

MURDER IN THE SAHARA, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

SEPTEMBER

25 CENTS



Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOP'S

"A Wyoming Huckleberry Finn,"

by JAMES EDWIN BAUM • FULTON GRANT
ELLERY QUEEN • R. G. KIRK • H. BEDFORD-JONES



Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops to illustrate "The Truth About Gilead Skaggs," beginning on page 4.

WHY I DONE IT

IT was Sam's idea. He lit on it one day like a buzzard prouncing down out of a clear sky. Sam says:

"Gillie, some lively things have happened around this ranch lately, things that throw a bright light on the sheep and cattle war for one thing, and a glimmer or two on a couple of killings, for another. A heap of folks would like to know the inside of them things. The rest of us here at the U Cross has our hands full; no range-war ever was a picnic. And you yourself, while you meant well enough, got all snarled-up in your own rope and kept us worried and spooked-up for months. But through it all we managed to ram a certain amount of book-learning down your neck. So it seems to me that you ought to whirl in and write down everything that happened, and make a book of it."

Beavertooth Charley backed him up; and the whole outfit kept a-pecking away, and after a month or two I see there weren't no peaceable way out of it. So I quit fighting and come out of the brush with my hands up.

I thought it all over from the start; from the day Sam stepped in so decent and took charge of me when I weren't much more than a baby. I got everything sorted out in a kind

of order in my head; all Bignose George's troubles, Beavertooth Charley's grand and lovely and mighty durable gift for steady, gilt-edged lying. Foxy old Stan's doings and all about the old man and how I lost him and then found him again—and at the end lost him again, you might say. And I've told what happened that summer when me and Lester and Bird's Nest was on the dodge and lived in the mountains on game, like breechclout Injuns, which Lester and Bird's Nest was, of course.

THEN I lined up in my head all about Tom Hands, the hired killer, a low-down reptyle of a human, lower than a snake's belly in a forty-foot well; and what happened to poor old Snoozer Jim and his two awful smart dogs—and all the rest of it.

It was months before I got the cussed thing done, such as it is. And if any four-eyed book-folks sneak up and injun around and try to make out that this is a book and not just a plain record, and want to make some poor devil read it and study it, like I had to do with those books, then I only hope they won't pull off no such high-handed persticutions while I'm around.

Gilead Skaggs.



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BLUE BOOK



SEPTEMBER, 1939

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The Truth About

A very American and wholly fascinating novel. . . . The author himself comes of pioneer stock and has been a Wyoming ranchman—as well as a war-time pilot for the British in the North Sea patrol, and an explorer in Abyssinia.

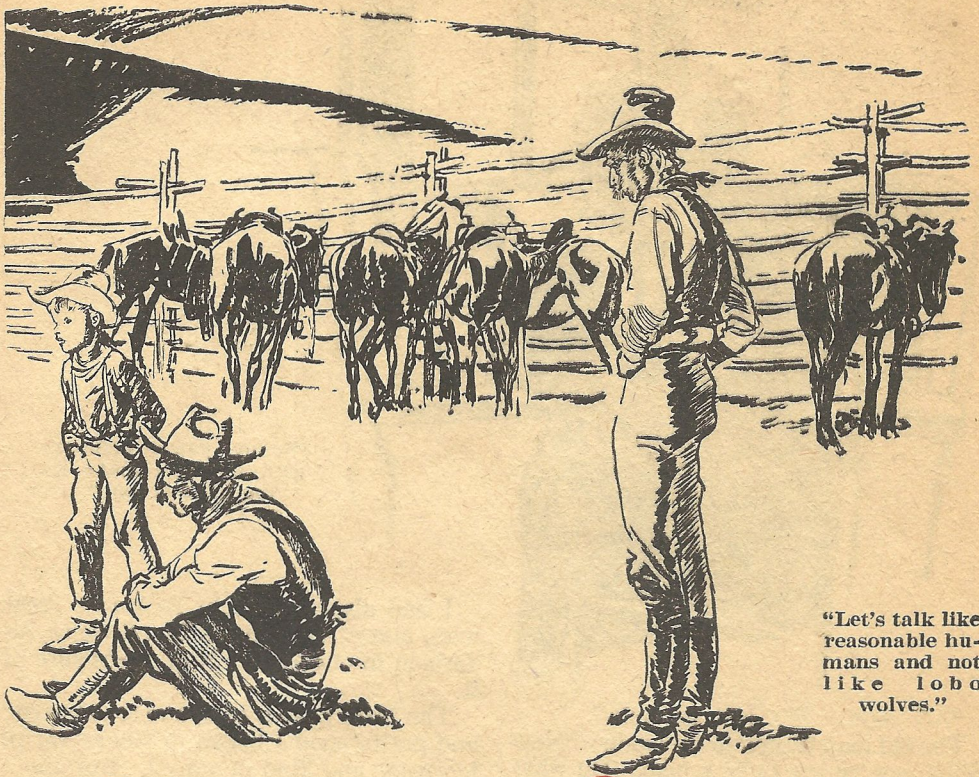
ME and the old man was riding on a train. It must of been almost three years ago. Anyway, I was so little I don't remember where we was going, or why. All I remember about that day was this: we set there together on a fuzzy red seat, Pa scrunched up with his hat pulled down low like he always wore it them days. We had been a-setting on that seat two days and two nights while the train went skallyhooting and whistling and taking-on mighty important.

"Must be coming to some town," Pa says. I looked out the winder but all I could see was flat plains covered with gray bushes—sagebrush bushes, the old man called them; and I wondered how

it would feel to be big and know everything. Pretty soon the brakes made the train shiver, and she come to a stop in front of a brick platform. A few men who needed a shave loafed around, chawing and spitting. A long-haired black-and-white dog, pretty moth-eaten, was tangled-up with himself having an awful time to reach a flea on his back. I couldn't tell whether he finally got it or not.

In about a minute two big, heavy, broad men with wide black hats came into our car, one at each end. They walked slow between the seats and stopped when they got near us. I see one take a little picture from his pocket, give it a quick look, stick it back in his coat,

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"Let's talk like reasonable humans and not like lobo wolves."

Gilead Skaggs

By JAMES EDWIN BAUM

Who wrote "Savage Abyssinia" and "The Lair of the Leopard."

nod his head to the other and jerk his thumb our way. The old man seen that sign too, and he turned liver-green for a second, or I thought he did, like he was sick. They came to our seat, and he looked up and grinned at the men, but it was a kind of painted, varnished grin, like he didn't mean it. And before they said anything, the old man spoke mighty fast:

"Well, well, if it aint my old pals, Mr. Law and Mr. Marshal!" And now he grinned on one side of his mouth, but the other side weren't grinning. "Glad to see you—uh—gentlemen. This here,"—pointing at me—"is my boy, Gilead. You're always glad to meet friends of your pa's, aint you, Gillie? One minute, gentle-

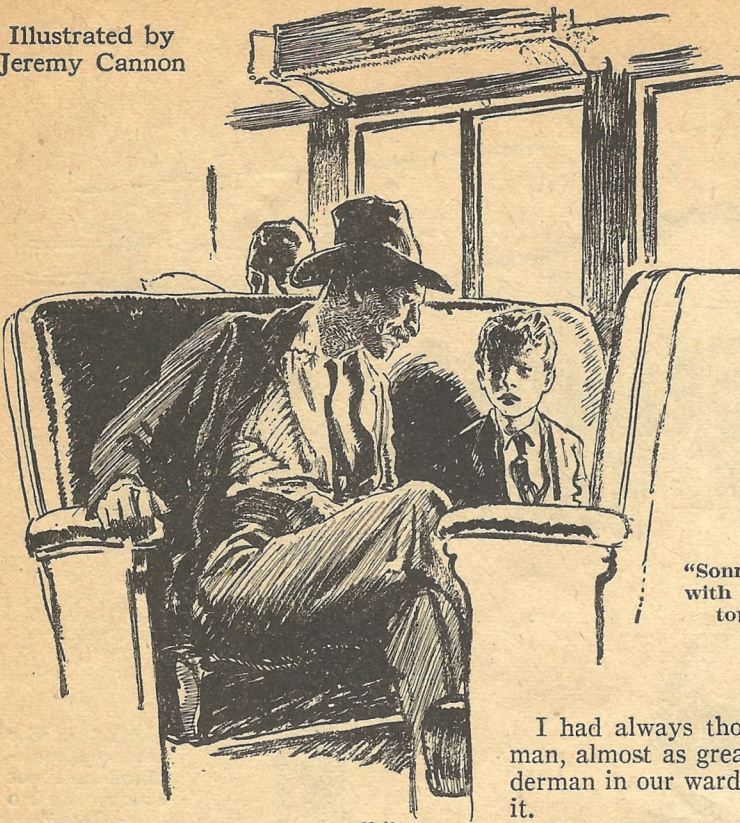
men." And he turned to me and tapped my knee with his finger after each word to make it more important. But I knowed anyway that things was awful important.

"Looky here, Gillie: I've got business with these old pals of mine. Business that won't keep, and I've got to leave you for a spell, see? Here's your ticket. I'll pin it in your pocket. . . . There. Now don't monkey with it. You might lose it. Give it to the conductor when he asks—"

One of the men says: "Never mind, Skaggs. We'll take the kid along to the—"

But the old man cut-in quick:

"No! Let him go to his Aunt Susy in Frisco." Then he got up and whispered low to the men. They looked at each other, and one gave a short nod:



"Sonny, you're coming with me. I'll make a top hand of you."

"All right. It's just as well."

The old man turned to me again: "Now Gillie, you've got to be a man. Do what I tell you and don't ask questions, see? Go as far as the train runs. That'll be Frisco. You'll see a big ocean there. You've always wanted to see an ocean. Ask somebody to show you where your Aunt Susy lives. Here, I'll write out the address and stick it in your pocket. . . . There. I'll be along after you when I finish my business with these old friends. Good-by, Gillie."

Then the old man straightened up and says to Mr. Law and Mr. Marshal:

"All ready now. Let's go."

"Remember, Gillie," he called over his shoulder when they started, "you've got to be a man now."

I came mighty near crying when I heard the door slam at the end of the car. But I remembered to be a man like he said. So I wiped my nose on my sleeve, but nobody seen me wipe my eyes at the same time. I done it too quick. Out the winder I see Pa and his two friends walk down the brick platform. The old man was in the middle, and one friend had his hand in Pa's right arm, and I wondered how long he had knowed 'em. "Gosh," I thought, "the old man knows everybody. Nobody else could find two old friends away out here on the sagebrush plains."

I had always thought he was a great man, almost as great as Mr. Sweeny, alderman in our ward. Now I was sure of it.

The train gave a toot, and we started; and pretty soon I began to feel powerful lonesome and kind of scared. But about that time a tall man in another wide black hat come over from his seat and set down with me.

"Well, sonny," he says, "I'll bet there aint one boy in ten, maybe in a hundred your age, could be trusted to travel alone. All the way to San Francisco too, I heard your paw say. You must be some proud to be trusted thataway."

"Aw, that aint nothing." But I wiped my nose again, and you bet I never let him see I was a-fighting back tears that very minute. He didn't say nothing more for a long time. He wore funny-looking boots with high heels. He talked awful slow and sort of drawly when he *did* talk, which weren't much. He didn't talk like the men who used to come up and set around all day with a bottle in the flat where me and the old man hung out. He didn't look like 'em, either. His eyes was too clear and his face weren't white like theirs. It was reddish-brown. And his head set straight on his neck, not droopy and bent forward like the heads of them others. He set there looking out the winder for a spell. In a minute he pointed to a horseback rider on a brown hill.

"Where do you reckon *he's* going?"



Old Stan says, slow and earnest: "Jim, every trail in this country is leading to a war."



