. I never had any luck, either. It's just what people call a gesture, Jane."

"I'm not p'ticularly fond of jests," she said. "Lombard used to say, when he was here, that I hadn't no sense of humor. But I reckon you mean well."

"If you want to win in the lottery—just for a gesture," Barnet said, "I'll buy a hundred tickets and send them to you as soon as I get to Sydney."

She flashed him a blue glance of challenge. Jane could not for the life of her keep from sending out those challenges now and then; but there were men who knew the danger of lifting the glove she so carelessly flung down.

Barnet may or may not have known; he was no coward. All that day, as they ran down toward the world of safety and of shelter, of beds and houses and food, of the places where money—which here was unimportant and dead—suddenly waked to life and became the center of the world, Barnet stayed beside Jane, watched her steering the cutter through perils of which he had hardly known until last week, nursing the cheap little motor on which their lives any moment might depend. Now and then he talked to her, choosing words with the skill of his kind. Jimmy-the-Rag, sitting cross-legged on the hatch, smoked and was silent, and all that long day watched.

With evening they neared a settlement: two tin houses and a copra-store. They went ashore to spend the night, and the trader gave them a newspaper that was only three weeks old. And in the paper were the winning numbers of

the last-but-three Sydney lottery. And the ticket had won fifty pounds!

Jimmy forestalled Jane's disclaimer. "You took it. It's yours. You take your luck, now you have it."

"I don't call that luck," Jane, with a catch in her voice, said, "to go scoffing something off of a good friend."

"Don't you look your gift-pig in the mouth," Jimmy advised. "You said enough yesterday."

"I know I was fair ropable about the luck," she agreed, "but this—"

"Take it," Barnet said in his silken voice. "Maybe you'll have another piece of luck soon." He thought he could arrange that, at least.

"May-I-go-hopping-to-church," swore Jane rapidly, "if ever I—"

"Yes, but you've set it going now, haven't you?"

She was silent.

"Give me that newspaper that you don't want," Jimmy said. "I'm hungry for a bit of news."

She tossed it to him contemptuously. "I never seen any good came out of reading newspapers," she declared. "Betting and murders and divorces; all them things that you get away from in the bush, and you open a paper, and they jump out and bite you. Where's the tin-opener? I'm going to help that man to cook a Christian meal."

Jimmy was reading. "Jane," he said, "*Jane.*" Something in his voice arrested her on her way to the kitchen. "Well?" she said, coming to a halt, with the wind of the river blowing her cotton frock about her tall figure. Jimmy said, under his breath: "*Nike Apteros!*" And Jane said, "Don't you swear at me; I haven't done nothing." And the silken Barnet, watching them both, said to himself: "This is the damnedest queerest country ever I was in: but she is—she is!"

Jimmy-the-Rag got up from his chair, and walked over to Jane. He put a hand on her shoulder. "I don't believe in breaking news," he said. "Your husband's dead, in Sydney Hospital."

FOR a long moment nobody spoke. The Solok River muttered among the sugar-cane roots, like a witch reciting spells. Out in the stream, the nipa palms clapped hands; and a snag, entangled, struck the water rhythmically, with a sound like the throb of an engine. As always, the river, the evil beautiful river, seemed alive; the one strong vital thing in a land of poisonous languors.

It was Barnet who spoke first. "I can't pretend not to know about it," he said. "You've been wonderful. It's over, and I sha'n't attempt to offer condolences." He was a little formal, a trifle distant; it seemed—had anyone been paying attention to him—as if he wanted to orient himself, know just where he stood.

BUT nobody was watching Barnet. Jimmy, tall and steady, stood beside Jane; he had taken away his hand; he was not looking at her—only waiting. As, perhaps, he had waited for years, six years, since Jane's disastrous wedding. Perhaps. No one knew.

Jane, with her hands upon her cheeks, sat staring at the muttering starlit river. "I don't know what to think," she said, and said it again. "I— He was a splendid man. Jimmy, you know Jack was a splendid man."

"I know it," Jimmy-the-Rag agreed. Jack Williams' "splendor," he knew, had been a trap to Jane—as it had been to many before her, in less honorable fashion. He knew, too, how little splendor, physical or mental, had been left in the wreck to whom Nor'west Jane had given her life.

After an interval, he spoke again: "Take your luck, Jane. You're free and no one's hurt."

"Aren't they?" she flung back at him. "You don't know how Jack wanted to live. He held on to the scrap he had, and why shouldn't he—and if I could 'a' kept it to him, Jings, I would!"

There was nothing to say to that. Dark came down. Supper was eaten. Jane was very silent all that evening; and the men, if they talked, were careful not to be heard. . . .

In the morning Jane gave out her ultimatum.

"I'm taking you back to the port like I said I would, since you've found your oil, or anyhow you think you have. And as for Jimmy, I reckon he's done enough prospecting for a bit; I told you, didn't I, that you might as well look for ice-cream in hell as gold along this river. . . . Well, when I've took you back, I'm going back."

"Up the river?" It was Jimmy who asked. Barnet looked dismayed—almost as if some plan of his had been interfered with.

"M'm. I want to see that Kitoko bloke again. I want to see him and give him back that devil-pig of his before anything else happens."

Jane was taking aim. . . . The revolver spoke — once, twice.

"But Jane!" It was Jimmy speaking "You can't say honestly that you haven't had two pieces of luck. We all know—"

"I don't want no luck that's luck only for me, and something nasty for some one else. I don't want no more of it. I want to see Kitoko and cram the thing down his throat before the next thing happens, that may be bonzer for me, and a fair cow for somebody, Lord knows who. But I'm carrying out my charter first."

"Oh, no—please," Barnet remonstrated. "Do let us go back too We want to see what happens."

"All right," said Jane, and without further words swung into the cutter.

TWO days later they were back at the sorcerer's village, where his strange castle, peak-roofed and spired, lifted its head above the cottonwood and mango trees. They had left the village peaceful and lazy; they found it changed, tense, sinister of mood; groups of young men standing about in the shade of the trees, watchful and excited; women and children invisible. Kitoko himself, no longer loafing within his castle, showed up in the midst of his men, taller by half a head than any; his face was painted devilishly; he stirred and quivered there as he stood like a fighting bow tight-strung.

Jane, looking about her, said: "They're up to mischief. I'd learn them if they was mine. You can't let them alone," she said, "for two minutes, but they get behaving naughty."

"What do you think is the matter?" Barnet asked. Jimmy-the-Rag did not ask; he knew.

"They're out to kill," Jane coolly said. "Who, says you? I don' know. Maybe they don' know themselves—or maybe they do. I'm off to the women's house to see if any of them's mixed up in it. We'd better keep together."

They kept together, walking along the narrow forest path away from the men; and Barnet suddenly had a vision of Pitt Street, Sydney, and the General Post Office in the square, with the gray doves flying, and the taxies buzzing by—a vision and a fierce desire, as Jimmy-the-Rag quite casually, remarked: "Walk slowly; don't look behind; and—smile!"

The smile that Barnet produced was brave enough, but not altogether convincing. He had bluffed his way through business deals a hundred times; now it seemed he had to bluff through something bigger—and it wasn't easy.

Jane, who had disappeared into the narrow opening of the women's house, where the men durst not follow her, now came out again.

"Jings," she said, "what do you think them devils are up to? They're going to cut the head off of the kid's mother, because she lost him."

Jimmy remarked, "Can't be allowed," and fingered the butt of his revolver.

"Not if we have to shoot it out, and take her down with us," Jane declared. "Here she is."

A small brown woman, wearing a grass fringe round her waist, and nothing else, was creeping out of the low door of the women's house. She might have been pretty, for a native, before her little face became swelled up with crying, and her eyes, as round and black as an opossum's, were smeared by the rubbing of her dirty hands. Slowly she raised that tragic face to look at the newcomers. Was there hope?

Under the brassy sky the afternoon thunderstorm was beginning to roll up, to beat its ugly drums. Uglier, nearer, came the throbbing rumor of the village death-drums, announcing sacrifice.

Jimmy-the-Rag leaned forward. He was a very tall man, taller than Jane. Without ceremony he stretched across the silent Barnet, and closed his fingers on something that lay concealed in Nor'-west Jane's hand.

"We'll not allow it, of course," he said. "But to avoid a row that'll have the Government on its hind-legs—"

Jane said something rude about the Government.

"All right. Keep that for by-and-by. You take that pig of yours, and hang it on her. It might be a safe-conduct."

"Like that sun-and-moon shell locket you give me, and you said if I was in the Solomons they wouldn't eat me for twenty-four hours, not if I had it with me."

"The same sort. I don't know. You might try."

It was strange, but even now, Jane felt reluctant to part with the queer little half-alive devil-pig. Rather slowly she straightened out the loop of native string that was attached to it, beckoned to the woman, and laid it about her neck.

"They do say," she observed, "that you can't throw a charm away."

"Oh, that's why we're a hundred miles up the river again, eh?" Barnet cut in. Nobody noticed him.

"You can give it, that's all. Now I done it; I've give it, and if there's any luck—"

But the native girl had taken no notice; clearly she was not interested in the devil-pig. She caught at Jane's cotton frock, and said things in her own tongue. She was crying, as one cries whose tears have exhausted themselves.

"We've two rifles," Barnet remarked, "and three revolvers. We ought to be able—" He didn't like to be ignored; he was as good a man as any, and if they all got out of this crisis alive, with their heads on their shoulders, he thought, eventually, he might marry Jane.

If he really had to. . . .

JANE was staring at the little brown woman, staring in an altogether new way. "Get out of the road," she suddenly said. "I want to talk private."

Amazed, the men moved a little distance away, keeping Jane and the eleventh wife of Kitoko well in sight. They saw Jane bend down and speak to the woman, and saw, with amaze, that she was understood. That the small woman was surprised; that she nodded her head, answering signs.

Jane straightened up. "I'm going to Kitoko," she said. "We'll all go back."

It was walking into the lion's mouth, but they went. And on the way Jane suddenly seized a small protesting native by his woolly hair, and dragged him to her side. "This is the bloke who can talk a bit," she explained. "And there's Kitoko."

"You keep out of it," she told the white men. But Jimmy stood as near to her as she would allow, and his rifle lay along his arm. And Barnet, copying him, didn't have time to wonder how ever he found himself in such a jam. The thunder boomed overhead, and bumped along the river, with a sound like giants playing at skipping-stones. The drums never ceased their drugging *pm-pm-pm*. In the entry of the sorcerer's house, some one was taking down a long head-rack, with dried heads on it, set upon spikes. There was one spike vacant. . . .

"Jane," said Jimmy-the-Rag insistently—and now there was a new tone in his voice, the tone of a man who is, or who might be, a husband: "Jane, you'll have to let me in on it. What's up?"

She threw one word at him.

"My—colonial—oath!" Jimmy slowly said.

"They're as ignorant as pigs. They don't know nothing, not what even pigs would know," Jane witheringly said.

AND with the little interpreter, who was not shaking in his shoes only because he had no shoes to shake in, Jane marched up to the tall tattooed Kitoko, and spoke:

"If you don't lay off of that wife of yours," she said, "you'll lose the only chance you've got of another son. In seven moons." She counted the moons on her fingers. She shook her fingers remonstrantly. "Bad children that you all are," she said; "I'd learn you better—that is, I would if I'd time."

The interpreter, his knees doubling under him, said:

"Him say you savvy too much, you very big woman. Him say, you givem *puri-puri* for him woman."

"Means he wants a bit of the hair of the dog that bit him when he was born," Jane explained. "A piece of sorcery. Well, he'll have it, and I hope he'll like it."

She took from her hand the broad gold wedding-ring, and placed it on one of Kitoko's fingers. Barnet, remembering what those fingers had done, in what blood and horrors they had steeped themselves, felt slightly sick. Jimmy-the-Rag looked on without expression.

"Tell him," Jane said, "that that's a big *puri-puri* to make people behave proper to their husbands and their wives. That's for his woman—and him."

She left him. Unmolested, the three white people walked back to the river. The drums, behind, were being drowned by the thunder—or was it that they were ceasing their steady, sinister beat?

"WHAT I want now," Jimmy-the-Rag said feelingly, "is a smoke."

He felt his pockets. Jane stopped in her tracks and looked round. "Got no tobacco?" she asked. Jimmy had suddenly, violently, sworn at himself. It was very seldom that he did swear, under any provocation.

"Plenty," he answered her. "But you ought to chuck me in the river, Jane. Here's the letter from the hospital telling you all about it, stamped with their name, and I forgot to give it to you till now."

"Men!" said Jane. . . . "Hand it over." She opened the letter, stood for quite a long while reading it. She looked up at last. "Jimmy," she said, "and Mr. Barnet: It's a mistake. There must 'a' been another Williams. This is dated afterward, and it says—it says—"

"That's right," Jimmy cut in. "I know. Jack's not dead."

"He's a right to be alive if he likes," Jane said combatively. "I—I'm glad he is. But Jings, Jimmy, if I hadn't've got shut of that devil-pig, what would the next piece of luck have been?"

Barnet said, "You can't possibly imagine, Mrs. Williams,"—he laid stress upon the *Mrs.;* he knew quite well now that his chance was gone—"that the whole thing has been anything but a chain of coincidences?"

Jane passed that. She was looking at her naked third finger.

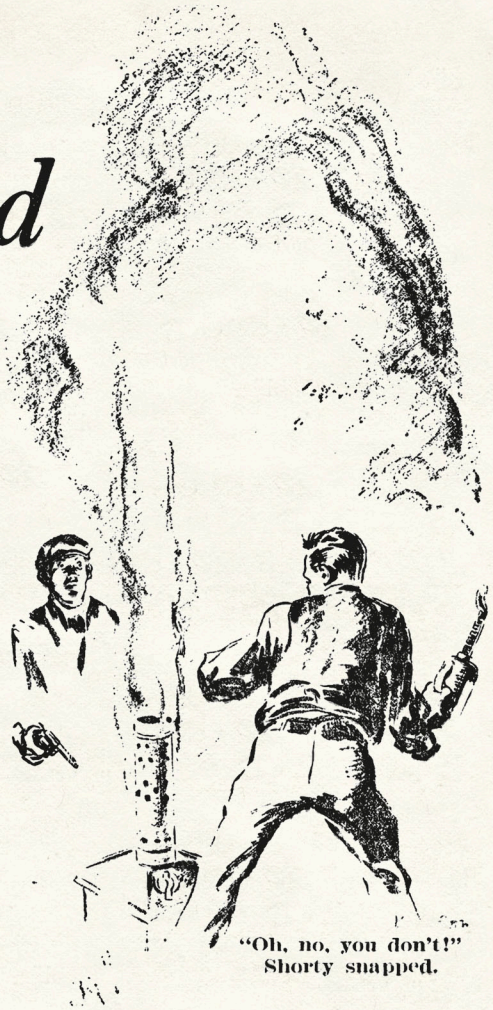
"They keep brass rings at the trader's in the port," she mused aloud. "I'll feel respectable, when I get there."

Another picturesque story by Beatrice Grimshaw will appear in an early issue.

Fall of the Wind

A story by the author of "Three Were Thoroughbreds" wherein, surprisingly, an orange grove is a scene of desperate danger.

By
KENNETH PERKINS



"Oh, no, you don't!" Shorty snapped.

"THREE men stopped at Clint Sandler's lonely grove late at night. They surprised him not only because of the hour, but because of the cool statement that they wanted to keep their car in his garage.

Clint swallowed hard. "Got my own car in it. It's a one-car garage."

"Listen, feller, you aren't telling us. We're telling you!"

And when one pointed a gun at his long, sunburned face, he wondered just what they could steal from his outfit. He had a fine crop of oranges, but it would take a picking crew and trucks to handle it. He also had a tank of crude oil, barely enough to heat his grove a few hours in case of a drop in the temperature. With a shortage, and all the growers frantically hunting for oil, his supply was worth stealing.

But these men were not growers—although one might have been a fruit-buyer, for he wore city clothes. The others were like fruit-tramps out of work till the picking season.

They asked Clint for his ignition key, backed his car out of the garage, drove theirs in. One of them marched him into the house. Another snooped through the rooms and out to the front veranda, where he could watch the road.

Clint was much calmer than his three visitors. He gave them the impression of being dazed, but that was because he was deceptively lazy in his movements. Naturally easy-going, he was the sort of rancher who would leave his cultivating to go down the dry wash hunting quail. He had a shotgun ready for this contingency, but it would do him little good tonight! Nevertheless he was really glad they had come here instead of the next ranch, where Jen Carson lived. Jen was very pretty, and a visitation like this would add ten years to her eighteen.

While Clint was waiting for a chance to get to the phone in the bedroom, the third man brought a thick blanket-roll into the kitchen. He was not so much a fruit-tramp as an ordinary tramp, a "blanket stiff" from the track-yards, perhaps. He set the roll upright on the floor, unwound it and shook something out of it.

It was a child—a tiny boy who sat like a petrified sage rabbit facing a car headlight.

They took the gag from his mouth. "You know this kid?"

Clint stared at the little mite, who was sniffling silently, too frightened to speak or cry. Nodding slowly, Clint said: "Sure, I know him. Neaf Murray's kid."

"Can you figure what's happening, or do you just naturally look that way?"

"I know a State patrolman rode past here and asked me if a closed car had

gone up the switchbacks to the mountains." He was staring at the boy. Clint could not remember how old Neaf Murray's baby boy would be right now, and he was not much at estimating the ages of very small children. All he knew was that this one seemed very young, but with eyes that expressed terror. "Guess the State patrolman was hunting for this kid, all right," Clint mumbled.

The strangers grinned at each other. "Pretty friendly guy, telling us everything right off the bat. The police think we headed up the mountains."

"Kind of a fathead, but friendly," said the city man. "Guess we'll stay right here where we can hide the car. Better'n a forsaken shack. They'll all be searched. We'll stay here till we go for the pay-off."

Clint looked at them, hollow-eyed. "Figure on Neaf Murray paying you off?"

"Is that a crack?"

"When it comes to paying off, he's like you said." Clint was trying to grin. "You don't tell him. He tells you."

"The boy's quite a card."

"What else you want to tell us about Murray?" the city man said.

"If you skin him out of any money, it'll be a good joke. He bought up all the oil before us little ranchers could get any. He's rich, and bought more'n he needed. A freeze wipes us out. Orange prices go up. He wins.... Shall I heat some canned milk for the kid?"

"You do everything just regular, and you won't get hurt. If anyone passes here, everything's got to look regular. You try signaling, and you get killed."

"How can I signal ten miles down the valley?"

"Try it and see if we can guess."

CLINT heated the milk, held it to the child's lips. But he would not drink. "I want home. I want my daddy!" he wept.

One of the men swore. "Make him shut up. Take him in that back room."

Here was Clint's chance. He picked the boy up.

"I'll fix your bed for you, see, little feller? Don't get scared now."

"I'm scared! I want my daddy. Man choke me! Where's my daddy?"

"Wait—I'm telling you something. I'm going to take you home. Don't you get it?" Clint carried the child to the bedroom.

As soon as he got into the room, he tried to screen the phone with his own body as he walked in ahead of the others.

"Listen, feller, you aren't telling us. We're telling you!" And one pointed a gun at his face.

Passing it, he knocked the receiver off the hook.

He expected a slug in the back. But he also expected a voice in that phone asking for a number. The shot would be heard, instead of an answer.

But the shot did not come. Instead the two gunmen laughed. "Not so dumb as he looks." The telephone was dead, its wires cut by the first man who had snooped through the house. "Who you trying to ring up?"

"Just my girl. Promised to ring her up tonight."

"Pretty quick at the answers." They laughed. "He says he's got a girl."

"You pulled a boner, cutting those wires," Clint said with a slow grin. "She'll wonder why I didn't ring her up, then she'll try calling me. And maybe she'll come here."

"We'll ask her in."

"She's too smart for that," Clint said.

"Did you say she was *your* girl? Maybe smart, but not too bright."

They laughed some more. One of them said: "How about those other wires up there, Max?"

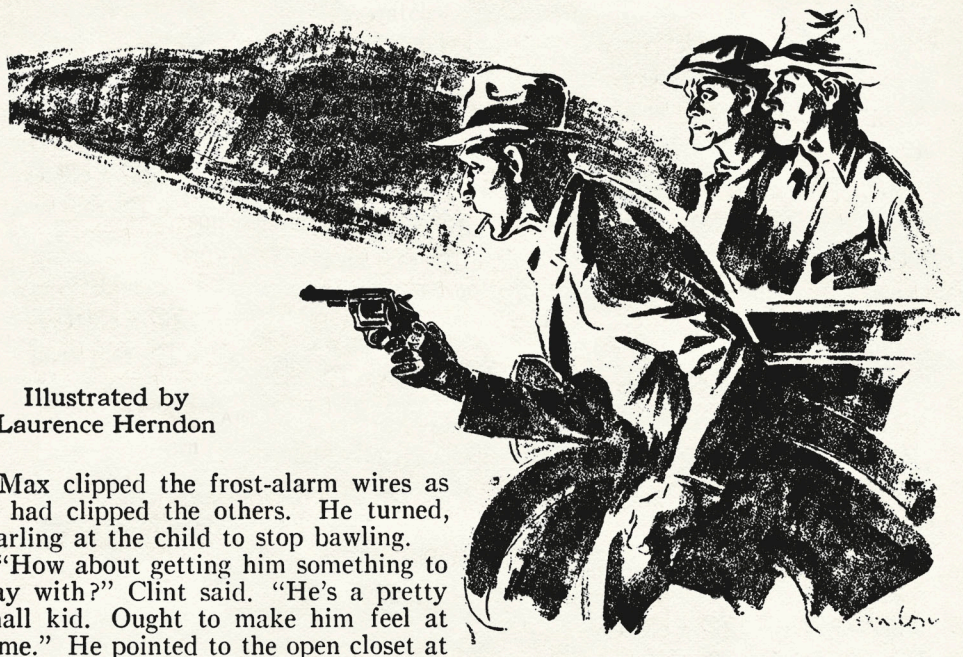
The one called Max, the city man, studied the set of wires on the opposite wall. "What's that for?"

"A bell wired to the thermometer in the grove," Clint said. "Rings in when the temperature gets low."

"Yeah?" Max was not going to be fooled. "That's a good one."

"It warns me when there's frost enough to kill my fruit."

"It won't do any warning tonight."



Illustrated by
Laurence Herndon

Max clipped the frost-alarm wires as he had clipped the others. He turned, snarling at the child to stop bawling.

"How about getting him something to play with?" Clint said. "He's a pretty small kid. Ought to make him feel at home." He pointed to the open closet at a hobby-horse he had made for his sister's little boy. It had been left here when his sister moved back to Louisville. The nephew would be too old for all these homemade toys now, but here was another boy of the age Clint liked to remember.

"Get away from that closet. He aint riding horses tonight."

Clint had just reached for the hobby-horse with one hand, and under some work-clothes for a shotgun with the other. But Max jumped to his side, ordered him back, found the gun. It was a good joke. They roared.

"Mustn't try any more of these tricks, farmer. You know how it is. Me and the Professor here,"—he nodded at his older companion,—"we get irritated." Despite his casual voice, his eyes had red and green fire in them. He lifted the gun.

"Come on, kill me, you rats!" Clint shouted. "And you'll all hang! They'll be coming up here any minute to see why I haven't started heating the grove. Think you're safe here, do you? We ranchers watch each other on smudge nights. If I don't light up, there'll be a dozen neighbors coming to ask why. Go ahead, shoot!"

The Professor looked frightened. "We better keep going up to the mountains, Max."

"What for? Hide where they won't look for you. Besides, this mug's just what we need. Keeps telling us everything he knows. Helping us." He went to the front door. "Hey, Shorty, come here!" The man who had been on watch came in from the veranda. "Anything different between this ranch and those down in the valley?"

"How do I know? I aint a farmer. . . . Sure there's a difference. Down there they're lighting up fires in the trees."

"That's what I mean," Max said triumphantly. "Think I don't know something about oranges?" He looked at the raw-boned rancher. "If they're lighting their fires everywhere, why aren't you lighting 'em?"

Clint said readily: "The wind didn't start blowing till now."

MAX was hugely delighted with himself for getting this bit of information. "We're lighting up this farm. You're showing us how."

They waited for only a moment. Their prisoner, it seemed, was quite agreeable. After all, he did not want to lose his crop. "All you do is light up a lot of pots," he said. "Got to light 'em with a torch. I go up and down the rows of trees—"

"You mean Shorty will go up and down—not you. Go out with him, Prof. Let this mug show you how to light one pot. Put some overalls on first, so you'll look like hicks. In case some one rides by on the road, everything's got to look regular. If this mug does anything out of the way or tries signaling to the valley, drop him."

Clint let go the little boy's hand. He had stuck close to the bed, held there like a magnet. It was the same force that pulled and held him at that same bed when his sister's child was sick, once.

But he got up, an idea glimmering. He led Shorty and the Professor to the tank-house where he kept his torches under oil-smeared canvas. He piled the canvas against the shack, then filled the big can at the bottom of a torch, and tipped the long snout to let the gasoline drip through. He lit the wick on the snout. "You let this fire drip into each pot in the grove," he said.

"What's in the pots?"

"Crude oil. Makes a thick smoke, so the oranges don't freeze."

BUT they were afraid to try it. They let him take the cover off the first pot and light it. The pot—a square can the size of a Dutch oven—belched a heavy pall of smoke into the trees. It got the gunmen jumpy.

"He could signal down the valley somehow," the Professor said.

At that very moment Clint had let a drop of flame fall on the pile of oily canvas. A trellis, a dead vine and then the old shack would have caught fire. Help would surely come then!

"Oh, no, you don't!" Shorty snapped. He threw sand on the canvas before it caught.

"You got the jitters, both of you." It was Max who spoke from the kitchen porch, where he had come out to watch. "The poor dope wouldn't burn his own shack. Maybe he would, but he's too slow. Get to work. He's showed you how to light up right. I've seen smudge-pots burn. How can he signal when the whole valley's doing the same thing? Go ahead, light up his farm."

"How about across the road?" Shorty asked. "It's away from headquarters."

"Only lemons in that orchard," Clint put in. "You aren't wasting oil on lemons, I hope! Oil costs money."

Max' egotism was of the born criminal. He must show Shorty and the Professor and this farmer that he was no ignoramus. "It's oranges they save from freezing, Shorty. What d'you read in the papers—the comics?"

Clothed in overalls, the two henchmen looked like any ranch hands doing that chore. No one, Max reflected, tremendously satisfied, could have seen anything unusual about the thick oil smoke pouring into the air, blanketing the trees and their golden fruit. The fake *mozos* prowled on, wading through the cover-crop, leaving wild flares of light in their trail.

Ordered into the house, Clint glanced back over his shoulder. The scene in his grove was clear despite the black pall, for the breeze whipped the smudge through the windbreak down the sage-covered slopes of the dry wash. The fires could be seen by the whole valley. He hoped these rats, unused to plodding on such ground, would give up before they found that the lemon orchard had smudge-pots like the others, half buried in the cover-crop.

The wind thrashed and moaned. But obviously it did not reach the ranches down in the Valley, for the smudge down there hung like a blanket. The wind out of the Cajon Pass hit Clint's grove and kept on toward Orange County and the south, sometimes missing the other groves.

"You gents are pretty good to me. You don't think you are, but you're doing me a good turn," Clint said. "This wind sure came up fast. And you're saving my fruit—lighting those fires."

Actually they were wasting his precious oil, for the wind sucked hungrily and high. He let them waste it—oil that every grower in the valley was clamoring for, oil that could not be bought this night for love or money. Let them waste all they wanted, if it would save this little freckled-faced, pug-nosed runt of a kid, tossing and terrified in that huge bed.

MAX ordered Clint into the bedroom. The boy, wide awake, stared at him, stopped tossing instantly and lay still as death. He was afraid now even to talk or cry. These men were shadows, bad dreams, monster robbers from his fairy books. Naturally he had no thought of hot milk or wooden horses. His eyes, dazed and enormous, could only follow

the lanky young rancher about the room. Clint had seen his nephew watch his mother that way, the time he was so sick. A gopher-trap might divert him from what he was thinking about. The little nephew used to follow Clint around the grove when he caught gophers. Perhaps the boy was old enough to know that one of these ogres was not bad but good. Clint held the trap out to him. "Ever catch gophers, little kid?"

The contraption frightened the child badly. He had just seen something like it on the belt of one of his captors—a pair of handcuffs. It might be an instrument of torture, like the robbers in fairy books used, or like Indians used on Kit Carson.

"I don't want it! I don't want toys! Don't want milk! I want home—I want my daddy!"

THE man called Max was watching shrewdly. "Look! You've scared him stiff! Cut this racket now! Throw the damned thing away."

"Sure! I'll throw it away. See, little feller?" Clint threw it out of the window.

Max lit a cigar and kept looking at his watch. He was waiting, doubtless, for a definite time when he was to go for the ransom. Clint imagined what would happen then. The boy might be taken to wherever the pay-off was to be, and perhaps not. Max' eyes were stark every time he glanced at the flop-eared boy. He was old enough to talk. It was not like leaving a baby in a closet somewhere.

The mantelpiece clock tolled, and the "ranch-hands" came in, grimy and ill-tempered from their work. Max ordered the Professor to stay on the veranda on watch. The other wanted coffee. Clint boiled some; like cats they watched everything he put into it. He got out a jug of wine.

"What's that for?"

He said it was what the *mozos* drank when tending orchard heaters. A jug of wine and a coffee-pot made things regular.

"No wine. 'Taint our drink. Especially since maybe you got rat-poison in it."

"Have no rat-poison," Clint said innocently. "Lots of ant-poison, though."

"What's he talking so much for?" Shorty swigged coffee; then they sat in silence, their forms gray and ghostly as the house filled with smudge smoke.

"Say, listen, why don't you close up this joint and keep out the smoke? Don't look regular. I read about it in the papers, how the ranch wives squawk about their lace curtains, account of the oil smoke. They hang up blankets."

Clint closed the windows and got a blanket. "I'll hang this up in the kid's room. He's sick. It'll keep the smudge out of his lungs."

"The guy's getting sentimental."

"That's what I figured him—just born that way. 'Kid's sick!' That's a good one! Hanging blankets in a window might be a trick."

"How, a trick?" Max said. "It's a back window. It'll help in case some one comes and the kid yells. The soft-hearted guy is always thinking of something to help us. Leave him hang up his blanket."

Shorty washed his ears and nose, which were black, took turns with the Professor watching the road. Max kept looking at his watch. Finally he kept his eyes right on it for two minutes; then he said: "Get me the rope for the kid. Call the Prof. Get the car started—this mug's car."

Clint's heart pounded. "The little kid—he's got a bad cold. He's scared to death. Tell him you won't hurt him." He held out a blanket. "Better wrap him up same as you had him before."

"Stay out of this!" Max tied the gag.

"Car's ready," Shorty came in.

Clint saw his eyes as they slid slowly to Max. He saw the same narrow movement in Max' eyes. Shorty said out of the corner of his mouth. "How about this mug? He's tried every trick a dumb hick can think up—phoning, getting a shotgun, burning the shack. And now if we leave him, he'll put the whole country on our tracks."

"We aren't leaving tracks."

CLINT held his breath. He knew well enough what was coming. But at that moment the Professor rushed in. "A car stopped outside, Max. A girl in it."

Clint's pent-up breath burst out. "It's only some one from the next ranch—the girl I told you about. Send her away. Tell her I'm busy. Tell her you're my ranch-hands." He begged frantically: "She doesn't know anything's wrong. She wouldn't come here alone if she did. Can't you get that? It shows everything's jake. Tell her everything's all right on this grove—and to go home."

Max snarled at him to shut up. "We're telling her nothing. Go out, Shorty, and help the Prof bring her in."

The two men left, and Max turned to Clint, deliberately slow. But when he turned, he bumped into a hard fist—and dropped.

That one smack was all Clint had time for. He snatched up the huddled form of

the boy and jumped. He jumped for the window, sailing through the blanket as if through nothing but a bank of smudge-smoke. For the window behind the blanket was open. He had fixed that!

He landed in the driveway almost on top of that gopher-trap. He gave it a measured kick which slid it into a rut of the driveway, just where he wanted it, and then he ran.

The gagged child tried to scream.

"Shut up, little feller. I'm taking you to your dad. Bad men—all of 'em, see? I'm taking you from 'em. We're running away from 'em, you and me."

The child, in this climax of his panic, seemed to sense the truth. He might have sensed it by the feel of those big arms —gentle and curiously soft, even though made of iron. He stopped crying.

It was a bit of good luck that Max had not been knocked out cold. He was at the window in time to send one shot after Clint's gray form disappearing in the smudge-cloud. And that one shot stopped Shorty and the Professor, so that the girl had time to start her car. As she backed out and turned, her lights swept the grove, giving one glimpse of Clint Sandler running with a child in his arms!

Clint knew that Jen Carson would not be stopping at his ranch at such a late hour unless she had a very good reason. Of all the people in the Valley, this girl was the one who had noticed something queer about Clint Sandler's smudge fires. Perhaps others had noticed it, and they might have tried to phone. But they were too busy heating their own groves to come up and find out what was wrong. Besides, the whole Valley by this time would be in a furor about the kidnaping of Neaf Murray's child. How one grower chose to heat his grove was a small matter—except to one girl.

"Shut up, little feller. Bad men— I'm taking you from 'em. We're running away from 'em, you and me."

AS Clint lay hidden in the cover-crop, hugging the child to his breast, he wondered how long it would take for help to come. Time was the one thing in his mind now, whirling in crazy figures, not like a clock but like a pinwheel. Just how long would it take, to the fraction of a second, for Jen to get down there to the Valley and tell what she had seen? How long to phone to the nearest filling-station on the mountain switchbacks, to the forest officers' look-out a few miles beyond, to the ranchers down below, to the sheriff and the State highway patrol?

Max and his two men dashed about madly, frustrated, for the fugitive might have flattened out anywhere in the irrigation ditches screened by the cover-crop of vetch and barley and mustard. Time was more precious to them than to Clint, for they had seen headlights fanning up the boulevard, others pointing down from the switchbacks, others on the lane beyond the windbreak.

As Clint counted the seconds, he heard the whir of a motor. It grew louder, vibrating in his ears like a dozen cars and motorcycles. His head banged now with the blood pumping in his temples, now with the crack of shots. He stretched his long neck, peeking over barley.

Shorty almost ran over him, sank, hit by a slug, sprawled to his face. Some distance away the Professor clawed the air with his hands, giving up. Max was the first, no doubt, to discover that they were surrounded, for he was in the car. The car bucked, spurting dust; a wheel plopped over the din of gunfire, its tire ripped by

the gopher-trap Clint had stuck in a rut of the driveway.

Most of the smudge-pots had burned out, but light blazed all of a sudden—pocket flashes, a lantern, motorcycle headlights. Clint got up, groggy, the boy still in his arms, although it was not Clint who held him. It was the boy himself who clung there. Many faces, blackened with the smudge of the night's work, moved closer. The first one was wrinkled and brown—the face of Neaf Murray. The next was deathly pale—the girl's.

"Here's your kid," Clint said. "Not hurt. Take care of him after this."

JEN'S father, Soggy Carson, was talking to the crowd of ranchers, although most of them were interested in the State patrolmen and their handcuffed prisoners.

"Guess Jen was right," Soggy said. "She kept asking me why Clint would be wasting his oil when there was a wind up here. She could see his eucalyptus windbreak thrashing. He's grown oranges long enough to know they won't freeze in a wind."

"That got me wondering," another grower said. "Jen phoned me to go over to Clint's grove and see how come. But I was too busy lighting my own place.'

"She phoned me too," said a third. "She said he was lighting up his oranges instead of his lemons. 'Clint's no fool,' she said. 'If he's lighting at all, he knows lemons would freeze afore his oranges.' "

"The whole Valley could see me doing that," Clint said in disgust. "And the only one who'd do anything about it was Jen Carson."

"I told her maybe you'd been drinking too much elderberry," Carson apologized.

"And what did she say?" Clint asked.

"She said she was coming up here to straighten you up with coffee."

"Lucky some one was bright enough to figure I needed straightening up."

Murray wiped his eyes and mouth and blew his nose. "How much oil did you waste signaling, Clint?" he asked.

"All I got."

One of the ranchers exclaimed: "And the wind's dropped! He's burnt up all his oil and there's not a stir in the windbreak. It's a freeze! And he's got no oil to save his grove!"

"He's got to have oil," Jen Carson said in a steady voice. "He'll lose his whole crop!"

"Maybe you realized that when you saved my boy," Murray said.

Max was at the window in time to send one shot after Clint's disappearing form.

"Sure," Clint shrugged. "But after all, a kid's a kid."

Neaf Murray's tiny son was looking at Clint, wide-eyed as if he had awakened from a nightmare. "Daddy,"—he pointed his fat little finger at Clint,—"can I ride the hobby-horse? He gave me a hobby-horse, Daddy."

Jen Carson burst out joyfully: "I guess Clint figured he's worth a little oil. In fact, he's worth a carload, Mr. Murray! You've got two carloads down on the track siding in town which you're holding for profiteering prices. Isn't that right, everybody?"

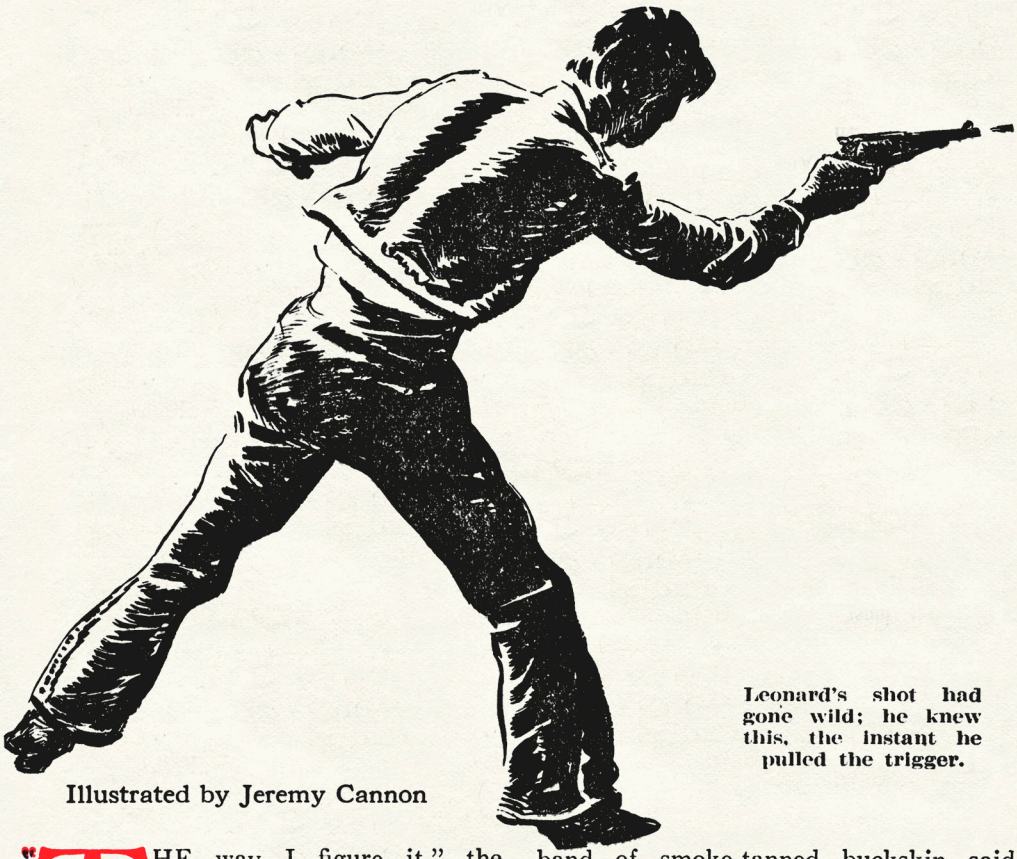
"One carload," Murray corrected. "The other goes to Clint, which is more'n he'll need the whole winter—and the next one too. I'll have a truckload up here in half an hour. I want to save this crop, because I'm buying it right now—on the trees. If it's all frozen, you lose nothing."

The ranchers gaped. Buying a crop on the night of a freeze had never been heard of in that valley!

"We'll stay and help Clint fire up," Soggy Carson said. "Only we need a little priming up ourselves first." He made for the kitchen.

"Stay away from that gallon jug, Soggy!" Clint yelled. "I put ant-poison in it. But those crooks were too smart." He raised his voice so that Max, the Professor and the wounded Shorty could hear him. "They wouldn't touch that jug. Too quick for me. Pretty smart boys, they were—considering!"

Bold Riders out



Leonard's shot had gone wild; he knew this, the instant he pulled the trigger.

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

"THE way I figure it," the Wagon-master said, "a man has got to look out for Number One."

He was leaning against the building wall of sundried bricks, and the mellow sunshine which was sifting down into the narrow streets of old Santa Fe that spring afternoon enveloped him like a bath of liquid gold; it drew from him the effluvia of many mules; it brought out all the grossness of his swollen midsection, and it glinted on his hard round eyes; its soft warmth seemed to heighten the reek of liquor on his breath.

"Sounds like good sense to me," Clay Leonard agreed quietly. "And anyhow, this aint my war."

He was, you would have thought if you had seen him then, as New Mexican as the ancient capital into which he had ridden this same afternoon. The trousers with the strips of leather down the sides, the short vaquero's jacket and the wide hat of soft felt with its embossed band of smoke-tanned buckskin said that he belonged to the generation of rich natives who had recently begun to put aside the clumsy steep-crowned sombrero of their forefathers. But the darkness of his skin and the lean features and the dead black hair which almost touched his shoulders came from some Indian-fighting forebear back on the Ohio. And he was thinking, as he made his answer, that it was very much his war just now. . . .

There were a score of men somewhere near, within the little recess between the flat-roofed buildings; and there were two fighting cocks in the center of the circle which these men made. The birds wore sharp steel gaffs; their feathers were puffed out in deadly anger; they were bobbing up and down, striking at each other with the man-made spurs. The two owners squatted, one on either side of the circle, and the other members of the audience sprawled on the hard-beaten earth: half a dozen booted,

# of Santa Fe

THE CIVIL WAR in the Far West—a scene hitherto untouched, so far as we recall, in American literature—is the background for this fascinating novel (complete in this issue) by the able author of "The Hazardous Highway" and "Nevada Gold."