"I was a-wondering how we'd manage to make out much longer without a boy just this size to ride all them little colts we've got. Gophers and prairie-dogs is thick around the ranch, too. *Somebody's* got to keep 'em thinned out. I reckon now a good, hard-shooting twenty-two rifle and a boy to use it is just what we need."

That sounded mighty fine! If I could help this man who had been good to me, I was ready to do it. I'd never shot a gun, and the old man never even let me see his pistol when he knowed it. I had saw the handle a few times in his pocket but he didn't know I'd saw it. Limpy George had showed me his plenty of times, but when I asked to shoot it, Limpy says: "You can't shoot a rod in a big city, you damned little fool." "Well then, if you can't shoot it," I asked him, "why do you and Weasel and the old man always carry 'em?" But Limpy picked up an empty

bottle. "Get the hell out o' here! I aint got time to answer fool questions! Beat it!" I knowed Limpy when he got mad, so I ducked. . . .

We drove all morning along a dim road. After a while I slept some, off and on; and once when I woke up, Sam was saying:

"Whoa, Baldy! Stand still, Buck, you buzzard-headed fuzz-tail, stand still!" The team stopped, and Sam reached under the seat and snaked out a rifle.

"Here, grab these reins!" And he handed 'em to the old white-haired codger whose name was Old Stan. I set up quick and looked around. I didn't see nothing but sagebrush.

"Only a coyote," Old Stan says. "Set still now, Gillie, and don't shake the buggy." I held my breath in then, you bet. But I couldn't see no coyote. Sam pointed the gun away off toward a hill.

"Over yonder—on that side-hill. See him?"



Sam weren't in no hurry. He rested one elbow on his knee, and his hand didn't show no trace of the shakes like the old man's and Limpy George's and Weasel's, specially in the morning before they got the first bottle open.

"Wham!" the gun said. The coyote give one jump, awful high in the air, like the ground had all of a sudden got red-hot and burnt his feet. When he come down he just flopped over and kicked a few times and laid still. I swarmed over the side of that buckboard like a flash, and fell down and skinned my knee when I lit. In no time I was over to that coyote. It seemed awful queer that anything could be as dead as he was, all limp and floppy. When you moved his legs, it felt like there weren't no bones in 'em. He was so heavy I couldn't hardly lift him. Sam came up while I was trying to carry him.

"How would you like the hide, Gillie, to

lay on the floor in your room at the ranch?" My room! Did he mean I could have a room by myself? Then it came over me all at once that the old man and Limpy George and Weasel wouldn't be sleeping and living in that room, snoring and chewing the rag, and maybe nobody would be drunk and I wouldn't have to be on the lookout for empty bottles. I was so glad I felt kind of soft like a baby, and before I had a chance to run my sleeve across my nose and eyes, Sam looked at me sudden.

"Well, I'm a Chinaman if you aint a-blubbering! It's only a measly coyote. I didn't know he was a friend of yours."

I was almighty ashamed and sorry he'd seen them tears before I had a chance to knock 'em off; so I lied:

"I hurt my knee."

He looked at it and rubbed it: "Oh, shucks! I'm plumb disappointed in you, Gillie. I didn't know you was such a

whine-baby over a skinned knee!" Then I was sorry I'd lied. It took another lie before I felt better.

"It aint my knee. That don't hurt worth nothing. I was thinking of the old man and Limpy George and Weasel, and wondering who they'll have to cuss-out and throw bottles at now I've gone. They'll miss me cruel." If you could of heard Sam roar then! I felt better right away. I weren't sorry I'd told that first lie now, because the second made it all right.

WE drove on again, and late that afternoon when the sun had swung clear around on the other side of us, we come over a hill and down into a long valley with green trees and bushes and a creek. A band of sheep was scattered around on the hills, and when we drove through 'em, they bleated like we was friends of theirs. A wagon with a canvas cover over it, and a rusty stove-pipe sticking up, a sheep-wagon, Old Stan said it was, stood off a ways on a hill without no horses hitched to it. A man and two dogs stood by the wagon, and pretty soon the man waved his hand, and away them dogs went, one around one side of the sheep and the other barking and jumping around on the other side. In no time they had the sheep bunched up close to the wagon. A man couldn't of done it in ten times as long as it took the dogs.

Old Stan drove the buckboard under some cottonwood trees by the creek, and him and Sam unhitched and hobbled the horses' front feet. Sam took two rolled-up camp beds from under the seat and a box of grub with pots and a frying-pan. The sheep-herder came over and et with us. Sam and Old Stan knowed him well. He brung along his two dogs. I never see such smart dogs. They were as smart as Mr. Sweeny, maybe smarter. Why! The sheep-herder, Snoozer Jim, says to the dogs:

"Shake hands with that boy over there!" And points at me. Nobody would believe it, but they come and set square in front of me and wanted to shake hands, which I done. Then he says to one:

"Go to the wagon, Dolly, and fetch me one of my boots!" It was a terrible long way to the sheep-wagon, but Dolly trotted off like this trick weren't nothing for her, and after awhile here she come with a old boot in her mouth and laid it at his feet right before us all!

Snoozer Jim was as kind as could be to

his dogs, and they seemed to think the sun rose right up out of Snoozer Jim's face every morning and set somewhere near the back of his neck every evening. They cuddled up close, one on his lap and the other against his side, while he set talking with us around the fire.

Snoozer Jim says to Sam:

"I hear there was a little trouble last week over on Fontenelle Creek between one of old Conrad Hack's sheep-herders and a cowpuncher riding for the K4 outfit. It seems the herder was a few miles north of the creek looking for strays—coyotes had scattered a band on him in the night—and when this cowpuncher seen him and his dogs north of the dead-line where they didn't rightly belong, he started trouble before asking questions. Well, this hot-headed puncher falls off'n his horse, yanks a rifle out of the scabbard and begins to build a fog around that herder. At the second shot he gets him in the arm, and the puncher rides over and finds out then that he didn't have no call to get huffy. Oh, sure, he's mighty sorry and ties up the busted arm. And he helps the sheep-herder hook up his team and get started for old man Hack's home ranch to get the arm fixed."

OLD Stan had been setting quiet. Now he says, slow and earnest:

"Jim, you're a good feller. I wish you'd take the advice of an old codger who's seen trouble aplenty in his time, and who sees big trouble coming now. Why don't you quit sheep-herding? Every trail in this country is right now leading straight to a sheep-and-cattle war. And when she comes—you hear me!—she'll be a plumb ruthless and blood-spattered fight! There is two sides to it, two ways of looking at it, and they never can be tied up and made to lay down together, like the lion and the lamb of Holy Writ. The cowmen come in here first. They took this country from the Injuns. They figger it's theirs, and they never will stand for no sheep-men nor nobody else a-crowding 'em out, law or no law. On the other hand, the sheep-men figger this is free range, Uncle Sam's domain, and they've as much right to it as ary cow-man. But cows won't live where sheep have grazed. When you let in sheep, you let out cattle. It's a fight for life, and let me tell you—when folks is out fighting for their lives, she's bound to be a jim-dandy of a fight!"

"All you say is true, Stan," Snoozer Jim says, slow and thoughtful, "and I reckon I'd like to keep out of it if I could. But

Beavertooth and
Bignose George



sheep is all I know. It may sound queer to you fellers, but I like sheep. And I like this lonesome life—herding sheep. A man gets used to it after a while, and he gets so he can't abide noise and crowds of people and all the things that go with town life. He gets so he don't ask nothing better than a pair of good dogs, enough grub, a wagon with a stove in it, and these barren, God-forsaken hills and plains a-stretching out forever in front of him; sunshine and wind and rain and snow—they all seem good in their turns. You cow-men with your sociable ranches, you can't understand that craving for lonesomeness. But it grows on a man. No, I reckon I'll keep on herding sheep and just do the best I can to keep clear of trouble when she comes."

"If all sheep-men was like you, Jim, there wouldn't be no danger of a sheep-and-cattle war. But some sheep-men in this country is always pushing out for more range. Them kind are the ones that'll bring trouble, and—you mark my words!—she aint far off, neither!" Old Stan was awful solemn when he said that.

They talked about it a lot more, but after a while Snoozer Jim and his two smart dogs went back to the sheep-wagon, and we slept on the ground with a million stars glaring at us from right over our heads.

ALL next day we drove over the sagebrush flats, and once we seen a bunch of animals way off over the plains a-humping themselves for all they was worth. Old Stan said they was antelope. That didn't mean nothing to me, so he says:

"Gillie, just for your own information, a antelope is a cross between a shadow and a ringtailed banshee, with a right smart sprinkling of race-horse blood throwed in. He's as hard to catch up with as day after

tomorrow, and as hard to hit with a rifle as that coyote howl you heard last night."

In the afternoon a long line of mountains come in sight ahead with white snow on the tops, and lower down dark patches which Sam said was pine timber. Just before dark we come over a hill; and there right smack below us in a wide valley was Sam's ranch.

There was a log house, one story high, with a green roof and white around the winders and doors, and a pole fence around it to keep out cattle. Green grass was growing inside that fence, and patches of flowers. And vines, green as anything, clumb up one side of the house and almost covered it. A wide stone chimley took up almost one end of it, and smoke was coming out the top, slow and lazy as ever you see. Big cottonwood trees throwed their branches high over the roof and shaded it. I never see a place like Sam's ranch for cool and shade and the homey feeling it give you.

The biggest and spottedest dog I ever see swarmed out a-barking and taking-on like he meant to chaw us all up. But when he come near the buggy, he knowed us and was mighty glad to see us. He jumped up and down in front of the horses' noses and ripped around.

"Go on away from there, General, you old whelp!" Sam hollered, cracking the whip. "If you don't quit both'ring them ponies, I'll come boiling out of this rig and knock a lung out o' you!" Sam didn't mean nothing by it, because he was grinning when he said it. "General" was a good name for that dog, he was so big and strong and blustery.

A woman with a blue-speckled apron over her dress come out of the house, and while Old Stan and Sam unhitched Buck and Baldy, and the General was sniffing me all over and thumping me a whack



Bignose George caught up his horse and left.

now and then with his big tail, she come up. The General quit me to jump around in front of her, but Sam shoved him away.

"Out o' my way, General! Let a man kiss his *own* wife for a change." And right there he give her a hug and a smack like he weren't one bit ashamed of it in front of me and Old Stan and the General. She was awful glad to see Sam, I could tell that by the way she kind of hung on to him.

She seen me over Sam's shoulder and let go of him quick and stood looking down at me. She didn't say nothing, not a word. Then she looked in Sam's face again and back at me, still not saying nothing. Sam acted kind of like he was ashamed. Then water come into her eyes all of a sudden, and I'm a Chinaman if she didn't grab Sam again and kiss him—awful gentle this time, and neither her nor Sam said a word. In about a jiffy she drops down on one knee and give me a hug, a long one and mighty tight. The General come and stood licking my face while she was holding me.

Sam leaned back on his heels, laughing.

"Emmy," he says, "between you and the General you've got that boy about drowned already. Be careful. He won't come up for air but once more." It was a funny feeling to be hugged by a woman.

They're softer and a heap sight comfortabler than men, even Sam. I wouldn't minded if she hadn't done it in front of Sam and Old Stan, and if the General weren't a-pushing and shoving and slapping that wet tongue back and forth over my face till I couldn't breathe. But she let go, and her hand came down with a crack on the General's head and made him quit.

"Emmy," Sam says, "this is Gilead Skaggs.

"Gilly, from now on, this is your Aunt Emmy."

CHAPTER II

AT Sam's ranch I started a kind of living that *was* living! There weren't no jawing and fighting, because nobody got drunk and I never had to dodge a bottle from one month to the next. And the months went by mighty fast. I never see a place where everything went on as smooth as it did at the U Cross, which was the name of our ranch, because we branded a U with two lines through it on our horses and cattle.

Aunt Emmy was powerful good to me. But the first time I let out a cussword around her,—not a very mangy one either, only a second-rater of a cussword, one that Limpy George and the old man wouldn't of sniffed at,—she put her hands on her hips and looked down at me sorrowful. Then she says:

"Well, I thought you was more of a man than that, Gilead Skaggs Bowman!" Bowman was Sam's and Aunt Emmy's last name, so now it was mine too. "I thought you was too grown-up to show off. Who ever heard of Kit Carson or old Jim Bridger cussing and raring around to make folks think they were bigger and braver than they was? They weren't afraid of nothing that walked, so they didn't have to cuss to impress themselves or anybody else. Now *I* know you're growing fast and not scared of hardly anything, so you don't have to cuss and show-off around *me*. It aint necessary."

That seemed like a crazy, scrambled way to look at it; but what she said kind of dazzled me, and I was ashamed for a minute, and was about to make up my mind to quit cussing forever. But I remembered just in time that Sam and Old Stan and the cowboys could out-cuss me and did plenty of times, when she weren't around. And they weren't afraid of nothing, or showing-off neither. So I says:

"Well, if I don't cuss no worse than Sam and Old Stan—and Beavertooth Charley and Bignose George and Lester Touch-the-Clouds—" Them was Sam's cowboys. Lester was a full-blood Injun from the Reservation, and a thundering good hand. "If I don't cuss no worse than them, that ought to be good enough."

"I don't expect you to be a sweet-smelling geranium, Gillie, but remember this: they aint men *because* they sometimes cuss. They are men in *spite* of it. Now you and the General get along and fetch me some stove-wood."

It weren't very long before the weather got cold and snow laid pretty deep in the timber along the creek. About that time Aunt Emmy begun a-harping on Christmas. Every few days she brung it up, until I says:

"They told us plenty of stuff about Christmas at that brick Home where I was hived away when the old man went off the first time. They give us a song-and-dance about what would happen when it come. But Christmas come at last, and nothing happened. So I don't lose no more sleep over Christmas."

Aunt Emmy was considerable roused up. She said she would take me in hand when she got time, and maybe after *this* Christmas I would be a lot wiser. Well, Christmas come, and the first thing I see when I got up was a twenty-two rifle and a bran new saddle! At Sam's ranch they give you presents on Christmas, and you can drowned me if these weren't both mine!

At first everybody could shoot my rifle better than me. But I practiced and practiced, and Sam learned me till I got a whole lot better. Sam was the awfulest best shot of all. The way he could knock over gophers was beautiful, that's what it was—beautiful! One evening when the snow was gone and spring was back again and the gophers and prairie-dogs come out, we was all setting in front of the bunkhouse waiting for supper and taking a crack now and then at a gopher for luck, and Sam curled up eleven without a miss, a long way off, too. Lester, who hardly ever let on what he thought, grunted:

"Heap strong bang-stick medicine! Sam's is the strongest medicine ever I see!" Lester could talk as good as anybody when he wanted to, better than most. Old Stan told me one time that Lester had went to school, first over on the Reservation and then to a Injun college somewhere in the East.

"Don't make no mistake, Gillie, Lester is book-learnt till hell wouldn't have it," he says. "Besides bein' one of the saltiest cowhands who ever forked a cayuse, that Injun knows reading and writing and can cipher to beat four-of-a-kind if he wants to. But of course he wouldn't admit it; he's too proud. He knows the Injun sign-language, too, and not one buck in a hundred knows it these days. Don't make no mistake, Gillie, he's plumb gifted, that Injun is, plumb gifted!"

Me and Lester was mighty good friends by this time and I got him to learn me the Injun sign language. We kept a-working on it until I knowed it, nothing like as good as him but plenty good enough. We could tell each other anything and never need to *speak* one word; as far away as we could see plain, too. Nobody except Old Stan, who was ever so foxy and knowed everything that went on around the ranch, had any idea that we was talking. And Old Stan didn't say nothing about it to nobody.

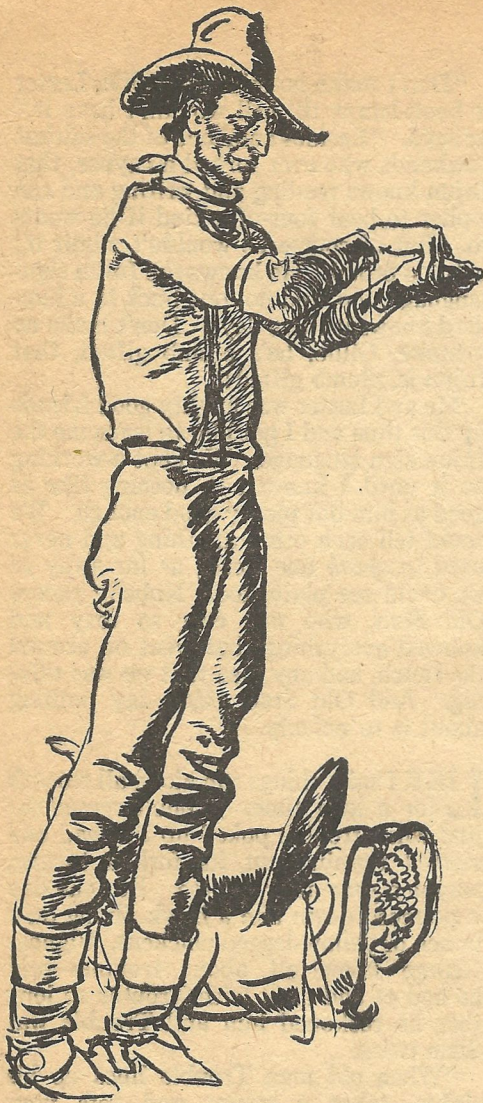
LIKE I said, things run along all smooth for a long time. I don't remember just when trouble poked up its head and started running out its forked tongue, maybe a year after I come. But one day it pounced down like a hawk diving on a bunch of yellow-legged chickens. Bignose George knew all about trouble—said he had et and slept with Trouble so long that he reckoned him and Trouble was Siam twins.

"When old man Trouble lines up his sights, takes a squint and gets your range," George said, "he's like a blood-hungry outlaw bushwhacking around in the sagebrush a-smoking you up for luck whenever he feels like it; the only difference is, you can't *see* nothing, you can't *hear* nothing, you can't *smell* nothing and so you aint got *no* chance to shoot back."

Well, one afternoon six men, neighbors who had ranches in the valley, come riding in and tied their horses to the corral poles. Only Sam and Old Stan was to home; Lester and the others was on the range somewheres working the cattle. Well, they tied up, and Sam and Old Stan walked out and stood talking to 'em. Me and the General was hanging around not very busy so I heard everything they said.

Nick Marr, foreman of the Spur outfit, says:

"Sam, we come over to have a talk with you about the rustling, that's getting so bad it aint no joke. The Cattle Association over on the river is plenty worked



up about it, and I reckon you people over on this side is too. The Spur outfit alone was short almost a hundred head of steers in the gather last fall. Them cattle was on the range in May, in the spring round-up; we tallied everything mighty close. Now everybody knows that when you run cattle close to an Injun reservation you've got to expect *some* beef-killing. A critter beefed now and then is all right; a joke's a joke. But when you're shy a hundred head since the spring round-up, it's mighty hard to laugh. There aint much doubt in our minds that the Injuns know a heap more about this beef-butcherin' than is good for them—"

Another man butted in pretty hot: "We've decided that your Injun, Lester Touch-the-Clouds, is a-working with these beef-eaters. He's got forty-some-odd relations on the Reservation, uncles and cousins and nephys and such, without counting squaws, papooses and dogs. It's

a ten-to-one shot that the Injuns is butcherin' our beef, and it's another ten-to-one gamble that any Injun riding this range is helping his friends do it. Blood is thicker than water. The Cattle Association has decided that we won't stand for no more Injun cowpunchers. And you've got to get rid of *your* Injun, like anybody else who's got one riding this range!"

I could see that Nick Marr was sorry the hot man had jumped in so rough, but I reckon he couldn't do nothing about it. Sam stood awful quiet for maybe a minute. Then he says, easy and slow, like he was counting every word:

"So you've decided—after looking into every angle of this beef-stealing, no doubt—that my Lester is implicated because he's got relatives? Maybe you think I'm in it too? I've got a few relatives."

"No!" the hot man says in a hurry. "We never thought that!"

Sam smiled. "Well, it takes a load off my mind to hear that *I* aint been eating your celebrated high-toned beef!" And he went on, still talking low, but stern as anything:

"So now you jugheaded members of a one-horse cow-congress have decided, because you've lost some cattle, that you've got a inalienable right to prance over here and tell me who I can hire and who I can't hire to punch my cows; to tell me just how I can run my ranch? Now I'll tell *you* something: This is *my* outfit. She was homesteaded by me! I built her up from nothing but sand and sagebrush, and I run her my way. I always *have* run her my way, understand? I always will run her my way, understand *that* too. Just one more thing: The next time a band of mental giants from any half-baked, hop-toad cow-association think they can tell me how to run my ranch—they'd better come a-shooting!"

The way he said it almost singed the shirts right off them men, I can tell you! But I was scared. I was afraid something would bust loose any minute, I didn't know what. Nobody said anything or even moved for a spell. Then Nick Marr laughed right out, loud and hearty as anything, and slapped his chaps and clapped Sam on the shoulder with his open hand. I never was so surprised.

"We asked for it, we got it, and we deserved it, every word!" Nick Marr says. "We had no business to come here and jump sideways at you all frothy and hot like we done. We've got no call to tell you how to run your ranch, and *most* of us know it." And he looked straight at

the man who had talked so rough. "There won't be no next time, neither. Now let's get in the shade somewhere and talk like reasonable humans, not like a pack of lobo wolves." I could see that Sam felt better right away. So they went and set down under the cottonwood trees, and I started to follow, but Sam told me to go to the house.

The neighbors rode away pretty soon, and Sam come in, but he didn't say nothing about their talk, so I slid out and found Old Stan alone by the bunkhouse. I was afraid they might of got Sam to

She had told me not to tell Lester. So I thought I'd better do it in sign language.



say he'd send Lester back to the Reservation, or something. I asked Old Stan if Lester would be fired.

"You was loafing around," Old Stan says, "when Sam give 'em his answer. That ought to answer your question. But just so you won't lose no sleep over it I'll say that Lester stays right here. Sam aint the kind to turn belly-up to a bunch of buzzard-headed, ignoramus oafs who can't tell a straight-shooter from a jack-leg just because he wears a saddle-colored hide." Old Stan was good and mad about it, so mad he got up and limped around and says:

"The only one in that batch of sheep-wits who's got brains enough to grease the point of a gimlet, is Nick Marr. I'm surprised at him, but I reckon he let the rest push him further than he meant to go. When Sam got through with 'em, Nick was ashamed of himself and said so like a man. The rest of that bunch is plain chuckleheads, always was and always will be. Gillie, when you're a-packing a load of years and experience as heavy as mine, you'll know that only one man out of a hundred *is* a man; the rest is sheep."

Finally Old Stan quit hobbling around and hunkered down to build himself a cigarette. He was some calmer now and he says:

"Why, Gillie, if you took a dull ax and chopped yourself a chunk of meat from ary one in that crowd, except Nick, and you fried it, or you roasted it, or you bar-bekued it—no matter how you fixed it up

with onions and truck, you couldn't kill that sheep taste. And if you set down and et it, you wouldn't run the *slightest* risk of caniblsim, because that meat would be only a poor grade of mutton."