By
FREDERICK BECHDOLT

ragged Texans, lank-haired and weather-stained; twice as many Mexicans, their eyes avid with the lust for death. The Wagon-master and Leonard stood a little way apart beside the building wall.

"Nor my war, either," the Wagon-master laughed thickly and nodded. "Look at these here Texas men: Come up the river from Messilla, bellies empty, to Fort Craig, an' fit two days at Valverde without a drop of water. Lost their stock in a stampede an' hoofed it on to Santa Fe. Look at Canby's men, what's left of 'em, up in Fort Union, waiting to take another licking. What's it get 'em?" He waved a grimy hand. "Now, me, I've got sense. I don't say nothing. I wait to see which way the cat's going to jump. And"—he winked at Leonard—"when this-here Texas column comes dragging into Santa Fe, I go to General Sibley an' I declare myself loyal to the Confederate States of America. I turn over my mules. I got to lose 'em, anyhow. But I get my pass. An' I can come an' go while others dodge the provost guard." He lurched and recovered himself.

Apparently Leonard was regarding the fighting cocks. He said:

"Suppose we go and get another drink."

"You're on," the Wagon-master agreed.

The narrow street into which they passed was deserted. The front walls of most of the low adobe houses were blank, windowless. They were going by a space between two of the buildings, when Leonard dropped back a pace; the edge of his right hand struck heavily on the nape of the Wagon-master's neck.

The Wagon-master stumbled once and fell forward on his face. His fat arms twitched, but there was no other movement. Leonard seized the greasy shirt-collar in his two hands and dragged the inert form into the space between the building walls. When he came out a few moments later, the pass, which General Sibley of the Confederate forces had written, was in the pocket of his vaquero's jacket, giving forth a faint aroma of sweaty mules.

The street was still empty save for a pair of moth-eaten burros and a dog which was biting fleas. Leonard walked

leisurely toward the spot where the narrow thoroughfare met the plaza; on either side of him were low buildings, the color of dried mud, with peeled poles projecting from their flat roofs. There was a church bell ringing somewhere in another quarter of the town. It was all very peaceful, and he looked a part of the scene. But he was feeling the loneliness which comes to one who walks in danger, a long way from those whom he had come to serve.

As a matter of fact, he had no business at all to be abroad in these narrow streets during the hours of daylight, for the errand which had brought him down from Fort Union, where the tattered regiments of the North were waiting to make their last stand against the equally ragged Texans who had already taken the most of New Mexico and Arizona for the Confederacy, could not be performed until evening was well along. And there were many who knew his face.

But he was one of those who liked danger for its own sake and did not like waiting at all; and so he had chosen to take a look at the men of Texas when cold common sense should have kept him in hiding until the time came to seek out the tidings which he had been sent to get. And now that he had the Wagon-master's pass in his pocket, there was less chance of undergoing examination which might lead to recognition—and later on to being stood up between an adobe wall and a firing squad, as a Union spy.

He was nearing the end of the street when he heard the sound of footfalls, and a moment later he had good cause to be thankful for that sweat-soiled bit of paper which was already beginning to make him smell like a hard-working mule. Later on, when he recalled the incident, as he did many times, he always felt a little prickling of the skin, remembering the various dangerous complications which arose from it.

HE was just walking into the plaza when he met the provost guard whose footsteps he had heard. A half-dozen Texas youths: the harsh sun and the harsher winds of the early spring had stained their skins to the color of used saddles; some were clad in home-spun breeches; others wore butternut jeans, and most of them were coatless. Their wide-brimmed hats were sadly soiled and battered; their lips were still cracked and their faces gaunt. And as he looked at them, Leonard remembered boys like these who had charged through the sand dunes beside the Rio Grande at Valverde, with Bowie knives in their hands, and their puffed black tongues protruding, while they fought to break through the Union lines and gain the water which they had been seeking for two days. One or two of them were carrying muzzle-loading rifles, and all of them wore long-barreled cap-and-ball six-shooters dangling beside their lean thighs. The sergeant, who had no chevrons, brought them to a halt; he said:

"Who are yo', pardner?" His blue eyes were bleak.

LEONARD pulled out the Wagon-master's pass and watched the sergeant as he read. The bleak eyes left the written paper and met his own.

"How come?" the sergeant asked. "That's not a Greaser name." His drawl was soft, but the eyes were hard and dangerous.

"It is the name of my father," Leonard lied swiftly. "He came here with his wagons many years ago. My mother was of the Turango family." And then, by way of good measure, he added: "I went to General Sibley several days ago. I was one of the first to visit him; and I have given him all I owned, my mules and wagons and the feed in the corrals. This I am very happy to do, señor, for I wish to serve the cause. Me, I am a loyal Confederate. You will ask the General, and he will tell you it is so."

While he was saying the last words, a girl passed close beside him. She had come from behind, and so he did not see her until she had gone by. If he had not been a cool hand, he would surely have betrayed himself then; but as it was, he did not even catch his breath. He merely glanced at the slender little form, and he did not let his eyes linger on the pink-and-white face for more than a passing instant. It was as if he had never seen this exotic vision, in billowing crinoline, with the mass of red hair under the funny scuttle-shaped bonnet; it was as if the only emotion which her sudden appearance aroused were a very faint disapproval at a young lady abroad upon the streets without a duenna. But he was thanking his run of good luck that neither the sergeant nor any of his squad had caught sight of her expression when she heard him make that avowal of loyalty to the Southern cause.

However, the sergeant was already restoring the looted pass to its possessor. The provost guard went on their way. Leonard turned and sauntered into the plaza, where dust-motes were rising into shafts of late sunshine.

The long, low Palace of the Governors stood on the opposite side of the sandy square, mellowed by the weather of more than a century; behind the shadow of its wide veranda the forms of sentries were dimly visible, lounging before doors which had opened to trappers and wagon men, to the descendants of Spanish *conquistadores* and to brown-robed padres. Over the flat tiled roof the red banner of the Confederacy with its crossed blue bars and its white stars fluttered lazily in the faint breeze. There were two rows of dingy tents on the plaza; there were several score of bed-rolls lying on the sandy earth; there were groups of Texas soldiers who did not look soldier-like at all, but deceptively unfit; lean, ragged men, unshaven, sunburned. One of the groups was playing monte. There were Mexican boys peddling *dulces,* in the late sunshine; there were several inquisitive dogs; there were four field-pieces which looked the worse for wear, and a few stacks of muskets. And there was no sign of order anywhere.

To these things which he had strayed hither to examine, Leonard was paying no heed. Apparently he was loafing, looking idly about him, but his eyes were following the girl who had passed him while he was talking with the provost sergeant. She had gone toward the opposite side of the square; and now, as he watched her, she came to a halt. She was speaking to a man: a blocky man in dingy flannel shirt and trousers of buckskin with fringes down the legs; there was a long scar on one cheek, and his thick eyebrows met above his nose so that they made a straight dark line. The girl was talking earnestly; Leonard saw her raise her hand in an abrupt gesture; he saw the man turn his head and look toward him. It came to him that luck, which had been kind to him today, was taking a dive for the worse.

"I TELL you," she was saying, "he is a Rebel spy."

The statement should not have seemed alarming, or even of unusual interest, here in Santa Fe, for the town was garrisoned with Southern troops, and it was full of Confederate sympathizers. But so far as politics was concerned, Nancy Adams was as out of place in these narrow streets as the Eastern bonnet and the silk dress which she was wearing. Like many people in those days of civil war, she was taking her convictions very seriously. . . . The color was high in her cheeks, and her eyes were blazing as she went on:

"I saw him two weeks ago in Fort Union, talking with Kit Carson. A few minutes ago, I heard him telling one of those Texas ragamuffins that he was loyal to the South; he was showing a paper that General Sibley had given him. He's been finding out the number of the Northern troops at the post, and he's come here to report. I know it!"

"YOU say you saw him at Fort Union?" The man with the heavy brows was frowning, but when she raised her eyes, his failed to meet them. He changed the subject abruptly.

"You know," he told her, "you oughtn't to be running around alone this way. These folks here have got different ideas than you was brought up with in the States. A girl don't go around like—"

She stamped her foot. "You mind your business, please," she bade him.

He laughed.

"Long as you're mad now, I may as well make you madder, Miss Nancy. I aint going to be able to drive you to Adams' ranch, like I promised you." He was going to explain his reasons, but the look in her eyes checked him; her face was as white as paper, and she turned away without a word.

He waited until she had passed into the next street; then he hurried to the long veranda which shaded the front of the old Palace of the Governors. The sentry who was loafing before the doorway to the room where Governor Henry Connelly had held forth until a week ago, evidently recognized him, for he stood aside without a word. Within, a lathy young Texan who was cultivating a pair of sideburns and wearing a gray blouse by way of uniform, heard what the visitor had to say, and went at once to the office of General Sibley, the Confederate commander.

A few moments later two squads of provost guardsmen set forth from the Palace and combed down the plaza for a tall young man who looked like a Mexican and possessed a Confederate pass, but who was, in point of fact, a Union captain from Kit Carson's regiment. But Leonard had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THERE was a blue tinge in the darkness which enwrapped the narrow streets of Santa Fe. Such lights as showed were few and far between; they glowed from behind small windows; they made blurs of orange, surrounded by blank walls which melted into the night. And more than one of those thick, invisible walls of adobe bricks hid its own secrets.

The house of the Serpas stood within a stone's-throw of the plaza; it fronted on a dusty roadway which eventually widened at the eastern limits of the town, where it became the rutted wagon-trail of the traders from the States. The residence was older than the Mexican Republic; it was one of the very few two-story buildings in the place, and the family went back to the Spanish *conquistadores*. There was a long hitching-rack before the house, and a solitary horse was standing there. A light was burning in one of the ground-floor rooms; another showed in a bedchamber. And in those two rooms two different plans were being laid for the long trail to Fort Union and the Adams ranch.

One of the planners was a red-haired girl; and while she was sitting alone in her bedchamber engrossed in her wild project, the blocky man with the scarred face whom she had met in the plaza that afternoon was conferring with Esteban Serpa in the downstairs room. It was a large room, with low ceiling and bleak whitewashed walls; the furniture was heavy and somber; there was a tiny flame wavering in the fireplace at the end where the two of them were sitting. They made, as far as external appearances go, a curious pair of opposites: the thin New Mexican with gray streaks in his hair, who sucked in his breath between colorless lips and hid his eyes behind secretive lids, looked like an anemic black beetle that never sought the light of day; his guest sat on the edge of the wide-armed chair, his buckskin-trousered legs outspread, and his weather-reddened face aglow in the firelight, the heavy brows curling up at the ends like a pair of misplaced mustaches. But the contrast lay largely in external appearance: it would have been hard to say whose methods were the more oblique.

"It is," Esteban Serpa was saying, "the fortune of war. It is not of my doing nor of yours. And as long as it is so, it is well that we should profit. Besides that, it is only justice." His voice became thin and venomous.

"This man Lucien Adams was without a dollar to his name when he came into the country. He went to work for my cousin by marriage; and after my cousin died, Adams married his widow. If that had not been so, the great grant near the Colorado line would have come to me. Forty-five miles along the Santa Fe Trail, twenty thousand head of cattle, forty thousand sheep." He drew his breath with a sharp hiss.

"When the Confederate forces came up the river and the Union regiments retreated northward to Fort Union, I went to the Palace of the Governors, and I declared my loyalty to the South; I gave them money, and I gave them horses, and I told General Sibley the story of the Adams grant. After the Texans have taken Fort Union and driven the Northern army out of New Mexico, the land will come back to the family. And if you do your part in bringing this about, you will be my partner, Señor Lawson; you will manage the ranch and the trading-post. We will be rich men."

LAWSON laughed. "Lucien Adams played in luck when he married into that grant—I played in luck this afternoon when I ran across his niece on the plaza. It's funny, the way these things happen. It was only a week ago the papers came through from Washington giving me the trader's post at Adams'. Then I ran across you, and we made this deal of ours. And both of us was figgering that everything was all right, no need of any hurry, until Miss Nancy finds me on that street-corner and tells me she's seen a Rebel spy. Soon as I laid eyes on the fellow, I knew him: he's not a Rebel spy but a Union spy—a captain in one of Kit Carson's companies; he was with St. Vrain and Carson last summer on the Picketwire. If I hadn't done some mighty quick thinking, he'd have been on his way back to Fort Union by this time, and they'd have got the news that Sibley's going to attack the post within the next few days. They'd send word up north to the Colorado troops that are coming across the Raton, to hurry on in time to reinforce them. And then, where would you and I get off? Yes sir. You can thank that red-headed little guest of yours for saving our bacon."

"But this man Leonard," Serpa said, "—he is not taken yet?"

"They're looking for him," Lawson told him easily. "They'll get him. He'll not ride out of Santa Fe. They're guarding every road. And I'll see to it that some one is watching the trail between here and Fort Union, to stop him if he should happen to slip through."

"And," Serpa said softly, "you will pass through Fort Union. You will leave the word that Sibley is going to take his time; they will feel easy then, and will not expect an attack for three weeks."

Lawson, smiling, shook his head.

"That might be the way you would do it, my friend; but I have another plan. When I stop off at Fort Union, I'm going to hunt up the commanding officer, and I'm going to tell him that Sibley's figuring on taking his Texas men out on the trail inside of the next few days."

He saw the look of dismay on the Mexican's face, and he laughed quietly.

"You didn't think I was going to put myself into a fix so that, if anything went wrong, those fellows would be hunting for me as a Rebel spy, did you? No sir! I got the name of being a loyal man to the Union, and I'm hanging onto it; and either way things turn out in this here invasion of New Mexico, I'm in the clear. Besides, the Colorado crowd would be a heap more liable to listen to a man if he fetched along credentials with him, wouldn't they? I want some papers, and this is the way I aim to get 'em.

"After I've brought the news to Fort Union, the first thing that General Canby and Kit Carson and the rest of 'em will do is to hold a council of war. Then the next thing will be to send on a messenger to the Raton Pass. He'll have his credentials all right and proper. By that time I'll be gone on. I'll pick a good place on the trail; and when this soldier comes along, I'll be laying for him. I'll get him from ambush, and I'll take his papers. Those that I want, I'll keep, and I'll ride on to meet the Colorado bunch. When I fetch up with 'em, I'll tell 'em that the Texas men took a licking at Valverde and are retreating down the Rio Grande. You can bet those Pike's Peak miners will have their bellies full of this country by the time they've crossed the Raton; and when they get that news, they'll be ready to turn back and go home as fast as God will let 'em."

"Why, then," Serpa asked, "are you taking such trouble to stop this Yankee captain from reaching Fort Union?"

"The hand is dealt, and we will play it."

"Because," the other told him, "he saw me this afternoon. And I'm pretty sure he watched me going to Sibley's quarters. I'd like to have him got rid of along the trail, if the Confederate crowd don't shoot him for a spy."

"It should work," Serpa murmured.

"It will work!" And Lawson slapped his knee by way of emphasis. "There's about six hundred Northern men in Fort Union, and there's twelve hundred Texans here in Santa Fe with Sibley. They'll take the post dead easy. And when they've got those supplies that the Government was kind enough to leave there while Jeff Davis was secretary of war, they'll take New Mexico and Arizona and Utah and California."

He rose from his chair. "This Captain Leonard won't get out of town. And if he should, he won't ever show up at Fort Union. General Canby and Kit Carson and the St. Vrain crowd will get the licking of their lives within the next ten days. And a week after that, I'll be managing the Adams grant for you."

He departed; a few moments later the hoof-beats of his horse were breaking the silence in the street outside.

NANCY ADAMS, in her room, heard the sound, but paid no heed to it. Her only confidant was her diary: after the manner of the hoop-skirted young ladies of the day, she was setting down her hopes and plans in boarding-school Spencerian. The entry read:

It is settled. I am leaving within the hour for Uncle Lucien's ranch. I am going alone, and when the servant comes in with the chocolate in the morning, she will be surprised, for she will find an empty bed with a note pinned to the pillow.

The pages of the diary went back two years; they contained the brief entry recording her father's death in one of the first battles of the war; her mother's death a few months later; her own departure for California, where there were relatives awaiting her; the meeting with a young Northern captain and his wife at Independence on their way to Fort Union, who had persuaded her to change her route. At that time, when the West was very wide and the rest of the nation somewhat narrow, the idea of visiting her uncle Lucien Adams in New Mexico had not seemed at all impractical; but the Confederate invasion from Texas had effectually closed the gap between Santa Fe and the stage road in the south, and it had put the stages out of business for weeks at a time. So she had found herself marooned on the great grant which her uncle owned at the edge of the mountains near the Colorado boundary; and when she had tired of Ute Indians and vaqueros, she had come down to Santa Fe in one of Adams' famous spring carriages, with a peon driver and four half-broken horses, to visit the Serpas, who were related to her uncle in some left-hand Mexican manner by marriage.

BUT if the wild lands of the Adams grant had seemed lonely when she left, they now seemed homelike and desirable, for the house of the Serpas was as silent as a convent, and the womenfolk lived as sequestered as so many black-robed nuns. Within two days Nancy Adams had become something near to a family scandal, what with her abrupt speech and her habit of going where she willed and when she pleased without a chaperon. The last four pages of the diary were filled with the rebellions of an impatient girl; the final one concerned this afternoon when Lawson, the Indian trader who was about to depart for the Adams ranch to take charge of the store, had informed her that he must make the trip without her.

She had learned enough of the ways of this great dismal house to realize that announcement of her intention to make the journey alone would probably result in nothing less than a polite imprisonment. So she had confided to no one except the peon who had driven her down—and the future readers of her diary. And upon the former, in order to insure his silence, she had bestowed a five-dollar gold-piece—which was, as things turned out, most injudicious.

She closed the covers of the diary and tossed it into the battered leather valise which lay beside her chair. She folded it shut and knelt upon it while she fastened the lock. She covered her billowing crinolines with a long dark cloak, and she hid most of her red hair under a black *rebozo*. She looked about the room: bare whitewashed walls with a crucifix above the head of the great mahogany bedstead; two large uncomfortable chairs with rawhide-covered cushions; a rosary on the table. She said under her breath:

"Well, I've seen the last of this." Then she took up the valise and walked down the deserted hallway, leaning away from its weight, which pressed one side of her hooped skirts against her slim leg and thrust the other side far out. When she passed the closed door of the room where Esteban Serpa administered the affairs of his family and talked politics in whispers, she saw a slender thread of lamplight oozing over the threshold. But the door remained shut, and all the other doors in the wide corridor on the lower floor.

The street outside was empty. There was a raw wind from the eastern hills. She breathed a deep sigh of relief when she turned the corner and saw the victoria carriage with the four rough-coated mustangs plunging and scuffling to the taut reins. She managed to lift in the valise, then climbed in after it; the reins slackened, and the half-broken horses leaped forward with a violence that threw her into the corner of the seat. She saw the back of the peon, a dark blur against the night; she caught the smell of liquor here in the rear where she was sitting; she realized it was the driver's breath, and she began to regret that five-dollar gold-piece.

THERE was a robe of gray wolfskins on the seat; she unfolded it, drew it around her. The four horses were lined out on a dead run; the carriage rocked on swaying springs; it was like the lurching of a small boat in a heavy sea. She leaned forward to speak to the driver, and at the same moment he pulled on the reins. The leaders veered, and the wheelers followed so sharply that the vehicle nearly capsized as it rounded the corner.

They were in a narrower street, and it led away to the southward. The pace of the horses had slackened to a steady lope; then, at the end of the square, they

whirled around another corner. Close walls on either side: it was hardly more than an alley, and the walls were no longer blank; there were many small windows ablaze with lights; the shine of lamps gushed out of open doorways; she caught a glimpse through one of them of an interior, where a dusky woman was sitting on a man's knee. She called at the top of her voice. And her heart leaped with relief as she saw the driver's body lean backward against the tug of the taut reins; but as the spans came to a halt, the driver leaped out and handed the reins to a ragged Mexican on the narrow sidewalk. Then he vanished within the doorway of a drinking-shop.

That next half-hour remained in her memory years afterward as a sort of nightmare. She recalled every moment of it when other details of grimmer events that followed during the next few days, escaped her mind. It was, she realized, her own fault that had brought her to this pass; she had seen drunken peons before, and she had been in the country long enough to learn the ways of the debtor servants, to whom a silver dollar meant a half month's wages, and a gold-piece existed only in imagination.

Now that the noise of the wheels and the rattle of hoofs had ceased, the smaller noises of the street were audible, and she was getting an education along lines which she had never expected to pursue. She sat there, huddled in a corner of the back seat, making herself as small as possible, holding her face averted, so that the men who were passing against the building walls might not get a glimpse of it. She heard the ugly, shrill laughter of women; she heard the gruff voices of men, and she heard the greetings which the women called from the doorways as they went by. And although her knowledge of the border Spanish was so slight that it was hard for her to give a simple order to a servant, she could not help but catch the import of some of the things the women said.

She dared not get out of the carriage with those men on the sidewalk, and she dared not call for help lest one of them come to her. A Mexican girl who was leaning over the half-door which barred entrance to a cubicle a few yards away, was regarding her under lowered eyelids. A tawny creature, full-breasted, with red paint on her cheeks. She said something to a pair of vaqueros who were going by, and as they looked up, the girl pointed toward the carriage.

The pair lurched across the narrow sidewalk. One of them called something in Spanish. He was a fat man with a yellow face, and his teeth were very white behind full lips; his companion, who was younger and lanky-haired, with features which looked as though they had been carved out of a cake of chocolate, laid hold of the carriage door and started to open it. The man who was holding the reins turned around and grinned. And Nancy screamed.

CHAPTER III

SHE was the most remarkable woman, probably, in the whole Southwest; she was an institution in Santa Fe and had been for more than two decades. Her face was marked by a network of tiny lines, and her eyes were shining in the light of the candles like two almond-shaped ornaments of polished jet. She was dealing monte to two Confederate colonels and three plump Mexicans of middle age whose spotless broadcloth made odd contrast to the trail-worn uniforms of the officers.

The men of the City of the Holy Faith and the men of the trails called her La Flora. The candles in their metal sconces on the four walls cast wavering lights on her slim hands. Her long fingers moved with bewildering swift grace, turning the cards from the bottom of the deck. She sat in a high-backed chair; she was sheathed in heavy black silk, with a thin lace scarf. Her face was quite expressionless, save for a certain gracious dignity. She was as stately as a Spanish noblewoman, as she delt the cards to her five invited guests.

In the years gone by she had dealt to Governors and generals and caballeros, to landholders whose grants extended for a day's long ride on horseback, and rich traders from the States. Only those whom she invited ever came within the doors of her long adobe house. Many little piles of gold had moved to her side of this same table; but tonight, in deference to the presence of the two shabby butternut-colored blouses with their tarnished shoulder-straps, the stakes were small. One might have wondered what motive lay behind the courtesy which had caused the famous mistress of the most famous gambling place in the whole Southwest to lend her presence to such poor-paying guests, when half a dozen hired dealers were available.

The smoke lay in swaying layers in the quiet air of the little room. The ends of the cigarettes glowed red against the candle-light; she rolled her own from thin cornhusks and golden flakes. There was a heavy rug of goat's wool marked in patterns of black and white on the tile floor; the walls were hung with more of these rugs. The polished wood of the table-top was brown with age, and it reflected the light of the candles in little shimmering pools.

When the door opened, the music of a guitar gushed across the threshold; and when it closed, the flood of Spanish music was shut off abruptly. The slim young man in flaring broadcloth breeches and a soft shirt open at the throat allowed his eyes to meet those of the hostess for a bare instant before he bowed. Her face gave no sign that she had got any message from his look; and when she spoke, her manner was entirely casual. She said in English for the benefit of the two Texans:

"You will excuse me for a short time. It is that I have some small business. I present to you Carlos Ortez, who will deal to you." She introduced the two officers, and added, rising: "The others you know. I hope the luck is kind to you, señores."

But when the door had closed behind her, the multitude of fine lines seemed to deepen for just an instant over her small face. And in that instant her black eyes hardened; they were wary. The wariness passed; she was impassive as she had been before. But there was just a trace of haste in her movements as she went down the wide, heavily carpeted corridor, just a hint of the liteness which had been hers when she was a young adventuress, unschooled in the art of repression, eager for the meeting which was awaiting her.

THE doors beside the corridor were thick; no sound came from beyond. When she reached its end, she passed into the long salon beyond, where the thin notes of the guitar hovered in the dimness like a golden mist. There was a great chandelier of beaten ironwork over the middle of the dancing floor, and the flames of many candles showed the dark rafters above; they cast paths and islands of light into the more remote corners; they revealed the figures of three men, their youthful olive faces, the scarlet gown of a girl whose face was invisible in the shadow, whose voice came out of the darkness in a husky undernote, the slim form of another dancer, clad in golden silk.

LA FLORA crossed the long room and came into another corridor. At the second door on the right hand, a pock-marked Indian stood like a chocolate-colored statue. She said, "Let no one enter." And she passed within.

It was a larger chamber than the one wherein she had been dealing monte. Its walls were hung with bright rugs, whose soft root dyes and curious patterns showed that they had come from the land of the Navajos. There was a huge grizzly-bear skin hiding most of the thick carpet; there were two candelabra of beaten silver on the table, which was the main article of furniture. A few oak logs were burning in a corner fireplace. Leonard was standing beside the heavy chair from which he had risen as she crossed the threshold.

She could not help it that her eyes flashed brief pleasure when she first looked upon him. But she was quick to shake her head; and when she spoke, her voice was brittle.

"The thing that you have done this afternoon, I have heard of it. The whole town is talking of you. It is not in this way that one should come, when the safety of others depends on his returning to them."

Leonard had been smiling when she started speaking; now he flushed, bowed.

"Señora," he said, "you are right. And I am sorry. There is no excuse that I can offer."

She passed around the table, and he waited until she had taken the chair beyond it before he seated himself. He watched her pick up a packet of thin cornhusks and a beaded bag of tobacco and roll a cigarette with her long fingers. And then she asked:

"When you came to my house, are you certain that no one followed? Was there anyone on the streets who looked at you a second time?"

"There was no one." He shook his head. "None that I saw, and I was very careful."

"Let us hope that you saw all there was to see." She shrugged. "At any rate, the hand is dealt, and we will play it."

She smoked slowly for some moments, regarding him through eyes like shining jet; and when she spoke again, her voice was a little gentler.

"The spy that you are looking for came in here, and threatened to kill me if I uttered a sound."

"You were with Kit Carson at Valverde, and you should know that it takes more than bravery when you are playing for high stakes. Any fool can do the bold thing, as you did this afternoon; but the sensible man never makes a bet unless he sees something to be won." She saw the flush return to his cheeks.

"You see," she went on, "the stakes are high tonight. If it should happen that you were stood up before a wall and shot as a Union spy, you would die nicely as a bold man should; but that would not be all. I have made a little wager of my own, you understand. It is not the first time I have done this. That was nearly fifteen years ago, when General Kearney's soldiers came to Santa Fe. They needed money badly, for they had used all they had to grease the palm of the governor, and when they could find no one among the traders who would give the contribution, they came to La Flora. Now I am playing Washington to win again, as I did then; and I am putting on the table all that I have, my house and my own safety and everything I own. I would not like to see the provost guard take you tonight.

"And that is not all. If you do not leave Santa Fe by morning and get through to Fort Union with the news that I have for Colonel Kit Carson, the Texans will capture the post. And when

they have the ammunition and the arms which were left there two years ago, they will be able to take New Mexico and Colorado and Utah—and perhaps California.

"If an old woman and her gambling-house do not mean much to you, my friend, you will remember these other players. Yes?"

"Señora," Leonard said, "I will be careful. I promise it. But Fort Union is safe. The Colorado regiments are coming; they are near the Raton Pass."

She raised her hand to check him, and he noticed the fine slenderness of the palm, the length of the slim fingers held up against the light of the clustered candles in the silver stick.

"This is the news that I have for Kit Carson," she told him slowly, watching his face as she spoke, to be sure that he did not miss a word. "And when you give it to him, you will tell him that I am sure of what I say. It was the idea of General Sibley to wait here in Santa Fe for three weeks; and while he was in town, he intended to gather more troops, to get large contributions from the rich families. He believed that New Mexico was strong with the South; but he forgot that the common people still hate the men of Texas as they did in the old days, when Mexico was fighting them. And he did not realize that all the money which these people of ours get, comes from the Northern traders. So the recruits whom he expected did not show themselves, and the only help which he got was from a few of the rich families. To wait here, according to his first plan, would bring him nothing. To march on at once will surprise Fort Union. He will march within the next few days."

SHE noted the surprise on Leonard's face; and her lips, which were still vividly red in spite of her years, relaxed in another slight smile.

"It is not without some profit that I am inviting the Confederate officers to come to my house; and when I deal monte for the small stakes that they have, I am not seeking the slight favors that they can grant me.

"Listen now! The Texas men will march within a few days; and the Colorado militia, who are coming from the north to reinforce General Canby, have been delayed by storms. Two weeks ago one of those regiments of Pike's Peak miners rebelled against the officers because they were sick of hard marching without any fighting. So now—" she spread her thin hands before her, palms upward—"we must get word through to them to hasten, or else Fort Union falls. There are some other things which I have learned—"

He listened while she repeated them: the number of Sibley's men and their condition, details of equipment and arms. And while he was absorbing these, wondering at her wide sources of information, the folly of his own action this afternoon was suddenly impressed upon him again.

IT came as a startling interruption: three loud knocks on the thick door. La Flora ceased speaking; her eyes met Leonard's briefly; they were as hard as two strips of black glass beneath the lowered lids. She removed the cigarette from her lips and exhaled a little cloud of smoke; she rose and crossed the room in silence; she made a swift, short gesture toward the wall beside the threshold; and as he stepped to the spot which she had pointed out, she opened the door. It swung inward, hiding him behind it.

There were three soldiers in the hallway. The Indian who had been guarding the entrance stood between two of them, booted rangers in double-breasted flannel shirts and jean breeches, who held their cap-and-ball pistols leveled upon him. The third man stepped into the room.

He was a raw-boned man; his loose blouse and his trousers were of smoke-tanned buckskin; the dust-soiled rim of his wide hat slouched toward one of his shoulders. His right hand rested on the wooden butt of a big revolver in his loose belt holster. His left hand swept behind him, and in the same swift movement it swung the door shut.

La Flora stood before him, her face like a wooden mask.

He started to say something; and then —perhaps it was that he had heard Leonard's breathing, perhaps it was some sense more subtle than that of his ears which brought the message of danger—he spun on his heel. He was drawing the weapon from its holster when Leonard seized his wrist.

It was a bony wrist, thick, covered with fine red hair. Leonard's fingers clamped tightly over it. He had to use the full strength of his arm to maintain his grasp; he was dragging his own pistol from beneath his waistband when the Texan gripped him with his free hand.

So they stood for a few moments, and the only sound in the room was their thick breathing; the only movement was the slight swaying of their tense bodies. La Flora stood barely a pace away. She did not move.

The heavy wrist was sliding within Leonard's fingers. The sweat was standing out on his forehead in little drops which glittered in the candlelight. Then he raised one foot; he brought down the heel, with all his weight above it, upon the Texan's instep. The man sucked in his breath as he flinched with pain. His grasp relaxed; his pistol clattered on the thick rug of bearskin. Leonard's weapon swept upward, and the heavy barrel descended; a slender thread of red crept up through the sandy hair. The raw-boned bulk sagged forward, and fell so slowly that the sound was barely audible when it landed beside the revolver.

La Flora's lips parted slightly; they exhaled a cloud of blue smoke. Then she did a remarkable thing.

Her slender body moved so swiftly, it was so lithe, that when Leonard thought of that movement afterward, she did not seem old, she did not seem Spanish; she seemed—as she had indeed once been—a limber young courtesan in whose blood there ran more than a trace of Indian. Her feet hardly left the floor as she glided to the other side of the room. She plucked a saffron-colored cushion from a couch by the wall; she hurled herself upon the window, holding the cushion in her two hands. The crash of splintered wood mingled with the tinkle of broken glass.

She whirled about; her lips parted. Her scream for help carried to the farthest corner of the long house.

AN answer came so quickly that Leonard had barely time to leap to the wall before the door swung back, hiding him from the two rangers who had rushed in. They halted just within the threshold, staring at the motionless form on the bearskin rug.

"The American did this!" La Flora had grown old in the moment of their arrival; she had grown old and helpless and frightened. "It is the spy that you are looking for. He came in here, and he threatened to kill me if I uttered a sound. And when your officer entered, he clubbed him from behind." She pointed to the window. "That way he went, just as I screamed. If you are quick—"

They became quick, upon the word. Within the passing of seconds their footfalls were receding in the outer darkness. La Flora closed the door, and she nodded to Leonard. Her face was calm, her voice was impassive.

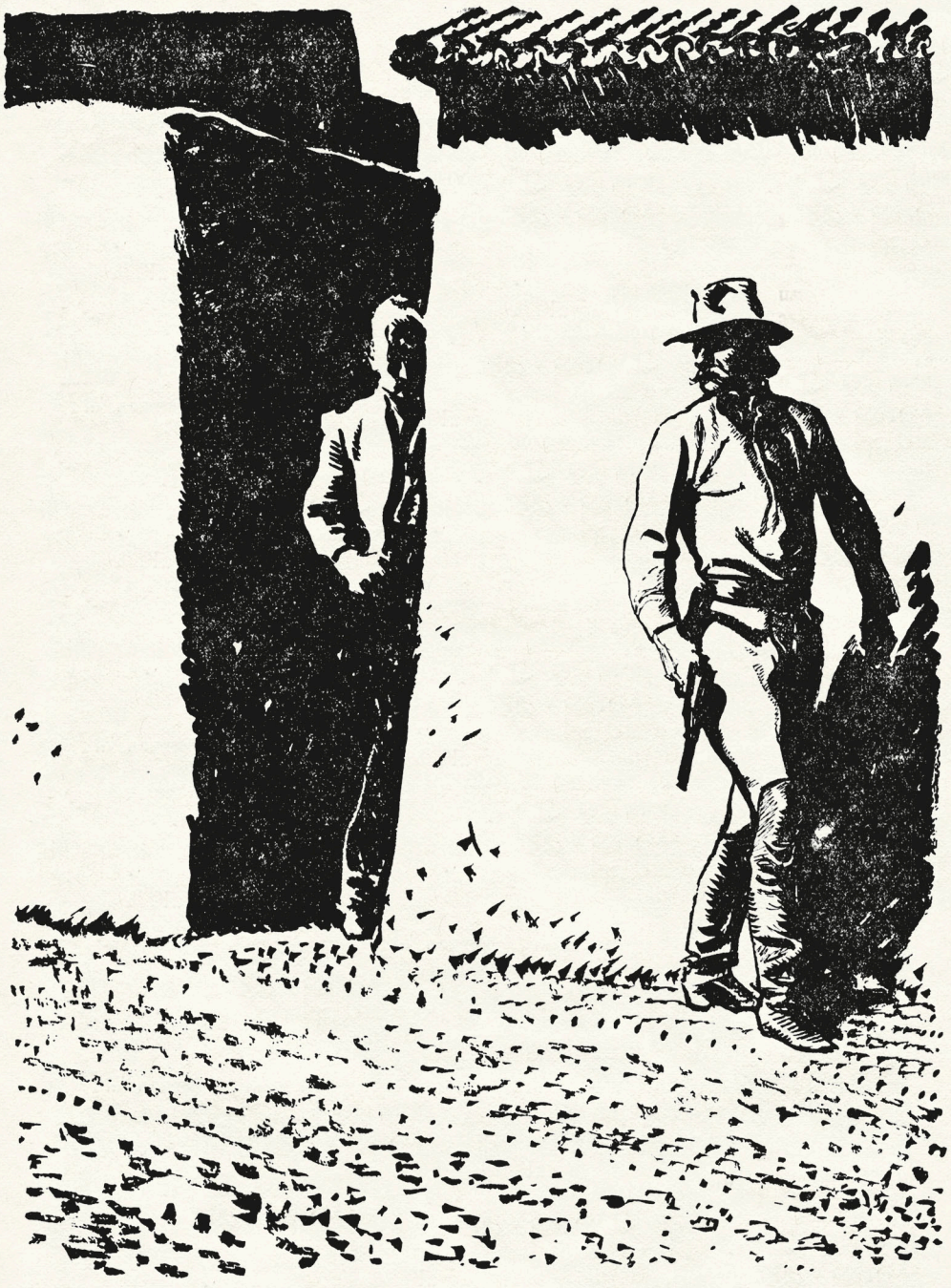
"They look for you, but they look before them, not behind. Go now, and God go with you."

CHAPTER IV

THE raw March wind swept down from the mountains upon the town of Santa Fe beneath a black canopy, dotted with blazing stars. The walls of the low buildings along the narrow street beside La Flora's gambling-house were like purple velvet. There was no sound except the receding footsteps of the Texas soldiers when Leonard stepped out of the open window; and after the shuffling footfalls had died away, he listened to the beat of his own heels upon the hard earth of the unpaved road.

For some time after that his only encounters were with night-prowling cats and two or three dogs engaged in dubious secret errands. The little house where he had taken lodgings with loyal friends of Kit Carson lay at the eastern edge of the town, and he was hugging the shadow of the building walls as he made his way in that direction. The desire for danger which had prompted his actions that afternoon—the same desire which had led him westward a few years ago and made him seek the company of the mountain men ever since—was gone now. The news that La Flora had given him had brought to him a sense of heavy responsibility. He knew that he was, in all probability, carrying on his shoulders the fate of the Northern forces who were holding Fort Union: the ragged companies of New Mexican militia who had enlisted under Kit Carson and Cerain St. Vrain, the regulars in faded blue uniforms who had stood fast to a man when their officers had gone over to the Confederacy nearly a year ago. If he did not get through to them in time for General Canby to send a messenger for immediate reinforcements from the Colorado volunteers, there was no chance of their holding out against the Texan odds.

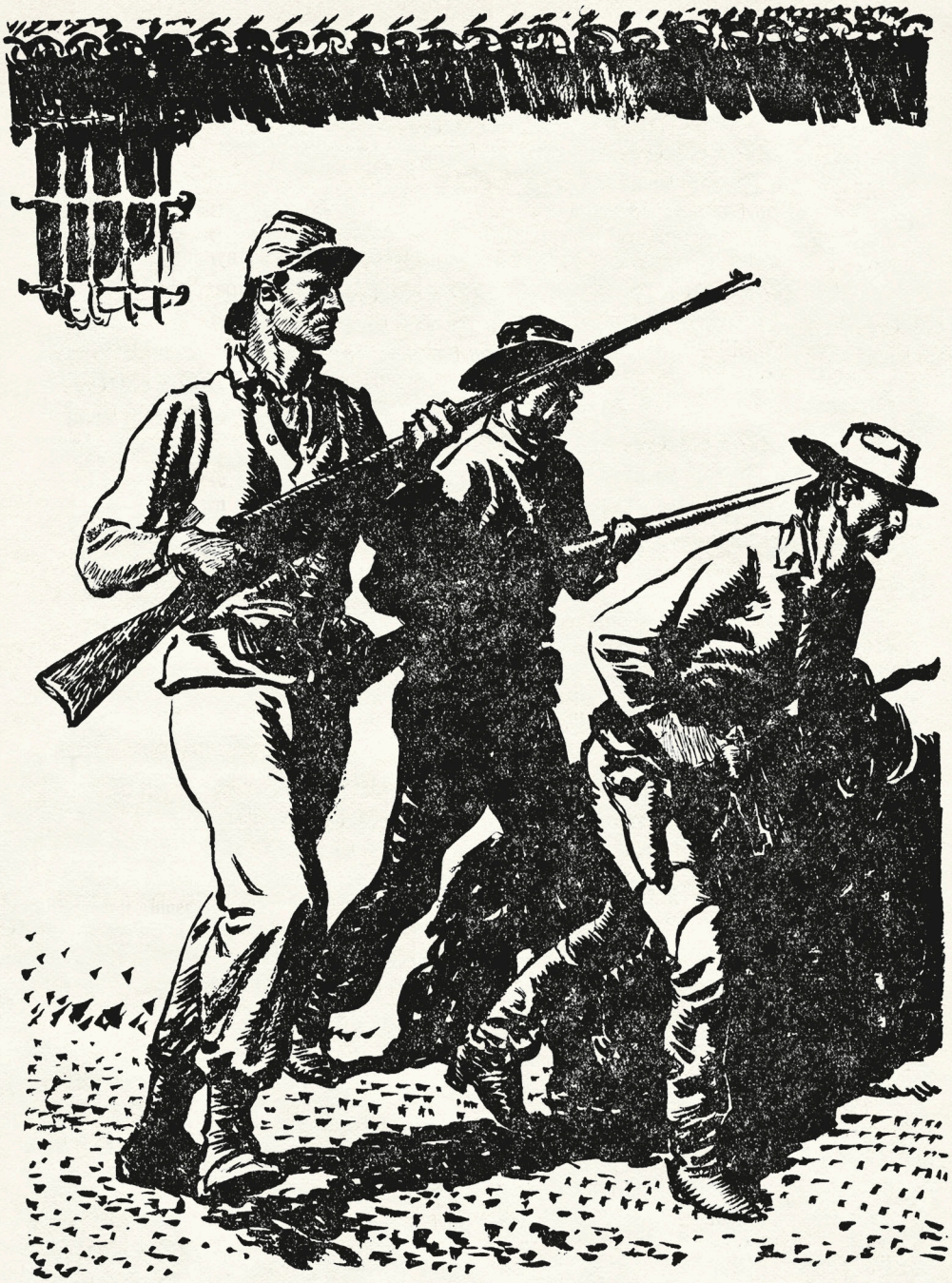
He was feeling ashamed of himself for his adventure-seeking during the afternoon. The memory of that red-haired girl who had overheard him talking to the provost guard and had hastened to



He was sliding around the building wall, when a

point him out immediately afterward, disturbed him. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that she was a Rebel sympathizer; if he had ever cherished any, it had been thoroughly disproved when the man with the heavy brows and the scarred face had hastened to the quarters of General Sibley. Now Leonard was a fugitive, with lank sunburned Texans combing the city for him, and sentries guarding the roads.