CHAPTER III

I WAS so thumping glad that Sam wouldn't let that hop-toad cow association run Lester out of the country that I was waiting at the barn when Lester and the others jogged in. Aunt Emmy had told me before they come back not to say nothing to Lester; that it might cause trouble if I did. But shucks! What does a woman know about men's business? But she had told me, and pretty solemn too, not to tell Lester. So I thought I better do it in Injun sign language.

So while Beavertooth and George was

busy unsaddling, I told Lester in "sign" everything that had went on. First I made the sign for "danger." Then I showed him that a band of hostyles, white men, had been here, and held a big medicine-talk about the killing of cattle, or spotted-buffalo, as you say it in sign. Well, then I showed him that the hostyles had set down a long time talking mighty big medicine, and they blamed *him* for the beef-killing. And I made my hands tell him that they had awful bad hearts and was powerful lowdown and dangerous. By the time Beavertooth and George had unsaddled and turned their horses in the pasture, Lester knowed everything almost as well as if I had blabbed it out loud in front of everybody, like a baby that couldn't keep still about nothing.

At supper that night and afterwards Lester never opened his mouth once except to say yes or no when somebody asked him a question. He always kept his mouth shut more than anyone ever I see, but that night he kept her clamped down tight as a wolf-trap.

THAT night in bed the more I thought, the worse Lester's troubles got. I couldn't help feeling that something was bound to happen. And when it *did* happen, I was about sure Lester would get the short end. No matter what Sam and the rest of us did to help—a Injun wouldn't stand much chance agin such a big batch of white men. I made up my mind that I'd be on hand ready to help Lester. And I was pretty sure I could help more than anybody might think, because I was a heap bigger now than when I come to the ranch, and knowed a powerful lot more. I had growed in a good many ways. For one, I was a long way beyond asking crazy-fool questions like I done at first. Why, just to show you! The second day after I come to the ranch, I was drinking some milk in the kitchen and Aunt Emmy was telling me that milk and cream come from cows, that bottles didn't have nothing to do with it. She pointed through the winder to old Sukey and Splayfoot and says:

"Them are the milk cows, Gillie, over by that big tree." And I says, like the awfulest chicken-brain: "Well, if them two are the *milk* cows, then where is the *cream* cows?" I wouldn't say a thing like that *now*, no more than Sam would.

And you bet I'd know, too, by this time, that Beavertooth was lying like Methusalem himself if he tried to tell me again about animals he called side-hill moodies,

whose legs on the left side was shortest from running around a steep hill left-handed all their lives, while other animals he called albitwiches had the legs on their right side shortest from tearing around the same hill right-handed. Beavertooth said that time:

"And Gillie, when a left-handed side-hill moodie and a albitwiche headed the other way come together head-on, on that steep hillside—why, you never see nothing like it! They're generally always awful mad anyway, like a bear with a sore ear. And when they collide, they're going so fast it makes 'em a lot madder. Each one knows he's got a reputation to keep up. So they tie into each other tooth and claws, and nobody that ever lived could stop 'em. And nobody with any sense would go closer than five miles and a half. They're exactly even matched, weight for weight, claw for claw, and tooth for tooth. It aint nothing unusual for a side-hill moodie and a albitwiche to fight plumb through the summer, day and night, Sundays and holidays and no time off till snow comes.

"That cools 'em some. But they don't give up then. Not a bit! They stay right there in their tracks a-waiting for spring and getting madder and madder. When the snow melts, they come tearing into a clinch again, squalling and bawling like forty grizzlies and start in fighting where they left off last fall. Fights between albitwiches and side-hill moodies have been known to last twenty-five years—no, twenty-four years, to be exact. And when they finally get wore plumb out, what do you think happens to 'em? Well, there don't nothing *happen* to 'em, except—all of a sudden and without no sign of warning, and just as they go into a clinch for the eleventh-millionth time, there comes the most gawd-awful explosion, a gob of smoke shoots up two miles high, and a flash of flame almost blinds you. And lo, that albitwiche and that side-hill moodie aint there no more! And they aint *gone* no place, neither. *They just aint there no more!* That smoke and flash is what starts most of the forest fires around this country."

I'D of knowed now that Beavertooth was a center-fire liar if he tried to feed me up on such truck again. Another thing I figgered out: you remember when I first met Sam? And how two men come into the railroad car, and Pa got off the train with them? Well, I got to studying *that*. And now I seen through it, and figgered

out the whole thing! And when I had thought about it awhile, I couldn't hardly believe that anybody, even a baby, could *help* but know them two men was town-marshals or detectives. Then I knowed what the old man and Weasel and Limpy George was up to with them pistols they always had hid in their pockets—a-murdering people, most likely. It made me shiver.

I was awful glad I had found Sam and was Sam's now. And I hoped I'd never see the old man again. I was pretty sure I wouldn't, either. But I didn't know half as much as I thought I did. I seen the old man again, all right!

YOU won't see for a while what Beavertooth's horse, Custer, has got to do with me not being able to get loose from the old man. But you'll see later.

Well, Beavertooth's horse Custer *could* run like a scairt wolf. But Old Stan says one day:

"Beaver, how much did that Custer hoss cost you?"

"A hundred dollars as a two-year-old."

"I reckon you think you got a mighty cheap race-pony, considering his speed?"

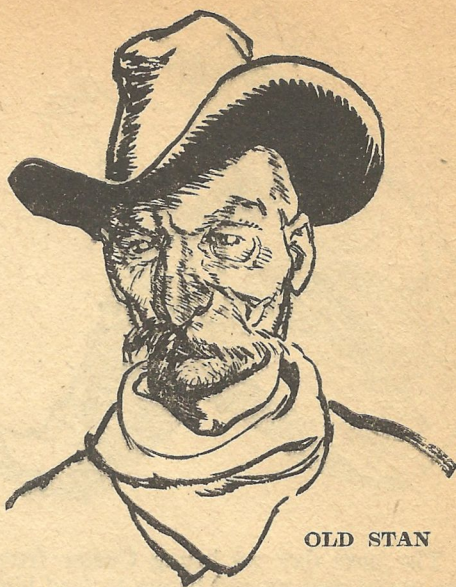
"Well! I should surely say I did! He never was beat yet. Picking up Custer for a hundred dollars was like finding a stray gold mine in the middle of the road."

"Maybe so," says Old Stan; "but when you're a-crowding seventy winters like I be, you'll begin to wonder if them fast-moving hosses aint the most exorbitant quadru-peds a man can own at any price. There aint nothing ever invented can circulate your money faster. They're plumb luxurious even if you get 'em for nothing from somebody's pasture on a moonlight night."

Well, they kept on jawing about race-horses and horse-races until they got the idea of pulling off a race. George asked Sam to let him off a few days to ride over to town and prospect around and see what he could fix up. Sam said maybe it was a good, sound, conservative scheme; he said he'd always heard that folks with loose money ought to make investments and keep that money working. There was a lot of talk about the town folks not having nerve enough to bet and Beavertooth says:

"We beat their best horse last year, so maybe now they've reformed and think it's bad for their morals to risk money on a horse-race."

But they decided it was worth while trying, so Bignose George caught up his



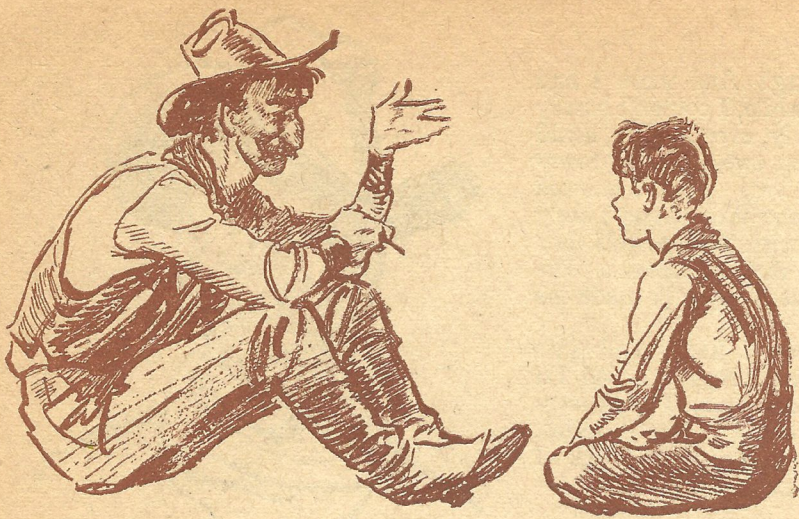
OLD STAN

horse and left in the morning. In a few days he come a-loping back. He let out a whoop when he topped the hill behind the corral, and we swarmed out to meet him and hear the news. George had managed to get a bunch in town sucked in on a race. We was a heap relieved at that, and everybody but Old Stan slapped George on the back or threwed him a few compliments for being so downright crafty. George said the town folks had agreed to bring their horse to the ranch in two weeks for the race. The town was by the railroad where it run through a steep valley, and there weren't no flat enough place in that neighborhood for a race-track like we could lay out on our ranch.

Beavertooth says: "That's all fine and dandy, George, but the main thing is—have them town wallopers got sand enough to wager a small stypend agin Custer?"

"They raised a thousand dollars after whispering a long time in the back room of the Bucket saloon. I told 'em mighty prompt we'd cover it. But before they go to any expenses and bring their horse over, they want the money slapped down on the counter at the bank all ready for the winner. It seems their horse aint a common cayuse. They've got to fetch him from a long way off. They was awful secret and owlsh about that horse."

They all throwed in money to make up that thousand dollars. It was scattered over the bunkhouse table, all kinds of it: silver-cash money and green-paper money, what George called bat-hides and frog-skins. I never seen so much money—nor nobody else did either, I reckon.



The next day we brung Custer from the upper pasture and begun to feed him grain and exercise him and curry him and swab him off with sponges, and rub him down and work on him like they work on kings in some other countries. Beaver-tooth run him two miles every day, and everybody was mighty well pleased the way Custer run. George says:

"That pony don't run—he flies! Yes-sir! He can sure catch birds!" And that was what everybody thought.

Things was a-booming around the ranch, I can tell you; and there was plenty of talk about what we'd do with the money; there weren't no doubt that we'd win it. Even Aunt Emmy come out and give George fifty dollars to bet for her the day he left for town to shove the thousand dollars in the bank, and to bring back the town folks and their horse.

Well, we went on training Custer and swabbing him off and waiting for George to come back with the other crowd. And sure enough, in a few days here they come, a big gang riding slow and easy so as not to excite their race-horse. They had tents and camp outfits, because the house couldn't hold but a few. The first thing we all done was to have a look at the strange horse. I hadn't never knowed a horse *could* be so smooth and slick and slim and graceful and dainty! His eyes was big and wide apart, and his nose was the smallest horse's nose that ever was. And when he moved, his hoofs just barely touched the ground, like he was tromping on eggs and didn't aim to bust a one.

They brung Custer out and stood him alongside the other horse, whose name was Steeldust. They was about the same size, but I want to tell you—size was the only way they *was* alike! Why, Custer looked like a shaggy, bucket-headed scrub



"Gillie, if you chopped yourself a chunk of meat from one o' that crowd, and fried it, and et it, you wouldn't run the slightest risk of caniblistm."

beside that Steeldust! I knowed we was sure to be beat! And you can bet Sam and Lester and Old Stan, even George and Beavertooth, knowed it too.

In about a half hour, while the visitors was still putting up tents near the house and turning their saddle-horses in the pasture and talking and laughing and cracking jokes and calling out to each other, I see Lester and Old Stan moving off slow toward the brush along the creek. Pretty soon George and Beaver-tooth follered, kind of careless, and in a minute I went down there too. They were setting under a tree, just them four, and they didn't see me when I first come. Old Stan was saying:

"Lester is dead right, boys. It's our only chance to win. But we've got to keep it from Sam. He might not stand for it."

Then Lester seen me and says mighty quick: "Yes, Stan, you're right. If it rains, some of them tents won't shed water—why, there's Gillie! Where did you come from, Gillie?" They all looked at me and stopped talking. They started again right away, but all they said now was just common gab about the weather and the sheep-men a-coming in and hogging the range, and how something had got to be done about it soon—just everyday talk. I knowed they had something up their sleeves from the way they acted, and I stayed a long time but didn't learn nothing.

The race weren't to come off for a few days yet, and the next morning when I got up, the General weren't waiting for

me as usual. I was looking all over for him, and Old Stan says:

"I believe I see the General a-follering Lester when he drove off at daylight in the wagon. Lester had to make a quick trip to the Reservation. He'll be back tomorrow or next day. Lester's uncle or cousin, or somebody, is sick, down with his head under him. I reckon Lester'll look after the General, all right."

"Why did he take the wagon? Why didn't he ride like he always does?"

"I heerd him tell Sam he'd stop on the way back and cut a load of firewood. You can't carry no wood on a saddle-hoss. The campfires of these here race-hoss folks eats wood awful fast."

Well, I never thought nothing more about it. Nobody would.

THEY saddled Steeldust about noon for a tryout, and after I seen that horse run, I knowed for sure, dead sure, we was beat. Watching that horse run was like setting down and listening to the awfulest, prettiest music in the world. He just *sifted* along, so easy and smooth and graceful, but so almighty fast it made your head swim.

Late in the afternoon I heard Old Stan and Beavertooth talking to the head man of the town folks. Old Stan says:

"Yes, I reckon we better turn Custer out in the pasture until the race. He's used to it there, and aint been in a barn enough to feel at home. And with Steeldust looking so good, Custer needs all the rest he can get—and maybe some more."

"*Steeldust* was barn-raised," the other man says. "He's full of hot blood, Steeldust is, and I wouldn't risk him in no wire pasture. He feels right to home in a stall."

It was three days before the race when they turned Custer into the pasture.

The next morning Lester was back again, but the General didn't come with him. Lester must of drove in late from the Reservation, after everybody had went to bed. I asked Lester where the General was at.

"Oh, yes," he says, laying a hand on my shoulder mighty friendly, "I wanted to tell you about that, Gillie. You see, the General follered me to the Reservation. And when I left my uncle's tepee yesterday afternoon late, to come back here, the General weren't around handy. I was in a hurry, so I told my cousin, Bird's Nest, to rummage around and find him and tie him up in the tepee, and I'd be back after him when the race is over. You don't need

to bother about the General. Bird's Nest is a way-up good Injun and likes dogs, and he likes the General, special."

Well, I never thought no more about *that*, neither.

The strangest thing begun to happen that morning. Nobody couldn't figger it out. Steeldust had been taking it so easy and calm in his stall before, and now he was pacing up and down, restless as anything. The men who owned him stood talking about it. One says:

"He must be off his feed today. He's nervous and jumpy and don't look like he rested much last night."

A gust of wind came blowing in the barn door just then, and Steeldust rared up and snorted, and his big eyes kind of bugged-out like he seen or smelled a ghost. The men looked at each other surprised as could be. They said that Steeldust was always so quiet and gentle anybody could crawl all over him; I seen a man do it only the day before, to show how quiet he was. But now you couldn't of got me in that stall with him for *no* money! The town men said they never see him take on so.

"He acts like a band of spooks was after him," says one.

"Hosses is mighty mysterious," Old Stan says. "And while I never did believe what some claims, that a hoss sees things no human *could* see, or would want to see, still, there aint no question: a hoss *knows* things that aint in the book for humans."

ALL that day Steeldust wouldn't eat a bite—just paced back and forth, back and forth, in his stall. He was sweating to beat four-of-a-kind too, and snorting like a buck antelope. Nobody never saw a horse so plumb restless and shaky and trembly.

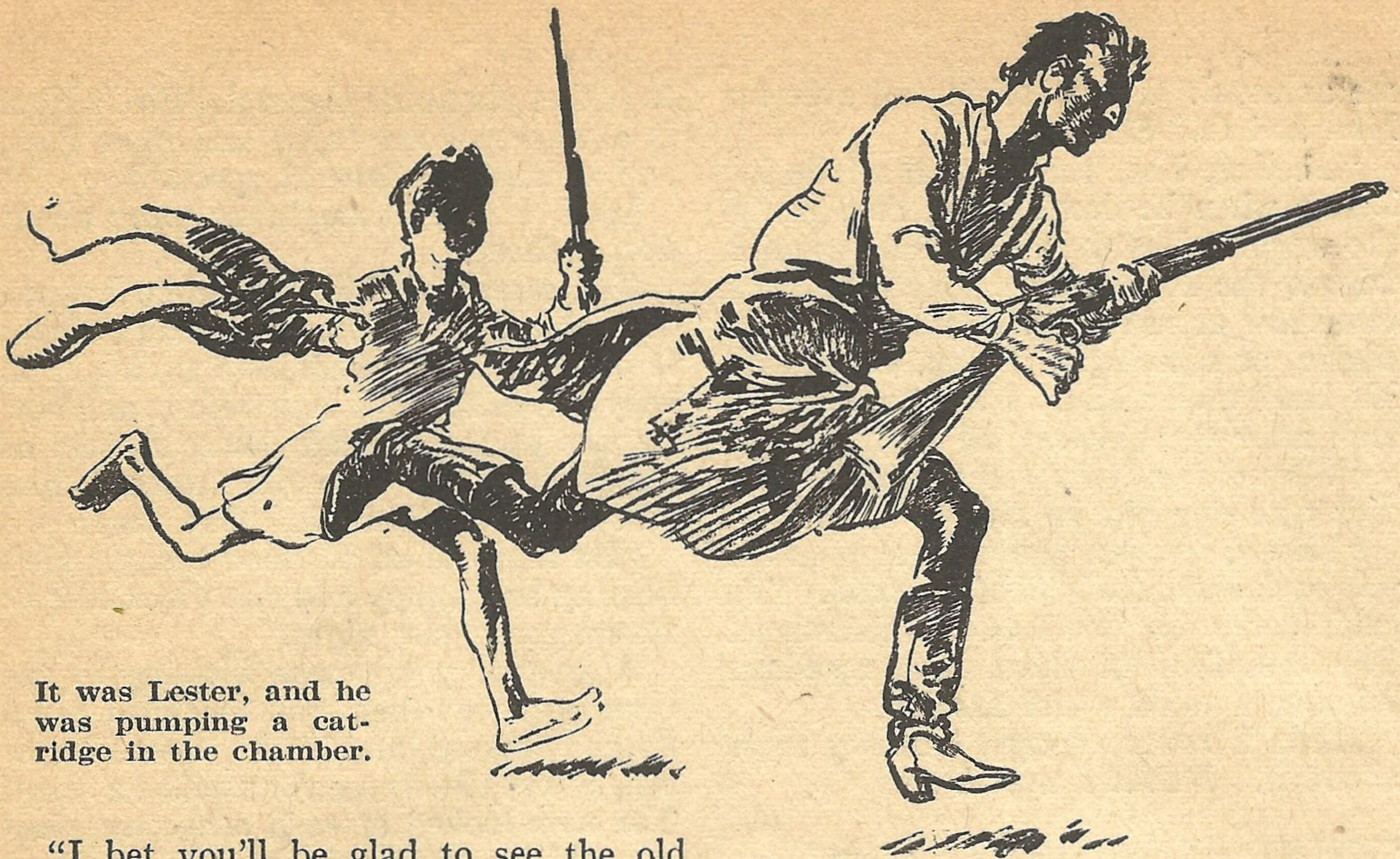
I says to Lester: "It's a lucky thing we took Custer out of that barn! I bet it's haunted. Why don't they turn Steeldust in the pasture too?"

"He was barn-raised. If he won't quiet down in a barn, he won't do it nowhere; and in the crazy state he's in, that horse would tear around and get snarled in the wire."

"Well, I bet it's spooks he sees, and we can't see 'em. Old Stan says that horses—"

"No," says Lester, mighty sure, "it aint spooks. Forget spooks."

"You seem to be awful *sure* it aint spooks! If it aint spooks, what is it, then?"



It was Lester, and he was pumping a cartridge in the chamber.

"I bet you'll be glad to see the old General come a-romping in when I fetch him after the race." And so we talked about the General, and then Lester had work to do and I went to the house.

Aunt Emmy had perked up again wonderful after I see her talking to Lester early that morning. She was singing now like a whole treeful of meadow larks, and rummaging around dusting things off and making the beds. When she seen me, she let out a chirp and grabbed me and give me a hug before I could get away.

"Gillie, you rascal, you," she says, "it would of been a mighty awful thing to let this crowd of town yahoos come a-sauntering over to the ranch with a blooded race-horse, a plumb ringer, and run us right off our home grounds! We'd never of lived it down, *never!*"

"Well, aint we beat?" I says. "I heard Sam say we aint got no more chance than a snowball."

"Huh! If you knowed everything Sam Bowman don't know, Gillie, you'd be the world's wisest boy. Pay no attention to what Sam says about this race. Lester and Old Stan is running this show, and don't never let nobody tell you different!"

There was something going on that I couldn't find out. No matter how I tried, I couldn't get nothing out of nobody. It weren't no use talking to Lester. And when I asked Aunt Emmy, she kept talking and gassing about everything else but the horse-race. Old Stan weren't no better. So I tried Beavertooth. I says:

"Custer's a-going to win that race, aint he, Beavertooth?"

"Just as easy as stealing a bucket of milk from old Sukey." And he grinned like he had that race-money already.

"Well, it don't take no expensive horse-doctor to see that Steeldust can run fancy rings around Custer," I says. "Sam knows it! Old Stan knows it, or *did* know it! Everybody knows it! *You* know it, too. Now, Beavertooth, tell me *how* Custer is a-going to do it!"

"Gillie," he says, awful nice and friendly, "I'm mighty glad you brung up that subjec'. I've been hunting for you high and low to tell you just that one thing. Set yourself down here on this wagon-tongue, and don't you tell nobody I told you!"

I said I wouldn't, you bet, even if they drowned me.

"Well then, Gillie, you remember that time when your throat was sore and they greased up your neck with goose-grease?"

"Sure," I says, "it was slimy as anything."

"Well, you see, I remembered how slick and slimy and smooth that goose-grease was. And I went to figgering and ciphering all by myself without no help from nobody, and I thought if we could grease up old Custer, inside and out, his jints would run smoother and he'd slip along through the wind a whole lot easier. So we whirled in and got to work and oiled him up. Then we turned him into the pasture so he couldn't rub it off like he could in a stall. George was over there yesterday to see how Custer was making it. George says nobody who aint saw a greased horse run wouldn't believe the way old Custer goes a-slipping and a-slithering through the breeze. You see, Gillie, the air can't get no holt on him. The grease keeps it from gripping and

holding him back. It's the same with lightning. You've heard of greased lightning, o' course? They always use goose-grease on forked lightning when they want speed. Well, George says Custer was exercising around yesterday cutting a few blue streaks through the wind, and a buck antelope stood there awhile watching him. That particular antelope was awful fast, George says, with no end of a reputation to keep up. Naturally, this antelope thinks that Custer, or any horse, is easy. But he never knowed about that grease. So when Custer is galloping along at about half speed, this buck runs up alongside and allows he'll cut a few rings and figger-eights around Custer and show him up. Well sir! What do you think happened? Now just listen to this:

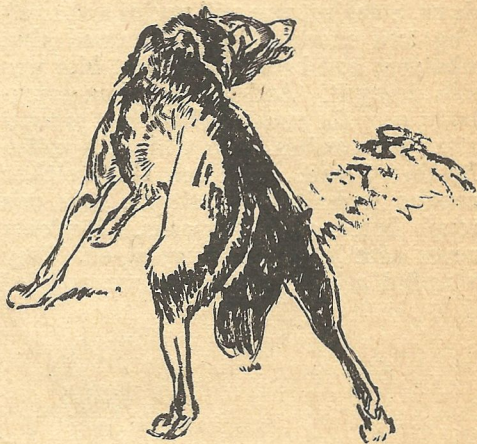
"George says, and you can rely on George for the truth, every time: That antelope was left plumb out o' sight, run clean off his feet! And finally Custer come back and cut a few fancy figger-eights around *him* for luck. Well, Gillie, to make a long story short, the shame and the dis-grace busted that antelope's proud heart wide open. He flopped down and turned belly-up, as dead as Julius Cæsar! George brung back the dead buck tied behind his saddle last night. You seen him when he rode in. Everybody seen him. Goose-grease done it, Gillie. And tomorrow when Custer comes a-romping in, winner in the race, you won't have nothing nor nobody to thank for it but good old-fashioned goose-grease."