He was nearing one of those narrow alleys which intersect the main thoroughfares of the old town like the filaments of an enormous cobweb, when he heard the faint clink of accouterments somewhere ahead of him. He halted, holding his back flat against the building wall. The sound was repeated; it was a little louder this time. A moment later three forms emerged from the mouth of the alleyway.



yell was raised: "It's him, men! The Yankee!"

Here in the larger street there was a sidewalk of sorts, hardly better than a beaten pathway. The trio stood at its edge. They were facing the east, and their backs were toward him, a little group of black silhouettes, inked in against the blue night. The wind was coming down from the eastern mountains with a deep humming like a thousand swarms of bees. One of the men was cursing the weather in his soft Texas drawl. He went on to bestow a few invectives upon the fugitive who had brought him and his companions out on this chase. One of the others cut in:

"When yo' have finished feelin' sorry for yo'se'f," this one said, "mebbe yo' kin tell us which-a-way we are to go. Me, I don't admire to stand here freezing."

The first speaker unlimbered a final oath before he complied with the request.

"West—" he began; and the skin on the back of Leonard's neck was tingling; he was beginning to pull the heavy cap-and-ball revolver from beneath his waistband when the man went on: "It is all clear that way. We done ransacked every corner. We got to shove on just to the aidge of town, I reckon. That fellow must have laigs like a jackrabbit, way he disappeared."

AS they went on into the east, Leonard's breath was coming more freely—when the sound of other footfalls behind him froze him into immobility.

The newcomers were still invisible. There must have been a half-dozen of them at least, judging from the noise they made. And the first squad had heard them now, evidently, for they were halting.

Leonard kept his body pressed against the wall; he slid his feet as softly as a stalking cat; he was edging over slowly toward the mouth of the alley. It was not more than three yards away, but the soldiers who had left it a few minutes ago had turned, and they were looking in this direction, trying to pierce the darkness for some sign of the squad which was advancing up the street.

The beat of feet was growing louder through the humming of the wind. A voice called:

"Who's there?" And one of the trio ahead of Leonard answered:

"General Canby an' Kit Carson."

Some one laughed, and Leonard felt the corner of the building wall against his hand. He was sliding around it, when a pistol flashed. The voice which had been cursing the weather and him a few moments ago, was raised in a yell of exultation:

"It's *him*, men. The Yankee!"

They were running back in full cry, and the others were racing up the block to meet them. Leonard glided through the blackness of the alley. He was wondering how soon it would be before he heard another pistol shot and the buzzing of hot lead beside his ear. And whether he had come to the end of his errand in the hour of its beginning, among heaps of kitchen refuse. His eyes were growing more accustomed to the deeper darkness of the place; he saw the stars above the summit of a six-foot wall that barred the way before him.

The expected pistol-shot came, and the snarl of a slug ricocheting from adobe bricks. He was crouching at the foot of the wall where the alley ended. He straightened his body, and his arms went above his head; he gripped the top of the wall, and he sprang, pulling himself up. There were two pistols barking at the alley mouth now; he felt the tug of a bullet as it passed through his loose jacket; then he was down on his hands and knees on the other side.

It was a garden of some sort, one of those courtyards which seem miles away from the streets around them; he got the perfume of flowers, and he heard the pleasant murmur of water in a slender irrigating ditch. He glanced around, and saw a figure on the top of the wall which he had scaled a few seconds before. He pulled his pistol and fired. The form disappeared.

The house was in front of him. He saw the large stars hanging above its flat roof, and he dived into the shelter of the wide veranda, praying that he might find a door which was not locked. His fingers slid along the rough surface of the sun-dried bricks; there were half a dozen voices clamoring in the alley when he discovered the wooden latch. He lifted it, and the door swung open.

The room was black save for two specks which glowed like coals; the specks approached him, and a cat purred, rubbing against his leg. He felt his way across the floor toward a slit of light that glowed under a closed door. He flung the door wide, and for just a moment he stood held by surprise.

It was a bedchamber; there was a crucifix on one of the white walls, and on the wide bed, a woman—an old woman, her pinched face held a waxen suggestion in spite of the darkness of the skin. Beside the bed a priest, whose black robe flowed out on the earth floor. His voice was droning a Latin prayer, and he never turned his head while Leonard stood staring. He did not stir at the outburst of voices which came from the rear of the house.

Leonard went on tiptoe to the door across the room. He passed into a dim apartment whose slight light came from a fire burning behind an open hearth, then on into the street beyond. He crossed the road on the dead run, and dived into another alley opposite the door from which he had emerged. It cut the square in halves, and he could hear his pursuers entering it as he sped into a narrow street where lights were blazing from windows and voices of women came out of open doorways.

His saddle-horse was waiting at the house where he'd had his lodging, a good mile away. But if he ever gained the horse, there was small chance of his leaving the city, for he felt sure that there would be sentries watching the road that departed into the east. The pursuers were going to show themselves within a few moments.

He heard Nancy's scream then. And he saw the carriage drawn up at the side of the street, a dozen yards ahead of him. He saw the Mexican who was holding the reins, the four horses scuffling, tugging at the bits, the pair of drunken men standing beside the carriage door. It was the old recklessness which saved him in that moment, for he ran to the spot, and when he caught sight of a girl in the back seat of the carriage, he forgot his own danger.

The man who had his hand on the carriage door turned as he felt Leonard's hand on his shoulder; the other slunk away. And Nancy cried out:

"Oh, *please* get me away from here!"

It was not the voice of a woman of the streets. He did not wait to learn more, but plucked the reins from the peon on the sidewalk's edge and leaped into the driver's seat. The four horses sprang off so briskly that it took all his strength to hold them; it took all his attention to save the carriage from being dashed against one of the building walls.

At the end of the third square he was beginning to get them under better control; he made the turn around the corner, and called over his shoulder:

"If you will tell me, now, which way?"

Blind panic prompted her answer.

"Out of town. Oh, please! Before they find me."

He was able to look around at her briefly, and she went on:

"I was leaving for my uncle's and the driver took me to that place."

"Your uncle?" he repeated.

"Lucien Adams," she told him; and then she recognized his face.

He turned away; she could hear his laughter through the rattle of the wheels.

CHAPTER V

THE long street was growing more like a country road. The houses were solitary cubes, a little darker than the night which surrounded them, and the light of a campfire showed somewhere ahead, a twinkling spot of orange that glowed and disappeared and leaped into sight again. It was the last outpost at the edge of the town; and as they drew nearer, Leonard saw the forms of the sentries guarding the Santa Fe trail against his escape. He snatched off his hat and clamped his leg down upon it to hold it from the searching wind; he drew the lap-robe around his shoulders.

"It's up to her now," he told himself. "It all depends on which she wants most: to turn me over to the provost guard, or to go on tonight."

HE pulled the horses down to a trot; when they came to a steep rise a little further on, he was able to slacken the pace to a walk. A couple of men were standing in the middle of the roadway, and the light of the flames glinted on the barrels of the rifles in their hands. The team came to a stop before them. They saw the driver's lean dark face, his black hair tossing in the wind, the girl wrapped in the wolfskin robe on the back seat. A third man emerged from the shadows; he barely glanced at the pair in the carriage. He said:

"Pass on." The men with the rifles stood aside, and the horses jumped into their collars.

"Now I wonder why she kept still," Leonard was thinking as they climbed up the winding grade toward the piñon-dotted ridges which stood out, dark against the starry skyline. "She must be terribly set on leaving town. A girl like her doesn't beg a stranger to drive her nearly two hundred miles without she's got some mighty good reason."

He remembered the first time he had seen her; it had been two weeks before; he was talking with Kit Carson when she passed them on the edge of the dusty parade-ground at Fort Union. And this afternoon she had pointed him out to the man who had denounced him as a Union spy. She seemed to be mixing pretty freely with both sides. An idea was beginning to form in his mind. It seemed to him far-fetched because she was so young, and perhaps also because he did not like it. But it did seem to be the only logical explanation. There was no doubt that she was a Rebel sympathizer, though he knew her uncle, Lucien Adams, was loyal to the Union. And if she was a Rebel at heart, it was more than possible that she was carrying some information up the trail to other Southerners. That sort of thing was always being done between the lines.

"Oh! Then you needn't go!"

It was, he reflected, a queer mix-up, this third meeting of theirs; and perhaps there would be consequences yet to come. At any rate, he would do well to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut as long as he was with her. . . .

The miles fell behind them slowly. The team plodded on upward toward pale rocks where dwarf cedars flung their twisted branches in black traceries under the blazing stars. The raw wind droned down from the ridges. The road wound on before them, several lines of deep ruts worn into the rocky soil, the beginning of the old Santa Fe trail, which led on into the north and east.

Nancy drew the wolfskin robe closer about her and looked at the tall form on the front seat. He had put on that wide-brimmed hat as soon as they were out of sight from the sentries; there was a smack of recklessness in the way he wore it, with the limp brim raking down toward one shoulder.

It had been an exciting day, and now that the heat of its various emotions was waning, the inevitable reaction came; she leaned back in the seat and buried her head in the folds of the robe; her eyelids drooped. She dozed for some time before the jolting of the carriage awakened her. They were crossing the summit, and the wild clean smell of the cedars was mingling with the harsher smell of dry dust. She dropped off again, and when she came back to the knowledge of the things about her, they were descending the winding grade into the east. The carriage was swinging around the sharp turns at a brisk pace, on one side the rock ridges rising toward the starry sky, and on the other, the depths of the cañon where darkness hid everything. The tall form on the seat before her was swaying slightly to the movements of the springs; she got the tang of tobacco-smoke. She was promising herself that she would turn this spy over to the first Union men whom she met—as she fell asleep once more.

It was broad daylight when they rattled down through the narrow cut between steep granite cliffs which the Mexicans called Glorieta, and the American traders, with a grimmer sense of the realities, had named Apache Cañon. The keen, wild odor of the sagebrush was beginning to assert itself against the more subtle perfumes of the mountains, and the sun was high by the time they left the rocks behind them. Leonard's voice came back from the driver's seat:

"The Pigeon's ranch is just ahead. We'll stop for breakfast. Maybe we can get a change of horses."

"That," she told him coldly, "was looked after when I came down from my uncle's. There will be another change at San Miguel."

It was the first time they had spoken to each other since they started.

THEY breakfasted together in a room at the end of the long adobe ranch-house, and a fat Mexican woman waited upon them. While Leonard was gone to look after the new team, Nancy seized the opportunity to ask for the Pigeon. He was a French-Canadian who had come into the country with the fur traders years before; and she had heard her uncle speak of him more than once as a loyal Union man. If she could only get a word with him, she knew she would be rid of this Rebel driver; and the fact that the latter had saved her from a very ugly predicament did not alter her determination in the slightest. But the Pigeon, as it turned out, had ridden away early that morning to look after some sheep-shearing, and Nancy was forced to keep her Rebel until she reached some other whom she could trust. That, she reflected, would not take place before Las Vegas, sometime the next day, and there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

After all, he promised to be better company than a ragged peon. She was more gracious when he drove up from the corral with the change of horses, and perhaps things might have fallen out differently if he had been more responsive. But the memory of the incident on the

plaza yesterday, which had come so near to being his undoing, was fresh in Leonard's mind; and he recalled the lecture which La Flora had read him last evening. Nancy's small attempts at conversation got such guarded answers that she gave it up as a bad job; she was not used to being snubbed by menfolk, and the determination to hand Leonard over to some one who would deliver him to the military authorities grew stronger as the miles passed behind them.

The morning went by, and with the afternoon the wind came up again. They made another change of horses at the miserable hamlet of San Miguel. The afternoon wore on, and the sun disappeared behind the range of mountains to their left; the mountains became as black as ink, and the plain became an enormous shadow in the gathering dusk. The new team was already jaded; one of the wheelers had fallen lame, and all the animals were soft from poor feed. The twilight subsided into darkness. A little speck of light blinked into sight somewhere ahead.

It had been a long day with Leonard, and he was starved for sleep. It must, he was thinking, have been a harder day with the girl in the back seat, for she wasn't accustomed to this sort of thing at all, she wasn't even accustomed to the country. Anyone could see that she was fresh from the States. He was beginning to feel a little sorry for her, and he wished he had been more civil when she had tried to talk with him.

There would be good beds where that light was burning; he had stopped at the place on his way to Santa Fe more than once, and he remembered its cleanliness, which was a rare virtue along the old trail. A change station for the stage-line with a Mexican couple in charge, and the woman was not at all a bad cook, provided you had learned to like hot chile.

He felt cheered at prospect of a hot meal and a good bed. He was thinking that he had not done so badly on this errand of his, in spite of the rebuke of La Flora. He had carried out the business, and he had managed to slip through the fingers of the Texas men, and he would bring the news to Fort Union which might save the whole Southwest from the Confederates.

IT was in part because of this self-confidence, and it was in part because of his growing solicitude for Nancy, that he failed to notice certain things when he pulled up before the solitary adobe house in the middle of the wide plain: a little cube of mud bricks with a corral and a haystack and a flat-roofed stable behind it. And in the fan-shaped pathway of light which gushed out of the open doorway, three men. Their skins were dark; the high cheek-bones and the sloe eyes of two proclaimed them as half-breeds; it said that their mothers were Comanche squaws. The other's Indian blood came from south of the international line; he towered a full head above his companions, but his body was so thick that he looked below medium height. Their garments were ragged, and all three of them were shod with rawhide sandals. Their black hair was lank and their eyes were like ink. They were staring at Leonard with the same impassive curiosity which shows on the faces of those who contemplate a condemned man when he stands up in court and is told the date on which he is to die.

AS the station-tender pushed by them and took the reins, Leonard helped Nancy out and carried her valise into the building. The wife of the station-tender hurried in from the kitchen; and when she saw the girl, her eyes widened; for just a moment there was something like horror in them. One of the trio in the doorway said something to her in Spanish, and she departed more swiftly than she had made her entrance.

It was because he had stayed here before and knew these two people, that Leonard was still heedless. He left Nancy sitting on one of the wooden benches beside the table, which was the room's main article of furniture, and he hastened out after the station-tender to make arrangements for tomorrow morning's team. He was not conscious of the presence of the big Mexican who followed at his heels; and because he was weary, anxious for his meal, and bed, he failed to notice the briefness of the station-tender's answers to his questions. But when he returned to the house and sat down at the table opposite the girl, it occurred to him that his host was looking a little sick. Then he saw how the members of that silent trio had disposed themselves, two of them with their backs to the closed front door, the other standing beside the entrance to the kitchen. He glanced swiftly at Nancy: she was evidently unaware of danger. . . . .

It was an unsettled period. What with the two armies and the interruption of

all stage traffic, there was even less law and order than usual in evidence along this end of the old trail. Here in the northern end of the territory the Comanches and the Navajos were beginning to make trouble. And there were occasional bands of Mexican riffraff whose methods were, if anything, more murderous than those of the Indians. It occurred to Leonard that he had allowed himself to fall into the hands of some of these bandits and had let the girl walk into the trap with him. He let his eyes go to her again.

She was very tired; the lids were drooping over her eyes and the color had gone from her face, but when she saw him looking at her, she raised her head; her chin went up and out.

"Long as she's staying mad at me, she won't take notice," he was thinking.

IT was a long, narrow room, and it smelled strongly of horse. But this fact was due to the presence of the trio who were standing before the two doors, for otherwise it was very clean in spite of the earthen floor. The walls were whitewashed, and there were several wooden pegs on them. Two of these supported a muzzle-loading Hudson Bay musket; a Spanish-bitted bridle hung from another. The table was uncovered, but the wood was white from scrubbing.

The station-tender had vanished in the kitchen. The Mexican who stood before its door stepped aside, and the woman of the house appeared; her arms were full of steaming dishes. Leonard said:

"Good evening, señora." She turned her dark eyes upon him, then on the girl; and the fear that they held made her plump face tragic. She laid the dishes on the table, and without waiting to arrange them, whirled on her heel and almost ran from the room.

One of the men by the front door laughed and said something to his companion in an undertone. Leonard was wondering whether it would be wise to start proceedings now, while they were not suspecting his awareness. It would be to his taste, in accordance with his way of fighting, which was, when possible, to take the enemy by surprise. It would be good strategy if he were alone.

He allowed himself a brief stare at the members of the trio. They were of the stuff from which all cutthroats are made; the sort of men, he told himself, whom you could hire to do a murder for a couple of big Mexican 'dobe dollars apiece. He did not know how close he had come, in that passing thought, to the facts. But their regard was all for him; they paid small attention to Nancy.

"And," he reflected, "they'll not bother with her until they're through with me." He turned his eyes to the plate before him, and for a time he was apparently unaware of anything save the meal.

It was a good meal after the Mexican style: a bowl of steaming porridge, beans with chile, and chile con carne, and dried apples cooked with proper skill. When he had finished, he lighted a cigarette. The wife of the station-tender appeared from the kitchen. She addressed Leonard in Spanish, and there was something in the manner of her speaking which made him sure that what she was saying was in accordance with instructions.

"The señorita will sleep in the room next to ours. You will take the bed which you had when you lodged with us before."

He understood the situation as clearly as if she had told him: the house was built in the form of a cube, when you looked at it from the front, but the cube was of three sides, and two of these were short wings, including between them a narrow courtyard. There were several rooms available for guests, but the prospective murderers had passed word to the station-tender and his wife to put Nancy in the front of the building, and to stow him away in the rear. In that manner there would be no chance for either to warn the other. And as he looked at it, no matter whether he liked this disposition or not, the thing to do was to accept. He translated the woman's announcement into English for Nancy. It was, he realized, to be their last word together, possibly for all time, and he was sorely tempted to add a warning, but there was the bare chance that one of these cutthroats might understand the language well enough to catch his meaning, and there was the larger hazard of her betraying the alarm which the news would bring to her.

NANCY rose from the bench; she did not even look at him; she smiled at the Mexican woman, and if she had not been so wrapped up in her own dislike for Leonard, she could not have helped but see the misery in the elder woman's eyes. She followed the other out of the room into the little courtyard at the rear. Leonard heard the heavy door slam behind them.

"I think," he announced, "I'll go to bed myself." He waited until the wife of the station-tender reappeared. It was, he realized, the sight of the big revolver-butt at his waistband which probably prevented matters from coming to a crisis then and there. He would have liked to force the issue, but he noticed that the eyes of the three were upon him, and each of them was probably an adept at throwing a palmed knife.

The woman was regarding him with growing fear; he saw her plump fingers twitching. He said, "You will show me my room, señora?" and she bowed mutely. She preceded him past the door which had closed behind Nancy, and across the narrow courtyard. The candle which she held was shaking so violently that he whispered in Spanish:

"Steady, señora. I know." She bowed her head by way of answer.

The sound of a footfall behind them silenced him. He did not turn his head until he had taken the candle from her hand and was standing within the door of his room at the rear end of the wing. It opened into the courtyard after the Mexican fashion, and he saw the man who had followed them lurking in the shadow of the wall, his head thrust forward, listening.

Leonard said, "Good night, señora," and closed the door. When the latch fell, he drew the revolver from beneath his waistband.

CHAPTER VI

LEONARD drew back the hammer of his revolver and turned the cylinder; he examined the charges, and he thrust the weapon beneath his waistband again. It was almost exactly similar to the single-action six-shooters which were to replace its kind throughout the West within a few years; the one essential difference lay in the fact that when the chambers had been emptied, reloading was a very slow process at the best, and in the ordinary shooting-scrape at close quarters, it was impossible. And tonight, the action was going to be fast.

"Six shots," he told himself. "That's all you've got."

He knew just about how the trio in the house were planning to conduct their project; they belonged to the unimaginative breed who cut throats in the same manner of their fathers. They had, in all probability, come to the place some hours earlier to await the first victims who happened along.

It was here that he made his only error: they had indeed appeared during the afternoon; but the victim had been selected for them in advance. He had been thoroughly described by Lawson, and Nancy's presence was a surprise.

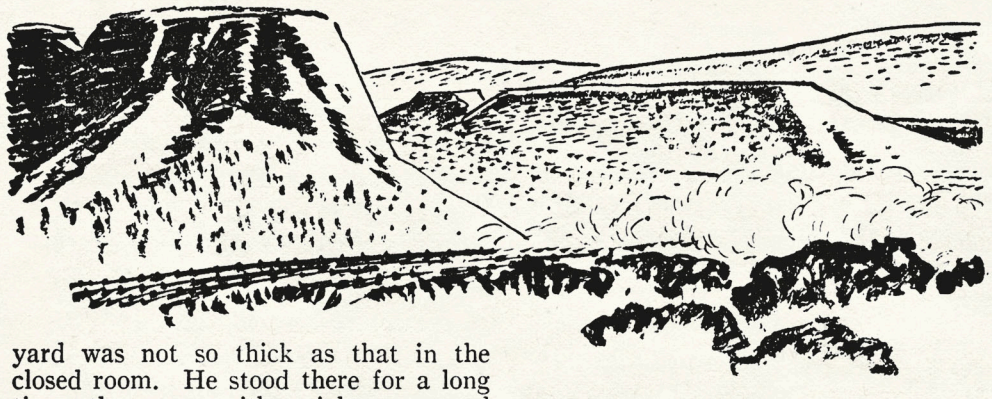
HIS thoughts ran on. The first thing that they had done on their arrival would have been to threaten the station-tender and his wife with death if either said a word or gave a look of warning. Then they had bided their time. And at this moment, they were probably talking it over in the house, selecting the one who was to do the work. When they thought that Leonard had fallen asleep, this one would come to the door of the room, and if he found it unlocked, he would steal in and finish matters with a single stroke of his knife; if the door was locked, he would call his companions, and they would break it in.

After they were done with him, they would undoubtedly murder the station-tender and his wife and Nancy, and when some one happened along within the next twenty-four hours, the word would go round that there had been another Apache outrage.

It was with the safety of these others that Leonard was reckoning: the man and the woman in deadly fear, the girl in blessed ignorance of what was going on. It was, he reflected, fortunate that he had been able to pretend that same ignorance, else he might not have been here to plan toward their salvation. And it was absolutely necessary that he come through without being disabled as long as a single member of that dark trio remained on his feet.

Ambush and indirection: that was the idea. And to be in some other spot than the one where your enemy expected to find you. He had heard these matters discussed gravely and at length; he had listened to Kit Carson and St. Vrain and old Jim Bridger voicing critical approval of such tactics, and now he was beginning to realize the soundness of their reasoning; it was his first serious attempt toward that wisdom which made the seasoned white warriors of the West so mighty against large odds on hundreds of unknown battlefields.

He unlatched the door without a sound and eased it open a little way; he peered through the crack. He had blown out the candle, and the darkness of the court-



yard was not so thick as that in the closed room. He stood there for a long time; there was neither sight nor sound of anyone: the man who had followed him and the woman had evidently returned to his companions. Leonard swung the door wider and stepped outside; he closed it behind him and glided around the corner of the house.

The wing was the width of a single room; the doors of the rooms opened into the courtyard, the windows gave to the outside; they were narrow holes, set high in the wall, and there was no glass. A faint light shone through the last one; it was the bedchamber of the station-tender and his wife. Nancy's room was dark; she was, in all probability, he told himself, asleep. He found himself wondering to what rude awakening she would open her eyes. He stole along the wall of the wing and he heard the murmur of a voice behind the lighted window. It was a woman's voice; it went on and on in what sounded at first to him like a monotonous chant; then he caught some of the words and he recognized the Ave Maria, the old cry for help which so many women of the Southwest have uttered in their time. It occurred to him that perhaps while she was praying for herself and her husband and the girl who had come into her house that night, she was including him also. He remembered how, when he had stopped off here before, he had praised her cooking and she had smiled at him, her eyes had glowed with gratitude.

HE stood under the little niche of a window, and he wondered whether it would not be well to call to the man and his wife and let them know that he was going to fight it out for them. But it came to him that if he did, there was the chance of being overheard by the trio in the front room. He drew his pistol and started back to the courtyard.

When he stole around the corner of the building, he saw that the door of his room was open. The wind was still blowing hard and he was thinking that this might have been the cause; then he remembered that he had heard the latch fall into its slot when he had closed the door a few minutes ago. Evidently the three men in the front room had grown impatient. The time was come.

The open doorway was as black as ink; no sound came from it, and he held his breath as he went by.

He took his stand beside the wall. Behind, a little farther off, was the closed door of the room where Nancy was sleeping; beyond this, the door of the station-tender's chamber, and still farther on, at right angles to these, the courtyard entrance to the main portion of the house. Some moments passed, a few seconds at the outside, but they seemed to him a long time.

A noise came from his room, a soft thud—and immediately afterward the shuffle of feet on the earthen floor. The doorway was blocked by a huge form. Leonard caught the faint gleam of the knife-blade in the giant's hand; raising his revolver, he pulled the trigger.

The report seemed deafening after the silence of the night. The wind blew the cloud of powder-smoke into his face; it blinded him for an instant; then the wind carried the fumes past him. The doorway was empty.

One of the doors behind him flew open with a bang. Leonard whirled around. Light gushed out from the entrance to the main portion of the building in a yellow flood that spilled itself over the narrow courtyard. The forms of two men stood out against the radiance. He saw the long barrel of the old Hudson's Bay musket in the hands of one; he saw the butt leap to the shoulder of the bearer, the jet of flame that licked out from the muzzle like the tongue of some huge venomous snake; he heard the deep boom, and the thump of the bullet on the sun-dried bricks beside him.

Leonard had not done badly on this errand—he managed to slip through the fingers of the Texas men.

The pair leaped backward as Leonard fired his second shot. It had gone wild; he knew this the instant he pulled the trigger.

He started toward the spot where they had disappeared, for he remembered a powder-horn and a bullet-pouch which he had seen hanging beside the musket on the wall, and it was in his mind that they did not care to risk a hand-to-hand fight against his loaded pistol; they had fallen back to recharge their own weapon. If he could reach the room in time, he would have only one of them to deal with; and if he were to handle this one promptly, he was going to stand a good chance of getting at the other who was doing the loading, before the old trade gun was ready for action again.

IT was good reasoning if it had only been based on all the facts, but as it happened, there remained one element of the situation which was unknown to him. He was passing the door of the room where Nancy was sleeping, when he heard some one moving behind him. He turned, and saw a sight that set the little hairs on the back of his neck to bristling.

The light from the open doorway of the front room spread out, as it flowed beyond the threshold, like a half-opened fan. Within this area all objects were distinct; beyond it everything was hidden in darkness. The man whom Leonard had shot was stepping out of the shadows.

He was a giant of a man, and the light bathed his huge form. His head was bare; his straight black hair was tossing in the wind which swept the place. The lower portion of his face was bright red.

Leonard's bullet had torn through his jaw, and one of the arteries was severed; the blood was welling out with every pulse-beat. It flowed down over his thick body; it dyed the whole torso and it crawled over the big legs; a film of bright scarlet shining in the lamplight, it moved as if it were alive. Little drops were falling from the long blade of the knife which the man held.

Except for the faint sound that his feet made on the beaten earth of the courtyard, he was as silent as if he were, as he seemed, born of imagination, a vision.

Leonard stood for a moment motionless, gazing at this thing; it was the first time in his life that he had really been afraid. The brief spasm of horror passed, and with its passing, he leveled his revolver. But when he pulled the trigger, the slight snapping of the cap followed. Before he had time to cock the weapon, the giant leaped upon him.

As he sprang, he uttered a deep-throated shout, a dull bass bellow, unformed and savage like the roar of a huge animal. The knife swept upward, and Leonard barely dodged the blade as it lunged down; he swerved aside, past the hand which strove to seize him. He was raising his heavy revolver above the bare head; there was no time for aiming now; there was the chance that if he tried to shoot, the next cap would snap on dampened powder like the one before. He was using the weapon as a bludgeon, putting all the strength that he owned into the arm that held it. But the blow did not fall.

The bulky body was sagging forward from the waist, the legs were buckling under it. As Leonard stood with lifted pistol, the whole huge form seemed to crumple, and the knowledge that in these last few moments he had been fighting with a man who was, to all intents and purposes, already as good as dead, left him almost as limp as the red bulk that lay twitching at his feet.

It happened that he was facing the open doorway, and his eyes caught the dull gleam of dark metal in the lamp-

light. He saw the toe of a sandaled foot edging out upon the threshold. The sandaled foot edged forward, a ragged knee came into sight; then suddenly the whole man appeared. The barrel of the musket hovered briefly as it was leveled.

Leonard's cap snapped. A slight interval of silence followed, broken only by the humming of the wind. The time was so brief that Leonard had not moved; his arm was still rigid when the delayed charge exploded.

He was leaping forward before the man had fallen. He was flinging himself on the door as it banged shut. It yielded and flew open; he heard the front door at the other side of the room slam as he entered, and he raced across the floor.

The light poured out over the threshold. Beyond the limits of the wedge-shaped area where it lay, the darkness was like blue velvet. The sound of running feet was audible.

When Leonard returned to the house a few minutes later, winded from a fruitless chase, he heard another sound—the murmur of a woman's voice. It was the wife of the station-tender, and after he had rapped several times upon the door of the bedchamber, the voice ceased. He called his name. He said:

"Your prayers have been answered, señora."

CHAPTER VII

"THERE were four of them," the station-tender said, "and they came up the trail from San Miguel in the afternoon. The other man went on; these three stayed, and they did not let us out of their sight: wherever one of us went, there was always one of them close by. They told us that they were waiting for a man who might be traveling from Santa Fe, and that was all. We were afraid, señor."

He was speaking the truth, and the fear had not yet left him. His teeth were rattling while he spoke; he had come very close to death himself that night, and he knew it. They were standing before the door of his room, and his wife had gone to speak a word with Nancy. The light flowed out across the threshold behind them where a dead man lay; it spread over the narrow courtyard, revealing another silent form that looked like a large heap of rags. The station-tender drew a deep breath.

"I did not dare to speak, señor—"

"You did the best you could," Leonard told him. "It is all any man can do. And if you had tried to warn me, we might have all of us been killed. You say there were four men, and one of them went on?"

"He was riding a good horse, Sénor," the station-tender said, "a palomino. He was a man that I have never seen before. Thick in the chest like a bull; and the eyebrows, they were like the hair on a dog's back."

"There was a mark on his face?" Leonard interrupted swiftly. And the other cried:

"It is so! It was the scar of a knife, I believe. It was a long mark, and it ran from the end of the eyebrow down the cheek to the jawbone. He was an American, and he wore the pants of buckskin with the fringes like the trappers have along the legs."

LEONARD made no answer; he was frowning; he thought of the thing that he had seen in the dusty plaza before the Palace of the Governors: the girl with the red hair and the man with the scar upon his cheek. He was thinking of his own meeting with Nancy some hours later. It was, he reflected, remarkable, the manner in which they had come together. Then he shook his head at the idea which had been forming in his mind. That, he told himself, was impossible; his happening upon the girl had been pure coincidence. But there was food for thought in the fact that these two whom he had caught planning his capture, should be traveling up the trail, one of them in a blind panic to get out of the town and the other solicitous for his assassination. There was—he was growing more certain on this point—a definite tie between these two. He did not like the look of it.

The wife of the station-tender touched his elbow as he was standing there thinking it over. She murmured:

"The señorita sleeps."

"Let her sleep," he said. "What she doesn't know won't hurt her. When she wakes up, you needn't tell her anything. She's just a child."

She was a little more than that, but he had far more important things on his mind than a young girl who was trying to meddle with the fate of fighting men. He turned to the station-tender.

"You will bury the two bodies, and you will clean up the place." He pointed to the courtyard. "I am going to finish my

sleep. And you will call both of us early in the morning."

The woman slipped closer to him. She said:

"They would have killed me and my husband too. I saw it in their eyes when they were looking at us. You have saved our lives, señor."

He patted her shoulder.

"Maybe it was the good Saints to whom you were praying. Who knows?" He laughed and turned away.

NOT a sign remained of the ugly work that had gone on in the courtyard, when he and Nancy faced each other across the cleanly scrubbed table in the front room. She was feeling a little more friendly this morning, and she said:

"I slept wonderfully. But early in the night there was some shooting that woke me up. It frightened me, but nothing happened; and the first thing I knew I was sound asleep again. I was scared that way once before by some drunken men at a stage-station back in Kansas. I'd like this Western country better if you people had a little more law and order, but I suppose you don't realize that these things bother women."

Leonard glanced at the wife of the station-tender, who didn't understand any of the words, but had an idea of their import, for she was frowning.

"It's nice to be young," he told the girl. "Now, me, I was awake half the night."

"Maybe," she retorted, "you'd have got better rest if your conscience was cleaner."

"I am"—he shrugged—"as I am. And being as I am, I'm in a hurry to shove on. We'll pull out as soon as you're ready, miss."

He rose from his chair and departed with the station-tender to look after the fresh team. Nancy remained in her seat. She was, she told herself, in no haste to leave; she was not taking orders from a stranger, either, not when that stranger was an avowed Southerner. If she had been the sort who sometimes stop to think things over, it might have occurred to her that this fresh access of dislike was due as much to her companion's brusqueness as to her firm belief that he was a Confederate. She was still at the table when he drove up to the door, and she kept him waiting while she got her few belongings together.

So this day's journey began with the same strained relations as the day before, and there was little said. As far as Leonard was concerned, his impatience passed before they had traveled ten miles, but he had other things to think about than his passenger. Now that he was drawing nearer to Fort Union, his desire for haste was growing stronger. It was about forty miles from Las Vegas to the army post as the trail lay, and a good rider could make the distance in about six hours if he had a fast horse and shoved it hard. On the other hand, if he remained with Nancy, he would have to stay in the town overnight. Time meant a good deal in this matter, for there was always the possibility that the messenger who would carry the word on from Fort Union to the Colorado troops might be delayed along the way. As for the girl, she would be safe enough in the town; her uncle had plenty of friends in the place. There was no reason why he should not leave her as soon as they arrived.

Nancy was doing some thinking of her own. With the quick flare of temper which had followed Leonard's good-natured snub at the breakfast-table, the memory of her original purpose had returned. The idea of turning him over to Northern men who would take him to Fort Union as a prisoner was honest enough; it had grown out of her own hot loyalty, and her disappointment at the ranch of the Pigeon had been keen. Now, she began to think over the possibilities in Las Vegas.

AT dawn the wind which had punished them so yesterday had died away. It was one of those marvelous warm days which sometimes adorn the early spring in that part of the country. The wide flat lands on their right were shimmering under a slight heat haze as the noon hour passed and the afternoon drew on; the mountains in the west were mantled in subdued colors; where the ridges stood out along their flanks there was a barely discernible flush which livened the gray rocks into ashes of roses; the shadows in the gulches varied from pale lilac to dark purple. Then, as the day began to wane, the grays turned to blue, the purple streaks gradually deepened to black. The sky was without a cloud and it was turning gold in the west when they rattled through green fields toward the sprawling patch of adobe cubes which surrounded the old church and the dusty plaza of Las Vegas.

It was the luck so often attending such affairs as theirs, which set the stage for a

Colonel Kit Carson

dramatic finale of their journey. Las Vegas was a stanch Union town, for the old families of the Spanish *ricos* who leaned toward the Confederacy were lacking here; the few people who were not actually poor were of small means. With the knowledge of the Texans' impending advance upon Fort Union, they had organized a company of militia, and it happened that these soldiers were gathering in the plaza for their semi-weekly drill this afternoon. There were forty-odd of them, and there was not a single uniform in the company. Some were armed with long-barreled muzzle-loading rifles; others were carrying army muskets which had been issued from the post; there were several who bore nothing more formidable than cap-and-ball pistols. They were a ragged lot, Mexicans and a few half-breed Indians, and the saffron-skinned captain who was trying to put them through the manual of arms was getting pretty poor results. But when Nancy's eyes lit on them, she drew a quick long breath of resolution. Her chance had come—a better chance than she had dared to hope for.

There was an old church on one side of the plaza, and on the other side a one-story adobe building where travelers got lodging. Leonard pulled up in front of this, and before he had turned the team over to the peon who presently appeared from somewhere inside, Nancy had stepped down. He saw her going across the square toward the militia.

"Now I wonder," he asked himself, "what's she up to?" He would have been considerably surprised had he but known. He watched her as she hastened across the plaza. Her back was toward him, but there was something in the way she walked and in the set of her slim shoulders which made her look very resolute. Then he shrugged; there wasn't time for him to meddle with her small intrigues, even if he had wanted to. He called to the boy who was taking the team away.

"*Muchacho!* A good horse and a saddle. I can get them at the corral?"

"*Si, señor.*" The boy grinned, and Leonard tossed him some copper coins.

"And I can have a bite to eat before I leave? It must be *pronto.*"

"*Si, señor.*" The youngster vanished around the corner with the sweaty team behind him, and Leonard followed.

It took some time to find the man in charge of the corral; it took more time to pick a good horse: three animals were roped and cast loose before Leonard chose one of his liking, a raw-boned roan, with a mean eye but deep shoulders and strong limbs.

"I must tell you this, señor," the man warned his customer: "he will pitch until the saddle is warm on his back."

"Then you will ride him first, my friend," Leonard said, "and I will go and get a bite to eat while you are making ready." He waited long enough to watch the saddling.

IT was with distinct relief that he set forth for the adobe building which did duty as a tavern. The thought that Fort Union was only a few hours away made him forget the weariness of the long drive from Santa Fe. He was whistling when he passed around the corner. The whistle died away and his eyes widened with surprise as they fell on the militia company: it was drawn up before the inn.

The men were standing at ease, and the murmur of their voices reached him as he regarded them. They seemed to be excited over something, judging by the manner of their gestures. Then one of them caught sight of him and uttered an abrupt exclamation. The others looked around, then gazed at Leonard intently. In that moment while he was facing them, he remembered Nancy's abrupt departure, the sight of her small figure hurrying across the plaza.

"That girl," he told himself, "isn't as foolish as she seems. This is a smart trick." It was a long time, and several things happened to him, before he came to

understand how much he had overrated her strategy.

Somewhere behind him he could hear the scuffling of hoofs and the voice of a bystander at the corral, engrossed in a spectacle which held more of action than the little drama here around the corner had as yet developed. Evidently the roan was living up to the ill name that the owner had given him; it would be a matter of a few minutes, perhaps, before the animal was available.

And in the meantime here were forty men with whom to deal. It seemed altogether likely that there wasn't a single loaded musket in the outfit, but when it came to those six-shooters, Leonard was not so sure. You could never tell about a pistol in this portion of the Southwest. There was, however, one element in his favor: they lacked a leader. For their captain was nowhere in sight.

He had, in all likelihood, gone into the building and Nancy must have gone with him, for the plaza held no sign of her. The two of them were searching for some one and that some one was himself.

"And I'll bet," he was thinking, "she's told him I'm a Rebel. Yes sir. She's smart."

He could have slipped back around the corner, but there was something in the idea of running away from these men that did not appeal to him at all. He looked them over with a cold, appraising eye. It would not sound nice, if the story got around, that he was captured and held prisoner by a handful of raw Mexican militiamen. And it might be a long time before he was able to prove his identity. It was just such troops as these that got too enthusiastic on the subject of spies. The thudding of hoofs was not so lively back there around the corner as it had been. Maybe—

His train of thought was interrupted by the opening of the tavern door. The captain emerged, and Nancy was beside him. He was a little man with a yellow face and he had waxed his wisp of black mustache until the ends were like a pair of needles. He seemed to like his errand, for his thin chest was thrust forward and his dark eyes were fixed upon the girl beside him. She was the first to catch sight of Leonard and her arm went out to an extended finger as she pointed.

"There he is!" she cried. The words conveyed no meaning to the little captain, but the voice did. He spun on his heel, and his black eyes snapped as he fell on the quarry he had been seeking. He said something in Spanish to the men. There was a general shuffling of sandaled feet; just then, the roan horse dashed around the corner.

It came to an abrupt halt. The rider threw himself from the saddle. He said, "He is *domado,* señor." He caught sight of the company and the little captain and his jaw dropped.

Leonard seized the reins from his hand; he threw them over the roan's neck. He was swinging into the saddle when he heard the report of a pistol; he saw the man who held the weapon; he settled down into the saddle; his foot found the stirrup. The roan horse uttered a windy sigh, and collapsed in a heap.

Leonard managed to throw himself clear just in time. The fall left him a little dazed, and when he started to struggle to his feet, he was surrounded by a half-dozen militiamen. He caught sight of a rifle-butt sweeping toward his head; that was the last thing he remembered.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN the little captain of the Las Vegas militia company signed his name, he wrote it, *"Excellentissimo Porfirio Esteban de la Torres."* The "Excellentissimo" came from a grandfather who had made a journey to Spain where he had procured through judicious donation some sort of a left-handed knighthood. The three names, including the *"de la,"* were inherited from a string of forebears who had always boasted that there wasn't a single drop of Indian blood in their veins or in the veins of their children. But the most of the population in this part of New Mexico was not so punctilious as to heritage, and their fancy turned to nicknames rather than to titles. And so, although the unwashed of the Las Vegas company grudgingly called their commander *El Capitan* to his face, they forgot the *Excellentissimo* entirely; and when his back was turned, they spoke of him as "the Prairie Dog."

He passed a sort of semi-subterranean existence in a huge adobe house within a stone's throw of the plaza. The place was kept up by the returns from several thousand acres of valley land. It was good land, and had it not been for the fact that no one in the family had ever known or cared about such a sordid business as farming, its yield would have been fat; as it was, the little captain owned

almost everything but money. And, as was the case with many men of his poor estate, his sense of self-importance had increased in direct proportion to the diminution of his bank-roll.

He lived with two yellow-faced sisters, whose only activities outside of the house were visits to the old church beside the plaza; their domestic life seemed to consist of prowling about the silent rooms like a pair of lean beetles, and he never laid eyes on either of them until the midday meal. So, on the morning after Leonard came to grief, this little captain was eating a solitary breakfast when the rattle of wheels and the scuffling of hoofs out in the wide courtyard proclaimed the presence of a visitor.

The debtor servant who was acting as major-domo, gardener, butler, and footman for one dollar a month and whatever he could steal, entered the dim dining-room a few moments later. He delivered his announcement in Spanish but the name which he gave was American; it was known throughout all the harsh uplands of the Western plateau country; it was a name that brought respect when it was mentioned in smoky Indian lodges as far away as the Yellowstone; schoolboys in New England dreamed dreams and saw visions when they read it. When de la Torres heard it, he pushed away his cup of chocolate, rose and followed the peon out into the courtyard.

ONE of those uncomfortable army ambulances which officers used for transportation in all the Western posts during those days was standing before the door; the four mules were stamping imaginary flies, a sunburned trooper in shabby blue was sitting erect on the front seat. In the rear seat, another man in blue; the faded coat had two rows of brass buttons, and shoulder straps with tarnished silver eagles. But it failed to convey distinction to its wearer. He was, in spite of his uniform, somewhat insignificant, a little under medium height, almost delicate of figure, just passing middle age. He looked, as indeed he was, a trader. Only a seasoned plainsman accustomed to the absolute lack of picturesqueness that belonged to the really great warriors of that dusty era, accustomed likewise to looking deeper than externals, would have noted the eyes, for they were as unnoticeable as dull steel on which the sun is shining.

The little captain made a punctilious salute; the officer in the ambulance responded with negligence; he said, in Spanish:

"This spy that you caught last night: I've come to take a look at him." His voice was like the voices of many men who are miserly with words. It had a gentleness that was deceptive; one who heard him would not have thought that the tidings of the capture had gotten him out of bed two hours after midnight to make this trip from Fort Union.

"He is in the *calabozo*." The little captain stiffened and he fingered one of the pointed ends of his mustache. He had just begun to realize the fact that his visitor had been traveling nearly half the night; this, then, was promising to turn out an affair of large importance. He had expected nothing more than a squad of privates and a non-commissioned officer when he sent a messenger to the post last evening. He had not looked for them before the afternoon, or the next day. And here, when the morning was barely begun, was Colonel Kit Carson.

"I go," the captain announced, "to put on my uniform."

"No need of making yourself so much trouble." If the visitor had any impatience at this idea of fuss and feathers, he managed to conceal it, but he also managed to make the suggestion firm. "Just get your hat and climb in. I've got an idea that you and I can settle this business by ourselves."

His prophecy set the little captain to speculating while he was seeking the hat, but it failed to prepare him for the thing that he witnessed a few moments later when they reached the adobe building which did duty as a guardhouse. His astonishment at the sight of a Rebel spy saluting the commanding officer of St. Vrain's Union volunteers, and immediately afterward wringing the officer's hand, left him speechless. But it was not too great to prevent him from doing some quick thinking. It would appear, so he was telling himself, that there had been a sad mistake, and in that case—

The growing premonitions were set at rest when the Colonel and the released prisoner bade him farewell.

"It is," the former assured him, "a mistake. But you are not the man that made it. It aint your fault that Captain Leonard wasn't able to talk, with that knock he got on the head last night."

Esteban de la Torres retired into his large bare house to try and solve the puzzle. The ambulance rattled off to the adobe tavern beside the plaza. The four

mules drowsed in the morning sunshine, awakening now and then to bicker with one another; the sunburned trooper managed to do pretty well by himself in the way of breakfast, and at the same time to put in a little rough and ready love-making with the plump cook in the kitchen. And the two officers had the small dining-room to themselves. They were sitting down to their meal when the hammering of hoofs and the rasp of iron tires announced the presence of another vehicle before the building. It was a spring carriage with four horses, and the Mexican with whom Nancy had replaced Leonard as a driver, was handling the reins with the utter abandon which the men of his race show in such matters. They watched the passenger climb in and Leonard said:

"That's the girl. If I'd stayed off the street in Santa Fe, she'd never have seen me." He told the story as briefly as he could without omitting essential details. And when he had done, he shook his head. "I don't know where she fits in, but the man's a Rebel, and he's somewhere along the trail ahead of us."

"Blocky-built," Kit Carson murmured. "Thick eyebrows and a scar across his cheek. It's Lawson, the new Indian trader. He's on his way to Lucien Adams' to take charge of the store. He was in Fort Union yesterday. He brought word that the Texas troops are going to march in a few days."

LEONARD sat back in his chair. The thump which he had got from that musket-butt had, by good fortune, laid his scalp open, so there had been considerable flow of blood but no congestion, and the concussion had been slight. Beyond a bad headache and a pretty poor bandage which looked very much like one of those soiled turbans worn by the Apaches, there were no ill effects. He had, however, been feeling decidedly sick; it was the sickness which comes with dread. Now, for a moment, he believed that he saw hope.

"Then you've sent a messenger to meet the Colorado men," he cried.

"A dispatch rider left Fort Union yesterday afternoon," Carson said. "He'll meet 'em at the Raton Pass or just this side of the range. They can get here before the Texas men show up if they make forced marches."

Leonard sighed. The relief that the announcement brought to him was mixed with deep chagrin. If he had not been delayed by that girl along the road, he would have ridden straight on through, without sleep; he would have been in Fort Union twenty-four hours ago. As it was, another man had saved the situation. And now that he thought about it, this was curious. He said:

"I don't like the way it sounds. Why did Lawson bring that news to you? I saw him go to Sibley's quarters. If he's a good Union man, he wouldn't have tipped me off to the Confederates in Santa Fe."

"Sure it was him that did it?" Carson asked.

"Dead sure." Leonard described the incident on the plaza in detail. "And he hired those fellows to lay for me at the change-station. Remember that."

"He could be playing both ends ag'in' the middle," the frontiersman said shortly. "He's the kind that would. They ran him out of Bent's Fort three years ago, him and two half-breeds. They were mixed up with a band of dog soldiers that was stealing squaws and robbing wagon-trains."

He brought his hand down on the table; there was something in the repression of the movement which made it more startling than it would have been if he had pounded the board. He rose from his chair.

"We may as well shove on. We can talk this over on the way."

They passed the Adams carriage in a cloud of dust before they were ten miles out of town. Leonard glanced at the girl in the back seat. He was thinking of what La Flora had said to him:

"Any fool can do a bold thing as you did this afternoon."

That old woman had spoken the truth. If there was some ugly development awaiting them, it had arisen out of his folly that afternoon in Santa Fe. He looked at the little man in the faded blue uniform beside him, who never took a chance unless he had to, who always figured out the play before he made it. Their eyes met and Carson said dryly:

"No use bothering your head about that end of it now. We've got Lawson to figure out." He leaned forward and his voice took on a sharper note. "Pour a little more leather onto those mules, soldier."

IT was early afternoon when they reached Fort Union and the mules were in a lather. It was one of those spring days when the sun is giving a hint of what

As he reached the summit, he heard the report of Lawson's rifle.

it means to do later in the season. There were faint heat-waves shimmering over the dusty parade-ground; the flag lay in limp folds at the tip of the tall pole. Two women were walking down the narrow street between the officers' quarters; their billowing skirts made bright spots of color beside the dingy adobe walls.

"I suppose," Leonard said, "they'll send the women to Las Vegas?"

"That's the orders," Carson told him. "In case help don't come in time. And if we have to evacuate the post, we'll blow up the magazines. The Rebels won't ever get to burn that powder."

It was nearly an hour later when they rode out from Fort Union with two Ute trackers. They were traveling up the Santa Fe trail into the north. The miles passed behind them; the buildings of the post looked like children's blocks which have been scattered after playtime: on one side of them the stippled gray wall of the mountains, and on the other side, the wide pale plain.

The Indians rode ahead: they slouched on the backs of their ponies; there was no grace about them; they rode like sacks of meal. Their legs kept up a constant movement, their moccasined heels were hammering the flanks of their mounts. Their wide-brimmed black hats almost hid their dark faces, their braids hung to their shoulders, thin strips of red flannel twined among the strands. Their thin calico shirts fluttered to the flapping of their arms, which was like the beating of awkward wings. Their beady eyes were always on the earth before them.

The old trail was wide, a series of deep ruts. Two sets of fresh tracks showed where recent riders had picked their ways among the wheel-marks. Sometimes the hoof-marks separated for long distances, and there were places where they met. And, if a man had been blessed with a discerning eye, he could have seen how one of the horses which made those trails had been going at a leisurely gait and how the other had been pressed hard; it was the latter's spoor that overlaid the former's where they crossed. All of these things and many more the two Utes

noted without taking the trouble to comment on them.

The slow miles continued to slip behind, the sun was sinking toward the mountains in the west, the shadows of the range were growing longer on the plain. Fort Union had melted into the background and the background of upland had long since disappeared. The Utes were talking in low gutturals; one of them turned his head and spoke in his own tongue, three or four words. Kit Carson nodded.

"Twenty miles out of the post," he said, "and the messenger has caught up to Lawson. Riding side by side."

The rebellion against bad news which always is strongest with the young, had been at work in Leonard's mind ever since they had started from Fort Union. And now it flared up again—the hope that endures against cold reason.

"If Lawson was going to kill him," he asked, "wouldn't he have done it here?"

Carson shook his head. "How do I know what was in Lawson's mind?"

The tracks showed plainly, for the soil was loose here, as soft as ashes.

"Messenger's slowed up," Carson said. "Jogging along, the two of 'em."

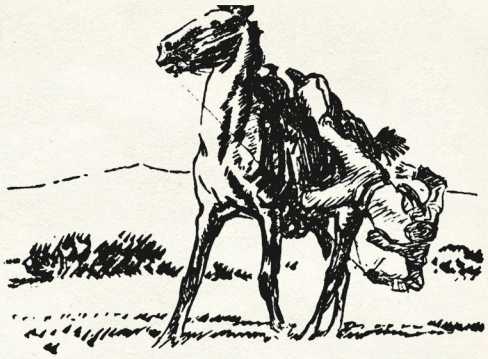
The picture came into Leonard's mind: the pair of horsemen hanging together, talking with each other as they rode on into the north. It could be that there was some reason other than the one which he had guessed behind that visit of Lawson's to the Texas general. Then he remembered what the station-keeper had told him, and he was still trying to reconcile this with the possibility of Lawson's loyalty to the Union, when Kit Carson spoke again.

"That would be a buzzard." He was pointing to the north.

IT was some time before Leonard was able to see the black speck against the blue vault of the sky, and even then he would not have been sure of it if it had not been for the older man's announcement. The Indians were looking upward and Kit Carson called to them in their own language. One of them replied and the Colonel translated:

"Six buzzards now." A moment later he added, "No need to bother about the trail. We know where we're headed for."

They urged their horses to a swifter pace; the heels of the Utes were beating a long roll against the bellies of their ponies, but it was two hours before they reached the spot.



There were a dozen of the buzzards and all of them were hovering overhead, but some of them had been reluctant to leave the earth and Leonard, who had seen death many times during these last few weeks, was feeling sick.

It was getting on toward dusk, and the sky was pale gold. But the uncompromising starkness of the dry country still endured here beneath it. There was a patch of ashes where some one had made a fire to cook a meal. There was a mess kit scattered beside it. The body of the messenger lay on its back. The Indians were bending over it; there was no emotion in their faces, they were intent and that was all.

They did not linger long at the examination, and when they turned to address the two officers the intentness had departed; a faint amusement had replaced it. One of them spoke; he punctuated what he said with wide, slow gestures. When he had done, Kit Carson retold it:

"Moccasin tracks. He'd figured it out before he left the post. He changed to those moccasins somewhere along the road. The two of 'em sat down and ate and then he shot the trooper from behind. He must've put in quite a lot of time to make it look like Indians." He gestured toward the body: there was evidence of work there, plenty of it.

"The scalping," he continued, "wasn't a bad job. Mebbe he'd had practise. But there's other things." He enumerated them in unpleasant detail. "And no Indian would leave a belt full of ammunition behind. If we didn't know it was Lawson already that would have told us."

Leonard stood facing the older man, his shoulders squared, his hands at his sides. He said:

"If I had stayed off the street in Santa Fe I'd have been in Fort Union before Lawson. This wouldn't have happened then."

"He has got a day's start," Kit Carson answered quietly. "It's a hundred and

forty miles to the Raton. You can get four changes of hosses on the way. It's up to you to make up for that mistake."

CHAPTER IX

THERE was snow in the Raton Pass, the drifts were two feet deep; the wind blew hard. But where the old trail looped downward into the cañon leading to the wide valley in the south, there was no wind; the drifts became patches under the shade of scattered pines and junipers along the mountain's flanks. There were places where the sunshine was still warm, late in the afternoon.

Here, where the cañon was just beginning to widen out, giving occasional vistas that led downward to glowing flat lands, the road which the wagon trains had gouged among the rocks awakened to the first noise of travel since the heavy frosts of the previous autumn: the thudding of hoofs, the jingle of pack harness, and the shuffling sound of many feet which came from farther back where men were marching. The Colorado companies were straggling down from the high country.

They had been on the march for weeks, and for the last ten days they had been fighting late storms. A belated spring blizzard had swooped upon them at the summit of the Raton Pass and they had spent two nights among the drifts. There were not half a dozen uniforms among the officers; the men were in rags; they averaged less than a blanket apiece.

So they came down the cañon and they saw the sunshine gleaming on the warm flatlands ahead of them. They had been away from news for a long time. There wasn't a man among them who had the slightest idea of what had taken place here in New Mexico since they had set out to reinforce the Northern regiments, and just now there wasn't a man who was giving the matter as much as a passing thought. Their only ambitions were warmth, full bellies, and a little sleep.

They made a winding dark line along the old trail; the multitude of sounds which rose from the line blended into a dull drumming which barely disturbed the silence of the cañon where it made a wide turn a mile below. Several big crested jays had heard it and they were beginning to give the alarm.

Lawson had got sight of the winding line two hours before, when he climbed a ridge to reconnoiter. At present he was busy getting himself a bite to eat, for he had an idea that if he postponed cooking the meal until the arrival of those gaunt militiamen, his food would be very apt to vanish before his eyes as swiftly as sprouting corn under a cloud of grasshoppers.

It was a good spot to camp. There was a little stream of sweet water and there was a grove of quaking aspens beside it. The trees were scattered, with small parks between the clumps where the pale young grass was beginning to show itself. He had killed a black-tailed deer that afternoon and he had brought a quarter with him; it was hanging from a branch, surrounded by a tracery of budding twigs. He had a small fire going and his horse was picketed a few yards away, nibbling at the sparse feed.

He had taken it easy on this last day of his journey from Santa Fe and he was feeling pretty well satisfied with himself, looking back over the affair as far as it had gone. The one really difficult part of the business had come when he got a change of horses at Lucien Adams' place, just before daybreak that day. There were a score of buildings surrounding the great house; there was a drove of Mexicans about the place and it was a dull period when there were not forty or fifty Ute tepees pitched on the flat below the trading-post. Even at that hour it was more than likely that he was going to run across some one who knew him, and such an encounter would necessitate explanations as to his purpose in traveling on. He had been doing considerable thinking as to the story which he would tell. But luck had been with him, and the half-breed who gave him a new mount did not know that he was serving the trader who should be stopping there instead of going by.

NOW luck was continuing to abide with him. The men whom he had come to meet were within a half hour of his camping-place. He knew well the hardships with which they had been contending, for he was an old hand in the mountain country, and was reasonably certain that after he had told them his story, they would not travel ten miles farther. Before tomorrow morning the most of them would be clamoring to return home, and by this time in the afternoon they would be turning back, no matter whether their officers liked it or not.

He went to the tree where his meat was hanging and cut several slices from the

quarter. He brought it back to the fire and he stood there for some moments gazing down the canyon. Where the last hills drew aside, the flat lands spread away. Wide lands, and rich. He had been riding through them all that day and part of the day before. Lucien Adams' grant. Within two months he would be half owner of that principality.

A jay screamed down the cañon. If he had not spent several years among the mountain trappers and the Indians he would not have noticed it. He would have taken it for granted that the bird had caught the same alarm which had set the others farther up the gorge to squawking. But when he heard the raucous cry, he knew that it was too far away to have been caused by the soldiers; the disturbance which had provoked it had come from below and not above.

HE did not like some of the possibilities which this suggested. He had not the slightest suspicion as to the facts at this moment. There wasn't a real doubt in his mind: he had taken effectual measures to keep the trail from Santa Fe clear behind him. But he stood there rigid, watching.

Two hundred yards or so below him the old trail showed, topping a low ridge; then it disappeared, dipping into the cañon, and it crossed the creek. Soon afterward it showed again where it rose to the summit of another ridge. He waited with the meat in one hand, and in the other hand his butcher-knife. He held his eyes on the first of those two ridges.

The jay screamed again. A few seconds passed. A man's head rose above the skyline of the hill; his body followed —then the horse which he was riding. A lean rider, a buckskin horse. The two of them passed out of sight where the trail dipped down to the creek bottom.

Lawson laid down the meat and the knife; he kicked the little fire out, and he scraped some loose sand over the embers, lest the smoke betray his presence there. He picked up his rifle and he threw himself prone on his belly; he rested the barrel of the weapon across a boulder. His eyes traveled from the hindsight to the bead; they lined the bead against the spot where the trail topped the nearer ridge.

He heard the jays screaming up the cañon and the dull undernote which came from men and horses on the march. There was something familiar in that lean figure on the buckskin horse. But it seemed to him altogether unlikely that Leonard had escaped those three men at the change-station, even if he had succeeded in leaving Santa Fe. The chances were that this horseman would be a stranger, some rider from Adams', perhaps. But in this moment when attainment was so near, he did not intend to let chance enter into the question at all. He held his eyes on the sights, the sights upon the ridge. His finger rested lightly on the trigger. . . .

Lawson had lived what even mountain men would call a rough life. He had been a trapper, he had been a dog soldier with a crowd of half-breeds who were cast off from their mothers' tribes; he had robbed and he had murdered in their company. There was, to use the old figure of speech, fresh blood on his hands. But he was not giving these matters a passing thought; there would, he was figuring, be just time enough to dispose of the body before the troops arrived.

The ridge was bare; it stood out between the bead of the rifle and the blue sky. A distant buzzard that was soaring in search of some dead animal, came within the range of Lawson's vision; it wheeled out of sight, and a moment later the rider's head appeared. Lawson's finger began to squeeze the trigger.

WHEN Leonard's horse crossed the first of the ridges and began to descend the abrupt grade into the creek bottom, the animal stumbled. And by that small chance of a rock in the trail, the issue was turned.

Ever since Leonard left Adams' ranch that morning he had been fighting sleep. His bones were aching with the weariness which comes from long hours in the saddle where the road is rough, and it seemed to him as if he had been holding his eyes open for weeks. At the beginning of this last leg of his journey he had been aided in his struggle by the fresh tracks on the trail. There was no doubt that he was drawing close to the man who rode ahead of him. The realization that their meeting might take place within the next few hours was like strong liquor. And when the eagerness which the sight of those tracks aroused began to flag, caution remained to stimulate his senses.

For a long time the trail was level and there was no sign of any rider as far as he could see ahead of him, but when he came into the broken country, the approach to every hilltop brought into

She said one word: "Lawson!"

sight a new skyline, behind which death might be lying in wait. So, while morning passed and afternoon began, his senses remained alert. And as the tracks of the man who had traveled on before grew fresher, his own caution increased.

It was a slow job sometimes, and always tedious. Dismounting at frequent intervals and creeping up among the rocks to gain a vantage-point whence he could see the country ahead without coming into sight himself. But as the miles wore on, the inevitable reaction came; his senses were becoming dulled; his mind was blurred; the whole scheme of existence resolved itself into that struggle to keep awake.

He had dropped off; he did not know how long it was, how far he had traveled with his eyes closed. He only knew that he had been asleep. And the knowledge came with his awakening. He was swaying in the saddle when the horse stumbled; he barely saved himself from falling. His body stiffened; he was wide awake now.

He looked about him, and saw that he had passed across the summit of a hill. The realization that he had probably ridden over several of these ridges was as potent as a cup of cold water thrown into his face.

The ruts were deep here for the road was narrow, seeking the ford which lay below. The stream was lined on either side by thickets of quaking aspens and slender birches, and although the season was still young, without a leaf as yet unfolded, the tangle of branches was so dense that a man could not see beyond it. Leonard was thinking:

"If he was down there, he'd have got me when I was skylined."

He drew his revolver then, and rode on; he remembered the carbine which was in its sheath beneath the stirrup leather of his saddle. But the saddle was in Santa Fe. He wished he had it now; this was no country for shooting it out with a pistol. Not when the other fellow had a rifle. And Lawson would have one; he hadn't any doubt on that point.

He forded the creek and started up the hill on the other side. The sense of danger was strong within him—but almost too late. For as he reached the summit, a bullet spattered lead upon a rock beside him. He heard the thud, and with the snarl of the ricocheting ball, he heard the report of Lawson's rifle. It was the violence of the surprise that made him fall—and the fact that he had been about to slip from the saddle in response to his prescience of peril.

THE bank was steep, for the creek had swept against it here, and when Leonard recovered his shaken senses he was lying, head downward. One arm was outstretched, the other was doubled beneath his body, and he could feel the hard butt of his revolver pressing against his ribs. It came to him with a sick feeling that he had been hit. Then he recalled the noise of the ricocheting ball and he knew what had happened.

He was lying on his side six feet or so below the trail; he must have rolled

over once or twice before he landed. Little clusters of gravel were dislodging from the bank, sliding down into the creek.

"And the minute I start to move, I'll slide down there too." As he was thinking, he saw something stirring up-cañon.

IT was curious the way the landscape looked: with his head lower than his feet, everything seemed to be tilted. But he ceased to note such unessentials when he saw the branches of the quaking aspens stirring two hundred yards up the cañon, and when he saw the burly figure emerging from the thicket he told himself:

"Play dead. He thinks he got you."

It seemed to take Lawson a long time to cross the level interval between the grove and the foot of the grade; there was one heart-stopping moment when a patch of loose earth gave way, and Leonard felt his body slipping. The movement ceased; the arm which was pinned under him was freer now; he could feel the butt of the revolver in his hand.

Lawson was climbing the hill. He walked wide-footed after the manner of so many blocky men. His face was red and the long scar across his cheek made a vivid white line against it; his heavy brows were drawn together. He was watching Leonard narrowly as he came on. He was within fifty feet when he passed behind the first of the big boulders near the summit.

"When he comes out," Leonard told himself, "he'll see that my eyes are open."

He slid the hand which held his revolver free. The slight movement sent him to slipping again; he was beginning to fall when Lawson reappeared.

The sound of his falling was slight, but Lawson had heard it and his pistol was in his hand. The two of them fired almost at the same instant and the smoke puffs drifted between them. Leonard was pitching down the bank, head foremost. He went into the cold water to his shoulders. When he emerged, his hand was still clutching the useless weapon. He dived into the thicket; he was expecting to feel the heavy impact of a bullet, to hear the report of the weapon above him.

There was no sound until a jay screamed somewhere up the cañon. The place where Lawson had been standing was empty. Leonard lay motionless, watching the skyline, for a long time.

"It's you, Nancy!" Lawson laughed.

The jays up the cañon had ceased their clamor and the clatter of hoofs was growing louder. Three riders came into sight; they vanished in the grove of quaking aspens where Lawson had made his camp. Other riders followed, ragged figures on shaggy horses. The place became alive with noises.

One of the vanguard reappeared; he was holding a slice of raw meat in his hand; his companions followed. They were nearing the crest of the hill when the foremost uttered a loud shout.

When Leonard came forth from the thicket, several tattered horsemen were gathered around the man who had given the alarm. Another rider was topping the skyline where the old trail crossed one of the low ridges half a mile farther down the cañon. He gazed after the receding figure and his face grew dark.

Only luck could have brought his bullet to its mark when he had fired that snap shot, but he was wishing that luck had been kind to him in that moment. Now Lawson was starting on a new leg of this race whose issue was so great and, by an ironical twist of fate, Leonard's horse was carrying him. The voice of a soldier interrupted his thoughts:

"Well, pardner, what's this mean?"

Leonard shrugged. "Take me to your commanding officer."

By the time his order had been carried out, dusk was creeping up the flanks of the hills; little fires were beginning to twinkle in the cañon; the weary companies were spreading their scanty bedrolls for the first night's sleep of this hard week. A few minutes later the officers were gathering the men into ill-assembled ranks. Many of them were grumbling loudly when Colonel John P. Slough stepped out before them.

He was a Denver lawyer, and in later years when he went back to the law, he was famous for his long speeches; but the one which he made this evening was short and to the point. He recited the tidings which Leonard had brought, and then he said:

"It's up to you, boys. Those who want to go on with me tonight, step forward." They had marched thirty miles that day, but it is recorded in the history of Colorado that of those hundreds there was not one who hung back. . . .

But it takes time to get troops moving, and long before the vanguard were in their saddles, Leonard was spurring down the cañon on the horse which the colonel had given him. Two weeks ago it had been a fine animal; now it would have made poor feed for the buzzards. He drove the spurs into its flanks and he fought off the sleep that threatened him. Sometimes his thoughts roved to the weary men who were marching behind. More often they were with the one ahead who rode on a better horse, increasing his lead at every hour as he traveled on to take the news to the Texas troops in Santa Fe.

CHAPTER X

THE great house of adobe bricks stood apart from the rest of the buildings; the grist mill, the trader's store, the two dining-halls, one for men, the other for the women, the kitchens, the stables, the smoky lodges of the Indians. In this huge establishment of Lucien Adams, the mansion was the only specimen of European architecture; it was two stories high, with sharp gables and many windows. The windows were dark now; the only sound about the place was the footfalls of the fresh horse which Lawson rode.

HE had caught up the animal in the corral; it was a bay, big-boned and deep-chested; it was good for a hundred miles without a rest if a man handled it with proper care. He pulled up before the house and dismounted. He stood there for some moments listening; the silence was unbroken now. He left the animal standing with the split reins hanging, and went on tiptoe to the great front door.

It was long past midnight and high time that he was riding on. But the thing that he had in mind should not take long: a few minutes at the most. He was thinking, as he neared the door, how curious it was that the project had not occurred to him until this last moment, when he was about to ride away. If he had only thought of it on his arrival, nearly two hours before, he could have carried it out already and been riding down the trail. But that interval of rest in the tepee of a half-breed squaw-man had been a blessed luxury and there was no great need for haste just at present; he was feeling comfortably assured concerning any chances of pursuit. The Colorado troops would not be on the march before daybreak; their progress would be slow compared to his; he ought to reach Santa Fe three days before they came within sight of Fort Union and, if the Texas men acted promptly on his warning, they would be in time to take the post.

The only elements in the situation which were lacking in his calculations were the doggedness of a young fellow, embittered at himself because of a mistake which he had made four afternoons ago in Santa Fe, and the eagerness of a young girl to be back in her uncle's house.

He halted before the wide door and hearkened for sound within. It was as if he could see through the hand-tooled panels which Lucien Adams had imported years ago by wagon train from the distant states: the huge bare room which occupied a full half of the ground floor: it was almost unfurnished; midway between the ends, on either side,

there was a wide fireplace. On the long winter evenings, when the ground outside was covered by a skim of snow, piñon logs blazed behind the hearths; the flames shone on the dark faces of Ute braves who sat, Turk fashion, on the hardwood floor, and on the weather-stained faces of mountain men whose fringed buckskin trousers were stained with dust of the long, unmarked trails of the western wilderness. . . . It would be dark in there tonight; the room would be tenantless; and the fireplaces would be two empty caverns. The bureau would be obscured by a deep shadow in the corner by one of the end windows.

It was an old-fashioned bureau, made of black walnut; it had one of those marble tops which were supposed to be the last word in elegance before the Civil War. A handle of the lower drawer was missing. It looked out of place in the great room. And it was one of the traditions of the old Santa Fe trail.

For it was known from Independence Missouri to the City of the Holy Faith. Teamsters and wagon-masters and trappers told stories about it: how they had seen Lucien Adams go to this queer article of furniture, when he needed cash to pay for a new race-horse, or to satisfy a wager, or to buy a few bales of fur pelts from a Ute Indian; how they had seen him open the top drawer and lift out a canvas bag, whose load of gold-pieces was so heavy that it strained a strong man's arm to hold it outstretched. There were, so the story went, thirty thousand dollars in that bag, sometimes.

All the other things in the long room were before Lawson's mind's eye, but they formed a background only; his thoughts were centered on the bureau and the canvas bag. It had been, so he remembered, Lucien Adams' boast that no man dared even try to steal this sack of gold; that, if a man did try and did succeed, that one would die regretting his foolhardiness. As the memory occurred to him, Lawson smiled to himself.

There was the chance that he might not reach Santa Fe in time; there was the further chance that the Confederates might be slow in moving out on Fort Union; and there was the still more remote hazard that the garrison might succeed in holding them off until the Colorado regiments arrived. To his way of thinking, these risks were slight. It was altogether probable that, within the next month, the Southern occupation would be complete, and that he would be part owner of this enormous grant. But he was one of those men who always liked, as the old phrase goes, to play both ends against the middle.

The wide door was unlocked. If there was a key, it had been lost years ago and it had never been used. Lawson turned the porcelain knob silently and stepped within. He halted there, as he had done outside; he waited until the fullness of the silence had impressed itself upon him. He was a heavy-footed man, like so many of his build, but he made little more sound than a moccasined Indian as he crossed the room to where the walnut bureau stood.

The top drawer was the one. It squeaked when he pulled it open and he cursed it under his breath. The place was so dark that he could not see within; he groped blindly at empty air and he swore again. Then his fingers touched rough canvas fabric and their tips felt the pleasant hardness of gold-pieces pressing against the cloth. He drew a deep breath of triumphant relief.

He had lifted the sack forth, and his heart leaped as he realized its weight. Then he heard some one coming.

IT is a mathematical fact that a good team of horses, hitched to a light carriage, travels a beaten road faster than a saddle-animal. And with changes every half-day, this ratio of difference becomes still larger. That was how it happened that Nancy Adams was sitting in her upstairs room on this midnight, confiding in her leather-bound diary. That and the further fact that she had chosen to travel from early morning until late in the night, rather than sleep in one of the poor beds at a stage-station.

"I think," so she was writing, *"that he is wonderful. And when they told me at Fort Union how he had gone to Santa Fe, to risk his life among those Rebels instead of being a miserable spy, as I had thought him, and I remembered what I had done to him at Las Vegas, it was just terrible. If I could only see him again! But if I ever do, I don't suppose—"*

Her suppositions were left in abeyance for the time. The Mexican girl, who waited upon her and made up her room, was sleeping in a bedchamber just across the wide corridor and she had taken this particular occasion to indulge in a nightmare. She was sitting up in bed, staring ahead of her with wide eyes which beheld only unrealities, when

Nancy came with a candle in her hand. It took several minutes to restore the little creature to a state where she was ready to settle down once more. Nancy was on her way back to her own room when she heard a horse stamping uneasily before the front door. She went to the window at the end of the corridor and she looked out. She never did know whether it was merely curiosity, or whether it was a premonition that made her determine to investigate.

WHEN she told of it afterward she said she had the strangest feeling, and she let it go at that. But, whatever the cause of her investigation might have been, there was no fear until she opened the door of the great room on the ground floor and stood on the threshold, holding the candle high above her head, to confront a burly figure with Lucien Adams' canvas money-bag in his hand. She said one word:

"Lawson!" She saw his other hand sweep to the thick waist. It was then that fear came to her.

She stood there rigid; she was unable to stir. The hand rested for just a moment on the butt of the holstered pistol; then it left the weapon and Lawson laughed. He said:

"It's you, Nancy!" He dropped the sack and started toward her. Her lips went tight. She forced herself to move. She was turning to flee when he seized her and she felt his thick fingers closing on her throat.

Time is a curious affair; things happen slowly and they seem swift in transpiring, or they take place quickly and seem terribly slow. The last things of which Nancy was conscious were the pressure of those fingers, a pain that was horrible, darkness in which flashes of light came and went, the hammering of hoofs somewhere outside the house. Then the blackness became complete and she never did know how long that period of blankness lasted.

It was interrupted by the crashing of a pistol-shot within closed walls. When she returned to a complete consciousness of the things around her, she was lying on the hardwood floor. The candle which she had been holding was beside her and the flame, by some strange chance, was still burning. But the candle was on its side and the flame was wavering, so that the various objects in the room seemed to be moving: Lawson's thick body on its back, the more slender form close by, with the black smudge of powder smoke on the cheek and the red streak under the dark hair from which more red was spreading.

She got to her knees; she tried to stand, then she sank down again. She crept past the dead man and she saw the crimson patch where the heavy barrel of Leonard's pistol had crashed down. She saw it but it registered on her mind as slightly and as vaguely as if the body were a piece of broken furniture. When the members of the roused household reached the room they found her kneeling beside Leonard's form; they heard her frantically asking him whether he was dead.

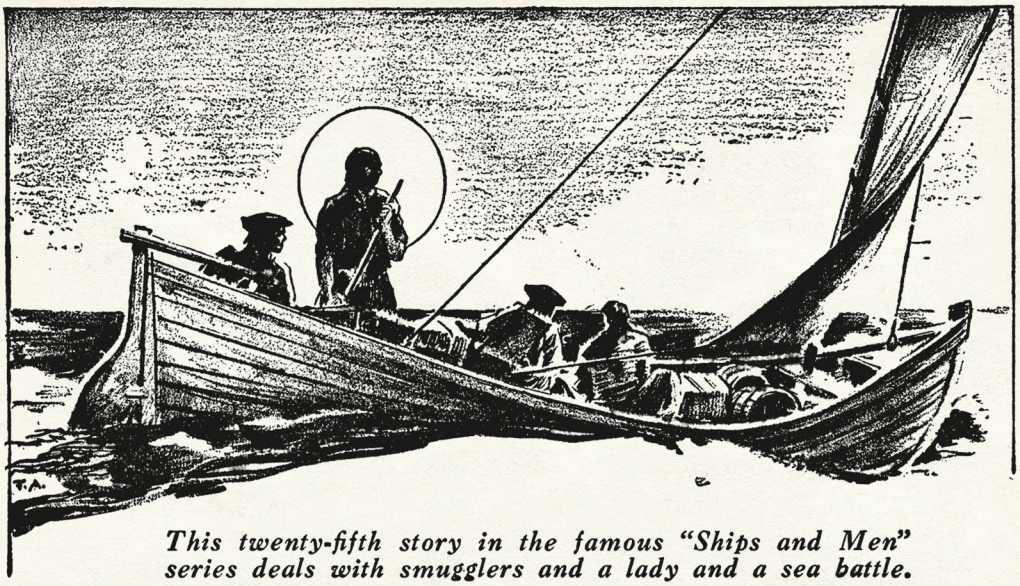
He was not dead. Far from it! But the ball which had plowed through his scalp when he rushed in to use his own weapon as a bludgeon, where a shot would have endangered Nancy, had left a severe concussion. He was lying unconscious in one of the upstairs rooms when Colonel Slough's Colorado troops arrived shortly after dawn, finishing thirty-four miles forced march on top of the thirty miles of the preceding day. He was unable to set forth with them when they departed six hours later. In fact, he was unable to do anything but lie there for the next ten days.

BY that time the Battle of Glorieta had been fought; there are some who still call it the Battle of Apache Cañon. It was a small skirmish compared to those struggles which were going on at the time far to the eastward, but the issue which it decided was large enough to have turned the fate of the Union, and there was plenty of hot work before Major Chivington, with a battalion of ragged Colorado miners, crept along the steep mountainside, to smash through the Texan rear.

A rider from the ranch of the Pigeon brought the news of the Union victory. It was the day when Leonard was to have departed to join his company in Colonel Kit Carson's regiment, and Nancy was standing on the wide veranda with him beside her when the messenger arrived. And just to show how potent a few days' propinquity can be, and how completely misunderstandings can be forgotten, witness her remark at the reception of the tidings:

"Oh! Then you needn't go! You'll be with me a little longer!"

THE END



This twenty-fifth story in the famous "Ships and Men" series deals with smugglers and a lady and a sea battle.

Long Tom o' Devon

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

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson and Yngve E. Soderberg

KENNY halted the car and turned to me.

"Get out," he said abruptly. "This is one of the most remarkable places in America."

I got out, gaping around. Nothing seemed unique about it to my eyes; the shore curved in below the road, with a snug strip of yellow beach. For an hour Kenny had been driving in a mad maze of New York suburbs, highly confusing to a foreigner from California; whether this was New Rochelle or Larchmont, I had no clear idea.

Kenny led me down to the beach. He's one of those men with what might be called a well-rounded education, rarely found these days when education seems an angular, highly specialized affair. Kenny knows something about everything, and a lot about some things.

"Run that sand between your fingers," he said, squatting down. "It's an experience you'll never have again, unless you return here."

I obeyed, puzzled. It looked like sand; it felt like sand: it was sand.

"What's the catch?" I demanded.

Kenny drew a letter *A* in the sand, with his finger; from this he extended a wriggly line to a second point, *B*; from this a long straight line to a third point, which he marked *C*.

"This is where we are now," he said. "This letter *C*. Get it?"

"I see, yes," was my reply.

Kenny frowned slightly; he dislikes levity when he's serious. He pointed to a building.

"That house, we'll call *X*," he observed. "It doesn't look up to much. It's old. It was built a long time ago out of ship's timbers, according to local report. The ship's timbers are still in it, though it's been modernized and made into a swell house. Now, you keep running that sand through your fingers. Does it feel queer?"

"No," I declared. "It's just like any other sand."

Kenny shook his head. "It is not. No other sand in America is like it. Now, this,"—and he indicated his sand-drawings,—"is a diagram which symbolizes one of the most pronounced and dramatic advances in shipping which has ever taken place. Sailing-ship design, you know, has exerted a profound influence on commerce and history—"

"What the devil are you driving at?" I demanded. "What has the history of sailing-vessels got to do with your normal flair for letting blood?"

He grinned. "Boy, this is a story fairly smoking with hot blood! That's a fact. Long Tom o' Devon knocked 'em off hard and fast, believe me; he had to do it, in his business. He had to do it if he wanted to go on living—and not living alone, either. She was a squire's daughter, you see."

I blinked at him. "This time I don't see. You and your diagram and your squire's daughter—are you gone daft? Not to mention sailing-ship design."

"Oh, that's really the nub of the whole thing!" he rejoined. "You see, in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century, the south coast of England did a roaring trade in smuggled goods otherwise highly dutiable—spirits, tobacco, and so forth. Half the fishermen were really smugglers, and everyone sympathized with them. The gentry put up money for the traffic, and many a fine big house in those parts today was built on the proceeds. The penalties were heavy, and the smugglers did not hesitate to put up a stiff fight if caught in the act. There's your background, with half the British Navy trying to stop the business and failing. The smugglers had guns too, and used them in a pinch. Long Tom o' Devon got that name because of the Long Tom mounted aboard his lugger—a long twenty-four.

"That craft of his was big, and she was fast as the devil. A lugger; the type had come in for cross-Channel work—"

"Luggers be hanged! Who was this Long Tom o' Devon?" I inquired.

KENNY gave me a pained glance, and then shrugged slightly.

"I was getting to that. He was just a name; a mystery, to people in general. Some said he was a Frenchman who had made himself into a great smuggler; some said he was a fine gentleman from London who had gone broke and turned to smuggling; his crew must have known, but did not talk. He flitted about, landed his tubs of spirits and tobacco of a dark night, and was gone. He seemed to have an uncanny knowledge of all the traps set to catch him. Twice he was nabbed, and fought his way clear, with a desperate ferocity that made an impression, even in those desperate days.

"No one could catch up with him. His lugger had the heels of anything afloat; she was a three-master, and had a dipping lug with topsail on the foremast, which was in the very eyes of the vessel. So with the mainmast, while the mizzen set a lug with outrigger and topsail. So much for Long Tom's darling. As for Long Tom himself, only one person in the world knew or suspected that he was Geoffry Craven."

With all his skipping about from diagrams to shipping rigs, Kenny had reduced me to utter bewilderment, and I said so. He merely grinned, and retorted that the prologue was necessary, and that I'd get the hang of it all in good time. With this, he launched into the yarn of Geoffry Craven and what happened at Squire Cardigan's fine old house on the Devon coast.

CRAVEN came swinging up to the house all unsuspecting, a fine figure of a man as he crunched the gravel of the drive. He was looking forward to seeing Alice Cardigan, but what he saw was one of the grooms coming on the run to warn him. Perhaps the grooms, like the country people, suspected a little about Long Tom o' Devon.

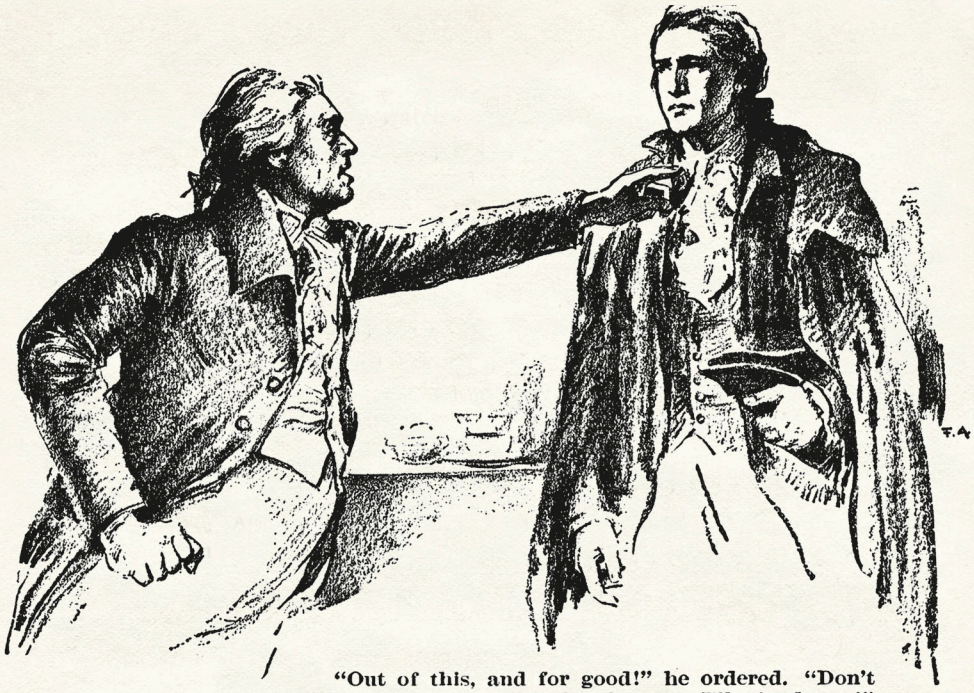
"What's wrong?" asked Craven, his gray eyes sharp and alert.