I had thought and hoped in the last week or two that Beavertooth had quit lying. Now I knowed he was worse than ever; the antelope tied behind George's saddle had been shot! I seen the bullet-hole myself! I quit asking questions of Beavertooth after he tried to soap me up with such ornery sheep-dip as that. If they was up to something about this race, I decided it didn't amount to shucks, no way.

YOU must be wondering how a horse-race learned me once and for all that I couldn't never get loose from the old man but had to be tied to him, in a kind of way, forever. Well, it did, and we'll come to it pretty soon.

The day before the race, all day long, Steeldust never once quit pacing his stall, and sweating and letting out snorts. He wouldn't eat, neither, and when they brung him a bucket of water, whatever

was a-dogging him wouldn't let him touch it. Once he tried to drink. He shoved his nose out toward the water, like a thirsty horse does, and was all fixed for a good long pull, when a little breeze come sifting in through the barn door as soft and gentle as anything. Steeldust



took one sniff of that breeze. He threwed up his head; his eyes bugged out, and he rared-up on his hind-legs and let out a snort as long as a well-rope; then he took to pacing and sweating and forgot all about the water. Nobody couldn't understand it, to save their lives!

One old codger who had been listening to Old Stan a lot had left the day before on a fast horse for town, and now he come charging back to the ranch. His horse was lathered up like it had been rolling in soapsuds. He pulled up in front of Old Stan and took a package from a saddle pocket and give it to Stan and says:

"Here's them yaller sulphur candles you told me to fetch. If sperits can be stampeded from a haunted house with sulphur smoke, as you say you've saw done a-many a time, then it stands to reason they can be shook loose from a *barn* the same way."

I had been pretty sure all along that spooks was at the bottom of that horse's troubles, in spite of what Lester said! And while I never had what you might call a neighborly feeling for hants and wraiths no way, still, I hoped *these* spooks would keep right on pecking away at Steeldust and not give him any rest till after the race. If they did, Custer could win. So when I see how downright brainy and official Old Stan and the town men was going at it to drive 'em off, I was worried.

Old Stan was busier than anybody. He

whirled in and helped light the candles and never let up for a minute telling all he knowed about ghosts—all he knowed firsthand, then all he had heard about 'em, and then what he thought.

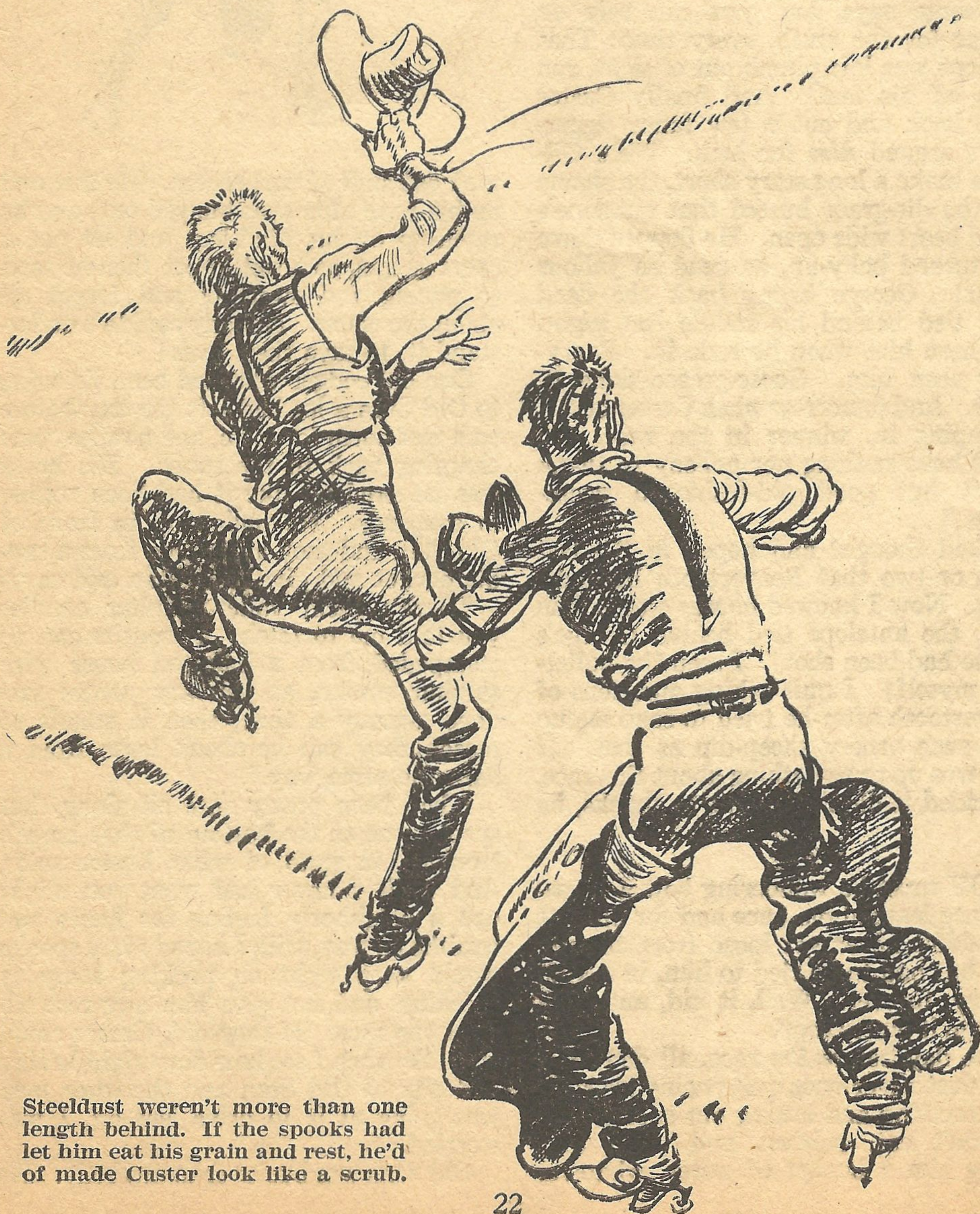
Well, they lit the candles and stuck 'em on the floor just inside the barn door. But when they had burnt about halfway down, Steeldust was still pacing and sweating and snorting—which showed that whatever had been gnawing at him was still doing it. And by this time everybody, even the man who had went to town after the candles, who Old Stan called Brother Snead, could see that sulphur candles weren't worth shucks agin this tough breed of barn-spooks. Steeldust never once let up his carrying-on. They wrapped a blanket around him and led

him outside and took down the corral bars and tried him in there. But whatever had been hoodooing him in the barn follered him out. In the corral he was wilder than forty hawks, and they was afraid he would hurt himself on the poles. So they snaked him out o' there in a hurry and slapped him back into another stall. Nothing didn't do no good. The whole business was almighty thumping queer. One man says:

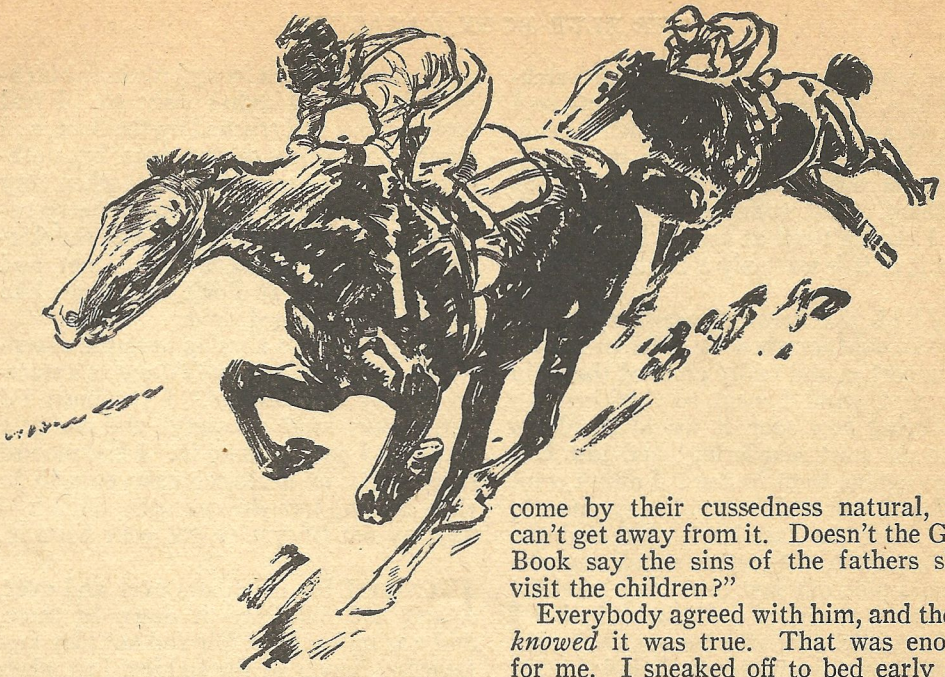
"If Steeldust could *only* talk and tell us what he sees or what he smells, the rest would be easy."

Old Stan looked at that man like a high-toned pure-bred bull looks at a cross-bred brindled calf:

"I'm plumb surprised and shocked at you, Bose Rinaker! Some people don't



Steeldust weren't more than one length behind. If the spooks had let him eat his grain and rest, he'd of made Custer look like a scrub.



know when they're well off. It's a heap sight better for humans *not* to be told *some* things in this world!" They all kept still and looked thoughtful for a while after that.

All the rest of that day Steeldust kept a-plugging away at his pacing and sweating, like he was getting paid for it in cash money. I bet he walked a hundred miles, back and forth in that stall. He weren't in no shape now to beat Custer and the men who owned him knowed it. And they was almighty gloomy.

IT was that very evening while I was hanging around one of the camp-fires listening to the talk, that I heard what *proved* without no doubt that there weren't a chance in the world for me to get loose from the old man! A town man who knowed a thundering lot was telling some things about race-horses. He says:

"No, boys, there aint no getting around it. Blood will tell, every time. Show me a horse's breeding, and I'll tell you within a split second how fast he can step a mile. It's all in the blood-lines; *it's the blood his daddy puts into him makes him what he is*. Like father, like son, as the poet says. A horse just *can't* be nothing his daddy don't make him, and you can prove it mighty easy: nobody ever seen a real race-horse that was sired by a cold-blooded, jug-headed scrub. And you never will. It just aint in the cards. Dog or horse or human, it's all the same. Blood tells the story; and if you knew the blood-lines of outlaws and criminals in prisons, you'd see it was the same thing. They

come by their cussedness natural, and can't get away from it. Doesn't the Good Book say the sins of the fathers shall visit the children?"