"Visitors, sir," and the groom touched his forelock. "I thought best to tell 'ee a coach is here, wi' Sir John Hardesty and another officer, up from Plymouth on business wi' the squire."

"Oh, Hardesty! He's the captain of that new cutter they've been outfitting, eh?" Craven nodded, and his gay smile came out again as he tossed a coin to the groom. "Here's a lucky piece for you, my lad, and thanks. Miss Alice is at home?"

"Aye, sir—in the garden, all of 'em."

To the garden Craven went, bold as you please, though there was no love between him and his cousin Sir John. His arrival created something of a sensation. Bluff Cardigan met him with surprise and chill formality, but welcomed him. Alice regarded him with wide eyes of alarm. Hardesty, precise and aquiline and savagely cynical, did not dissemble



"Out of this, and for good!" he ordered. "Don't attempt to see my daughter or I'll pistol you!"

his dislike. The other officer, a young lieutenant, perceived nothing wrong at all and shook hands heartily.

"We've met ere this," snapped Hardesty, at the introduction.

Craven chuckled.

"Aye, cousin John, long ere this! And you're still a fine gentleman in His Majesty's service, with your stiff collar and cold eye. And, God help me, I'm still a graceless runagate who prefers country to town, honest fishermen to honeyed courtiers, a good horse and a hard morning's run to lolling about a coffee-house or wasting my earnings at high stakes."

"Earnings!" repeated Hardesty with contempt. "Earnings, indeed! Are you in trade, that you should talk of earning money?"

"Aye, in trade, and a disgrace to the family," Craven said cheerfully, tipping Alice a wink. "But don't let me interrupt, gentlemen. A drink and a pipe—I have my own pipe, with your permission. . . . . Good tobacco you have, Cardigan. Smuggled stuff, I'll warrant you!"

He made himself breezily at home, disregarding the anxious glances of Alice, who was in talk with the lieutenant.

Sir John Hardesty rather stiffly went on with his business. This was to urge Squire Cardigan, as a magistrate and man of position, to co-operate in putting down smuggling hereabouts. Cardigan evaded, up to a certain point, but was pressed into consenting. Craven put in a word now and then, slyly, which increased Cardigan's embarrassment. Far from having any sympathy with the coastguard, Cardigan had many a tub of tobacco and spirits in his cellar at this moment.

"However," he said at length, "if you have any scheme for catching this fellow they call Long Tom o' Devon, I'm with you on it."

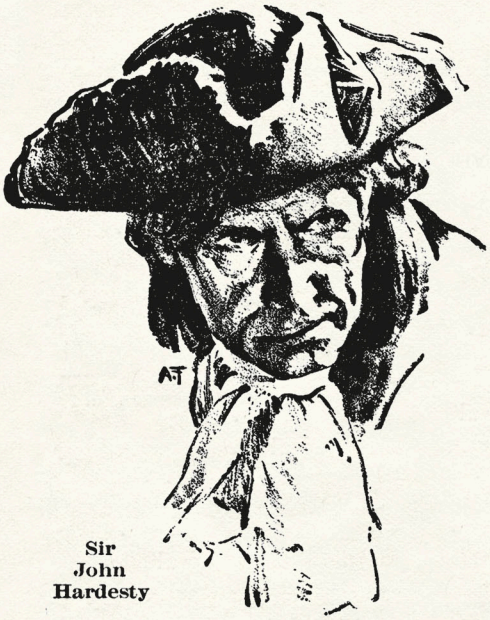
"That's the nub of the whole affair," said Hardesty, eying Craven. "But I've no mind to speak too far in the presence of others. This precious cousin of mine would be only too glad to tip off a ruffian like Long Tom."

"True for you," said Craven, beaming. "However, cousin John, I'd hate to spoil the sport. I'll inform nobody—you have my word on it."

Hardesty nodded stiffly. "And your daughter, sir?"

Cardigan turned to Alice, who laughed and promised secrecy. In that day, when a man's word meant more than any bond, Hardesty might well be satisfied.

"VERY well, Cardigan," said the officer. "You'll see why I need your help. This rascal Long Tom has a remarkably fast lugger, but I think I've ended her glory and that of all other smuggling craft of the kind. I've a cutter outfitting at Plymouth, and finished, which embodies some new principles. To cope with these luggers, the ordinary cutter won't do. We need a craft heavy enough to carry guns, stout enough to keep the sea at all times, and speedy enough to run down a lugger."



Sir John Hardesty

"No small order!" Craven chuckled. "I'd love to see one of your cutters trying to overhaul a lugger on a reach!"

"You'll see it, sir," snapped Hardesty. "Now, I shan't go into details, but I've fitted my craft with a new rig—it will set a precedent for the Royal Navy, I believe. The Admiralty is already studying the plans. I've learned a bit about this Long Tom, who usually lands his cargoes along the coast. In fact, his last cargo was landed a week ago at Tor Bay, two miles from here. He's expected back in about three weeks from today, and if you'll lend a hand, we'll nip the rascal for good."

CRAVEN puffed hard at his pipe and avoided the glance of Alice. Good Lord! The man had everything exact. Somebody must have played Judas.

"Very well, sir," Cardigan said with energy. "Count me with you. I'd indeed be glad to make sure that this rascal would never land another cargo! My tenants have been demoralized by his goings-on. Only three months past, he fought his way out of a trap, killed half a dozen men, and emptied his guns into a brig that tried to halt him. Why, the fellow's no better than a pirate!"

Hardesty warmed. "Egad, sir, I'm glad to hear such sentiments from you! Then it's agreed. On Monday, I'm taking out my cutter for trials. Three weeks from tonight, I'll have twenty coast-guards here under your orders to block the paths up the cliffs. The lugger usually runs in after dark, on a signal from the shore folk that all's clear. Let the signal be made on this occasion; keep your men hidden. I'll arrange with a second cutter to show up an hour after dark and scare our man off—slap into my hands. I'll be hanging off and on to await him. This, of course, depends on the weather being fine. If otherwise, it'll be the next night, or the first fine one. You understand?"

So taken and accepted. Sir John Hardesty refused to stay the night, having a dinner engagement at Plymouth. He made his farewells, bowed stiffly to Craven, and departed with his lieutenant.

WHEN their coach had left, Cardigan returned to Craven, who was standing deep in talk with Alice. He went up to them, took Craven by the shoulder, and looked into his eyes.

"Now, Geoffry Craven, it's no time for slippery words," he said grimly. "We've been friends, we've done business together, I've made you welcome here. That's ended. You got my letter, requesting you not to enter this house again?"

"I got it. That's why I came," said Craven steadily. "Such discourtesy must have a reason, I think?"

Cardigan glanced at his daughter and ordered her out of the room. Craven nodded slightly, and she departed. The bluff squire turned to his visitor again, and indulged in no weasel words. He was a blunt man.

"Craven, I'm no fool. I can guess that either you're one of Long Tom's agents, or his lieutenant; for all I know, you may be the rogue himself! That's neither here nor there, for our relations are ended."

"Why?" asked Craven coolly.

"Gad, sir! I've waked up to your impudence, that's why—your daring to lift your eyes to my daughter!"

"What of it?" Craven smiled a little. "Come, come, man! I'm of good birth. I've made money in the game. My name's not clouded; and, if you consent to the match, I'll quit the trade entirely."

"You infernal scoundrel!" snapped Cardigan. "Why, damme, sir, have you the insolence to suggest that you'd ask my daughter to live on money earned in such fashion?"

"I fail to see the distinction, since you've certainly pocketed enough by your own dealings with Long Tom—"

Cardigan flew into a rage, having no answer to this truth.

"Out of this, and for good!" he ordered. "Don't come into this house again. Don't attempt to see my daughter, or I'll pistol you! It's too much to expect that you'll keep your word about warning this rogue of what you've overheard today—"

Geoffry Craven bowed slightly. "Since you think so ill of my honor, sir, I suppose I should bluster and call you out and so forth. I prefer to leave you to your own sad ignominy. A man so utterly illogical as you are, creates his own hell. Good day, sir."

He departed, humming a gay tune; but this was more affectation than reality.

As he passed the stables, he encountered the groom who had warned him. Beckoning the man, Craven handed him another coin—a yellow one.

"Now, Tom, listen well," said he. "The squire and I are no longer friends, but I'd have you get a word to Miss Alice for me—it'll be the last time. Tell her it's for Tuesday night, and to take no chances."

He stepped briskly away down the drive. At the corner of the house, he heard a little voice call his name, and glanced up. At the window of her room was Alice. He blew her a kiss, flung her a smile and a wave of the hand, and went his way.

IN the fishing village under the cliffs, Craven came to the tavern and found there a dark, merry, foreign man whose teeth flashed in a smile of greeting.

"The horses, Pierre!" he said shortly. "And quick about it. No talk. We must get back to the lugger and away before dawn."

Two good horses were brought out and saddled. A bite and a tankard, and the two men rode away together. Once at the top of the cliffs and on their road, Craven reined in.

"Pierre, somebody's blown the works," he observed. "Everything's known, about the next cargo; even to the very spot and the time."

"So! Then you'll change the plans?" asked the Frenchman.

"I will not!"—and Craven laughed. "I may advance them a trifle, but I'll not change them. All I'll change is the future. On Monday, lad, we'll discover just what the Royal Navy has up its sleeve. Cousin John's a canny seaman; if he's done what he says, the next cargo will be the last for me. I'll take that cargo of wines for Alexandria that the Bordeaux Merchants have offered, and become an honest trader."

"Alexandria! In the Levant?" gasped Pierre. "But, m'sieu, one cannot make money by being honest!"

Craven laughed heartily at this philosophy. "I've other plans, lad," he said.

ON Monday, with a spanking breeze out of the west, Captain Sir John Hardesty took his newfangled navy cutter out of Plymouth and set to work testing her paces. She was like nothing ever seen, and good to look upon. Of big displacement, with her greatest draft at the heel, she was sturdily built and amazingly strong aloft, with lofty topmasts, long yards, long bowsprit and booms, with extra stout shrouds, backstays and runners, and with canvas to make any seaman stare.

The lugger that swaggered insolently along certainly stared, as did Geoffry Craven aboard her, and Pierre and all his foreign crew. Being well to leeward of the cutter, up went her canvas in no time. Pierre grinned.

"We'll run from her quick enough, m'sieur! You'll see."

"I don't like what I see, Pierre." Craven lowered his glass, then lifted it again, as he stood beside the Frenchman. "Take a look. My good cousin has done something that may prove original. In fact, the British Navy should make him an admiral—"

An exclamation broke from Pierre. The cutter, hauling about to overtake the lugger, was suddenly crowding on unsuspected sail, her yards spotted with men at work. Craven, watching, began to count the canvas aloud.

"Jib, fore staysail, and she's got a square-sail for'ard, topsail and square t'gallant sail—look at it bloom out! Square stunsails on either side of the topsail. What's that triangular canvas above the yard of the lower course? Oh, I get it! The thing fills the gap left by the goreing of the topsail—then her mainsail, and a ringtail set abaft the leach—good Lord!"

"And every one of them drawing," groaned Pierre. "She has the legs of us, m'sieu. She can sail circles around us!"

"Not quite; but that's all I want to know. Now try her out—take the helm!'

Two hours, three hours, the lugger maneuvered as though trying frantically to escape from this towering mass of canvas. Speedy as she was, the cutter was faster. On the wind, into the wind, the

cutter had the advantage any way the game was played.

Craven, watching narrowly, could give his cousin full credit. Here, he knew, was an evolution in rigging which bade fair to change all seamanship. With cutters like this, the King's men could sweep the comparatively clumsy luggers off the seas—that is, in theory.

"One thing they don't count on," he asserted, as he prepared to duck below. "Everything shipshape, Pierre? Yes, I see it is. Take the deck, then."

He vanished, as a gun sounded from the cutter and the shot dropped in the ocean ahead.

Sail fell off. A boat came aboard, with Hardesty in person. An armed lugger? But yes, m'sieu. Why not? France and England were not at war just now. An honest ship laden with wines. Papers in order, cargo in order. Suspect as he might, Hardesty had no proof. Craven was stowed snugly away below. The boat pulled back at last, and the lugger set her course again for Bristol—supposedly.

When night drew on, a small boat set Craven ashore.

"Get across to Cherbourg, load your cargo, and come back on schedule," he told Pierre at parting. "Send this letter to the Bordeaux Merchants for me. You know where to pick me up when you return. Leave the landing details to me. And, mind you, it may mean trouble! They're out to nip us this trip."

Pierre showed his white teeth. "Give the orders, m'sieu—we obey!"

"Then have the guns loaded and shotted when you pick me up; double-shotted, with bags of bullets," said Craven, and went down into the boat that was to land him.

ON Tuesday, as sunset deepened into dusk, he was riding along a dale, half a mile from the Cardigan manor. He came to a bridge crossing the rivulet, and there a horse was waiting; and beside the horse, stood Alice.

They met in silence—in a long embrace, a long look, a swift happy smile.

"Your father?" asked Craven.

"In Plymouth. I'm afraid, my dear, he's in earnest."

"Faith, so am I in earnest!" and the gray eyes twinkled at her. Then they sobered. "My dear, will you marry me despite him?"

"Of course," she said simply. "But it can't be done in England."

"Then it'll be done out of England, if you'll trust me," he said gravely, holding her two hands, looking into her eyes. "If you'll trust me, and trust the future. It needs so much trusting, my heart! It's enough to frighten any woman—"

"Devon women aren't cowards," she said quietly. "Listen, dear. He suspects that you're Tom o' Devon himself. Somebody must have talked."

"Somebody has talked—we've some traitor in the crew," said Craven. "No matter. I can't ask you to marry Long Tom o' Devon; but will you come with me when Long Tom makes his last landing? Will you come to France, and marry Geoffry Craven there?"

"I will, as you know," she replied, and gripped his fingers hard. "What's in the future, that I must trust so hard?"

"All of life, and a new world," he said. "We land our tubs here; I'm committed to putting this cargo ashore. It'll make me absolute owner of the lugger, with money enough besides. We go back to Bordeaux, and from there take an honest freight to Alexandria, with good pay. And from Egypt, we make a long traverse for America. Can you face that, my heart? All the chances of sea and of life, for the two of us?"

HER face lit up suddenly. She was a deep-eyed, deep-bosomed young woman, with red roses in her cheeks, quiet measuring gaze, and none too ready words. But now her words came suddenly, to second the swift springing glory and love in her eyes.

"Oh, my dear! All the chances of sea and life—why, what more could I ask than such a honeymoon?"

"You'll not regret to leave your father?"

"Yes," she said honestly. "But I'd regret more to leave you and all the rest of life, my dear. Kiss me."

Craven stooped to her lips. Then she drew away, still holding his hands.

"I must tell you—they know exactly when and where you're going to land!" she exclaimed.

He laughed lightly.

"They think so. No one knows that except Tom Long—and you. Instead of Tor Bay, it's the cove ten miles east. Instead of after dark, it's in broad daylight—in the middle of the afternoon. Should weather or aught else spoil the landing, it'll be the next day."

"But—the shore folk will have to be told about the change in plans!" she ex-

claimed. "Somebody will have to know in advance. And if anyone knows, someone may tell. They've put a reward of a hundred guineas for your capture."

"Too cheap by far!" And Craven broke into an amused chuckle. "What you say is true. The Sunday before the landing, tell that groom of yours about the change. He'll spread the word to the right people. We'll be met—and no one will blab."

SHE stared. "Our groom—then he's one of your men! All right. But, my dear, think of the risks! Sir John's new cutter, and the other one—"

"You'll share the risks," said Craven gravely. "Two days before the landing, I'll pick you up. A boat takes us west along the coast—the lugger picks us up there."

"West?" she questioned. "But your lugger comes from France!"

"Precisely," he said, smiling. "No one suspects we'd come from the west, but thus it is. Are you content to share the risks? If caught, it means everything to you—"

"If not caught, it means everything!" She dimpled suddenly. "Ah, my dear, but you're a man to face the world with, for good or ill!"

He took her in his arms, kissed her.

"And you," he said huskily, "you're a woman to live and die with, my dear; God bless the two of us! Now, then, you know the landing's on a Tuesday. I'll come to the door of your house on Sunday evening at seven, with an extra horse ready. You'll have to leave behind everything except what you can carry."

"No loss," said she, and laughed. "You'll come to the house itself?"

"I'm no sneak," he replied with a touch of anger. "Aye! Let your father ride after us and be damned to him! I know the roads. I'll take you from the door of your own house, for your pride and mine—"

As, in fact, he did when the day came. Alice had not forgotten the message

"You," he said huskily, "you're a woman to live with and die with, my dear!"

through the groom, and next night the message went out to the right people.

On the Monday, a blunt-bowed fishing craft went dancing to the westward along the Cornish coast, to meet the lugger coming in from her wide sea-sweep—if indeed she came.

"Why not? The weather's good, and will hold good," said Craven to the woman beside him, as the fishermen scanned the horizon for the expected sail, and the little boat bowled along. "We gamble on Pierre—a good man. We gamble on life and wits and brawn, and on destiny."

"Perhaps on God," she said softly, and pressed his hand. A woman does not shrink from voicing what a man thinks only in his heart.

And while they gambled, the country folk gambled also. On the Tuesday morning, carts and men converged on a barren cove, ten miles west of Tor Bay. A daylight landing was something bold and rare, but they took no chances. In a dingle above the cliffs, the carts were hidden, and men let down lines, and other men were posted out every way as guards, and on the shingle below the boldest of them waited.

From the cliffs, lookouts scanned the sea. Off to the eastward, near Tor Bay, flashed the glint of canvas where the smaller cutter was taking her position. Off to the south, every now and then a fleck of white showed on the horizon, where Sir John Hardesty's new craft stood off and on.

Then, creeping in from the Cornish coast, came the old brown lugger with the weathered sails that did not show at a great distance, and her topsails doused. She came unhurriedly, and was hauling in almost before she was recognized.

She hove to off the shallows, and her hook dropped, and her canvas fell, and her boats were out. Men trooped aboard her in all haste to aid the crew, and stared at the cloaked woman who stood beside Long Tom o' Devon; and many a man recognized her and touched his forelock, but said no word.

NOW the tubs went ashore—cognac and spirits of all kinds, tobacco, a bit of lace and other things. Ashore with them, any way at all, with a rush and a thump; ashore, and up the steep cliff paths, and away to the waiting carts. The Devon men joked in their uncouth jargon, the Frenchmen of the crew laughed and jabbered in their lilting birdtalk, Craven smiled and watched the tubs go ashore and up the cliffside.

"We're really doing it!" said the woman beside him, a thrill in her voice.

"Why not?" His gray eyes danced. "We've cleaned out most of it already. Another ten minutes, and we're off. If we—"

"Ahoy, below!" A thin voice came down from the top of the cliffs. Men paused, staring up. "Ahoy there! Cutter to the south'ard reaching in!"

Pierre came up on the jump. "M'sieur! She's bound to see us—we have no shelter—"

Craven's voice blared in fluent French and English, now at the seamen, now at the shore folk. The tubs were put over with a rush, the hatches were clapped on, the country folk went hurriedly ashore, the anchor came up. Canvas fluttered and lifted.

"Enough has gone ashore to win the game," said Craven. "But enough's under the hatches to damn us if caught. We can't get rid of it until night—"

"Looks like she's made us out!" hailed a man from aloft.

THE brown sails were peaked to the wind, Pierre himself took the tiller, Craven beside him. The Frenchman indicated Alice at the rail, with an inquiring gesture.

"She stays," said Craven shortly.

A breeze rippled over the water. The lugger paid off by aid of her jib, and stood out. The cutter had changed course slightly, and with all canvas bellying, stood toward the lugger. At sight of her sailspread, the Frenchman pointed and talked excitedly. Pierre shook his head.

"Look how she cuts the water, m'sieu! No need to give her a race to tell that she has the heels of us," he said, and emitted a growl of oaths. "What can we do?"

Craven uttered a quick, ringing laugh.

"Do? Use our heads of course, until we must use our hands! Keep near shoal water, run along the shore; and keep that blasted cutter sailing on the wind. The breeze is freshening. This craft is new, her crew aren't used to her yet; sure as fate, she'll jibe! She won't sail by the wind while we're on the wind or she'd lose too much ground in tacking. If she jibes once, we'll have our chance to tack offshore—they'll be paying more attention to all that spread of canvas than to the ship—"

Pierre grasped the idea, and his voice blared out joyously.

"Look alive for'ard! Haul the foresail over—wing-and-wing!"

So they were off on what was to prove no short chase or merry jaunt, but a grim matching of wits and wits, ship and ship, hunter and hunted, with flame and death at the run's end.

PIERRE knew by heart every reef and corner of this rocky coast. As the craft slipped through the water, as the time passed, even to Alice Cardigan it became evident that the cutter held command. Anxiety grew in her eyes.

"My dear, Sir John was right," she said quietly to the man beside her.

"Only too right," said he. "And your father the magistrate—is that what's in your mind?"

She searched his face. "You're still hopeful?"

"Faith, I don't hope; I know!" and as he spoke, his laugh rang out. "Look—look! Pierre! She's done it!"

Shouts arose from the men. Sure enough, the cutter's main boom had been topped, the sail bellying forward of the mast, the boom slapping up against it. Pierre's orders bellowed down the deck, and barely in time. The lugger, still dangerously wing-and-wing, was nearing a jutting point of rocks. The cutter's crew muzzled the mainsail, wrestled the boom amidships, and brailed up until the wind was on a safe quarter, then began to draw swiftly offshore.

"Shift over the sheets!" bawled Pierre. "Stand by to haul aft starboard—down mainsail—set mainsail—haul aft the main sheet—"

The lugger had come by the wind on the new tack. Craven watched as the minutes fled, as the afternoon wore. Always it was the same. The lugger would tack offshore, then square away, while the cutter had to duplicate every move—and sailed faster. But, being forced to go on the wind most of the time, Hardesty was cautious. To keep from jibing, she must continually brail up her mainsail before letting the wind shift, and so she lost precious way.

The thing could not last, however. Eventually, as the sun wore westward, the heading-off tactics of the cutter began to tell.

"We're losing," said the girl quietly.

Craven nodded, biting his lip.

"Aye. My worthy cousin is playing cat-and-mouse; he's got us, and knows it. He must know you're aboard, too. Clever fellow! And if he respects you, I must respect him and not play my one last card—"

A groan escaped him, then a shout of warning to Pierre. Too late.

Caught in a shallow bight with small room to maneuver, Pierre tried to come about, missed stays, and fell in irons. Desperately Pierre endeavored to send her around on her heel and let her fill, but under the lee of towering cliffs, the lugger had not enough way.

The cutter bore down. An officer leaped into the hammock nettings with a trumpet.

"Lugger, ahoy! Put down your helm and ease off on your main sheet. Fetch to, or I'll fire into you!"

"If you do, take the consequences!" shouted Craven furiously.

Pierre put down helm, eased his main sheet—just enough to pass under the stern of the cutter. A little gust of wind came off the land. The foresail and square topsail shivered. Pierre's voice lifted again. The lugger put her nose into the wind and shot ahead, clearing the cutter by a cable-length. The breeze picked up. She filled away on the larboard tack. But Craven, seeing the sudden stir aboard the cutter, seeing her swing around, seeing her ports fall, caught Alice about the waist.

"Down with you! Below! Pierre—get the cover off the Long Tom. By the Lord, the last card gets played—"

He had her below, on the ladder, when the broadside crashed from the cutter, when men shrieked along the lugger's deck, when the ship reeled to the belching rattle of iron. He shoved her down, ordered her to stay there, and was up again with a leap and a roar of gusty orders.

The Long Tom swung and lifted. Craven pointed the gun himself as the lugger rose and dipped and rose again. Once more—then match clapped to linstock, and the long gun boomed and the lugger reeled to the shock of her recoil.

A WILD yell burst from the dark foreign men. The bags of bullets had gone slap into that towering mass of canvas, slap into the broadside below. And as the lugger fell away and went slipping through the water, picking up the wind and racing like a hound dog for the horizon and the coming night, behind her the cutter was a mass of fluttering canvas and severed lines, one spar carrying away and then another, a ruin of majesty. . . .

"For France, my dear, for France!" And Craven brought the girl on deck again to point back at the hapless wounded thing behind. "For France and the new life, and the new world!"

"And for us," she said. . . .

Kenny had finished his story; he made it quite obvious that he had finished. We were again looking out across Long Island Sound, and I discovered that I was still running that yellow sand through my fingers.

"So," I observed with sarcasm, "they just sailed away and lived happily ever after, huh? Is that your idea of a story?"

He looked up at me with his quick, flashing smile.

"You miss the whole point, with your impatience! Of course they went on and on, to Alexandria and finally over to—here." He waved his hand at the houses behind us, then jabbed down his finger on the spot marked *C*. "From *A*, on the Devon coast, to *B* at Alexandria, then here. Get it? The house I was talking about, back yonder, was built from the timbers of that lugger, years later."

"Do you call that the point of the story?"

"Not at all," he rejoined, with a sigh. "The point is, that Craven was dead right. There was only one answer to the cutter rig Hardesty had evolved—guns. Craven gave that answer and got away. Others didn't. That rig went into the Royal Navy and practically drove the smuggling luggers off the sea. Some smugglers even copied it and used the rig themselves. It became an integral part of sea lore. And Craven never knew it, probably, but that one blast from his Long Tom not only cut the rigging of Hardesty's ship to pieces, but it killed Hardesty."

"Oh!" I said thoughtfully. "That's not so bad for a kick-back. But what's all that yarn got to do with this sand? And why is this plain, ordinary sand so darned peculiar, anyhow?"

"It's not plain, ordinary sand!" And Kenny chuckled. "It's sand from the shores of the Nile—Egyptian sand, a whole shipload of it! Craven couldn't get any cargo from there for America, so he filled up with sand ballast and dumped it here. Any how, that's the local tradition, and local tradition is usually right. Now are you satisfied?"

Another colorful story in this fine series will appear in the next, the February, issue.

Santa Claus Wears Spurs

A lively story of Tiny David and the State Police.

By ROBERT MILL

OUTSIDE the barracks of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, howled a December blizzard. In the warm living-room Lieutenant James Crosby, his face ruddy after a brush with that storm, shed his coonskin cap and his sheepskin-lined coat and announced:

"Mrs. Crosby's brightest son, James, has had enough of this weather. You may state on reliable authority that next winter will find him in Florida."

Sergeant Henry Linton emerged from behind a magazine and declared:

"They have a very strict vagrancy law in Florida."

Mr. Crosby, in deference to regulations, rescued his discarded clothing before he demanded:

"What does that have to do with me?"

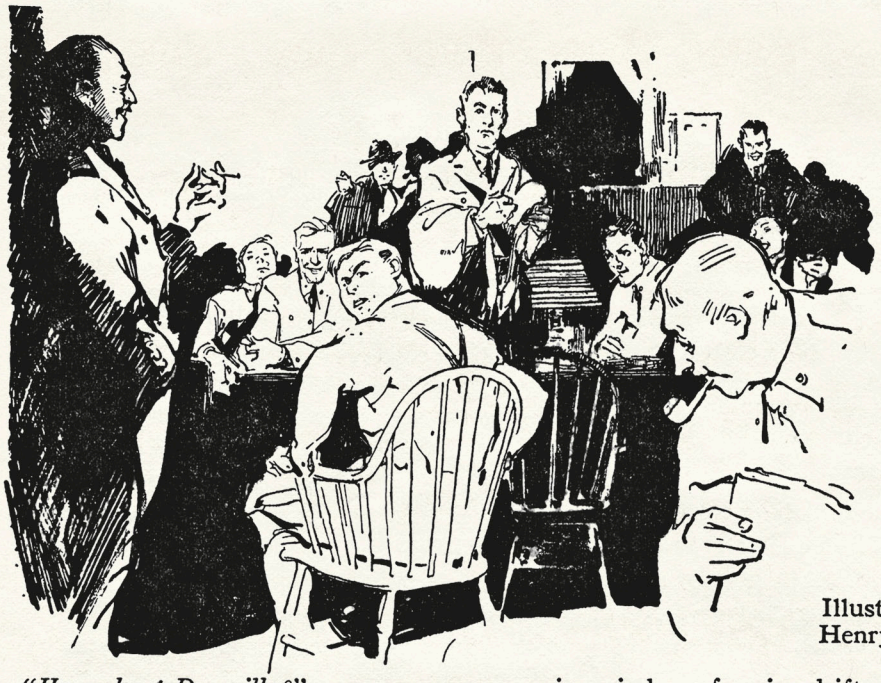
"Not a thing," declared Lieutenant Edward David, easily the largest man in the room, which explains why his nickname was Tiny. "If you get there early in the season, everything will be all right."

Mr. Crosby concealed his surprise at aid from an unexpected quarter. Prudence prompted silence, but curiosity urged him on. "Why should I get there early?" he asked.

"Because," said Mr. David, "most of the dish-washing jobs are grabbed off early."

Mr. Crosby waved this aside.

"On second thought, I may pass up Florida. There is Bermuda. And Nassau. Or Havana. They all are places popular among the gay international set, with whom I would be right at home."



Illustrated by
Henry Thiede

"How about Deerville?"

The question came from Captain Charles Field, commanding officer of the troop, who, quite unnoticed, had been standing at the entrance to the room for several minutes.

"Ordinarily," continued Captain Field, "I would hate to send any man out in this storm. And you are just back from one trip. But in a few months you will be on a beach under the palms with the smart international set, while the rest of us, lacking your advantages, will be bucking the drifts. So you are elected."

His smile shifted to Tiny David.

"Take Lieutenant David with you. He can give you all the dope on those dish-washing jobs." The knowledge that justice had been dispensed caused Captain Field's smile to grow even broader. "While one of you gets the car, I'll explain to the other one what you are supposed to be going after."

Mr. Crosby saw a faint hope of evening some scores.

"Bad going on the roads sir. If it please the Captain, how about taking Sergeant Payton and Sergeant Linton along to lend a hand with the shovels?"

Captain Field gave the suggestion scant consideration.

"That's out. They have no southern trip to look forward to, so we will have to go easy on them." His smile vanished. "And get going!"

"Yes sir," said Mr. Crosby wearily.

THE car pulled away from the shelter of the barracks, and headed into a white wall. Visibility was limited; the roaring wind was forming drifts along the road, and when the front wheels of the car struck them, Tiny David was barely able to hold the wheel.

"The beach," he observed, "isn't very crowded this morning."

Mr. Crosby sighed.

"Let's pretend nothing was said about Florida."

"If nothing had been said about it," Tiny David objected, "we wouldn't be here."

Mr. Crosby tried to change the subject. "Just why *are* we here?" he demanded.

"Robbery at the Northwoods Lumber Company office in Deerville."

"That was on the teletype two days ago," Mr. Crosby declared. "Why the sudden activity?"

"Information. Nice kit of burglar-tools supposed to be hidden in a garage. All that sort of thing."

MR. CROSBY brightened. "Who gets tagged as *It?*"

"Rodney Bosler, Jr."

Mr. Crosby whistled softly.

"Old Man Bosler owns that lumber company. How come his pride and joy is so hard-up he has to slip a finger in the till at night?"

Mr. David regarded his companion with pity.

"You are getting old," was his verdict. "Time you head for Florida, and a game of checkers under the palms. You are away behind on Deerville news. About seven years, in fact."

Mr. David struggled with the wheel,

and pulled the car away from a deep drift at the side of the road.

"Seven years ago, not long after we were stationed there, the heir to the pines and spruces began to do some thinking on his own account. Instead of the Social Register product his parents had their dough on, he up and married a local gal. Lucy Hunt. Swell gal. I could go—"

"Oh, sure," said Mr. Crosby. "I remember."

"So have his parents," Tiny David continued. "Right after the wedding, his old man read the well-known line: 'I have no son.' He hasn't changed his mind. Since then things have been tough, and I guess Rod could use the jack. Jobs are scarce, and I guess his old man saw to it that he couldn't get any of the few there were. Add two little bundles from heaven, and you have the set-up."

Mr. Crosby nodded. "Where did we get all our hot dope?" he asked.

"Mr. Anonymous called on the telephone."

"Mr. Anonymous," said Mr. Crosby, "is a louse. And he picked a swell time to do his lousing."

"What do you mean?"

"Come day after tomorrow," declared Mr. Crosby, "come Christmas."

Tiny David's face clouded.

"Aint we got fun!" he observed. "I never had young Rod on my list of people and things I love, but Lucy is a swell gal." He shrugged. "On this job, you can't pick your customers."

THEY rode on in silence, the roar of the wind sounding above the whine of the laboring motor. Then they came to Deerville, and Tiny David piloted the car along a deserted main street. At the other end of the village, they pulled off into a side road and almost at once came to a stop before a small house.

"Here comes the Sunshine Special," growled Mr. Crosby. "Compliments of the season, and all that sort of thing."

"You slip around to the garage, and see what you can find," Tiny David ordered. "I'll go in, and be received into the bosom of the happy family."

He waded through the snow to the front door, and knocked. The door opened a trifle, but the wind blew it shut. He seized the knob, and helped the person on the inside to swing the door open.

A young woman, whose beauty and charm were only partially hidden by the cheap dress she wore, stood peering at him uncertainly. Then her face brightened with recognition.

"Why, Tiny! It's been a long time—But never mind that. Step inside."

"Hello, Lucy."

He entered the house, closing the door behind him.

She was laughing at him.

"Don't try to tell me you came to see us. You never did before. Now you are stuck on the road, and it is a case of any port in a storm."

He stood shifting from foot to foot.

"I'd rather not be here, Lucy."

"Isn't that nice!" she reproved him. Then she saw his face; and her manner changed. "What is it, Tiny?"

"Is Rod home?"

She ignored that question, and repeated: "What is it, Tiny?"

He made a gesture of resignation.

"Nothing, I hope. But I have to talk to Rod."

She raised her voice: "Rod!"

A MAN in his early thirties entered the room.

"Hello, David."

"Hello, Rod."

Tiny David swallowed hard. He hated himself for what he was about to do.

"How are things going with you, Rod?"

"Not so bad," said the man. "They have been rather tough, but now they are looking up." He grinned. "Looks as if there'll be a fairly decent Christmas in the Bosler manor."

Tiny David gritted his teeth.

"About a two-hundred-dollar—Christmas?" he demanded.

"Just about," Bosler admitted. Then his manner changed. "Say, what's it to you? What's this all about?"

"Where did the two hundred dollars come from?" Tiny David demanded.

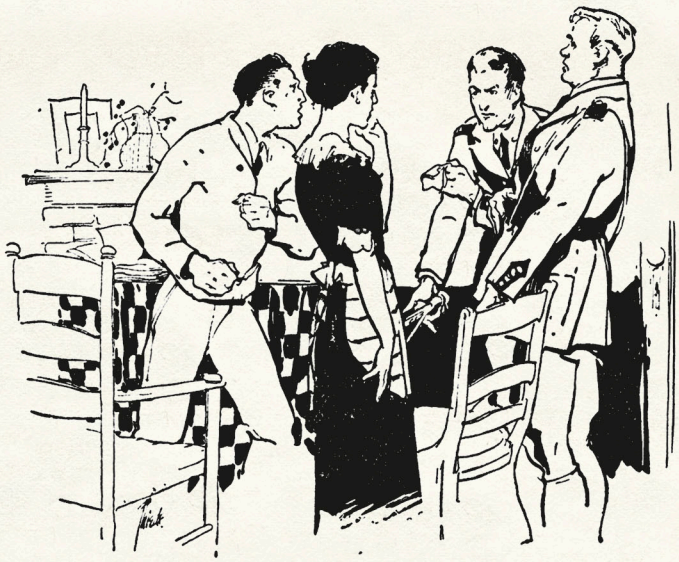
Bosler turned white.

"I—I have nothing to say." He regained a bit of his composure. "None of your business."

His wife stepped forward, her eyes flashing.

"Rod is right. It isn't any of your business. But I'll tell you: It came from a man who is going to give Rod a job the first of the year. The money was an advance on his salary." Her glance stung the trooper, and her voice cut. "Does that satisfy your desire to pry into other people's affairs?"

"Who is the man?" asked Tiny David.



"They aren't mine... Just what am I accused of?"

Bosler scowled. "I won't tell you."

Tiny David turned to the woman.

"Who is he, Lucy? It may save a lot of trouble if you tell me."

She hesitated. "I don't know," she admitted. "Rod told me that was to be a surprise." She drew herself up defiantly. "I believe him."

Tiny David shrugged. "Well—"

There was a knock at the door.

"That will be Jim Crosby," said Tiny.

Crosby entered the house.

"Hello, Lucy. Hello, Rod."

He pulled several metal objects from the pocket of his coat.

"Bit of trouble with our car," Crosby explained. "Took the liberty of slipping back to your garage and borrowing several of your tools."

"Is this part of the game?" demanded Bosler. "My car went for food and clothes months ago. The tools went with it. So you are wrong."

Crosby appeared to examine the objects closely.

"They don't look like automobile tools," he admitted.

"What—what are they?" The question came from the woman.

"Offhand," said Crosby, addressing himself to Bosler, "I would say they are burglar's tools."

"You say you found them in my garage?" Bosler demanded.

"Buried in one corner," Crosby asserted. "These were with them." He produced a pair of gloves. "Thanks to the detective stories, even amateurs wear them."

"You lie!" cried Bosler. "They aren't mine." He took a step forward, his fists clenched. "Just what am I accused of?"

"Somebody broke into your father's office," said Tiny David. "He took between two and three hundred dollars." He made a gesture of distaste. "We would sooner take a thrashing than do this, but if we balked, somebody else would do it." He turned to the woman. "Lucy, now is the time to come clean. I want to help you. So does Jim. Tell him to tell us where he got the money he has."

The woman faced her husband. "Tell him, Rod."

He shook his head stubbornly. "I promised. It is to be a surprise. A surprise, on—on New Year's Day."

Tiny David shook his head. "I wish I could believe it."

"I believe it!" said the woman.

Tiny ignored her. "Hand over what money you have," he ordered Bosler. He saw the man hesitate. "Don't make it hard."

Sullenly the man produced a wallet. Tiny David accepted it, counted the money, and announced:

"Two hundred and twelve dollars. I suppose you spent some of it."

"About thirteen dollars," Bosler admitted. "For food. And I gave twenty-five dollars to Lucy." There was infinite scorn in his voice. "Does that add up right for you?"

"It was a little more than that," said Tiny David patiently.

MRS. BOSLER walked from the room. There was the sound of a drawer being opened. Her cheeks were flaming as she returned, and thrust a pocketbook into the trooper's hands.

"That is what is left of the twenty-five Rod gave me. I spent some of it for little things for a Christmas party for the children tomorrow evening." Her voice broke. "We never were able to

"Shanty Claus little late. But heesh gonna make it." . . . Tiny David's right arm flashed up.

give them a Christmas party before." Scorn triumphed over her sorrow. "You can take the things with you."

Tiny David shook his head.

"That isn't fair, Lucy. This is tough on us. I am not so hot on putting things into words, but you know I don't get any kick out of picking on women and kids. This is bad medicine, all the way through. But we have to play the game, and pick up what pieces we can. You and the kids go ahead and have your party. You know I wouldn't take your things."

"But you are—are taking Rod?"

"Yes," he admitted, "we are taking Rod. We have to do that."

"I could have done it." There was dull despair in her voice. "I could have gone through with it for the children's sake. And because I know it is all a mistake, and that Rod will be back. But now it is no use."

"Why?" he demanded.

She laughed bitterly.

"There will be no party. All the children in the neighborhood have been invited. Do you think their parents will let them come to a party given by the children of a man in jail? Even if he is innocent!" she hastened to add.

"No," Tiny David admitted, "I guess they wouldn't."

"You guess right," she told him. "We may be poor around here, but we aren't burglars. Even if you think Rod is."

"It isn't what I think," said Tiny David. "It's what I have to do." He pondered for a moment, and then reached a decision. "Tell you what I'll do. Rod has to come with us. But he can come as our guest at the barracks. No formal arrest. Nothing in the papers."

He attempted a grin that was not much of a success.

"We can do that much. It will save the kids' party. It will give us a chance to scout around a bit." He turned to Bosler. "You aren't helping us much, but we are trying to help you."

Bosler muttered: "I have nothing to say."

"All right," said Tiny David. "In that case, you better get your coat."

They paused at the doorway, and David and Crosby looked away while Bosler took his wife in his arms.

"I didn't do it, Lucy," he told her. "Do you believe me?"

She gazed into his eyes. "Yes," she said.

"That's all that matters." He turned to the troopers. "I'm ready."

THE day before Christmas was a busy one in the barracks of the Black Horse Troop. The storm had continued, and extra patrols were sent out to aid stranded motorists. An unusual number of routine complaints were received. And holiday leaves added to the problem.

Bosler was installed in one corner of the living-room, and well supplied with reading matter. After lunch Tiny David took advantage of a temporary lull to drape himself over a table near the man.

"If I promise you I won't tell any-

body, how about telling me who gave you the money?" the trooper asked.

Bosler hesitated. "I—I can't tell you."

"That helps a lot," said David as he went back to work.

The afternoon was well along, and the early dusk of a winter evening was upon the country, when David, with his last complaint slip investigated, paused before the window of the top sergeant.

"How are the roads to Deerville?" he asked.

The man behind the window consulted slips torn from a teletype.

"Passable but dangerous," he said.

"Good," said Tiny David. "Check me off duty, and out of the barracks. And a Merry Christmas to you, Max."

Stars were twinkling in the night sky when Tiny David piloted a coupé, which was his personal property, through Deerville. The car came to the short side-road that led to the Bosler house, but the trooper piloted it into another side-road on the other side of the main highway. There, out of sight from the main road, he stopped the car, and snapped on a light in the interior of the coupé.

On the floor near him was a huge sack, from the end of which various toys protruded. On the seat beside him was a bundle of clothing, which he surveyed ruefully.

"Might as well go whole hog," he muttered.

He drew on a pair of red trousers, glanced down at them, and made a grimace of distaste. He slipped into a red coat, trimmed with white, which was tight when he buttoned it over his uniform. He donned a hat that matched the costume. Then he sat fingering false white whiskers.

"Why not?" he demanded at last.

He adjusted the whiskers, picked up the pack, and stepped from the car. It was only a short distance to the main road. Directly ahead of him, a car had halted. Near the car, standing at the window beside the driver, stood a man. The light from the moon threw his face into bold relief. He wore a mask, and a revolver in his hand was pointed at the driver of the car.

Tiny David took a step forward, mentally cursing the clumsy costume that made a complicated process of reaching his gun. The man turned. The revolver swung away from the driver, and covered the trooper in the Santa Claus costume.

Tiny David pretended to stumble. He began to mumble with the incoherence of a drunken man:

"Shanty Claus little late. But heesh gonna make it. Gotta make it. Gotta—"

All the while he walked unsteadily toward the car.

The man with the revolver stood watching him warily.

The trooper held the sack, which was slung over his shoulder, with his left hand. His right hand had made a vain attempt to pull out his gun, and had then been withdrawn lest it attract the attention of the highwayman.

Tiny David drew near to the highwayman. "Merry Chrissmas. Shay—"

Tiny David's right arm flashed up, and his fist was launched toward a chin. But the man with the revolver was alert. He ducked. The blow went wild. The butt of the revolver descended on Tiny David's head.

The trooper's knees sagged, and he started to fall. Then his subconscious mind summoned all his strength, and he threw himself upon his assailant.

They went down in the snow together, four hands fighting for possession of the revolver. Tiny David's mind had cleared a trifle, but his muscles were slow to obey its commands. Slowly but surely the highwayman pulled the gun away. One of Tiny David's hands slipped from it. He made a desperate effort to recapture the hold. Off in the distance he heard a scream, which seemed to come from the car.

HE regained the hold. But now the other hand was slipping. The revolver eluded it. Try as he might, his grip on the revolver was failing. He was so intent on the struggle that he failed to realize that another car had pulled up beside them. Just as he lost his grip, the occupant of the car piled out, and waded into the struggle with enthusiasm and impartiality.

It took this newcomer only a few seconds to pull them apart, keep them both under control, and demand:

"What the hell is this all about?"

At the same time, he used a free arm to produce a flashlight, which illuminated the scene. The ray of light revealed a false beard that had gone awry.

"Tiny!" cried the man with the light. "Well, I'll be damned!" He roared with laughter. "Just a blooming Santa Claus! Wait until they hear about this at the barracks."

He turned his attention to the other:

"Where does this baby fit into the picture?"

"He was trying—" It was hard for Tiny David to talk. "Trying to—to hold up that car."

"Isn't that nice!" said the new arrival.

He tightened his hold on the collar of the highwayman, bringing forth a cry of protest and pain.

"Shut up!" said the man with the light. "I eat guys who hold up cars, and I'm hungry."

Tiny David raised himself on one elbow. It was a painful process. Dimly the scene was taking shape.

"Jim! What brought—how did you—"

"Well, to tell the truth, I slipped downtown and picked up a few toys. Not many. And I certainly didn't make a fool of myself by tricking myself out in a fancy suit. Not Mrs. Crosby's boy—"

Tiny David sat up.

"Better take a look in that car," he advised.

But before Crosby could open the door, an elderly woman stepped out. She was swathed in an expensive fur coat, and despite her nervousness, she was very much the *grande dame.*

"I am quite all right." She indicated the captive. "Can you take that mask off his face?"

Mr. Crosby obliged, and none too gently.

"Humph!" was her comment. "That loafer Hadbork. I knew it had to be somebody from around here. Only a native would know that every Christmas Eve I distribute envelopes to the men who work in the mill."

Tiny David struggled to his feet.

"You are Mrs. Bosler?"

"Certainly." She returned to the subject at hand. "He probably robbed the office, too. That was done by somebody who knew when the most money was there."

A wave of relief surged over Tiny David. He turned, seized Hadbork by the shoulders, and shook him.

"We'll get the truth out of you, or we will shake it out of you! You put those tools in young Bosler's garage, didn't you?"

"Lay off!"

MR. CROSBY, who enjoyed full strength, took a hand in the shaking.

"Yeah, I done it. I hate Rod's guts, and I nearly fixed his clock. But lay off, will yuh?"

"What's this about Rod?" demanded Mrs. Bosler.

Tiny David hesitated.

"We sort of thought he might have had something to do with the robbery at the office. This bird helped it along with a telephone call."

"The more fools, you!" she snapped. "Rod is a fool, but he isn't a thief."

"Well," Tiny David attempted to justify himself, "he had quite a bit of money he couldn't explain."

"I gave it to him," she declared.

"Why didn't he tell us that?"

"Humph!" The remarkable old woman was off in full stride. "That was on account of that fool wife of his. We didn't want Rod to marry her. She told him the day they were married, and she has told him a thousand times since, that if he ever accepted a penny from us, she would leave him. Said she would forgive almost anything but that. Rod is just fool enough, and under her thumb enough, to be willing to go to jail rather than lose her."

Tiny David was grinning.

"That sends Rod's stock away up with me," he asserted. "Lucy's always was tops. Did you ever stop to think that the average girl in her position wouldn't care what you thought about her as long as the money was coming regularly?"

She drew herself up haughtily. "I don't need any advice from you, young man."

"You won't get it," Tiny David assured her. He turned to Crosby. "Let's get organized. Maybe one of us better go with Mrs. Bosler."

She snorted her disdain. "When I need company provided, I'll call an escort-bureau."

Tiny David chuckled. "Good enough," was his verdict. "In that case, we'll call the barracks, have them bring Rod home, and take this bird off our hands. Then we will go on with the act."

"Nothing doing," protested Mr. Crosby. "I'll take care of all the details, but I want no part of the act. I haven't the suit. You have. And nature made you for the part. Here." He produced a bag from his car. "Add this to the pot."

He stood there in the snow, his hands thrust into his belt, surveying the rather bedraggled Santa Claus beside him.

"And be very good to me from now on. I'm not squealing—not yet. But it will be up to you. . . . Sure, it's blackmail. That's the only way to deal with a lad like you."

"Look, Mother! Santa Claus wears spurs."

LUCY BOSLER answered the knock at the door. Her quick glance took in the costume, the two sacks, the false whiskers in his hand. Her cheeks flamed.

"We don't want your charity," she said. The door started to close.

Tiny David blocked the move with a big foot.

"Santa Claus doesn't hand out charity," he corrected her. He pushed his way into the room. "He has a present for you. You are going to take it, and you are going to like it." He brought in the two sacks. "Rod is on his way home. The whole thing has been ironed out. On the way here I stumbled on the guy who really pulled the job."

His big hands reached out and grabbed her elbows.

"Don't you go sissy on me and faint."

He led her to a chair. He stood before her, awkward, tongue-tied, and ill at ease. Then, to cover his confusion, he began to empty the sacks.

He pulled forth a sled and a pair of skiis. A large doll and a tiny set of dishes followed. Then came a toy train and many sections of track.

"Why, Tiny!" She was standing beside him. "Those were the things Rod and I intended to get for them. How did you know?"

"Found the list in the wallet I took from Rod." He cut short her thanks by attacking the second sack. "These are strictly Jim's own idea. Just a poor boy, with no list to guide him. Bit of duplication, but no harm done. Use one for a spare."

He stood up. "That's the inventory." He gazed ruefully at his costume. "When I started out, I thought I would have to pinch-hit for Rod. No need of that now. I'll be pushing along."

The door burst open, and Mrs. Bosler, Sr., entered the room.

"You will not. Don't be a fool. There are enough fools around this neck of the woods." She turned to Lucy Bosler. "I include my husband and myself among them. But we have stopped being foolish. Will you?"

Lucy Bosler hesitated.

"Of course you will," continued the older woman. "You are a sensible girl. Where are the children?"

"They—they are asleep."

"Wake them up," came the command, "and bring them in. My husb—your father will be here any minute. He will want to see his grandchildren. Besides," she grinned at Tiny David, "Santa Claus only comes once a year, and this one looks as if he would like to run out on us."

Lucy Bosler left the room, and returned leading a little boy and girl by the hands. The little boy stood staring at the scene in dignified silence. But the little girl, her golden curls flying, ran forward with a glad cry.

"I know you! You are Santa Claus!"

Tiny David gathered her up.

"Right. And I have a lot of things for a good little girl, and a good little boy. Their mother and father told me what to get. But they will have to wait a few minutes until their father gets home."

The boy, who had been an interested spectator, pointed an excited finger.

"Look, Mother! Santa Claus wears spurs!"

"Humph!" This came from Mrs. Bosler, Sr. "Santa Claus has quite a knob on the top of his head, too. But I admit that he is adequate." She surveyed the scene with approval. "Quite adequate," she added.

Robert Mill will offer another story of Tiny David in an early issue.

A Million for

A young man undertakes to make a million dollars in one year through the exercise of "personal mystery."

The story thus far:

"DEWERT," growled old Hartswell, the city editor, "you're through. I'm sorry, and all that, but you'll never make a reporter. Good luck, son."

It was tough going for Bentley Dewert after that—until that fateful day of the two letters. The first was from Mrs. Rylan, his landlady, giving him one week to pay up his overdue account—or else. The second was from Ephraim Brood, president of a well-known soap company, stating that Hartswell had recommended him for a job, and asking him to call.

Fierce little fat man, the soap magnate proved to be.

"You," Brood said to him, "are a failure. I'm a success. Know why?"

"I wouldn't," said Bentley bitterly, "be here if I did."

"Right. I'll tell you why: Because I own the secret of success, and you don't. Read 'The Count of Monte Cristo?'"

Bentley nodded.

"Then you've seen it work. Dumas used my formula. Personal mystery made the simple sailor, *Edmond Dantes*, over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him, that's what. Didn't talk about himself. So people were afraid of him because they couldn't figure him out. Personal mystery, boy! Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open; don't talk about yourself, and people will be afraid of you. Personal Mystery; that's it. Greatest force in the world!"

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood. But—well, just how does it concern me?"

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-*actor*. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your job. Pay you money to be my stooge. You're a puppet. I pull strings. Be-

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John J. Destiny

By FULTON T. GRANT

sides, you'll make a million dollars. That's the proof of the formula. And you get paid while you make it, Dewert. How's that for a job? Want it? Ghost-*actor*, not *writer*."

Dewert took the fantastic job. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—and bribed a bellboy to give him a list of important people registered there. He chose a name at random—that of Camille Archambault, a French airplane-buyer. Then he bribed the hotel clerk *not* to let Archambault know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and those overeager young men as promptly jumped to conclusions and printed a story about Archambault and the mysterious Mr. Destiny. As a result of *that*, the airplane-manufacturer Julius Hartlow suspected that "Mr. Destiny" was the agent of a rival concern—and paid him six thousand dollars to keep away—though he made Dewert forge his (Hartlow's) signature on a check, which he retained as a threat in case Dewert didn't keep his word.

Meanwhile one night at dinner Dewert was greatly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when fate took a hand: the old gentleman choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley at once offered help—took them to his rooms and called a doctor. Afterward he politely left them alone there a few moments; but when he returned, they had vanished—leaving her ermine wrap, but no message. *(The story continues in detail:)*

EPHRAIM BROOD was a toy balloon. Slowly, but with an increasing tightness of skin, he was being inflated with

the highly volatile gases of anger. Any minute now, Bentley kept thinking whimsically, the little fat man would become lighter than the air of his office. Another surge, and he would leave the floor and go floating around the room like a bubble in suspension, still bellowing his wrath, while Bentley could only sit there open-mouthed, watching him and trying to get some tangible meaning from the little man's inarticulate roaring. Trying to snatch the pause of an instant in which he might say what *he* had to say—which was plenty.

But there was no pause. Brood's bellowing was incessant, fluid, poly-dimensional. "Ya-a-ah!" he yelled. "Imbecile! Damned fool of a gnat-brained young nincompoop!" Brood's visage metamorphosed into fantastic shapes, giving vent to words without form, a brassy blare, a fanfare of ire. "Wah, wah! Any ten-year-old could have done better."

Bentley tried for the n'th time as the little homunculus took another breath.

"Now see here, Mr. Brood—"

"Shut up! Yah, yah, yah—don't 'Mr. Brood' me. You get swell-headed, stick your chin out, let 'em make a sucker out of you, catch you day-dreaming! Little boy learns the scales, and thinks he can do a symphony! Walk around with your head in a cloud of two-bit conceit! Yah, yah—"

But human flesh cannot forever endure such high tension. Ephraim Brood was, apparently, just about to burst when the frailty of mere flesh defeated his purpose. His voice had passed high C. His bellow had become a screech, his roaring a mere squeak. With his plump little hands clutching the air above him as though to lift himself bodily from the confines of gravity, the veins on his forehead were blue against pink, his eyes were round, his mouth a gaping zero. Then suddenly he collapsed—clutched his middle and slumped down into his chair, moaning like a man in apoplexy.

It frightened Bentley, and all his indignation oozed from him like water from a sponge, in his quick concern. He jumped from his seat and caught the little man's shoulder in time to keep him from slipping to the floor.

"Easy, Mr. Brood—easy! Mustn't let yourself—"

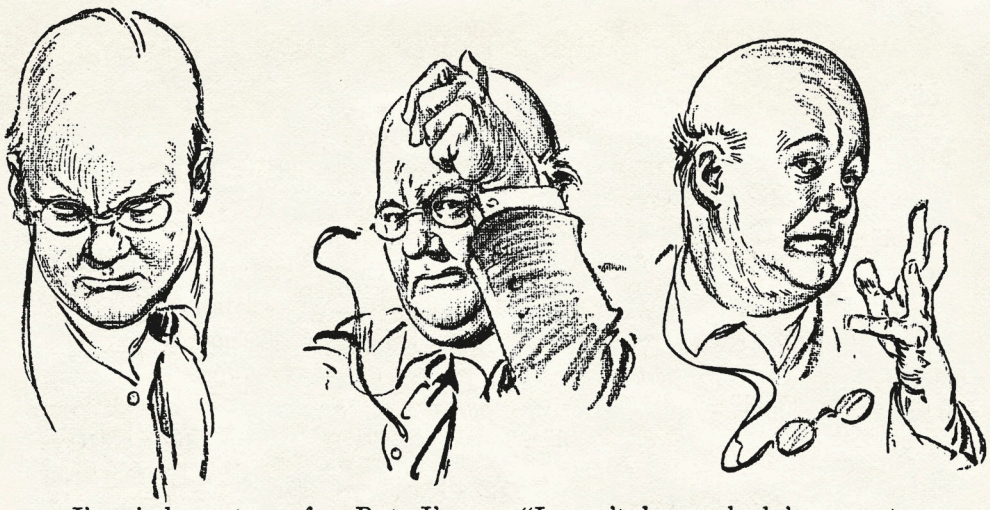
"Go away, you blithering numskull," panted the stricken man, giving his body another surge with surprising energy. "Get me water—water, you damned young pup!"

Bentley got water. He handed Brood a paper cup from the mechanical cooler, still concerned lest the explosive little man burst out of this life in another tantrum. But he did not. The water put a new face on things, a new face on Ephraim Brood, at any rate. It softened and dropped and the wattles under his massive chin shook with a new emotion.

"Thank you, Dewert," he said pantingly. "Too much temper, that's my trouble—too much temper!"

AND then Bentley seized his chance. He had had enough of this little man's thundering eccentricity. He had made up his mind.

"That's all right, Mr. Brood," he said, "And I'm glad you're all right. But I've been trying to tell you that I'm through. I'm not the right man to play your Personal Mystery games, anyhow. Maybe I'm an imbecile and a nincompoop, as you just said, but I did my best. It just isn't good enough, so I'm through. I'm quitting before I lose what little self-respect I have left. I'll give you your money back—what's left of it; you'll have to wait for the rest. You can sue me if you want; I don't even



care. I'm judgment-proof. But I'm breaking our contract, right now."

Brood's red face went white.

"Wait, boy," he said hoarsely. "Wait—don't talk like that. Don't get mad because I yelled at you. Always yell at people. Doesn't mean anything. But don't quit on me. You did fine, Dewert. Nobody could do better. Now don't you see what a big thing this is?"

"Maybe it is, but I don't care. Not any more. I'm tired of ghost-acting. Tired of constantly pretending, of keeping back things I want to say, and only saying a lot of ambiguities, taking people in. It isn't decent. I want to be me, myself, not somebody's ghost."

Brood waved the words away.

"That's rot, boy. Sentimental drivel, and bunk. Nobody is ever themselves. Must have read that in a book. Nobody is anything but a reflection in a mirror for other people to look at. People talk about the weather to be polite, when they're only bored. People say 'Please' and 'Thank you,' when they don't really care a damn. People are always trying to make a good impression. When you were a rotten reporter, didn't you interview people? Did you try to make them like you, so's they'd talk? Sure you did. That's all Personal Mystery, in a way. Everybody uses it all the time, only nobody ever made a formula of it before. Nobody ever planned it, before, did it consciously—"

"That's all right; I don't care. I'm tired of bluffing."

"You're bluffing, yourself, now. The whole of life is a bluff. Salesmanship's a bluff—"

"I detest salesmanship."

"Didn't you ever have a girl? Did you always tell her everything? Didn't you try to put your best foot forward? Sure you did."

"I won't be anybody's puppet on a string—"

"Everybody's a puppet on a string. Difference is that my string is synchronized, formularized. Personal Mystery's just a piece of everyday life—compressed into a formula. And it worked, didn't it? You got six thousand dollars, didn't you?"

"Sure, and I forged a check to get it, so they can put—"

"That was your fault. You got too cocksure. They caught you bending, as the English say. You didn't have to forge that check. You let Bann and Hartlow outsmart you. Hartlow's one of the smoothest articles in the country."

"But I—"

"I know what you did; you got too greedy. You surprised yourself when my formula worked. Didn't quite believe it would. Got careless when it did. Talked too much. Told Hartlow in so many words he was wrong, that you weren't the man he thought you were, took a chance in order to keep him guessing. That put him on his guard. If you had played right, he'd have given you any money, with no security. That's what made me so mad. You started to run before you could crawl. Like the small boy who learns the scales, trying to play—"

"All right, all right, but I've had enough of it. I'm through." Bentley was very positive now, and the effect on the little old man was sudden and almost pathetic. His round little eyes went soft.

"You wouldn't really let me down," he said, almost whining. "Don't you want that million?"

"Sure I want a million—decently."

"Personal Mystery's decent. You don't do anything. You just let 'em do it for you."

"I don't like it."

"I want to know where Doc Graymaster is—and his niece. Come on now, son; you can make it easy if you talk."

"Didn't you have any fun—kidding the newspaper men, kidding that hotel clerk?"

Bentley nodded vaguely; to be honest, he had really enjoyed that.

"You didn't tell any lies."

"I *acted* lies."

"Everybody does. The cop on the corner, and your grocer and your plumber, and the drug-store cowboys, they're all acting lies, trying to look bigger than they are. So's everybody. Difference is, you aren't *trying*. You're *planning*. You *know* people will make you bigger than you are, anyhow. Preconceived formula. A doctor's bedside manner is a lie. Psychiatrists are paid to act lies, to kid sick people into new thoughts. Schoolteachers, diplomats, dictators, and kings, Presidents, garbage-men, truck-drivers and movie-stars, all acting lies all the time. Believing they're being themselves. Lying to themselves, too. Only they don't do it by rule."

"Well, just the same—"

"Shut up and listen, boy." The little man was bristling again. "You've got six thousand dollars—that's more than most people can make in a year. You made it in a few minutes. Six thousand dollars! Know what *that* is?"

Bentley presumed he did, but Brood gave him no time.

"I'll tell you," Brood roared. "That's capital! With capital, you can do anything. Makes more capital. Dollars are papas to dimes. A dime is daddy to ten

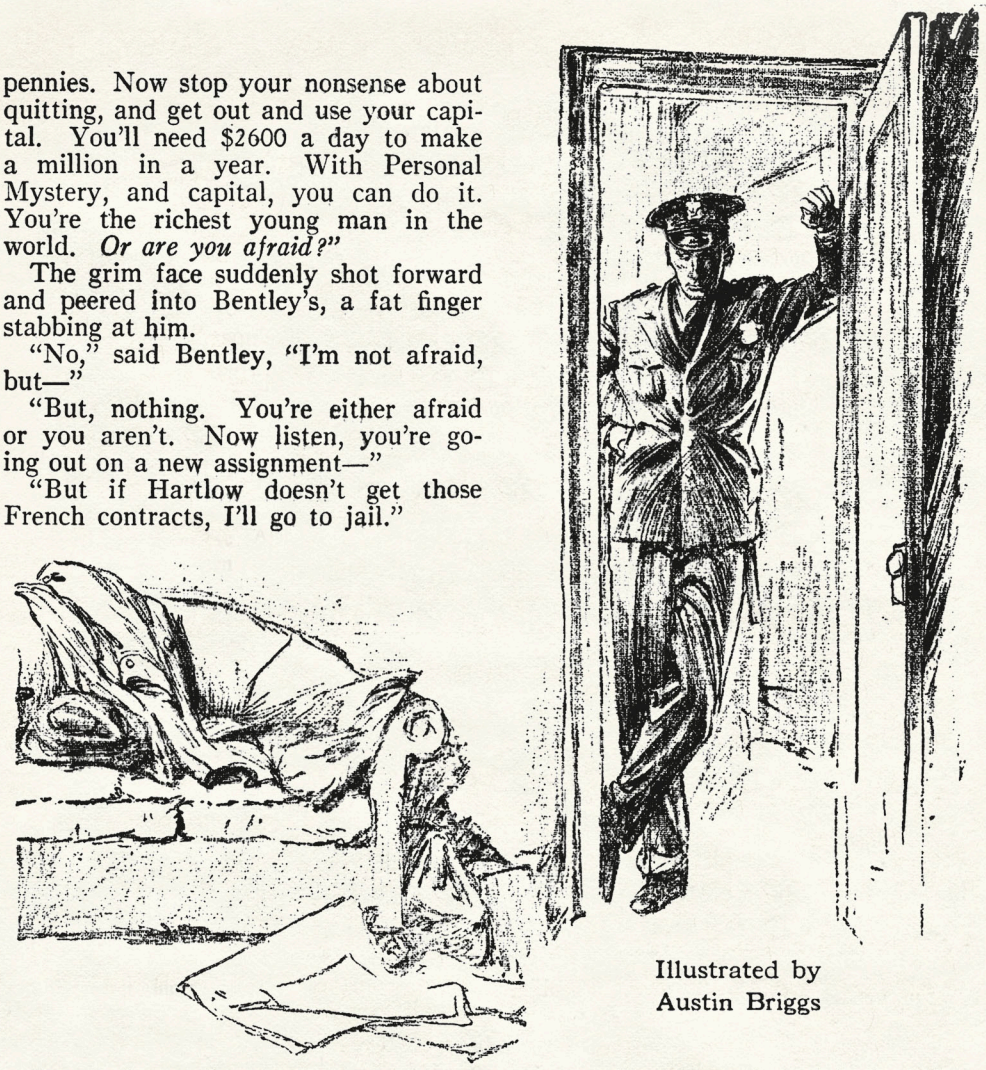
pennies. Now stop your nonsense about quitting, and get out and use your capital. You'll need $2600 a day to make a million in a year. With Personal Mystery, and capital, you can do it. You're the richest young man in the world. *Or are you afraid?"*

The grim face suddenly shot forward and peered into Bentley's, a fat finger stabbing at him.

"No," said Bentley, "I'm not afraid, but—"

"But, nothing. You're either afraid or you aren't. Now listen, you're going out on a new assignment—"

"But if Hartlow doesn't get those French contracts, I'll go to jail."



Illustrated by Austin Briggs

Brood shrugged.

"He'll get 'em. Always gets his contracts, that Hartlow. Steel hand in a silk glove. I know him. Got ice in his veins. Talks soft and thinks hard. A decent man, Hartlow is, but hard as nails. In a nice, friendly way, he'd cut off your hand and sell it back to you, stuffed."

Bentley opened his mouth to make one final effort at withdrawal, but the tide of Brood's domination swept over him.

"Besides, they'll never put that check through," he roared confidently. "You could fight it in any court. It was a good gag; it sounded fine, but it's not so simple. If they tried it, I'd back you up, boy. I'd never let you down. I'd fight that forgery into the Supreme Court—spend all my money if I had to. I've got as much as Hartlow, too. I'd never let you down. And don't you let me down, boy. I'm getting to be an old man, now—this Personal Mystery thing's important to me."

"But if you aren't satisfied—" Bentley attempted.

"Of course I'm satisfied," asserted Brood with a reversal of attitude. "Have to be, don't I? You're human. Must expect it. Besides, I'm only trying to show what an ordinary *human* young feller can do—with Personal Mystery. Make mistakes? Sure you will, lots of 'em. Only keep at it. You'll learn technique. Now you're starting on your next job with six thousand dollars capital—"

"What is it, my next job?"

HE couldn't get away from it: it was a compelling force. There was, after all, a lot in what this crazy old duck said. Besides, if he quit now—there was the park bench and Miss Rylan unpaid, because he'd have to get the money back. . . . And then there was Brown Curls. Brown Curls was still very much on his mind.

Brood sat back and rubbed his hands, grinning owlishly.

"I consider you overinquisitive, my young friend. Do I look like a fraud, a public enemy?"

"Ah!" he said. "So now you're interested again."

"In a way—yes." Bentley hated to give in, but with an alternative of six thousand dollars or a park bench—

"That," said Brood, "is more like it. Now you listen to me."

Bentley listened to him. The picture of Brown Curls and of a comfortable room at the Washington Towers defeated the picture of that not-so-hypothetical park bench.

"The first step in this Personal Mystery experiment," Brood was saying, like a fat little pedagogue expounding some theory, "was a hyphen. By hyphen, I mean it was a sort of introduction. Boy comes to city. Boy has limited means. Boy calls attention to self. Uses Personal Mystery, gets results, makes money. That's primary stuff. That's elementary. But it depends on circumstances—a little. Now we forget all that. You've got a proven rule. You've got a thing that works—you *know* it works. Now you go out after the bacon."

"Yes sir."

"First thing you do is to get a business office. You've got capital. Go use it. Incorporate."

"Me? Incorporate?"

"Naturally. Got to have a working point. Incorporate, so's you can do anything. John J. Destiny, Inc. How d'you like that?"

"I think it's crazy," said Bentley, "—just crazy. But I'll do it. What do I do then?"

"Incorporate, get offices. Go down into Wall Street—that's where the money grows. Be near money. Hang out a shingle."

"But I'm not any—I haven't any profession."

"Don't need one, but you have one. You're a money-maker—by profession. Figure it out. Get your office and sit in it. People will come in—they always do."

"Well—" Bentley was hesitant. "What then?"

"That's your affair," Brood said. "How in thunder would I know? I can put you in situations, but you have to solve 'em—by Personal Mystery. That's in our contract, too. Now, here's a new situation. You get out of here and start solving it. What d'you think I'm paying you for?"

And that was the end of that afternoon's interview. . . .

"Home" is the hearthstone, the *foyer,* the *chez-soi,* the seat of the *lares et penates;* and it is improbable that the lofty granite façade of the Hotel Washington Towers could, so to speak, symbolize those tender things for Bentley Dewert. Think of *home,* and you do not get an image of express-elevators, pompous floor-men, sleek room-clerks and a lobby filled with bell-hops. Yet it is true that Bentley, approaching the vast structure from the Park Avenue side, and seeing it loom formidably and haughtily and snobbishly there, found himself feeling something—perhaps not *warm* and homely—but a new sense of security. At the hotel, at least, he felt himself a "somebody." Life had recommenced there.

ONLY two days earlier, he might have felt a wistful touch of sentiment over Miss Rylan's lodging-house with its odors of disinfectant, its inevitable eggs-for-breakfast, its pounding feet and its heterogeneous guests. But now his horizon had expanded. If it is possible for a ghost—a *bona fide* spook and dauntless hauntsman—to look back upon his erst existence and to shrug his genuine pleasure at being well out of the mêlée of human struggle, so did this ghost-acting John J. Destiny look back upon the recent vicissitudes of Bentley Dewert with that same sense of relief, as he approached this new symbol of his emancipation, the Washington Towers.

"Well," he told himself jauntily, "here we are. I feel a little like *Faust* looking over the rewards of the Devil, but it feels good to be able to hold your head up. Now if we can only run into the little lady of last night—"

The "we" was rhetorical, editorial and hyperbolical. He felt distinctly singular, not plural. But he felt a new courage and strength that came from the possession of a bank-book, a check-book and cash dollars in the pocket.

"Six thousand dollars!" he muttered to himself as he entered the lobby. "Why, it's a fortune. Capital, as old Brood says. It'll do a real job if I can only let it work."

He was filled with Ephraim Brood's words just then:

"They'll never put that check through. . . . If they do, I'll back you up. I'll fight that forgery into the Supreme Court—spend all the money I've got." Well, you couldn't let a man like that down. Besides, this Personal Mystery was exciting, even if it did make you feel a little shabby. Now if Brown Curls—

The eyes of the room-clerk focused upon Bentley as he went through the lobby to the elevators in a manner that made him wonder. There was a look of savage satisfaction in their stare—as though the clerk had a knowledge which concerned Bentley, and was gloating over its possession.

"Wonder what that slimy ape is up to. He looks like the cat who swallowed the canary," he mused, breaking into his speculation concerning the mysterious Brown Curls and her aged cavalier of the fish-bone incident. Was it possible that the elevator-boy had the same odd look? Was there a nervous rustle among the bell-hops, sitting along their bench as he passed by?

"Maybe," he thought, "I made an impression, going out with a man like Hartlow."

The elevator-car arrived at his floor. He turned the corner and hurried gayly down the hall to his rooms—and stopped dead in his tracks.

For there, leaning against his door-jamb, stood a uniformed policeman. The door, moreover, was open; and even from a distance he could see figures moving inside his rooms.

"Hey, you!" This was the police officer. "Hey, you, you're named Destiny?"

Bentley admitted it.

"Get in here, then. We wanna talk to you."

"Me? Why, what—what's wrong?"

"Get in here—talk to the sergeant. I been waitin' for you."

Bentley went in, gingerly. What could it be? Certainly not Hartlow's forged check—yet. What could be a reason for a police visit?

"Here he is, Sarge. He walks right in, just as nat'chel! Siddown over there, you, and start talkin'."

THE sergeant, who was not in uniform, had the face of a ferret. He sat down beside Bentley, and began:

"You're Destiny?"

"Why—why, yes, of course."

"You came here yesterday?"

"Yes."

"You had dinner downstairs?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"Why—nothing. . . . Why?"

"You lie, feller. Something happened."

"What do you mean?" Bentley asked.

"I want to know where Graymaster is —old Doc Graymaster and his niece. Come on, now, son, you can make it easy if you talk."

"Graymaster? I never heard of—"

And then the flash caught him. Brown Curls and her old companion! But why —why the police?

He managed to say: "You mean the old man who choked on a bone?"

"That's right. It was a good act, son, but it doesn't go down. Now, where'd you put him? Tell me, and maybe you won't have to tell a court."

"A court?"

"Sure, a court. Whaddaya think? Yuh can't get away with a thing like that —not in this city, son. Now—what's happened to him?"

Bentley looked level into the sergeant's eyes.

"I wish," he said, "I knew."

"Huh?"

"I don't know. I carried him up here —she came up too. I just went down to get their things, and when I came back, they were gone. Honest, Sergeant. That's true."

"Nuts," said the sergeant, succinctly. He was evidently annoyed and disappointed. Finally he changed his manner.

"Listen, son," he said: "Maybe that's the truth, and maybe it isn't. I'll let the D.A.'s office figure it out."

"But it *is* true." Bentley's earnestness must have been visible in his face, for the sergeant backed away from him and regarded him with a faintly changed expression.

"Okay, okay, son!" he said. "We'll call it true—for just now. Now, can you identify these things?"

He picked up the rich ermine cloak which had been Brown Curls'; and the dignified ulster of the aged gentleman.

"In a way," Bentley said. "I got them out of the check-room myself. I slipped the girl a dollar, and she gave them to me. Took her word for it that they belonged to—those people. . . . Sergeant, I wish you'd tell me what's wrong. I've got nothing to hide. I never saw those people before, and probably never will again. They didn't even wait for me to bring their stuff. What is it, now? They wouldn't be crooks—"

THE sergeant was convinced despite himself.

"No," he said. "They're not crooks. Graymaster's one of the richest nuts in all the world, is all—and that niece of his—wow!" He made an appropriate gesture with his hands to describe his conception of Miss Brown Curls, and Bentley felt himself flush. Somehow he resented such familiarity with—with a girl like her. He had it on his tongue to say something on that score, but sensibly checked it. Meanwhile the sergeant, growing more friendly, produced an afternoon paper which, apparently, he had been reading as he and his aides awaited Bentley's return.

"Take a look at that, feller," he said, holding out an open page. "And cross your fingers—if you're in on it."

"That" was a story—startling, to Bentley, at least. It had not found its way to Page One, but was given feature spread across an inner page which the *Chronicle* (it was Bentley's familiar journal and no other) habitually reserves for stories with what the idiom of the city-desk calls a "society angle." Two large photos topped the page, and it was these which startled Bentley and left him faintly dazed. For there, peering up at him through those same diabolical little eyes, was the Voltairian face of the old gentleman who had contributed to the events of the previous evening, and the never-to-be-forgotten beauty of the charming Miss Brown Curls herself.

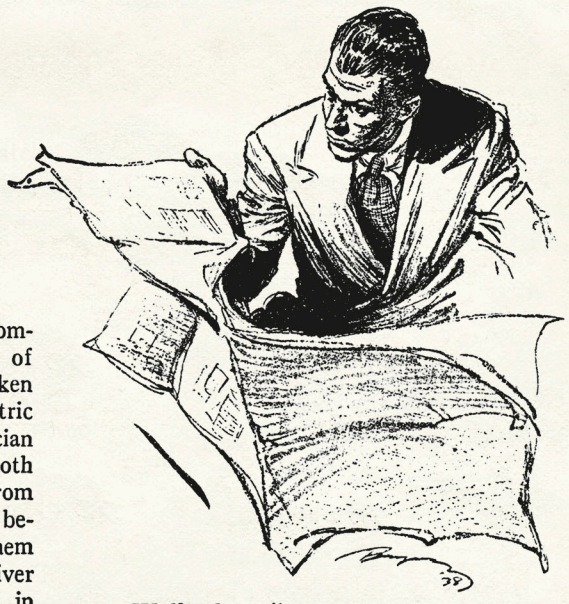
But the headlines were startling also.

ALL SOCIETY AGOG AS WEALTHY ECCENTRIC DISAPPEARS AFTER ESCAPE FROM ASYLUM

Buntsman Graymaster's Dramatic Hospital Break Recalls Famous Sanity Trial of Last Decade
Police See Help of Niece, Stranger

That was enough to set Bentley to reading the story which followed, his mouth open with astonishment. Through the half-jocular tone of the writer's language, he could perceive an underlying tragedy and an issue as grim and serious as it was full of mystery. It read:

> Shades of Delmonico's, Rector's and the "Diamond Circle" at the Opera stalked abroad this morning as New York socialites learned of the dramatic escape of Dr. Buntsman Graymaster, popular wit and physician of an earlier day, from the psychiatric ward of Mt. Hemon Hospital, where he had been confined for the past five years. . . . .
>
> Police investigators, tracing the insane doctor to this city, revealed that he dined



A glance at the headlines confirmed Bentley's worst fears.

last night at a well-known hotel, in company of his niece, popular débutante of last season, Lorraine Graymaster. Stricken with a slight illness at dinner, the eccentric doctor was attended by the hotel physician in the rooms of an unnamed man. Both Graymaster and his niece vanished from this room, leaving valuable property behind, and no trace has been found of them since they were reported by a cab-driver to have driven to an obscure street in Greenwich Village at about eight o'clock in the evening. . . .

A theory held by the hospital guards is that Graymaster's escape was a carefully planned affair, achieved with the aid of his niece, who visited him during the usual reception hour and must have brought the costume of an elderly woman in which the doctor seems to have slipped past observers. . . .

The legal battle over Buntsman Graymaster which aroused Society into violently opposing camps in 1922 centered around the ancient doctor's control of the Ban-o-Lax patent-medicine millions. The ruling of Justice Meddifer, adjudging Graymaster incompetent, has never been fully satisfactory to a large number of his friends, and to a powerful group of the doctor's relatives.

At this point Bentley could not avoid an indignant exclamation.

"But," he protested, "I don't know anything about him. It's perfectly true that I carried him up to my rooms and called a doctor, but—say, you don't think I was in on a plot to get him out of the hospital? Why, that's just crazy. Besides, I can prove it."

The police sergeant seemed a little mollified now.

"Well, where were you all morning, then?"

Bentley could answer that easily.

"I had a visitor here and I went out with him—business."

"What's the name?"

"Julius Hartlow, the airplane manufacturer. You can call him up."

"Sure I can. We'll call him, all right. But I don't mind telling you, that checks with what the hotel desk says."

"Well, then?"

Plainly the sergeant felt less sure of his attitude.

"Okay, okay, son," he said. "Looks like you're in the clear, only—only you'd better stick around. The D. A. may want you for questioning. But don't make any funny moves, or I'll jam you into jail—get it?"

"I won't be leaving here, if that's what you mean."

The sergeant walked to the door and motioned his patrolman away.

"That," he said, "is just what I mean. There's dynamite in this Graymaster case, and I know the D. A. will go all out on it. So stick around."

Bentley nodded, then said, as an afterthought.

"I'll be opening business offices downtown. I suppose it's all right for me to attend to my business."

"So long as you leave an address here where we can pick you up—in case," replied the sergeant, and edged out.

IT had not been an easy thing for Bentley to get back to normal after finding his rooms occupied by the police. An evening of trouble and worry hung over him, shared between the thought that the investigating sergeant and the D.A. could really do nothing to him, had nothing on him and were just trying to pin something on the nearest person in the case to keep up the good name of the police, and the haunting uneasiness which comes to anyone after the law has knocked at his door.

Then of course there was the other side of it: Miss Brown Curls. She bothered him. She had slipped his mind for a few hours since that first glittering

moment he had seen her in trouble down in the grill-room of the hotel; but now, with her name flashed in the news, her exquisite features displayed for a gaping public to sneer over, her family's skeleton-closet opened for the world to pry into, she began haunting him again.

He liked the girl. He had decided about that. Bentley was not quite so callow as to call it "love." Love, he knew by intuition if not by experience, comes slowly if it is to flower richly. Still, the seed of love had been in that brief contact when he had hastened to the aid of a damsel in distress. And now that seed had turned a trifle bitter. It was ironical, too, that his simple if not altogether disinterested act of gallantry had harmed the girl. Certainly, if he had not butted in (his own words, "butted in"), they would not have found her coat in his room, and they might never have identified either Miss Graymaster (how he liked her name, now that he had learned it!) or her unfortunate uncle. It gave him a faintly guilty feeling.

"Poor kid!" he thought. "I wouldn't know whether her uncle is crazy or not, nor why she helped him escape; and it isn't any of my business; but—well, she's in an awful spot now, and it's all because of me."

Not quite true, perhaps, but in keeping with Bentley's mood that night.

MORNING, however, changed all that. With morning came new awakening to the more pressing business in hand: Brood's business, the ghost-acting business, the Personal Mystery business. It was almost as though, a puppet, he could feel the master-pull of Brood's hand on his strings once again, jerking him back out of romance and into realities.

A brisk, cool autumn morning it was, and the air was laden with a faint odor of burning leaves, as though the City Fathers, rising early, were opening doors and windows to air off and sweeten their faintly rancid metropolitan house. The tang of it caught Bentley up in a new vigor. Zest for life, the thrill of the game, returned to him. He sang as he dressed, and merrily addressed his own likeness in the long mirror, between sips of breakfast coffee.

"Now listen, old son," he cautioned his reflection: "You've got yourself a job, this morning. You forget about ladies with nice brown hair, and their troubles, and pay attention to your own."

And the image nodded dutifully.

"Didn't Brood tell you to take an office and get incorporated?" he demanded, shaking a finger at his reflected self. "Just how do you think you're going to do it, sitting here and brooding over a dame you'll never see again in your life, maybe? Snap out of it, feller, and get to work."

Which is just what he did.

By nine-thirty that morning he had reached one of those downtown agencies where, for a consideration, one may insert lines in the classified advertisement section of any newspaper in the country. By ten o'clock, sitting in the little room which the agency provides for classified advertisers, he had composed his masterpiece of several neatly printed lines. It was, he knew, exactly that—a masterpiece; and he grinned as he handed it to the clerk, with instructions to run the little ad in the four larger daily papers of New York until further notice.

He had written:

P.M. Expert seeks office space, furnished, small, Financial District essential; quiet, bright, cheap. No agents need apply. Phone: Destiny, Washington Towers Hotel

She came bursting out of the crowd. "Oh, John-e-e-e!"

He had some difficulty in controlling his laughter when the clerk asked him:

"Beg pardon, sir, but what is a P.M. expert? We are forced to investigate such things, sir. We don't accept advertising from certain types of professional persons—must protect our public. . . . No offense intended, sir, but—what is it?"

Bentley contrived to frown just sufficiently.