Everybody agreed with him, and then I *knowed* it was true. That was enough for me. I sneaked off to bed early and didn't eat my supper. I didn't care now who won the race. I didn't hardly care for nothing. I was dead sure now I could never get loose from the old man if I lived a million years. Oh, I might keep out of his way. He might never find me or even know if I was still alive, or care. But that didn't make no difference. It was like that man said about horses: "It's the blood his daddy puts into him makes him what he is. Like father, like son, as the poet says. Dog or horse or human, it's all the same." I had the old man's blood a-crawling around all through me, from my ears to my spurs, and I couldn't *never* get rid of it. The old man might be a murderer, prob'ly was, and that made me a murderer too. If I wasn't one yet, I mighty soon would be, because *I was bound to be exac'ly like the old man!*

CHAPTER IV

AFTER I see, from what that race-horse man said, that it was all arranged for me to become a murderer, I couldn't go to sleep that night for ever so long; and when I did, I drempt that I was a killer already—and *had* been for a long time. And it come natural and easy to me, and weren't much of a chore; as easy as driving in the milk-cows or filling the woodbox. In that dream there was a big crowd of men, a whole round-up crew, and one man happened to say something I didn't like—he didn't mean no harm by it, but the old man's blood must of been rampaging around in me because I didn't

argue a minute! I hauled off and butchered him. It was easy and pleasant, so I kept on and snuffed out the whole bunch. Then I stacked 'em up like cordwood, crisscross, one on top of the other, neat as anything. That woke me up with a jump, and I couldn't tell at first if I had really done it or if it was only a dream.

WELL, that dream showed me just how I would act when the old man's blood got uncorked and really cracked the whip over me! And I went to thinking and wondering how soon it would decide to make me start murdering; and just *how* it was agoing to make me if I didn't want to—but I knowed it could easy enough, after what the race-horse man and the others said. And I took to wondering who I would pick out first to try my hand on, and how I would go about it, and what I would do with him after he was dead—if I would throw him in the creek, hide him in the willers or just leave him lay for the coyotes to polish off. If I was bound to murder somebody,—and I knowed I was,—I made up my mind it wouldn't be no friend who had been good to me. No sir! No matter how that blood might keep on a-prodding me, and telling me to get busy and quit wasting time, and go kill somebody, I wouldn't butcher none of my friends. I made up my mind when it got to hounding me too much and wouldn't have patience and accept no more excuses, then I'd offer it one of the neighbor sheep-wits who had it in for Lester—maybe *all* the neighbors, except Nick Marr. Anyway, now it was settled I had to be a murderer, I would see that somebody I liked got some good out of it.

Well, I laid there thinking and making plans, and it was bright moonlight but awful spooky. The campfires of the race-horse folks was burnt out, and everybody was sound asleep. It was extra quiet, and you couldn't hear nothing except maybe a lone coyote tuning up out in the hills. I knowed that old Steeldust would be awake too, and restless, like I was, with that band of spooks gouging away at him, like the old man's blood a-riding me. And I wondered what Steeldust had done to deserve *his* punishment—bucked somebody off, most likely. But I remembered that Custer had bucked Beavertooth a-flying, and not so long ago; and *he* was taking things easy and soft in the pasture and having no end of good time; spooks weren't a-bothering *him*. And I tried to remember what *I* had done to deserve what was coming to *me*, to be shoved and

prodded and sicked on and made to butcher folks when I didn't want to. I had cussed some, and tracked up the floor, and maybe done a few other things, but nothing as bad as the chuckleheads when they tried to run Lester out of the country because he had relatifs. And the chuckleheads was taking it easy, too, I bet, and sleeping sound. It didn't look to me like things was arranged right.

Then I took to naming over the sheep-wits to decide which one I'd use as a starter for my butcherings. I reckoned I'd better start kind of careful, and one at a time, till I got my hand in. I had mowed down forty at a clatter easy enough in that dream, but dreams aint reliable—anyway not till you've got your hand in.

I'D named the neighbors over and over, I and had narrowed it down to three, and was trying to be fair and not play any favorites, when all the sudden, just when everything was quietest and spookiest, the awfulest barking and howling broke out in the brush behind the barn. You can bet it didn't take but one bark before I knowed it was the General! And I knowed he had got away from Bird's Nest, somehow, crawled out from under the tepee and lit out for home! And now he was here, and I was sure he had a porkypine or a skunk or something backed up in the brush and was a-lamming it to him.

I was so glad to hear the General's bark again that I jumped up, grabbed my overalls and my twenty-two, and away I went for the brush and that noise! I was in such a hurry that when I fell over a tent-rope and the tent come down, ker-flop, on whoever was in it, I only run the faster. When I got to the willers, I had to slow down and work my way in, and when I got almost to the General, I see somebody else in the moonlight high-tailing it from the bunkhouse to the willers with nothing on but his boots and a shirt. It was Lester! And he had his thirty-thirty and was pumping a catridge in the chamber. Lester run over and grabbed me by the shoulder:

"Run back to the bunkhouse and get me some more catridges! Quick, Gillie!"

"What is it? What's in there?"

"Quick! Run and get them catridges! It's a bear!"

Well, then I remembered I had forgot my own catridges! And you bet it didn't take me *no* time to start for the bunkhouse! And I never even wondered how Lester knowed so soon, and in the dark

too, that it was a bear. When I got to the bunkhouse, Old Stan was up and had the lantern lit, and he was a-cussing the General mighty sultry, and even the General's father and mother, and at the same time shoving Beavertooth and George toward the door.

"Hurry, you two," he says, "—get down there in the brush and get that collar and chain hid. . . . Well, I'm a ring-tailed son-a-gun if here aint Gillie! If you don't manage to happen along plumb punctual, right on the dot, at the most unluckiest times! Come in here, Gillie, and set down and *stay* down!"

"No, Stan, no! I can't! Lester and the General has got a bear in the willers behind the barn. Lester sent me for more catridges."

Beavertooth and George swarmed out while I was talking, and the door banged after 'em. Just then a shot lammed loose, and right quick another. Then the General quit barking, so I knowed he was either killed or the bear was dead. And pretty soon most of the race-horse folks was up, lanterns was lit and a fire was going. Some town men was starting for the willers to find out about the shooting.

I went tearing for the brush, and Stan took the lantern and come hobbling after. When I got there, Lester and George was talking low, but they quit. Beavertooth had gone somewhere, and the General was growling and pulling at a dead bear which was flopped down in some thick brush.

Lester says: "Gillie, I don't see how the General got loose and come home tonight. I told Bird's Nest to keep him and keep him *good*. I'll tell that cousin of mine a *few things!*"

NEXT, some race-horse people come and talked and gassed about what a knot-headed fool bear *this* was, or any other bear that didn't have better sense than to come a-bushwhacking around so close to a ranch. For a while nobody couldn't figger out what *any* bear would be doing so far from the mountains and thick timber. But Old Stan ciphered it all out for 'em.

"Why," he says, "we're a pretty dumb bunch not to see it sooner. Bears is migratory. They're on the prowl, moving camp, constant. Now this bear must of been traveling from that mountain range over yonder on the left to this one over here on the right. Naturally he had to cross some open country to make it. Well, there aint no feed for a bear in plains country. This bear gets hungry, and when he comes a-

shuffling past the ranch, he gets a whiff full of grub smells, thick as pea-soup. So—his belly crowding him some sharp, he saunters in to look over the grub situation. He injuns around in the brush awhile, sniffing and snuffing. Pretty soon the General gets a whiff of *him*. And the first thing that bear knows, he's up agin it, and the next thing he knows Lester has checked him out with a mammoth dose of lead poisoning. That's all there is *to* it, and it's mighty simple when you know bears."

That satisfied 'em and I could see too how natural it was for a bear. The race-horse folks went back to their tents.

Lester hooked up the wagon and carted the bear about a mile down the creek, and skinned him and hung the hide on some poles to dry.

After breakfast Beavertooth and Sam led Custer in from the pasture. They give him a good rub-down, and I watched 'em mighty close, and felt of him, and of *course* there weren't no sign of goose-grease nor nothing else on him, as I knowed there wouldn't be.

Steeldust had calmed down now, and they give him a last going over with the curry-comb and some cloths, but he looked awful frayed and moth-eaten in spite of it. Them two days and nights with spooks eating on him had been mighty tough. Custer was in fine shape and just a-raring to go.

WELL, there aint much to tell about the race. It was two miles, and at the start Steeldust run right away from Custer. But when they had run a mile, Steeldust begun to weaken. His head bobbed more and more with his stride, which showed he was tiring. Custer sneaked up on him steady, and when they come to a stake which marked the last quarter, they was neck and neck. Steeldust was game as spiders; he done his best not to let Custer get by. But two days and two nights with spooks a-nibbling on you would take it out of anybody. No horse, no matter how fast he was, could go through what Steeldust had went through and hope to beat Custer. But he weren't more than one length behind at the finish. If he had been fresh, and the spooks had let him eat his grain and rest, he'd of made Custer look like a scrub. Everybody knowed it, even Beavertooth.

Well, after the race we give a barbekue and roasted a steer and some of the bear meat too, but the bear was tougher than rawhide, and greasy, and nobody wouldn't

eat it. Sam brought out a big jug and passed it and everybody was setting around. Pretty soon the expert race-horse-man who had told about breeding and proved that I could never get loose from the old man if I lived to be a million, gurgled himself a big snort from the jug and says:

"Sam, I aint kicking none because I lost money on a hoss-race. Don't think that. It aint the first time nor the last, I reckon. But there's one thing I *would* like to know, and that is: *where did you get that bear?*"

Well! If you had seen Old Stan jump to his feet! He was so mad, so terrible mad, it seemed to me somehow that lightning was darting around his head. He shoved in between Sam and the race-horse man and his voice made me shiver:

"Do you mean to insinuate that the U Cross outfit rounded up that bear and *drove* him down here—that we had him hived here in the willers a-purpose to spook up Steeldust with the scent of him? Are you a-trying to specify that we *conspired* to work any such a low-down rini-kaboo plot on you? If that's what you mean, then I want to *know* it! And if that *aint* what you mean—then just what *are* you a-driving at?"

I never seen any man *half* so mad as Old Stan acted, and I reckon the race-horse man never did either; he was kind of dazzled. He just set there and gulped. Bignose George and Beavertooth rose up on their legs and stood beside Old Stan. Things looked awful rickety then, like something was sure to bust loose. One town man gave a little jerky, nervous laugh:

"Shucks, we never thought nothing like that. Set down, boys, and pass the jug. A hoss-race is only a hoss-race, and one pony is bound to win. Set down and forget it."

I COULD hardly believe they didn't know the General had been away for two days; but nobody come back at Stan and said anything about it. They had saw the General when they first come, all right; he was always nudging and sniffing at strangers, but I reckon they was too busy gassing about the race them last two days to know he had been away until just before daylight this morning. And when Old Stan seen for sure they *didn't* know it, I wish you could of heard him harp on the dog part of it!

You can bet I see then that spooks weren't to blame for no part of Steel-

dust's troubles! I see plain enough now that Lester had fetched that bear in the wagon from the reservation where some Injun had trapped him.

The race-horse people saddled up early the next morning ready to pull out for town. Most of 'em had got over feeling gloomy about the race and thinking of their money a-festering in the bank waiting for some of us to ride over and get it; they was laughing again and cracking jokes. But Brother Snead and a few who had helped him and worked so hard with the sulphur candles was kind of quiet when they rode away.

CHAPTER V

AFTER the race, Lester and Beavertooth and George was away from the ranch for a while, throwing a bunch of steers north to the mountains, where the grass was always belly-deep after the snow went out. So things was a lot quieter at the ranch, and I liked it that way for a few days. I could take it easy and rest my brains. I didn't have to keep braced all the time wondering if *this* was the truth or if *that* was just another spider-web of lies.