"Produce markets, perishable merchandise, perpetual motion, public maintenance or Personal Mystery, my friend," he said. "I am surprised at you. Do you ask a C.P.A. what his business is? Do you ask a D.D. whether he is a dentist or a Doctor of Divinity? An M.E. whether he is an engineer or a Methodist Episcopal? Or an M.P. whether he is military police or a member of Parliament? No, you don't. I consider it an imposition, I consider it overinquisitive, my young friend. Do I look like a fraud, a criminal, a public enemy? No, I do not. Must I, because of a few lines of agate type for which I am ready to pay, sign away the privacy of my life as a citizen? Where is your superior? Who is in charge here? I want to have an explanation of this!"

It was quite enough. The clerk stared at him round-eyed and spluttered a protest.

"I'm sorry, sir," he insisted abjectly. "I did not mean to offend you. It was simply that the term *P.M.* did not register. Stupid of me not to know it. Now if you will just fill out this schedule, sir, I'm sure there will be no further delay."

And it was a young man in most jovial humor who walked out of the agency, ten minutes later, his feet gliding upon the upper clouds.

But the joviality was not long to endure.

BACK at the hotel, lounging in his rooms and waiting for the effect, if any, of his notice in the classifieds to assert itself, he obeyed the urge of natural curiosity and fumbled through several of the afternoon papers to discover what new developments were reported in the

Graymaster case, doubly close to him, as it had turned out.

It was not a pleasant experience. It dampened effectively his good spirits. For the second-day story of Buntsman Graymaster's escape from Mt. Hemon, having no real facts to back it up, relied upon a rehash of known facts, supplying new facts by mere conjecture.

"Aroused Graymaster Heirs Accuse Lorraine," shouted one headline, followed by a story in which the reporter had interviewed an assortment of cousins and in-laws of Buntsman Graymaster, all of whom protested angrily that the story-book escapade of the eccentric doctor's pretty niece—the Brown Curls of Bentley's day-dreams—had had no more noble a motive in aiding her uncle's escape from Mt. Hemon than trying to "wangle a wad of his money" by this very ancient method of seeming to play Good Samaritan.

"The so-and-so's!" Bentley expostulated profanely. "As if that girl could be like that! They railroaded the old guy into the hospital themselves, and now they're sore because they may lose his millions, that's all."

Another paper seemed to confirm this, too. A caption stated: "Graymaster Habeas Corpus Thrice Demanded by Niece, Refused." And it revealed that pretty Lorraine had not been inactive in trying every legal means to procure a new trial for her favorite uncle, albeit the courts had not seen fit to release him.

BUT when the buzzer of his hall door snarled sharply, and the reporter O'Connell of the *Ledger* stood there, leering at Bentley with a familiar, patronizing grin, Bentley was struck with a new understanding of how deeply involved—like it or lump it—he really was in this absurd business which the Fates had seemed to thrust upon him.

"Hello, Destiny," said O'Connell. "I hope you're gonna do more talking than you did about that airplane business, on account this time we got the dope right on you."

Bentley resisted the urge to toss him out of the window.

"Yes?" he asked. "What dope?"

"That'll wait," said the reporter. "I want to ask one question, and I want a real answer."

"Ask it," Bentley prompted.

But something rankled in O'Connell.

"I oughta take one out on you, smart-guy," he said with an impertinent grin, "after that run-around you gave us on the Archambault story. And then old Hartlow himself coming down here next day! Think I don't know? We'll see about that some other time, though, and you'll spill this, or else—"

Bentley's eyes narrowed.

"Or else—what?"

"I'll print it and let you both deny it—that'll give you something to work on, *Mister* Destiny."

THIS Bentley did not quite follow.

"Both—both who?" he asked.

"You and that Graymaster dame. She'll—"

"I don't like your tone, newspaper man," Bentley said, stepping toward the reporter. "And if I don't like your question any better, I'm going to kick you down the elevator shaft. How d'you like that?"

O'Connell grinned.

"That'll make a swell story, feller," he said. "I almost wish you'd try it."

He very nearly got his wish.

"Well," said Bentley, "shoot your question."

"Okay. I wanna know—the whole city wants to know, feller, if you're gonna marry her; that's what."

"Marry—who?"

"The Graymaster dame, of course. It's gotta be like that. I got it all figured out."

"Ah, so you've got it figured out? That's fine."

Reporter O'Connell needed only that stimulus. He had figured something out, and he was proud of it.

"Sure," he said, grinning with smug satisfaction. "It's gotta be that love-angle, see? Couldn't miss. Here's this Graymaster frill. She's a hot number; she's got dough, and she's got the looks. She was over in France last year; that's where she met you, see? Maybe a transatlantic romance, see? And now you come back here to America on this airplane business, see? And you run into her again, and the romance sticks. Maybe you aren't in the Social Register, and all that, but it's all moonlight and roses, until she gets this idea about snatching her rich uncle out of the bughouse. Now maybe you aren't any millionaire, see, but you gotta chance to grab some of the old duck's kale if you work it right. So you figure out the whole thing. You fix up the old dame's clothes he made his break in. You fix it so's they have dinner here, and you move in on 'em the

way you did. They duck out and leave their things in your room just to keep the cops worried. Pretty good stuff, feller, pretty good. Only, you don't know your uncle Foxy O'Connell. Now if you will spill the whole story, see, we'll write it so's it can't do any harm. Me, I wanna scoop—"

Resentment was growing in Bentley beyond all control.

"I wanna scoop," O'Connell was saying, "and I'm gonna get it. There was a Frog—a Frenchman the Graymaster dame played around with in Paris—his name is d'Estaigne. Well, I figure that's you: *Destiny—d'Estaigne,* see? It's easy to change like that. And now when you see a chance to grab off a slice of Uncle Bunty's coin, you and the little jane—"

He stopped right there, because his mouth was too full of Bentley Dewert's flailing fist to share available space with the mere words. The bubble of self-control had burst; and Bentley, flaming with a surge of rage which he himself could barely comprehend, drove that fist, backed by one hundred seventy pounds of bone and muscle, smashing into the O'Connell face.

And the reporter collapsed.

He collapsed; and Bentley, still raging, bestrode him, lifted him, fairly hurled him limply through the door to sprawl his length on the rich carpet of the outer hallway.

LOUD cheering arose; there was a roaring of many voices outside in the hall, and bright flashes of light almost blinded Bentley as he stood there, fists clenched, muttering:

"There, you cheap little ink-rat, and that's only a start—"

"Whe-e-e-e-e-e-e!" shouted a dozen voices. "Just hold that pose, feller. . ." *Puff! Puff!* "Thank you!"

Cameras clicked. Leering faces of newspaper men grinned, enjoying doubly the discomfort of their colleague O'Connell and the embarrassed surprise of this irate Mr. Destiny whose interview they had been sent to get. This was news. This was feature stuff. This was what people liked!

Bentley gaped at them, and they laughed.

Bentley charged them, and they broke and ran down the hall—all but O'Connell, who was still sprawling half-conscious where Bentley had heaved him; and there they stood, the gentlemen of the press, laughing and jeering and taunting—a pack of news-hounds with their quarry at bay.

"Nice goin', feller," they cried. "This is gonna help a lot, swingin' on a reporter. Wait till you see the papers tomorrow. And maybe the little lady won't just love it, too!"

Then, of course, he understood. It was an old gag. A newspaper man's gag. When a man is hard to interview, gang up on him, make him mad, make him commit himself. Probably O'Connell had started it. Probably he had told the others that this Destiny was hard to talk to. So they had cooked up that cock-and-bull story, and O'Connell had come in with it while the others waited outside to see what would happen.

Well, it had happened. It had worked, all right. And they had made a fool of him. He'd made a fool of himself. Given them a hot scandal to work on. You can't sock a reporter without turning the whole city press against you. And now they had it, complete with pictures. Just the stuff all the tabloids would love. And not only tabloids, either.

And the worst of it was that they'd drag the poor girl into it. They'd *use* that story O'Connell had faked up. They'd pin something on poor little Brown Curls (he could not quite get himself to call her Lorraine) as if she hadn't enough trouble without that. And she couldn't come out and deny it, because of the cops and her uncle. And they had put Bentley in a position where he couldn't deny anything any more.

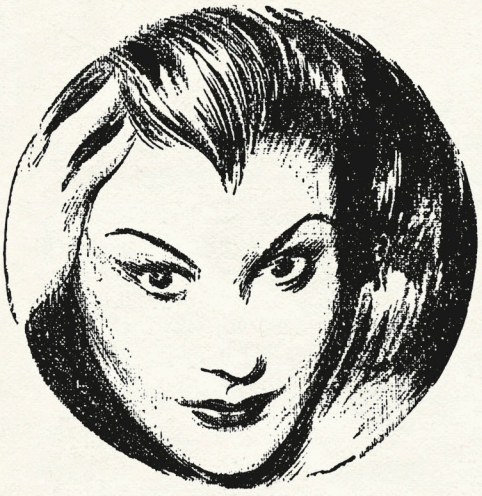
"What a damned fool, what a damned stupid idiot!" he told himself when he had slammed the door against the jeering crowd. "Until I got mad, they didn't have a thing; and now I've just let her in for—for anything they want to say."

And so Bentley passed an evening of doubts, discomfort and misgivings, for nobody loves to contemplate his own stupidities. . . .

With morning came breakfast, his newspapers and more trouble. A glance at the headlines confirmed his worst fears. The jeering reporters had done their worst—or best—and had contrived a masterpiece of near-fiction which, because of Bentley's outburst, seemed to have the air of solemn fact.

Blazed the *Ledger:*

DOES CUPID LURK IN GRAYMASTER CASE? LORRAINE'S BOY-FRIEND SOCKS REPORTER



Other papers varied the words, but the story was similar. Each carried a large flashlight photo of Bentley, standing in his door in the act of dragging the limp body of O'Connell to the hall. His face wore a look of startled indignation, caused by the suddenness of the flashes, no doubt, which had a ludicrous twist to it. It was like a cartoon, a burlesque of indignation. It stripped him of dignity; it made him laughable.

And in substance each story read like that of the *Ledger,* stinging, ironical, slurring, incriminating.

> The young man of mysterious origin in whose rooms Lorraine Graymaster and her uncle left their wraps when fleeing from a Park Avenue hotel on the eve of Buntsman Graymaster's hospital break, became angry, and violently attacked a reporter last night when asked to deny or confirm a report that he was secretly engaged to the pretty débutante. Although calling himself John Destiny and posing as an American, the young man is believed to be a foreigner with whom Miss Graymaster carried on a romantic interlude last year when traveling abroad. . . . This would tend to confirm a theory held by the police that the Graymaster girl could not, unaided and alone, have carried out the melodramatic "rescue" of her uncle from Mt. Hemon, but must have needed the help of another, presumably a man, and possibly the mysterious Mr. Destiny.

Bentley read them all, growing angrier each minute.

"The damned rats!" he muttered, meaning presumably the reporters who had concocted the story. "I'm glad I socked that O'Connell, and I wish I'd hit him again."

Still, he was uncomfortably aware of his own impotency. The story made "good copy," and it would be hard to disprove. And even if denied, it had been printed, which made it register with the public. And the worst of it was that the girl was not able to deny it, couldn't give it the lie, without exposing herself to police action. . . .

Toward ten o'clock the telephone began ringing. In the mental turmoil of the Graymaster affair, Bentley had forgotten his advertisement, and it was a welcome thing to be caught up in his own business once more. It appeared that the whole city had offices to rent. Offers came swamping the line. He was fairly deluged with them, albeit most were absurdly far from anything he would be likely to want or consider. For the most part they were too big, too pretentious, and much too costly for a six-thousand-dollar capitalist. There were suites formerly used by extinct investment houses, complete with boardroom and customers' rooms, available since a recent crusade by the Federal Commission against speculation. There were entire floors abandoned by stores going uptown, large showrooms, the offices of a well-known real-estate agent, wholesale importers, and one entire small building offered for the "mere song" of ten thousand dollars per annum. A few were interesting, however; and he began a list of addresses which he intended to visit during the afternoon.

But it was hard, even so, to concentrate on business. Brown Curls and her troubles intruded upon him. The bitter realization of his absurd gallantry and the temperamental outburst which had brought about that story in the papers, kept haunting him.

"What did I have to go and stick my head out for?" he demanded of himself a hundred times. "Never saw the girl but a few minutes, and there I go—had to go noble! Play hero! If I'd only kept my mouth shut, they wouldn't have dared. Then old Brood will see that stuff in the papers, and he'll figure I'm not paying attention to business. What a damned fool I was!"

His face burned with it. She would know, better than anyone else, too, what an asinine thing he had done. Brood would be bad enough, but the girl—

BY noon he had a half-dozen addresses ready to investigate, and listlessly he dressed himself to go downtown upon

his hunt for an office. He had already donned his overcoat when the telephone jangled harshly once more. He hesitated. Six addresses were probably enough. Certainly as many as he could well investigate in a single afternoon. Besides, the ad would be repeated, and there would be more tomorrow. Still, you can never tell.

So he picked up the receiver. The voice was a female voice, and it rippled and dripped with gushiness. It was, moreover, an oddly puzzling voice, and it brought him a message which confused and bewildered him beyond measure.

"John?" inquired the voice. "Is this you, John?"

SOME mistake, of course. There was not a soul in all the world who would call him John. Some one with a wrong connection. So he said, solemnly:

"This is Mr. Destiny talking, madam. I—"

"Why, hello, John," cut in the voice. "I'm *so* glad to find you in, dear. This is your little sister Minnie, Johnny dear. I've just this minute got in at Grand Central, and oh, I'm so bewildered and tired—"

Fantastic, of course. Why did the woman persist?

"Really," he cut in, "I haven't any—"

"And you simply *must* come down and meet me, Johnny. . . . Now don't be stubborn. Besides, I want to hear all about you. Is it true, what I read in the papers, Johnny? About that swell society girl, I mean? Just imagine, our Johnny busting into society! Mamma's *so* excited, and Pop wants to come to the city and visit you, just as soon as you're married. Now you come right down, Johnny—"

"But I assure you—"

"I'll be at the information-desk, Johnny, practically under the clock. And oh, I almost forgot. I have to wear dark glasses because I've been having those awful headaches, Johnny, so don't pretend you don't know me, Johnny, even if I do look a fright. Hurry up, now, and don't keep me waiting too long. I'm just dying to talk to you."

And then the voice changed suddenly, dropped lower, became suddenly hard and sour as it added rapidly;

"And if you break your neck on the way, Johnny *dear*, I'll be tickled to death."

The wire clicked and went dead before Bentley could muster any reply, adequate or not. That was all. Nothing more.

He dropped the receiver on its cradle and stared blankly at the wall.

"Now just what in blazes does *that* mean? Is somebody crazy, or am I—"

But in an instant he almost knew the answer. Of course it was a gag. Had to be a gag. He had no sister Minnie, nor any other sister, either. And as to his own family, not even his mother out in a Boston suburb knew he was hiding his identity under the novelesque name of *Destiny*. So it was a gag. Nobody really looking for her brother would talk like that, not giving him a chance, not listening to his protests. Besides, whoever it was, was trying to conceal her own identity. Probably guessed the police and the newspapers would be listening in on his calls, somewhere. And as for that business about dark glasses—

"Of course," he decided suddenly. "That would be it. It's one of these society columnists, like Helen van Tench or Doris Tetwiler, trying to grab a scoop on the other papers. No, maybe not. That doesn't make much sense, either. She'd try to sneak in here; she wouldn't telephone. But *somebody* is trying to get to me for something. Somebody smart, too. Smart enough to guess they'd make me curious with this gag. . . .

"Well," he said to himself with determination, "there's only one way to find out. I'm going down there. And if it *is* a newspaper gag, I'm going to give 'em a story they'll remember, this time."

HE didn't quite believe it, of course. Not even as his taxicab nosed into traffic on its way to Grand Central did he believe any such improbability. Because, underneath it all, deep, and inexpressible too, inside of him, he believed it was something quite different, something quite thrilling, something which, had it not been for those newspaper stories, he would have been happy about. Which, of course, is why he took such elaborate precautions in leaving the hotel. He knew about the plain-clothes man detailed to watch him by the D.A.'s office. He knew about the reporters hanging about the lobby and in the lounge and in places where they might escape his notice, ready to pounce or to follow him. Or what he didn't actually know, he suspected. So he fooled them, with some luck. He walked openly into the bar, ordered a beer, ducked quickly out

toward the wash-room, doubled back along the passageway which ties four large hotels with a subterranean link, escaped by an alley that leads to Lexington Avenue, and jumped into a taxicab, before even the most alert shadow could have kept pace with him.

And even so, he scarcely hoped to elude them. They would have heard that conversation. They would have listened in, and would want to see for themselves this young Destiny's sister Minnie.

But at the station there was not a sign of them. Not yet. He pushed roughly past and through a cloying crowd, jostled and bumped and shoved his way toward the hive around the clock at the celebrated hub of the information-desk, and stared into the sea of faces.

Much good it did him. None of them beamed, either in recognition or derision. None detached itself from the crowd. There were the usual travelers, bundles, porters, loiterers, damsels waiting for boy-friends, swains ditto for damsels, anxious inquirers about trains, people fumbling with time-tables. But there was no lady with dark glasses, no face in which he could trace the slightest interest in him.

He waited. Minutes slipped by and lengthened into a quarter-hour, a half-hour. He grew red in the face as a faint suspicion suggested he was the victim of a practical joke. One of those reporters, perhaps—

Then suddenly he had had enough.

"To hell with her," he said inwardly. "I seem to be a sucker for making a fool of myself."

And he strode angrily away, down toward the marble overhang where an incline surges toward the street above.

He didn't get far. It happened right then.

"Oh, Johnny—John-e-e-e-e!" squealed a shrill voice, and what seemed a small cyclone overwhelmed him.

She came bursting out of the thick of the crowd. She was like nobody he knew or had ever seen. She was a little dumpy, a little frowsy, a little dowdy, in a great ill-fitting raglan and an absurd leather hat of an earlier vintage.

"Oh, John-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!"

SHE fairly leaped on his neck. Her little arms entwined about him. Her knobby head and its scratchy spectacles of ten-cent-store dark lenses nestled against his astonished face. People all around stopped and turned and smiled.

And then, while he was writhing with honest embarrassment, he heard her whisper sibilantly in his ear:

"If you have any kind of decency left at all, you'll play up and get me out of here."

He found himself doing it, almost without knowing why.

"Why—er—hello, Minnie. . . . You're —er—late!" he managed to stammer, tucking his hand under her arm and leading her away.

She answered him loud enough for ears to hear at a distance of several yards.

"Oh, I was just famished, Johnny; I had to have a sandwich in the lunchroom. . . . I did make you wait, didn't I? But I'm *so* glad to see you."

THEY got up to the street-level somehow and they found themselves, almost by a miracle and without any conscious act on Bentley's part that he could be sure of, in a taxicab, and the cab grinding off down Forty-second Street with a vague destination which neither Bentley nor his astonishing long-lost sister Minnie had given.

And suddenly Bentley was filled with resentment. Who was this woman? Why had she done this? Who could possibly phone him and call him Johnny and—

She had leaned suddenly over to the window and called to the chauffeur.

"Drive through the park—keep on going around," she said; and her voice was changed, and all the piping throatiness had gone out of it, and it was somehow familiar.

She snapped the window shut and faced Bentley squarely. The dark glasses were gone. So was the dowdy look; so, mysteriously, was the peculiar air of matronly frowsiness that had seemed, at first, so essentially a part of this unheard-of, unknown, unwanted and completely unidentified sister-from-nowhere. Or so it had seemed when he had first caught sight of her, rushing on him in the "hall of lost steps" of the Grand Central station.

And the change broke an illusion and worked a miracle.

He gaped at her. She stared into his eyes, straightforwardly. He gaped more. She stared more. He could have believed it a dream. It was, in fact, a dream. It had nothing in common with merely commonplace living at all.

For this girl—not a matron, not even chubby and dumpy at all—was nobody else at all than Lorraine Graymaster,

the Brown Curls of his dreams, the menace to his good intentions, the fly, so to speak, in the ointment of his Personal Mystery.

She said, in an odd, low, curiously vibrant voice:

"I think you're wonderful, Mr. Destiny—just wonderful."

Pale little sounds moved in his throat, but no words came at all.

"To think you'd hit a nasty reporter for poor little me!"

He gasped, but his voice failed again.

"So noble!"

Her gray eyes never shifted.

"So heroic!"

He managed to stammer:

"Please, Miss Graymaster! I—"

And then the storm broke. Her eyes snapped; the tight aristocratic little nose wrinkled in disgust. Her lips seemed to toss off the words with utter disdain.

"You meddling idiot!" she said, articulating each syllable. "Were you looking for a sensation? Trying to get yourself some publicity—at the expense of a poor old man who never did you any harm? Or were you just using him to flirt with me that night?"

She did not lift her voice. There was no emphasis, no undue stress, no visible trick of anger, but each word was like a whiplash, like the sting of a hornet.

BENTLEY was aghast. "But—Miss Graymaster—" he began feebly.

"Or are you what you look like now, a hick, just a country hick? I'd like to know, Mr. Destiny. I really want to know. Because it's going to be important. Very important. I don't want anything to do with you, God knows; but you've made a mess and I've got to use you to get out of it. So I want to know—what's your motive, Mr. Destiny? Don't tell me it just happened. Don't try to make me believe that. I'm not a fool. I'm just a social butterfly, if you believe the papers, but I'm smarter than that. There's something wrong about you, and I've got to know what. That's why I tried to see you. Foolish, I know, but I'm always doing foolish things—and getting away with them, too. So tell me, Mr. John J. Galahad Destiny. Tell me your story. Tell me why it is that you can muddle other people's lives, make poor old men suffer, make a young girl like me suffer too, and wonder if she'll ever be able to face people again. Just what is it, Mr. Destiny? . . . I—want—to—know."

And suddenly he knew she was hysterical. Not in the classical, yelling, screaming sense, but in a poised calm way, a real hysteria was gripping her. She hated him. He could see hate and suspicion in her fine eyes. All the radiance he had seen shining from her as she sat there dining with her uncle seemed to have faded, and in its place was something hard and unshining. It did not suit her. It did not fit her. It was as though a child had donned, playing charades, the mantle of an old woman, and had borrowed something of the sad, hard world-knowledge which goes with age.

Bentley caught it, and it braced him. He had been, he knew, moon-calfing. It was time to be a man. This girl was in real trouble. There was something deeper here than he had known. Something further-reaching than an old man and his liberty or his money. He stiffened, and regained a little of his poise.

"I think, Miss Graymaster," he said, "that you should hear my side of the story—honestly told—before you make up your mind. In the first place, I want to tell you that I admire you very much—for what you've done. Both the business of your uncle and the big chance you take in telephoning me or risking meeting me."

"Skip that," she answered quickly. "If you have anything to say, get on with it. I didn't come here to listen to fool compliments."

"All right," he said. "What you've got to do is to look at things simply—not look for deep, dark motives where there aren't any. Let's go back to the other night when we were dining at the Washington Towers."

And very carefully, in complete detail, he went over the whole story.

AS he talked, Bentley grew calm. The girl said nothing. She made only one little movement for ten minutes of riding—merely to loosen her raglan and to give a little freedom to the light pillow she had apparently stuffed under it to complete her disguise. He told her simple facts. He did not tell her the oddities of his own business—if business it could be called—but merely such things as touched upon her, her uncle and the newspapers. He was a little boyish, perhaps, when he came to the moment of his return to his room when they had vanished.

"I was—well, a little disappointed," he said.

"Why? What did it matter?" she asked. He tried to answer, and his answer sounded absurd.

"Because—well, I didn't understand, of course. I thought it was a little shabby of you—to run out on me."

She said nothing. He went on, and when he had completed his story, with a picture of the police waiting in his room, and then the visit of O'Connell and his trumped-up yarn, he said:

"I just couldn't stand having him talk about you like that. I knew you couldn't be—playing up to your uncle to grab his money; and besides—of course this business about having met me on a ship was all rot. It made me mad, and I—I just socked him."

She gave him a quizzical look.

"Very noble," she said. "And a little sophomoric, don't you think?"

When she put it that way, it was, of course. Why didn't she see what he meant? She was a queer girl. She wasn't quite what he had thought her. She was somehow—colder.

HE said nothing after that, and they both rode on in silence. Finally she said: "So now, what are we going to do about it?"

"Do?"

"I think you might do something—if you're any kind of a man. You've caused a great deal of trouble. I don't mean for me only."

What did she mean, then? What was she after? There was something under the girl's manner which seemed unreal, a little unnatural. Any other girl he had ever known would have—well, she wasn't like any other girl, that's all. She wouldn't be. He tried to tell himself that, but it didn't go down, somehow. He was disappointed in her. She didn't *look* cold and hard and harsh, but she was acting that way.

"I could write a denial to all the papers," he said. "I could even see your family and—"

She shook her head.

"You know that wouldn't work. They'd just quote your letter and laugh at—at both of us. Not that I care for myself, but—"

"Well, what can I do? I'm truly sorry, Miss Graymaster. I acted on the kind of impulse any man would—"

"Any very young man, perhaps," she said bitterly; and that stopped him. Silence again. It was growing chilly in the cab. The girl seemed to be thinking out something—something far remote from him. Presently she said:

"You can sue—for libel. Sue the papers."

"I'd lose. What good would that do?"

"It would—" She stopped short, and suddenly he saw that there were tears in her eyes. What was behind all this? Why should a young girl like this feel so deeply?

"Oh, can't you see?" she said hurriedly, trying to control her tears. "It isn't just me—it isn't just Uncle Bunty. I love him. He's been more than a father to me. And it's true what some of the papers have been saying; they did trick him into that first trial; he's no more insane than you and I are. They did want his money. But it isn't only that: there's something big, something terrible behind it. Please, Mr. Destiny, I can't tell you all of it. It isn't mine to tell. But it's—it's a tremendous thing—an international thing, a world-crisis. What you know is only a trifling part of it. Uncle Bunty would give up his life and liberty—anything—if only we— You *must* do something. If you sue the papers, it will take public attention away from the rest of it. Don't you see? It will give us time. You just do it. It's the only possible way."

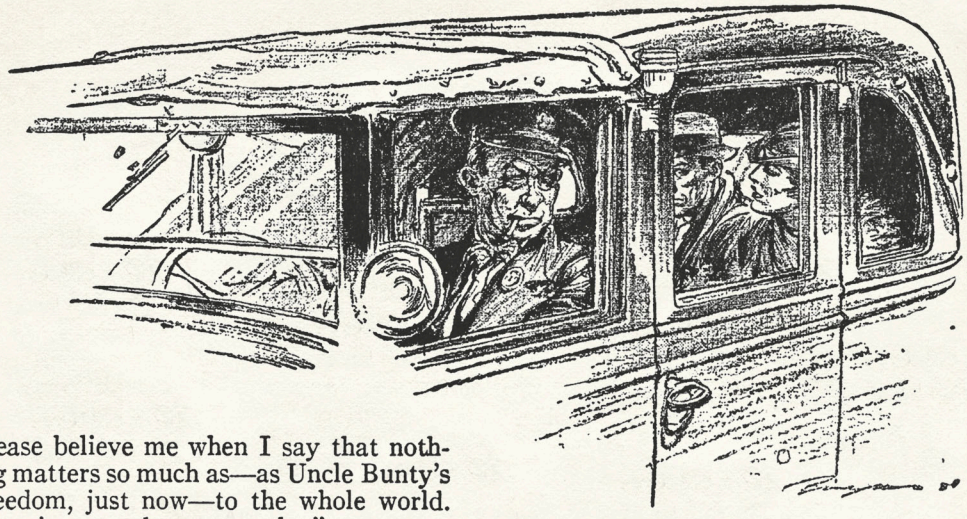
"But I don't understand at all, Miss Graymaster; and besides, I'm not sure I can—"

That was just it. Not only did he not understand why she should care about his suing the papers, but it seemed a little absurd, almost a little cheap. And he was afraid of it. If he did this, they'd dig up everything in his life. Everything would be spoiled. It would all come out, before he was even well started: Brood's idea, and the *Chronicle;* they'd never stop; they'd dig up his very shadow; they'd plaster his name over the whole country. They'd—they'd do anything to make him publicly a fool, stamp him an impostor. No, he couldn't risk a thing like that.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I can't attack the papers. It isn't only that I don't have the money, but—well, it would ruin all the things I'm doing. I'd lose—a million dollars."

SHE looked at him. There was not only disappointment in her stare, but something else—chagrin, hurt, and a little disgust.

"Your million doesn't matter," she said coldly. "Believe me, Mr. Destiny,



"There's something big, something terrible behind all this," she said.

please believe me when I say that nothing matters so much as—as Uncle Bunty's freedom, just now—to the whole world. Happiness and peace and—"

"What?" Bentley asked.

"Everything," she completed her sentence rather weakly. Then she added, slowly:

"I know it sounds absurd for me to sit here and ask you to believe me. I know I'm just a girl, last year's débutante. I don't matter. But since you've got mixed up in this, you've got to believe me. I know it's absurd to ask you to take me on faith, but you must. If you have any patriotism, any love for your home and country, for other human beings—you just must believe me. You must do anything, just *anything*, to help now, because—"

Bentley saw the girl's expression, and it troubled him deeply.

"Please, Miss Graymaster," he said. "Why don't you take me on faith too? I'm just a normal man,—nothing especially bad or good about me,—but I—I'd never let you down. You can trust me. You can tell me what this is all about if you want to. Because I admit right now, I'm all in a fog."

"I can't," she said quickly. "I simply can't. It isn't mine. I'm only a—just nothing, just a little cog in a machine."

There was a tapping on the window and the car was rolling slower now. The chauffeur had turned in his seat and was grinning through at them, calling out:

"Hey, aint you love-boids got enough of this park? That's five times I been around. I'm getting dizzy, Mister."

It was true. Time had been rolling away, unheeded. The meter was reading dollars.

"Let me drive you somewhere, Miss Graymaster," Bentley began, but she stopped him.

"No. I've made up my mind—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you'll do what I asked you to: start a lawsuit against one of those papers."

"But I can't," Bentley protested, really impatient at her persistent harping on this seemingly trivial point. "I just can't. It would be letting other people down."

She was not listening to the end of his sentence. She was leaning forward in her seat and tapping for the driver's attention.

"There is a police station on East Fifty-seventh Street," she called through to him. "Drive there at once, please."

The driver looked his astonishment, then shrugged and said;

"Okay, lady—it aint none o' my business." And giving Bentley a puzzled look, he stepped on the accelerator.

All fares, to taxi-men, are just a little crazy.

IT took seconds for Bentley to fight through the shock of what the girl had just said.

"Are you out of your mind?" he said finally. "What are you going to do? Have me arrested? See here, young lady; in the first place they'll recognize you, and your whole game will be up. They'll clap you in jail. They'll—"

"That," said this disconcerting young woman a little pettishly and a little mysteriously, "is exactly what I want them to do—and I hope it makes you proud of yourself, *Mister* Destiny."

Which drove Bentley into angry silence, and they rode on without another word. Angry, of course, because he had been shocked and disillusioned. It was

no pleasant thing for him to have built up a pretty, exotic (and probably quite impossible) picture of this dream-girl he had been calling Brown Curls, carving her out of the figment of his imagination, a fine, brave, poised little aristocrat—and then, in a few incredible minutes to see his idol not only wearing clay feet, but wearing them brazenly and arrogantly, showing herself unpoised, selfish and just a little hysterical.

The girl shed the large coat that had been part of her disguise, removed the pillow which had given her shapeless bulk, and Bentley had another mild shock when he saw from the corner of his eye that she suddenly had become the same slender, charming Brown Curls of the hotel grill—but with the sparkle and laughter omitted from her eyes.

And then they came to the police station. The cab stopped. And before Bentley could stifle his anger enough to make one last protest, the girl had slammed the door in his face and had rushed up to a uniformed patrolman who lounged near the door, crying:

"Officer! Arrest me—I'm Lorraine Graymaster."

Said the outraged and bewildered taxi-driver: "Hully gee!" "Hully gee!" he said again. "Believe me, buddy, all dames is nuts. Just nuts. Say, let's get outa here!"

And Bentley nodded his agreement, silently, morosely.

CHAPTER IV

WE must now describe a quaint little scene in the office of Colonel E. Witherby Jossop which profoundly affected the fortunes of Bentley Dewert. . . . The Colonel set his broadest smile on his face, shook his white locks, cleared his throat and loomed big and noble over the top of his desk at the little nut-brown man in the shabby country-store suit, saying:

"And so, my dear Mr. Watcherley, you want to place this—ah—small sum of money in my personal care. To be sure, to be sure! Can't do better, in fact. Five thousand dollars, Jason, is a lot of money down Pine Springs way, but only a piece of small-change up here. Glad you came straight to me, Jason, before some of these sharks in New York got hold of you. Fine business. I take it as a great compliment, Jason, I do indeed—ah—a great compliment that a native son of my natal village—well, hardly a village these days, I'll be bound—should take the trouble to look up old Jossop in such a confidential matter."

Jason Watcherley understood only part of this, and that rather obscurely. Guardedly he said, to show his accord:

"Wal, I reckon, Cunnel."

"Hum—ah—hum—" contributed the Colonel. "Now, let's see if I get the idea. The pipeline company handed you a check for five thousand to use part of your ranch—that right? You've got mortgages for fifteen thousand, eh? You feel that by coming up North where money flows—ah—faster, you might, with good sound advice, run your five thousand up to a sum equal to your mortgage. Very perspicacious, very—indeed, Jason. And may I say again, very complimentary to me. Appreciate that, Jason. I do indeed."

"Wal suh, Jeb Rawlston, he told me, he said—"

"Naturally, Jason, naturally. Being a banker, this Rawlston would endeavor to advise you to the best of his knowledge. But Texas is far from New York, far from the seat of money. And now let us see what we can do with this little nest-egg of yours—"

"It all the money I got in the world, Cunnel," said Watcherley. "Aint been no money in cattle since oil hit us. Ma, she says I'm a fool fer runnin' way up here with all that money, but I tells her right back, I says—"

"You mean you've actually brought that money with you?"

The little cow-man nodded: "Yessuh."

"The ladies," said the Colonel, "God bless 'em—and keep 'em out of men's business! Investment is man's business, Jason. I like to see a man wear the trousers in his family. Yessuh, glad to see you're the boss."

"But Ma, she said—"

"Quite. I understand, Jason, but think no more of it now. As it happens, you've come to me at an excellent moment. I have just acquired for my own account some excellent securities—railroad stock, first preferred, Jason. Practically solid gold. Nothing like railroads to be safe, Jason. Greatest public service in the world. Now, I chanced to put my hand on some of the preferred stock of the Southways, Gulf & Cherokee Road. Quite a block, in fact. Their dividend rate is sixteen per cent—four per cent quarterly."

"But Jeb Rawlston, he says I should get bonds—Gov'ment bonds, he says."

"The banker's conservative point of view, naturally. Very sound, very patriotic. But Government bonds rarely pay more than three per cent, Jason. With such an investment you would have to wait until your grandchildren are grown before that mortgage is paid. Three per cent's not enough money for a man in your position, Jason. You owe it to—ah—to Ma and to your children to get that mortgage paid. It would take fifty years to earn five thousand at three per cent on your original five. Fifty years, my friend. Of course if you can afford to wait that long—"

Poor Jason was like a rabbit hypnotized by a rattlesnake. Ideas of such things penetrated only slowly into his unaccustomed brain, if at all. But fifty years was something he could think of and visualize. He was just fifty years old.

"I cain't wait no fifty year, Cunnel," he admitted. "We folks don't live so long. Besides, old Squire Culton aint gonna wait fifty year before he forecloses them mortgages."

The Colonel nodded, and shook his white mane.

"But with earnings at sixteen per cent, my friend, the thing is possible. That's eight hundred dollars a year."

But Watcherley had another idea—vague but still there.

"I read as how fellers make lots more'n that outa their money up here," he said, frowning. "They's fellers struck oil over Burkburnett way who has run their money into a million, most."

The Colonel shook his head piously.

"That's plain speculation, Jason. Speculation is gambling. Investment is good business. If you want to gamble, Jason, I must send you away to some—ah—other advisor. No one has ever said that Witherby Jossop is a gambler. I could not have it upon my conscience to see you risk losing your little nest-egg on any speculative advice of mine—even if I could give it. Sorry, my dear friend, but if that's what you wish, I must refuse to act."

His words told.

"I aint no gambler," protested the now entirely bewildered cow-man. "I jes' read about them things, and I was thinkin'—now Ma, she says—"

But the sayings of Ma—doubtless a devoted though termagant Mrs. Watcherley back home—were doomed forever to remain unsaid, for the Colonel plucked up the dangling thread of conversation:

"Naturally, my dear friend. Banish the thought. Gambling is not for you. But if you will allow me to make a little gesture of—ah—gratitude and friendliness—"

"Whatever you say, Cunnel—" said Jason contritely.

"I was about to offer you the advantage of my own—ah—good fortune. These stocks of the Southways, to which I referred just now, came to my hand in partial payment of an—ah—old debt. In other words, I obtained them at a price far below their market value. Therefore it pleases me—yes, Jason, it pleases me—to let you have stocks whose par value is—ah—considerable, for your neat little wad—ah—five thousand. I mean to say, my friend, that these stocks are worth, at par, twenty thousand dollars—just two hundred shares at one hundred dollars a share, Jason. But I will give them to you for my own purchase price—five thousand. . . . No, no, I'll take no refusal, suh. This is not charity. This is man-to-man friendship. I merely sacrifice my profits. Why should I desire to make a profit on a friend, dear fellow? Not E. Witherby Jossop, I assure you, suh."

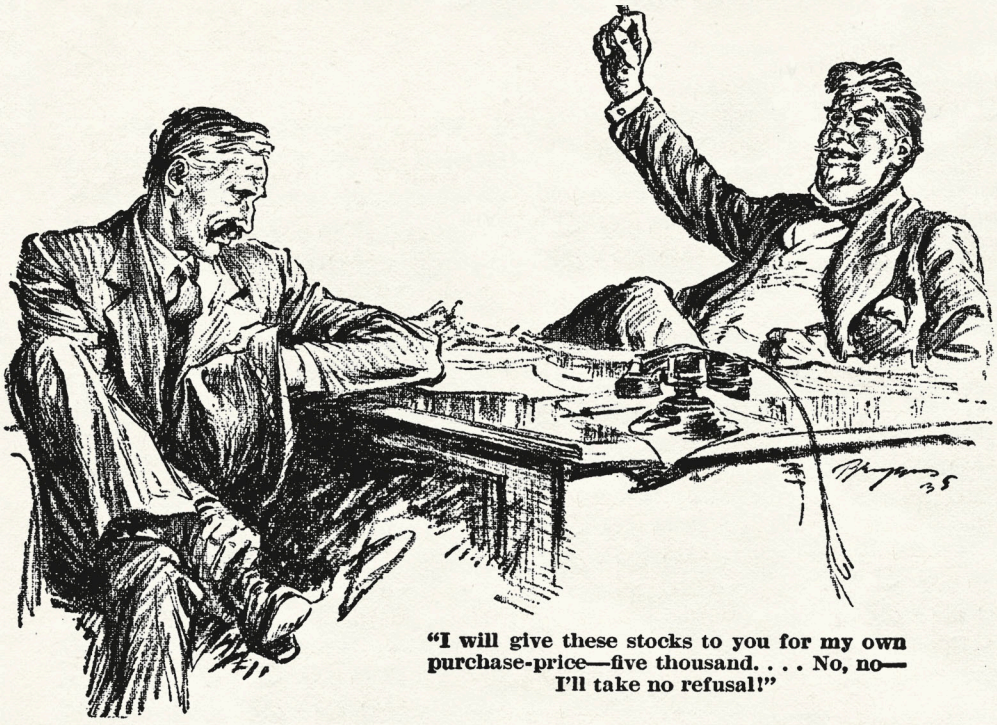
Presently the thing was done. Watcherley walked out of the office minus his package of crisp new bank-issued greenbacks, his new-bought briefcase stuffed with beautifully engraved certificates bearing the name of the Southways, Gulf and Cherokee Railroad.

The door closed behind Jason Watcherley. The Colonel tapped for Miss Steblins.

"Mary," he said with a beaming smile, "here is a little advertisement which I have clipped from the classifieds of the *Ledger*. I want you to telephone this gentleman called Destiny. His name both amuses and amazes me. He appears to desire office space. We shall rent him office space—by a sure-fire method. . . . Phone at once, Mary."

"What's a P.M. expert, Colonel?" asked Mary Steblins, reading the ad. "It wouldn't be Post Mortem?"

"Call it pure moonshine, perpetual motion, peripheral mensuration, my dear. What does it matter? It is the name of the man which intrigues me—Destiny! I am just superstitious enough to believe that he is our destiny, my dear. Phone him at once."



"I will give these stocks to you for my own purchase-price—five thousand. . . . No, no—I'll take no refusal!"

"But—"

"Telephone, my dear, and then go home and pack our bags. I have just disposed of two hundred shares of Southways preferred."

"You mean we're going to—"

"Exactly," said Colonel Jossop.

IT was already five o'clock by the time Bentley returned to his hotel after a day which had been entirely fruitless. He had striven to forget the Graymaster affair by devoting himself to the search for an office, and he had succeeded in neither endeavor. Office space there was to be had; but either it was too pretentious and costly, or it had defects of atmosphere which disturbed him. And he could not forget Lorraine's fantastic behavior—nor the story the newspapers had made of it.

The reporters had done well with the story—using that half-mysterious, half-jocular manner which news-writers often employ when they are not quite sure of their material.

One journal had run it thus:

SOCIETY'S MYSTERY LASS BAFFLES POLICE: APPEARS SANS UNCLE, STAYS MUM, IS MAD

The Graymaster case took on a new and faintly ridiculous angle today when the eccentric doctor's pretty niece, wanted by the authorities as an alleged accessory in the escape of Buntsman Graymaster from Mt. Hemon's psychiatric ward, walked calmly into a police-station uptown and voluntarily surrendered herself.

Bluntly refusing to make any statement about her vanished uncle beyond saying that he is "safe where you can't find him," and that he "will appear when my lawyer gets a new hearing on his competency trial," Miss Graymaster submitted genially to an afternoon of intense questioning.

Smoking a cigarette at her ease in the company of her attorney, Charles A. Soyer, Miss Graymaster expressed her angry indignation at the New York press for "daring to infer" that she had been involved in a love-tangle with a chance acquaintance made on her last transatlantic crossing. "Such insinuations are malicious and unfounded," she snapped at one reporter. "I never met the man on a boat at all. I never saw him until that evening at the hotel, and I'll never see him again in my life. . . . You can print that, just as I said it, and if you don't, I'll sue for libel."

Asked whether the young man in question (known as John Destiny) were an American or a Frenchman, she said: "I don't know and I don't care." Pressed by Judge William H. Magruder to reveal her uncle's whereabouts or face imprisonment for contempt, Miss Graymaster simply said: "I don't care if you do put me in jail. It will be all the worse for everybody concerned when the truth comes out. I won't talk."

"She needn't be so rough on me," Bentley said to himself as he entered the

Washington Towers. "You'd think I was rat-poison or something awful, the way she talks."

In the lobby, however, the room-clerk created a diversion by making hissing noises in Bentley's general direction.

"Psst! Mr. Destiny! Psst, I say, Mr. Destiny!"

Bentley crossed to the desk.

"Gentleman waiting to see you, sir," the clerk informed him.

"Who, me? I don't expect anybody."

"He's down in the taproom, sir—a very insistent gentleman. I understand he telephoned several times while you were out, and finally came in person."

"What name?"

"I'm sorry to say, sir," the clerk replied oddly, "I'm not quite sure of the name. Jossop, I believe, sir—a Colonel Jossop. A very nice old gentleman, indeed, sir, but he—ah—he had been drinking—forgive me for remarking about it, sir."

"Thanks," said Bentley. "I'll find him. In the taproom, you say?"

THERE could be no doubt as to which of the crowd of drinkers at the taproom bar would be Colonel Jossop. If there were Colonel Jossops at all in this world, that florid gentleman with an enormous black felt hat, long coat and polished cane would be the archetype of all. He leaned heavily on the bar, a tall glass in his hand; and he was talking thickly to the room in general.

"M'friends," he said oratorically, "we Southern gem'men are all natural philoshophers—stoicsh, we are; we take our dishappointmentsh without a murmur. We don't complain. Look a' me, m' friendsh. Do I look like a man who ish struck down by Fate? No, I do not. Do I look like a man who ish forshed to abandon hish poor quartersh by a money-grubbing landlord? No, I don't. I welcome trouble, m'friensh. I welcome it—I drink to it."

Which thing he proceeded to do actively, draining a considerable glass with one combined movement of arm, hand and lips, until Bentley tapped him on the shoulder.

"Colonel Jossop?" he asked, "My name is Destiny. I believe—" He got no farther. The man's arms reached out and enveloped him, crushed him to his somewhat moist bosom.

"Destiny!" He fairly shouted the name. "Man by the noble name o' Destiny. Finest name in the world, Destiny. Saw the name, had to see the man. Drinks for Mr. Destiny, m'friend," he crowed to the bartender. "Good ol' Southern name o' Destiny. One o' the finesht namesh ever pronounshed down my way, gem'men. Scotch and soda for Mr. Destiny, m' friend. Now le' me look at you, m' boy. Stand there—let me see the kind of young blood has the name o' Destiny. . . . Finesht name in—"

Bentley's resentment lifted up through his confusion.

"I was told you had some business with me, sir," he said, none too pleased with this kind of reception.

"Businesh, ah yes, businesh—matter of renting my poor li'l' office. Matter of saving m' name—but let that wait, my dear young frien'. Let us drink to Destiny—Destiny, the force that rules the world—Destiny, the man. Drink up, m' boy—drink to Destiny's destiny! Are you Lemuel Destiny's son, from down Richmond way, m'boy? Or are you Calhoun Destiny's boy from Lou'ville?"

"I was born in Boston, sir," said Bentley, now utterly disconcerted, wishing he could escape this drunken old man, and hoping a frank statement of his Yankee origin would do the trick; but the imbibing Colonel pounced on the very word.

"Boston! Boston, suh? Then I place you, young Destiny. You're Jackson Destiny's son John—Calhoun's brother, that was. Married Sally Tolliver, went up No'th same as I did. Now, don't tell me, boy. I'd know a Destiny face in a million. Another drink, m'friend. Another drink to Johnny Destiny!"

And so it went on for minutes, an unbreakable, impregnable volley of meaningless words.

A KINDLY old fellow, this. You could not be rude to him. Drunk as a lord of course, but his was a fading generation. Another twenty years, and Southern colonels would be as extinct as passenger pigeons. Or buffalo. Even bogus ones. This old duck was as bogus as a rubber dime; still—no use affronting him. Imagine that rot about being some Destiny-somebody's son! Absolute rot, of course. There wasn't any such name as Destiny. Or was there? How could he know? Call it a case of Personal Mystery, then. Drunken Personal Mystery. Maybe he'd better stay and have a couple of drinks with the old geezer, after all. Let him talk about his office for rent. What kind of an office would a drunken Southern colonel have?

Anyhow, a couple of drinks wouldn't do any harm. Shake him out of that miserable Graymaster business. Clear his head a little. Mental purgative. Not a bad idea.

So he had his couple of drinks.

THERE is one thing about Southern Colonels, bogus or not, which is almost invariable. You can think what you please of them. You can like them or lump them, laugh at them as rather harmless impostors, or take them seriously. But you can't hope to drink with them—that is, unless you're another Southern Colonel yourself. For Southern Colonels, the nation over, are famous for their inordinate ability to put down quantities of good whisky without the dire consequences which, almost inevitably, smite other men.

As Bentley found to his surprise, his distress and his misadventure!

By six o'clock he was quite willing to be Jackson Destiny's boy, or any other boy which would please his genial snow-haired companion. By seven o'clock he found himself, he knew not how, in a taxicab winding through the mild traffic of evening into the lower chasms of the city. By seven-thirty he was sitting in a deep, comfortable leather chair in a cozy little business office, listening to the still rumbling voice of Colonel Jossop, who had been for a considerable time explaining some dire misfortune—Bentley never did get quite the hang of the story—by which he must, all immediately, sacrifice his precious business and take refuge from creditors below the Mason-Dixon Line. It was a most involved story. It was a tale to bring real tears to the eyes of any humane man. It was told grippingly, with enough nobility to give it the powerful impact of true tragedy.

"And so, my dear boy," the old man was saying, as Bentley struggled to keep his eyes respectfully open and trusting in luck to bring the right and appropriate answers to his lips when a wane in the outpouring voice indicated an answer was needed, "and so that's the long and the short of it. They have stripped me bare of my meager income, these damned Yankees. They have shorn me of all but my pride and my honor. I am an old man, now. I must yield to them; I must capitulate, my dear young Destiny. All that I can call my own is right here in this—ah—tidy little suite of offices—once, may I say without exaggeration, humming with enterprise, once filled with gentlemen who sought my services. And now, even that must go—must go—must go—"

Tears welled into his old eyes, not unmixed with alcohol; and a great sadness came, responsively, into Bentley's heart.

"So when I saw your little—ah—advertisement, my boy, I seized upon the good name of Destiny. 'There,' I said to myself, 'is an opportunity. These premises shall not pass unto the Philistine. If the son of Calhoun—no, Jackson—Destiny requires offices, he shall have my own. And there you have it, my boy—in the proverbial nutshell, eh? Look around you. Look at the memories which flitter through these rooms. Look at the loving care which has gone into—ah—fitting them out. A gentleman's office, my son—if I do say so myself. How can I abandon such a place to—to some mere rental broker? I cannot. I shall not. I will not. They shall be yours, my dear boy. Yours—your very own."

IT seemed all right, somehow. It made a kind of sense. But the latent Down-Easter in Bentley made him ask:

"All right, Colonel, but how much are these offices worth to you? What's the rent? How much for the furnishing? Let's have the details, sir."

The Colonel blew his nose loudly.

"Am I some money-grubbing Shylock," he demanded with fire, "that I should make profit from the son of my dear friend? No, my boy. I give them to you—almost. I must—ah—ask you for a small sum—a mere trifle. Shall we say a thousand dollars? A modicum to enable me to confront my greedy landlord and to send him to confusion. And the place shall be your own. It is worth three thousand, unfurnished, my boy. But I shall sublease it to you for a nominal thousand—a mere nothing. The furniture is yours. I abandon it. The collection of a long life of activity—I give it to the son of Jackson Destiny."

And so, presently, there had been papers to sign, and the thing was done; and Bentley became proprietor of a suite of offices which (he earnestly hoped) would be adequate for the business of Personal Mystery.

Even more interesting are the episodes which follow in the next installment of Mr. Grant's remarkable novel of Personal Mystery—in our forthcoming February issue.

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 volunteer in the Spanish Civil War tells of his desperate share in a close-quarters fight against Moorish zealots.

By HANS AMLIE

At the Battle of Brunete

MEN from every country in the world are fighting on one side or the other in the Spanish civil war. During the Battle of Brunete a little over a year ago, which was fought on the plains near Madrid, more than five thousand members of the International Brigade took part. This brigade was made up of volunteers from more than fifty countries. About five hundred Americans were there with the Lincoln-Washington Battalion.

Now, in all wars the best troops are used as shock troops, and this was necessarily so at Brunete, for at that time the Spaniards were undergoing their training period. Brunete was a surprise offensive, and the Rebels did not have their strongest forces opposing us when it started. But after three days of rather easy advancing, we met real resistance. The sniping became deadly. Our battalion adjutant was killed by a rifleman more than a mile away when he exposed himself for a few moments. We knew what that meant: The Spanish insurgent troops had been relieved by General Franco's Moorish Legion.

The Moors are among the best fighters in Spain, perhaps in the world. They believe if they die in battle they go to a very good heaven, but if they die fighting an infidel, an unbeliever, and especially their traditional enemy the Spaniard, they go to the very finest heaven, where they will be waited on hand and foot by forty beautiful maidens. They have excellent eyes and steady nerves. They are past-masters at hiding themselves and are always to be found where we are sure no one can hide. They rarely surrender, even when desperately wounded. I have known of instances when a Moor who was completely cut off from his company and almost out of ammunition would lie motionless until some unwary infidel got so close that there was no chance of missing. The Moors all wear the khaki uniform of the Spanish army but never take off their turbans, for they look on wearing a helmet as cowardly. They wear hooded woolen

capes instead of overcoats against the chilly Spanish nights, the cloaks serving as blankets or sleeping-robes.

At night these desert warriors invariably sing. Not songs of their homeland and their maidens, but blood-curdling yodels of the Alhambra and Granada that once was theirs; of the Spain they dream of regaining and of what they will do to their cowardly enemies. Sometimes at night the Americans would try to imitate the North African singers in the hope that they would come close enough to get into a trap, but never with success. They were very clever at night signaling, using what we called bird-whistles—small leather pouches with a musical whistle in one end. Squeezed in the hand, it made a noise just like the cry of a night bird. Our night patrols were on the alert for these whip-poor-wills.

Very terrifying to the Americans were the reports of the Moors' custom of mutilating prisoners and enemy dead. This ferocity is due partly to their religion, for they believe that a mutilated enemy will become a eunuch slave for the victor's heavenly harem.

BUT to get back to Brunete: It was really too hot to fight during those July days, but the battle had begun and we were only halfway to our objective. After several days of slow advancing we consolidated our lines along the bed of a dry creek. The banks afforded us shelter, and we rested in this gully for twenty-four hours before making another attack. The Moorish troops took advantage of the lull to strengthen their positions.

There was a long gradual slope from our lines to the top of the hill where the enemy was well entrenched about a kilometer away. There were many olive trees, some oaks and some stubble in this No Man's Land. The enemy outposts were about halfway down the slope. Snipers cleverly concealed in the trees or carefully camouflaged in the grain stubble took a heavy toll of our men as we made the assault the following forenoon. Our small artillery kept pounding their trenches, but could not be used against the hidden sharpshooters. We were making the attack by short rushes. That is, ten per cent of the soldiers would rush forward a few yards and get behind the shelter of a tree or a rock while the rest would keep up a fire on the enemy positions or where we thought enemy snipers were hidden. By the time we were halfway up the hill we had lost heavily. Harry Hynes, Sam Stone, Ernest Arion, Dan Grasso and Malcolm Chisholm were dead on the field.

I gained the cover of a big oak, and almost at once was rifle-dueling with a sharpshooting son of Mohammed less than seventy-five yards away. I am a good shot, but it was pretty hard to pick out a man's head in a stubble-field at that distance, and naturally it was equally hard for him to find mine behind that tree. We exchanged several shots, and then the firing from his direction ceased. I thought that I had got my Moor, but to make sure, I held my helmet out alongside the tree. . . . Dead quiet. I loaded my rifle, and started to run for another tree some twenty yards to my right front, but keeping my eye on the spot where the bullets had come from.

I had gone only a few steps when I saw the head and shoulders of the foe lift. I knew that I'd made a blunder and started dropping. A bullet caught me low in the side and plowed through to the backbone. It felt as if I had been cut through the back with a hot cleaver. I remembered letting loose a long groan and thinking, "I've been killed," but I recovered my senses almost immediately. I had fallen in a small irrigation ditch a few inches deep. I was paralyzed from the waist down, but my arms were all right and my head was clear.

Bullets were cracking overhead and *ping-gg-ing* when they hit my binoculars, or making that sickening thud when they hit the body of a comrade already dead.

I had scarcely brought my rifle into an easy firing position when a wailing, blood-curdling cry sounded, and three Moors came bounding toward where I lay. They were carrying their rifles in their right hands raised high over their heads, and their howling *"Allahh—Allahhh—Allah!"* sounded like some inhuman battle-cry rather than a prayer. For an instant or two I felt chill and numb.

They were almost upon me when I opened fire. At that short distance they were easy targets.

I HAD made a mistake when I left the oak tree too soon, and nearly paid dearly for it; but those sons of the desert made a bigger mistake when they left their snipers' nest to add to their heavenly staff of servants. The stretcher-bearers soon crawled up to where I was lying, and my part in the Battle of Brunete was over.

All Hands, Shorten Sail

Exciting hours aboard the Tusitala, *last of the great square-riggers.*

By ROLAND BARKER

THE *Tusitala,* last active square-rigger under the American flag, lay deep-loaded at a Lackawanna pier when I joined her in 1929. She was an arresting sight, I remember, with her trim white hull and buff tophamper. The shriveled tail of a shark adorned the tip of her jib-boom—a charm fastened there, no doubt, by some superstitious hand. Aloft, her canvas was bent to the yards in a neat harbor stow, and she made me think of a seabird resting with folded wings. Stepping over the gangway, I made my way aft to where the mate stood smoking his evening pipe.

"Take your gear for'ard," he said tersely. "The crowd's ashore for a last spree. We sail for Honolulu tomorrow. Let me tell you," he added, "shippin' under canvas aint no picnic."

At ten next morning we cast off, a puffing Federal tug towing us out of the slip and straightening us up in the river. The wind was at nor'west, and fair. A seaman of nearly half a century's experience in square-riggers, the captain immediately clapped sail on her. By the time Liberty was abeam, we were snoring away down the harbor at twelve knots with foam gurgling high as the hawse-pipes. It was a grand start.

Off Ambrose Lightship the yards were backed to the masts and the ship hove to. With obvious reluctance the pilot went to the waist and clambered down a rope ladder to the waiting tender. Half an hour later, when the land had faded to a thin blue line in the dim distance astern, all hands were mustered and the mates picked the watches. American boys predominated among the crew, but the cook was a German, and there were four square-head seamen. Most of us were jubilant, but I remember hearing the captain and the mate conversing on the poop as the freshening breeze droned in stays and gear, and night came down on the vast disc of the sea.

"Keep her at sou'east, Mister. By gad, we're in luck. If this wind holds, we'll make Colon in eighteen days."

"You said that, last voyage," the mate growled, as eight bells rang out and I crossed over the lee side of the poop to relieve the wheel. "I aint forgettin', Captain—a good start generally means tough luck later on."

It seems odd to me now that the fair wind petered out long before dawn, leaving the *Tusitala* floating idly on the sea, her canvas hanging flat and lifeless from the yards. Throughout the following morning, we holystoned the deck, sweating in the heat of the blazing sun.

The captain, however, gave no evidence of his disappointment, except to pace the poop for hours, stopping every now and then to sweep the horizon for signs of wind. He went below at two o'clock, presumably for his customary snooze. Less than five minutes later I was surprised to see him return hurriedly to the deck. With the sun high in a cloudless sky and the sea unrippled, he looked incongruous standing there at the break of the poop—in his seaboots and oilskins!

"Mister," he sang out in even tones, "snug her down to lower tops'ls. Furl and marl everything!"

From the main deck, we stared up at him dumfounded.

"Eh, what's that?" the mate said. "Is anything wrong, sir?"

The reply was like a dynamite blast.

We almost jumped out of our shoes as we sprang lively for royal and topgallant halyards, clew and buntlines. Not more than twenty minutes later, when the light sails had been handed and furled, an ominous stillness hung about the ship. The voices of the men sounded hollow and loud. Only the captain knew then that the glass had fallen one-point-five inches since noon. A peculiar pink-tinged vapor clung low over the sea, and all hands sensed something coming.

"Furl the mains'l!" the captain roared. "Spring to it!"

Wind smote us with raging force, careening the ship almost on her beam ends.

IT was no fun up there on the main yard, swaying on a threadlike footrope which sagged under the weight of twenty men. Before us, as the men on deck bunted it to the yard, the heavy canvas billowed and rose like a balloon, its clew-irons whipping dangerously up and down with a nerve-racking metallic sound. With wild shouts we fought the sail, handing it in, inch by inch, till at last we had it on the yard and made it fast with stout gaskets. As we groped singly down the rigging, the gale, rising in demoniacal fury, flattened us against the ratlines with relentless force, and only after laborious effort did we reach the deck. . . .

It was four o'clock when the captain roared: "Have all hands brace her up, sir!"

The mate's acknowledgment rose above the tumult. "This is what comes of sailin' on a Friday, blast the luck!"

Under three lower tops'ls and with the helm hard down, the ship now lay hove to. Enormous seas, ugly and confusing in their direction, towered and broke harshly from every point of the compass. She seemed easier, however, more buoyant. Along with a dozen other bedraggled shipmates, I was clinging to the crojick braces at the main fife rail when some one yelled: "Look out! Here she comes!"

There it was—a fifty-foot wall of water running at us with the speed of an express train, its phosphorescent mane glowing weirdly in the darkness. Fascinated, we stared, fingers gripping manila rope or iron belaying-pins. High as the crojick yard, the crest curled over, and with a thunderous roar, fell inboard. The avalanche drowned out wild shouts of fear. Unable to hold on against its irresistible force, I was torn away and tumbling over and over, helpless, I brought up suddenly against the swifters three feet above the lee rail. Somehow I caught a frantic hold. Had I been carried a foot farther aft—

Well, I wasn't.

No one else was swept away, either; but the bosun was carried halfway through a waste-port. Only the daring of a young A.B., who risked his own skin and clung fast to the vanishing bosun's leg, prevented a tragedy. When the ship had recovered, we saw that one of the boats had been torn clean away.

The night dragged on. Nothing more could be done to ease the vessel. In those long moments when the sky came down like the wrath of God and the sea was a roaring chaos, the captain warned us repeatedly to keep ourselves lashed to the fife rail around the mainmast. Coffee would have tasted good, but the galley had been gutted. Indeed, we found out later that the entire fore-deckhouse was lifted two inches out of line.

AT two A.M., after the hurricane had attained a degree of intensity such as most of us had never before witnessed in those latitudes, the gale took off so abruptly as to leave the impression that there was no more wind in the world. Above a sea still heaving in monstrous turmoil, countless stars shone peacefully in the heavens. The *Tusitala* and the men in her seemed insignificant amid such manifestations of a power which, to most of us, was God.

It had been a harsh baptism for some of the first-voyagers, but such are the risks men take in a sailing-ship at sea. In the darkness, as he mounted the poop ladder, the mate's voice reached us clearly: "Just what I told you, Captain—a good start means a bad finish. What do you say now, sir?"

"Mister," the captain roared with a fearful oath, "you better get down on your knees and thank God we're not at the bottom of the sea!"

"Why didn't I go into steam?" the mate said dolefully.

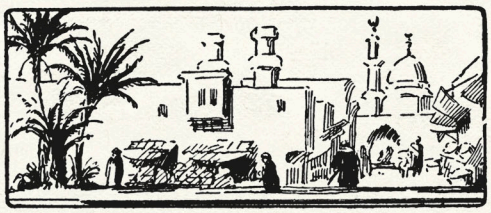
Evidently he didn't mean it, for he made four more voyages in the ship, and, I'm told, he actually cried when she went out of commission forever.*

* Since the above was written, it is reported that the famous old *Tusitala* is to see service again as a Navy training-ship.

Palestine Policeman

Very little peace on earth in this story of the Holy Land in these troubled times.

By ROGER COURTNEY



ON one occasion during my service with the police in Palestine, an Arab attack amounted almost to a siege of one of the settlements. The attack was at night, and was from the Arab lands all round the settlement. As soon as news of the disturbance reached us at Tul Mond, we dashed off in our pick-up car, we three British police as usual, and a German supernumerary driver, and had to run a gantlet of Arab fire to get into the place. As soon as we were inside the settlement and the Lewis gun had been taken to one of a number of sandbagged positions which had been built for just such an occasion as this, I dodged off down through the orange-groves to the barbed-wire entanglement. Not tonight would there be that notorious scarcity of Arabs that had marked so many of my night excursions out into the Arab lands.

Outside the wire, I found an open drain and crept along it for some distance, until at last I was within some forty yards of one of the Arabs, whose position I knew from the glow from his rifle's mouth as he fired, though of the man himself I could as yet see nothing. For quite a time I crouched there, studying the lie of the land between the Arab and myself, then crept up out of the drain for a yard or two, took aim at the glow of his rifle, fired, and promptly rolled back into the drain. Some of the buckshot pellets hit him, for I heard a kind of cross between a gasp and a groan.

I then made my way back down the drain to the settlement; and a rough little journey it was. Bullets from friends of my Arab flew whanging over and about the drain. Also, bullets from the Lewis gun in the settlement began peppering the region too. It was my two comrades firing at the glows from the rifles of the Arabs who were firing at me—and more than once their bullets came near to combing my hair. Creeping along as fast as I could, I cursed them as never I had thought I should ever curse such good comrades.

Meanwhile one of them had spotted what obviously were signals being flashed from a large Arab house some distance across the fields. It was the house of an important Arab lawyer named Abdul Latif Salah, a member of the Arab High Committee, and it was clear that the signals were to guide the Arabs in the attack on the settlement. The Lewis gun was now trained on the house and the signaler given "half a pan"—that is, a burst of firing amounting to half of a magazine of ammunition—twenty-three cartridges. The signal light went out as suddenly as if it had been shocked out; the signaler had quite clearly got the surprise of his life. The Lewis gun was also trained in the direction of various Arab villages in the neighborhood, for it was easy to guess that it was from these that the attackers had come; and "pans" and "half-pans" were fired over them—over and not *into* them, because of the women and children. And with that the "battle" began to die away; there was only one other high spot, when one of the Very lights that we sent up revealed for an instant a number of figures against the skyline of a ridge—long enough for the Lewis gun to send a burst of bullets. A few minutes after

this the last of the Arabs had gone, and all was peace and quiet once more.

But for us policemen peace and quiet never lasted long. Next day Abdul Latif Salah complained to the Administration that we'd fired on his house, and because of his complaint we had to draw up umpteen reports.

After that, the people of the Arab villages that we had so magnanimously fired over and not into, set vengefully to work, and the three of us British policemen were blown up by a mine, pick-up and all, as we were driving along one of the tracks between the settlements. The mine—actually a sixteen-pound shell—had been buried in one of the wheel-tracks, and the explosion blew up the front of the pick-up, leaving the mud-guards sticking up like a pair of rabbit's ears. How we escaped, I know not. All I know is that, the explosion being so close to us, right under us, in fact, the concussion was so great that we never heard the crash of the explosion itself, which seems to be a feature of heavy explosion when one is very close.

After that, I was taken off the settlement work.

THE Arab environment was as different from the Jewish as it could be. To be moved from the Jewish settlements to the Arab hills, was like being moved far back in time.

In the Jewish areas all was modernity and progress. Everywhere were good roads, and proper buildings, and the agricultural methods were highly scientific and up-to-date. The benefits which the Jews have brought to Palestine are enormous.

Wherever they have settled they have turned what was only a depressing dreariness of country into as flourishing a garden as possible in such a land.

They have built factories and established markets abroad for the sale of their own and Arab products. They have instituted medical services—available to Arabs as well as to everyone else—of an efficiency equal to that of any country in the world.

The Arab areas were as they had always been—mostly dusty rock-heaps. Likewise were their houses and other buildings chiefly of the tumbledown order, with dungheaps indiscriminately beside them, and hens, goats and donkeys wandering between. Right from Biblical times these Arabs had lived like this. Progress as we understand it, was not in their blood. They were content with things just as they were.

But plenty of other things mattered to them—good manners, for example. Good manners were almost a fetish with them.

All this time in these hills we saw little of any Jews. A hotbed of Arab fanaticism, the whole region was naturally avoided by Jews as much as possible. But that did not mean there was a dearth of exciting happenings. There was, for example, much killing of Arabs by Arabs. Arabs who had sold land to Jews went in danger of their lives, as did any who were suspected of being in sympathy with any aspects at all of the Administration's attitude to the whole Jew-Arab question. Again, the great strike had financially impoverished many of the Arabs, and many had taken to highway robbery as a means of making a living.

Dealing with these bandits was very difficult. The organized military way was terribly unwieldy and vastly expensive. And as, with their binoculars, they could recognize troops miles away the bandits always had plenty of time in which to disappear.

It seemed to me that the only real way of dealing with them would be by means of a flying column of mounted police *disguised as Arabs.* I worked it out in detail, and wrote it all out in a report, which I sent to Headquarters. But nothing happened. My idea was too unorthodox—far too unorthodox.

Though many of these bandits worked under the cloak, as it were, of the general political disturbance, they were at all times ready to hold up and rob Jews, Arabs and Christians alike, anyone and everyone. Their methods were simple, and highly effective. They operated only at night, and their first procedure was to place a barrier of stones across an important road where it ran through a high and narrow cutting. Then they placed riflemen up the cutting on both sides a little way, to cover the spot, and the rest stood by the barrier and waited for the first car, lorry or other vehicle to come along.

Once we three British police in our pick-up (the same three who had been together at Tul Mond, in the Jewish settlements areas) ran into a bandit gang working a trap with the result that we very nearly lost our lives, and also later learned something of what a curious thing the attitude of officialdom could be.

The trap had been working about an hour, and already a number of victims had been caught. We got this part of the story from the said victims afterward. The first vehicle to come along was a lorry-load of oranges, bound for Haifa. As the head-lamps revealed the barrier, the driver stopped—and at the same moment a pair of the bandits stepped out, jammed a rifle in his ribs, and dragged him from his seat.

"I AM a poor man, a poor man, by God! All I have in the world is half a piaster," cried the driver, shaking with fear. This the bandits took from him, also a ring from his finger, a more-or-less silver cigarette-case, and a sum of one hundred piasters in notes which they found concealed in his shoes.

Then they bundled him round a projecting part of the road, left him in charge of one of their fellows to see that he could give no warning to the next car to approach. This proved to be a taxi, with a fat Armenian inside, traveling in the direction of Jerusalem, or the direction opposite to that in which the lorry had been going. The Armenian had the toughest few moments of his life when he was dragged out of the taxi and the bandits shone upon him one of their powerful electric torches.

For like many Armenians, the cast of his features might have been Jewish; and as he stood there one of the bandits jammed the point of his rifle up under the captive's nose and declared he was minded to shoot him there and then as one of the cursed Jews. Nor were the bandits any the more pleased when on searching the man they found no money. But more cars were coming up now, and the bandits couldn't waste any more time on the Armenian, so, together with the driver of the taxi, he was sent to join the lorry-driver round the corner.

So it went on. Vehicle after vehicle was held up, and their occupants sent to join the victims who had preceded them. There were Arab merchants, with their wives heavily veiled, on their way to Jerusalem, and holiday-makers returning from Syria. There were a couple of excited and voluble Greek merchants, several Arabs of varying degrees of social and financial importance, and a family of Syrian Arabs who liked to pretend they were not Arabs at all, but French, even to declining to speak the Arab tongue, as is often the way with Syrian Arabs. From each of these, as they arrived, the bandits collected something to add to the "kitty"—money, rings, bangles from the arms of the Moslem women (the women themselves, though, were treated with respect), and even here and there a pair of shoes whose good quality made them desirable.

Then suddenly in the midst of it all there was the sound of a rifle-shot, followed by the harsh rattle of a machine-gun, and a Very light appeared, right over the place where the victims of the bandits stood unhappily around. They threw themselves down flat, cowering. The intense brilliance of the Very light shone over the scene like a young sun, and machine-gun bullets were whizzing.

"What is it?" quaked the Armenian; and in a burst of fear the Syrians so far forgot to be pseudo-French that they cried out to God for help in Arabic.

It was us—the police, we three British police and two Arab police in our pick-up. We'd been out on a patrol, on the lookout for just such a happening as this, and we'd found it. We'd run almost slap bang into the tail of the line of empty vehicles that by now stretched away from the stone barrier. That shot which had so startled the bandits' victims was fired by an Arab who at the moment of our arrival had stepped out from behind one of the cars and let drive straight at us.

In the darkness we hadn't seen him; the first we knew was the rosette of flame from his rifle's mouth, and—*whang!*—the bullet smashed into the woodwork of our car, just missing the driver; and at the same time the riflemen posted a little way up the sides of the cutting to cover the barrier opened fire down on us. The driver had switched off our car's lights on the instant, and we leaped down and threw ourselves flat on the ground almost without knowing that we'd done it. I'd instinctively grabbed up a Very-light pistol and still flat on the ground, fired it; and my comrade in charge of the Lewis opened fire.

But I'd fired the light too low, and not only that but the machine-gun had no stand, and the gunner couldn't aim it high enough. The result was that instead of the sides of the cutting being lit up, revealing the bandit riflemen in the brilliant glare, it was the bandits' victims who were thus lit up; and it was alarmingly close above their heads that the bullets flew.

Meanwhile the road all about us was being spattered with the bullets of the

bandits up on the cutting, and how we escaped I know not, for the range was only some fifty feet. Maybe it was because they were so close that the Arabs missed as they did; at a longer range they would not have been so afraid of us and our machine-gun, and their shooting would have been more considered and cooler. But escape, somehow, we did; and soon the Arabs had fled, and we were listening to excited stories of their victims, and the fat Armenian was asking us to bring electric torches and come back with him along the road.

Thinking it must be at least a body we were going to discover, a couple of us went with him; and presently the Armenian gave a cry of delight as the light of a torch revealed something stuck among the rocks at the side of the road. It was his wallet, with two hundred pounds in it. As his taxi had come up to that stationary lorry which was the first vehicle to be held up by the bandits, and he glimpsed the barrier across the road, he had whipped out his wallet and thrown it through the darkness out up the side of the road.

If only those bandits had known! Also, if only we hadn't been policemen and had found it first! As it was, all we got was a greasy handshake from the Armenian and the information as he stuffed the wallet deep down into his breast pocket with an air of finality, that we were "very kind gentlemens, yes."

As to the attitude of officialdom to the part we had played in this hold-up—well, in our innocence we thought at least we'd get some notice taken of it. We saw ourselves being highly commended before the assembled and cheering Force. "Constable Gwynne, Constable Morris, and Constable Courtney, it—um—gives me great pleasure to have the—um—honor—" You know the sort of thing.

Alas: we'd got it all wrong. The only thing that happened was a notice in "Force Orders" under the heading *"Awards and Punishments:* No. 527—British Constable Morris, losing through negligence three buttons, overcoat, large. Fined 45 mils, Forfeits 45 mils."

Those buttons had been scraped or torn off Constable Morris' coat as he had wriggled along the road on his tummy under the fire of the Arabs at that fifty-yard range, and returned that fire. As the aforesaid Constable Morris put it, himself, the buttons were as much shot off as scraped off. The rest of the official recognition was silence.

Cow-Country

(Continued

With the words she reached up and seized one of Ted's ears, pulling his head down to where she could hold it more conveniently. Then she led the big man straight to the saloon door and through, and the two disappeared.

It was getting on toward noon when I decided to go over to the store and order some supplies I needed. The postmaster, who was also the storekeeper, handed me a long official envelope as I entered, an envelope bearing the frank of the Forest Service, and post-marked Silver City. Opening it, I found the pay-check I'd been expecting, and a short note which I put off reading till later—shoving it into my pocket and promptly forgetting all about it. The check I gave in payment of my store bill, receiving some sixty dollars in change.

During the afternoon there was a series of horse-races, accompanied by much excitement, considerable sport, and numerous fist-fights over the results. Then the crowd returned to the saloon.

IT must have been eight or after when the word went around that Polk Shattuck had come; and the tall white-faced gambler, followed by a group of local supporters, moved up to the bar.

He was a dignified figure, immaculately clad in black, with a huge diamond glittering in his shirt-front. The unspoken homage of the company he took, apparently, as a matter of course.

"Howdy, Polk!" greeted Brad as the two shook hands formally. "What brings you down here?"

The newcomer tossed off his whisky and wiped his mouth on a spotless handkerchief he drew from his breast pocket and shook gracefully open.

"Thought I'd change my luck," he said casually; "they've been handling me right rough up yonder."

Wes Ford, Graham, Gallegher and the cowpuncher who wore the purple neckerchief, and was now happily recovered from his earlier indisposition, sat in with Shattuck in the beginning.

The gambler, a fat wallet behind his stack, played expertly, of course, covering the entire stack of an opponent when he thought he had him beaten, a maneuver his superior resources enabled him to adopt without great danger to himself.

Wes Ford, caught in a whipsaw jackpot, was the first to succumb. Shoving

Christmas

from page 5)

back his chair, he sought Brad, who was talking to me at the bar.

"Lemme take ten more, will you Brad?" he pleaded hoarsely. "I aint hit my stride yet."

Brad shook his head.

"Yo're too temper'mental, Wes, for anything but a friendly game—especially when you're playin' on my money." He cast a reflective eye at his cash-register. "The way things look, this bar money's going to be all the cash left in town, come morning. Polk's got science and the biggest bank-roll; and that there's a right hard combination to beat."

As time passed, it seemed likely that Brad's prediction would be borne out by events. By midnight three only survived to dispute Shattuck's supremacy.

The cowpuncher, who had been playing the combined resources of his friends the Triangle men with some skill and considerable luck, was one of these. Another was Lew Borsch, a heavy-set man, a well-digger by trade. The third was Tuck Holliman, a cattleman with a thick black mustache, sharp eyes and the devil's own nerve.

At the end of a round of jackpots Polk glanced over at Brad.

"How about getting in, old-timer?" he asked. "Looks like a good chance for you to get back at me for that cleaning I took you to last year."

Brad did not reply immediately. His bony hands gripped the bar till the knuckles grew white.

I had heard for the first time that evening of the classic session in which Polk, some years before, had stripped Brad of everything he owned, and how in consequence the saloon-owner had been compelled to move to this town and begin again. Observing the Texan's hesitation, I wondered if history was about to repeat itself—if the bar and all it represented would change hands over the card-table, as had the old man's former stake.

I saw Brad glance uncertainly at the cash-register. He moved slowly toward it.

"Wait, Brad!" I said.

I did some quick computing. I'd paid my store bill that day, could get along for the next month on credit if I had to, and had some sixty dollars in my clothes.

"Keep out of it," I said, low-voiced, "till I see what I can do. I feel lucky tonight."

Brad nodded. His features relaxed.

"All right," he said. "Bet yore hands high—and good luck."

For some reason I felt supremely confident as I took the vacant seat at the card-table. With me, I knew, luck usually ran in a quite definite streak. Tonight I had a hunch it would be good.

THERE was the customary revival of interest among players and spectators when a new victim sits in. I bought sixty dollars' worth of chips, passing over my cash. I knew Brad was right when he counseled quick action—every loss meant less capital to back succeeding plays; and I was resolved to back each hand to the limit.

Tuck Holliman, on my left, dealt first. I picked up my cards and was conscious of a thrill when I saw two aces. They weren't so much in themselves, but they seemed a good omen.

"Ten dollars to draw cards," came the even voice of Polk Shattuck. He tossed in a blue chip.

Jordan and Borsch laid down their hands. Tuck, after a moment of frowning concentration, stayed. I stayed also.

Shattuck drew three cards. Boosting the ante had been bluff on his part.

"Three!" I said, and the cards slid toward me.

When I picked them up, I saw a third ace. I gazed at the trio enraptured.

Tuck flung down his hand. Polk, gazing at me from beneath lowered lids, evidently decided that the satisfaction I couldn't hide was assumed to deceive him, for he said abruptly:

"I'll match your pile."

I pushed my chips to the center of the table, and Polk matched them.

"What have you got?" I asked.

He showed three queens and reached for the stakes.

"Just a minute," I cautioned.

I displayed the three aces and took the pot—a hundred and eighty dollars' worth of counters.

Shattuck smiled genially.

"Nice pot," he commented tersely.

For the next hour I couldn't lose. I filled a two-card inside straight, and beat two high pair on which Holliman had bet his last chip. A little later I won a jackpot in which both Jordan and Borsch lost what money they had left. Then the game was between Shattuck and myself.

By this time everyone who could had crowded around the table. The air had become tense with excitement. The game

had suddenly developed into a duel between our town and Shattuck's, with the gambler and myself as the champions of the two rival towns.

I had about four hundred dollars in front of me, so that Polk's earlier advantage of the larger bankroll no longer remained. Twice he had taken money from his wallet, and twice I had won large pots, so that his reserves were depleted.

THE climax of the evening, from my point of view, came on a two-card draw when I had three kings on the deal. Polk, who also held onto three cards, boosted the ante recklessly. We each drew two cards from the deck.

I had become used by now to getting about anything I sought from the complaisant deck; but even so, I had all I could do to suppress a shout of elation when I saw four kings staring up at me from my completed hand.

Shattuck, evidently lucky also in the draw, gazed at my stack appraisingly.

"How much you got there?" he demanded.

Hastily I counted the money and chips before me.

"Five hundred and ten dollars," I said.

Polk glanced at his hand, then calmly emptied his wallet, and with chips and bills matched what I had, leaving himself a thin sheaf of greenbacks.

"No use stringing it out," he observed, and threw down a full house, jacks on tens.

Grinning, I showed my four kings. Few moments in my life have topped that one for sheer exultation. The spontaneous yell of delight from my fellow-townsmen made the tin roof of the building shake. Brad tapped my shoulder lightly—an accolade—and muttered:

"Fine. Keerful now, and you got him licked."

Shattuck, apparently unmoved by the setback, flicked out his handkerchief, touched his lips delicately, and replaced the linen square with meticulous precision.

He counted the money he had left.

"Forty dollars' worth of blue chips," he said calmly.

In a short time I had that also; and the gambler, still cool and collected, sat back and eyed me in silence for a moment. Then he said:

"That was a right good game. Now, I'm asking you to give me a chance to get back at you."

"How do you mean?" I asked, puzzled.

"I've a horse and saddle outside worth easily a hundred and fifty dollars. I've a gold repeater worth two hundred. And this"—he touched the gleaming diamond in his shirt-front—"will bring a thousand dollars anywhere. My proposition is this: I'll cut the cards with you once, high card to win, my horse and watch and stone against your winnings!"

I stared, taken aback by this extraordinary proposal. My glance moved about, met that of Brad—who winked and shook his head slowly in warning.

Shattuck spoke again, his gaze level.

"You don't have to take me up," he said almost casually. "The game was table stakes, and it's over. You've won." He paused; then his voice came crisply: "But I'm daring you to take me up."

I don't know to this day whether it was because I was young enough to feel the edge of the dare, or whether I was reluctant to pocket my winnings without giving the loser a chance to recoup, or whether I just didn't think I could lose that night. Whatever the reason, I found myself saying, without further reflection:

"All right. You're on."

I SHALL abridge the scene which even yet, years after the event, I can see clearly, but on which I dislike to dwell longer than is necessary. Suffice it to say that Polk cut and turned a nine; I cut and showed a trey. The gambler drew the huge pile of chips and money toward him. That, in substance, is what took place in Brad's saloon, at about two o'clock on the morning after Christmas, under the incredulous eyes of the astounded onlookers.

At once I proposed to cut again and stake my two horses against a hundred dollars' worth of chips, but Shattuck smiled a firmly polite refusal.

"Got to be getting back," he said, and added: "But I'll buy for the house before I go."

I moved over with the others, feeling somewhat dazed. As I explored my pockets on the theory that some coin or other might have escaped an earlier search, my fingers encountered the letter from Silver City I had not read as yet.

I drew it out slowly. It read:

Sorry, but funds are low, and I find I'll have to lay you off for an indefinite time. If any change in the present situation occurs, I will let you know.

(Signed) Austin Kemp, Supervisor.

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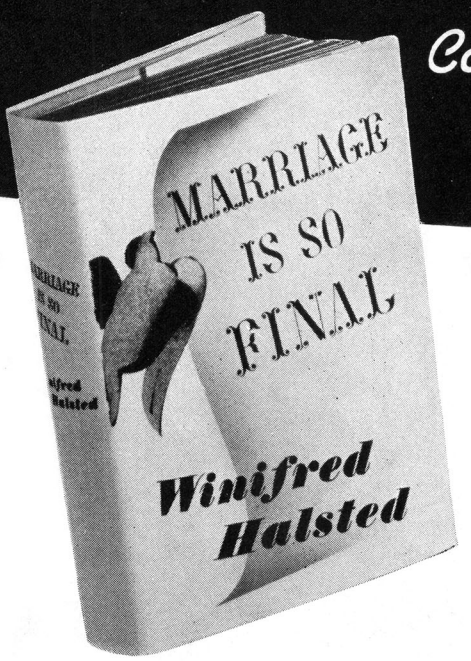

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