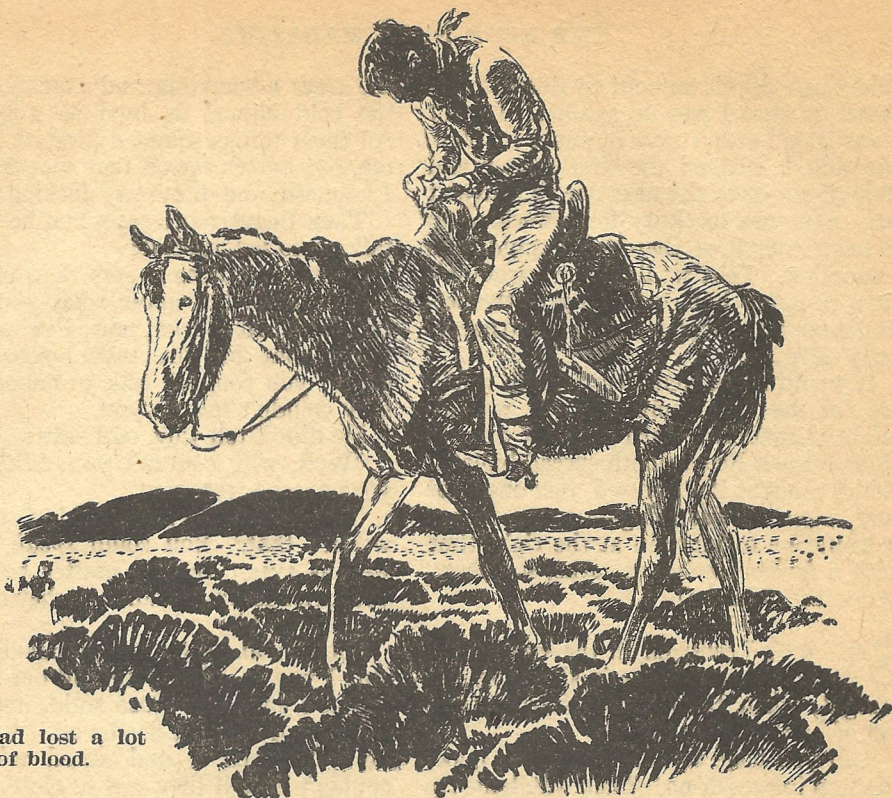
In a day or two, though, things was a little too quiet, and I wished all three was back again. It's a awful thing to say, but I reckon I *did* miss Beavertooth's lies. A week later, though, Aunt Emmy and Sam was talking, and she says:

"Sam, have you thought any more about Gillie's education?"

I jumped in quick, before Sam had time to answer:

"I don't need no book-learning, Aunt Emmy. I've been a-lapping up most every kind of learning awful fast lately. There won't be nothing left for me to learn if I keep on the way I been a-going, with all them race-horse town-people around telling all they knowed every minute. In a few months I'll know all I can stand to know—if I just don't have to go and get it all jangled and mixed and hashed-up in my head by messing around with books."

Sam says: "Gillie, you savvy too much about some things and not half enough about others. Don't you crave to know about histry and that old professional liar Baron Munchausen, instead of just Baron Beavertooth, a rank amachoor who couldn't hold the light for old Munchausen the best day he ever lived? And I should think you'd want to learn about



He had lost a lot
of blood.

General Napoleon Bonapart, and all the other old blood-soaked flag-wavers. Why, them old-timers didn't think nothing of mowing down ten thousand men at a clatter, and if somebody give the word, they'd charge hell with a dipper of water."

I could see plain enough that books would ruin everything here at the ranch if we ever let 'em get a foothold. I could of argued Sam out of it, or found some way to keep putting it off, if it weren't for Aunt Emmy. She was soft and pretty, and her hair glimmered in the sunlight, and her voice was low and silky, and you couldn't help but like her sometimes more than anybody. But don't think she didn't know what she wanted you to do—and you'd better do it, too. You might think you had her talked out of it, or think you had put something else in her head that drove the other thing clean out. And maybe you had for a day or two. But just when you weren't expecting nothing and thought you was safe—here she'd come, a-swooping at you with that same old thing dusted off again and looking like new, and begin harping on it worse than ever.

Well, she kept a-harping for two solid weeks, and the next time Sam made a trip to town in the wagon, he come back with a big packing-box full of books: readers, spellers, geography, numbers, penmanship—the whole cussed layout. I see then

there weren't no way out of it and no help for it, and I might as well try to get used to seeing the ranch ruined.

With books and study staring me in the face right on the heels of what the race-horse expert had proved about the old man's blood a-hounding me for maybe a million years, I can tell you I knowed what trouble was! On the outside of me was that big box of books crouched down like a pack of lobo wolves, and on the inside was the old man's blood ready any minute to begin plaguing and prodding me to get busy and butcher somebody and quit this loafing and making excuses. Big-nose George might *think* he knowed all there was to know about trouble, specially since a red-headed hasher at the eating-house in town had run off with a sheepman and forgot to send back the solid gold-plated ring that George had bought with the money Custer won for him and give to her when she promised to marry him. But he didn't know trouble like I was learning about it with them two things a-clawing at me.

Well, they unpacked the books and come at me. Aunt Emmy pecked away with a reader in the mornings for a hour or two, every day except Sunday and washdays. And sometimes in the evening Sam made a pass at me with a reader or a speller. For real downright trouble, George's run-off hasher—and even the

gold ring—didn't amount to shucks compared to what I was up against. I don't know why I didn't cave in under it. Well, one day I finished the first reader and they didn't have the next one to shove at me. Sam was too busy for a week to go to town after it, so they said I could have a vacation. That would mean I wouldn't have to study but could stay in the setting-room after supper and listen to everybody talk.

It would mean that Beavertooth would lay for me with more lies. It was almighty thundering hard to know what to believe when Beavertooth spread himself. And I thought if I knowed, just once, for sure, when he was lying—what a chance it would be to jump in at the right time with a few blistering remarks, scorchers, and wither him up!

SO I took Lester off in the willers and asked him to tell me in sign language tonight, when Beavertooth started talking, if he was lying or not.

"All you have to do," I says, "is make the sign for yes or no. Then watch me rip into him!" So we had it all arranged. And sure enough, after supper Beavertooth started when we was all setting around the table. He told how he had shot a coyote that day and found a few porkypine quills in it. And he went on to explain to me how quills sometimes work right through a animal and come a-bulging out the other side. I was almost sure he was lying, and was ready to let him know I knowed it, when Lester turned over his right hand in the *no* sign. So then I knowed it was true. So I said to Beavertooth:

"Sure. I knowed that before. Quills will almost always work right through any animal. There is animals, I bet, has had a whole bale of quills sliding and bumping around inside 'em for years. I can tell every time now, Beavertooth, when you're giving me straight goods and when you're lying."

"Yes, I see you can." He kind of sighed. "You're too big and smart for me now, Gillie."

Pretty soon they begun talking about cold weather and the North Pole, and Sam said he had saw it so cold right here that if you touched a iron wagon-tire with your bare hand and held it there a minute, a hunk of skin would come off when you pulled your hand away. George said he had been camped in the high mountains one terrible cold winter and when a bad spell come you could hear

the trees a-snapping and crackling with the cold almost as loud as a gunshot. All them things sounded kind of fishy to me, but Lester signed they was true. So I kept still and didn't say nothing foolish.

Then Beavertooth says, and he weren't talking to me, special:

"Yes, sometimes it gets right chilly in this country, but never what you would call *cold*. In Alaska, now, I've saw it so frigid that all the talk bogged right down; you couldn't talk to nobody, and they couldn't talk to you."

He didn't tell why, so I says:

"Well, why couldn't you talk? Was your tongue froze up?"

"No, Gillie," he says, kind of sad. "It weren't that. You could *speak* just as well as ever. But no matter how close your friends was a-standing, they couldn't hear a word."

I looked at Lester, and he made a sign. But I was in a hurry to find out if them people's ears was froze solid, and I got mixed and thought he signed it was true. So I believed it and asked *why* they couldn't hear if they was so close.

"WELL, you see, Gillie," he said, "our ears weren't froze nor nothing bad like that. But when we talked, I'm a Chinaman if the words didn't freeze solid as fast as they come rolling out! The minute they hit the air, and it so frightful cold, they give a shiver and froze as solid as the Rock of Ages. My, my, they looked funny and ragged with icicles hanging down like long white beards. And o' course, them frozen words fell to the ground, *kerplunk*, at your feet, each one with a big cake of ice around it. If you was new in the country and forgot, and throwed in a few big words, you had to be quick and shifty and jerk your feet back out of the way; them eighteen-carrot words, plumb solid thataway, was dangerous, a-falling all over the place. Why! A professor from some college strayed up there one winter, a dreamy, forgetful, splayfooted sport, always experimenting with things. But the main trouble with him was, he didn't know a single word shorter than a lass-rope.

"Well, the first time he got conversational in the cold snap—and we run to warn him, but we was too late—it took six men two hours to dig him out with shovels, and we had to ampytate three of his toes where the heaviest of them words had lit; it was the big toe on his right foot and the second and third on his left. But you must have knowed already about

words freezing in Alaska. You knowed that surely, Gillie?"

"Well," I says, "I weren't *dead* sure. But I had kind of figgered it out."

"Just so. But now I'll tell you something you don't know about words. Cuss-words is a heap heavier when froze and locked in ice chunks than any other words—heavier by the pound, that is. We had another man up there who cussed so dreadful that naturally we didn't have much to do with *him*, and made him keep to himself. I aint got time tonight to tell you what happened to him at the finish, but you ought to know how spooky it was to be a-mushing along a trail in spring where that man had passed in winter during a cold snap, and to hear them cusswords of his'n thawing out, one by one. It was downright *confounded* spooky, I can tell you, to be trailing along two hundred miles from a living soul, and to have a string of the most comfortable and homey old standbys of cusswords thaw out and come bombarding at you from the trees—and they were all so clear and loud you couldn't hardly believe they was spoke sometime last winter."

After they went to the bunkhouse, Aunt Emmy told Sam she didn't believe I was getting the right kind of education. But Sam said it was just as good as any other kind. He said self-perfection was the first law of nature.

PRETTY soon now things begun to happen. Bignose George said old man Trouble had got our range and was ready to quit fooling. George was right too, as he always was about Trouble. But even then I didn't expect nothing much, and when Sam sent Lester out in the hills the next morning to look over the country and see if any sheep had come north of Fontenelle Creek, I never thought nothing of it. The cow-men set Fontenelle as the deadline; south of the creek was sheep country; north of it was cow country, and no sheep was allowed. Some sheep-men was a-bluffing around, saying the cow-men didn't have a right to set a deadline nowhere, and they intended to run their woollies wherever they were a mind to; they said the law was on their side, and this was Uncle Sam's free range, and what could a bunch of ornery cow-men do about it anyway? So far, they had took it out in talk. None of 'em dared to throw a band across. But the cow-men was a-watching that deadline mighty close.

After I had told Lester about the neighbors from the hop-toad cow association riding over to make Sam fire him, Lester never went on the range without his rifle. And that morning he slipped his thirty-thirty into the scabbard and jogged away. He weren't home by dark, and I could see that Sam and Old Stan was worried.

IT must have been midnight when the General started barking and run out to the corral. I clawed on some clothes and got out there in a hurry. Sam come out right behind me, and Old Stan come from the bunkhouse with the lantern. We saw that Lester was hurt and couldn't get off his horse. Dried blood was caked all over his shirt, and some had run down and dried on the left side of his saddle and even on the horse's shoulder.

They got Lester out of the saddle slow and easy and made him lay down while Sam and Old Stan cut away his shirt. A bullet had plowed through the edge of his left side and made a big ragged gash. It had only grazed him, Sam said, but after he felt around the wound slow and careful he said two ribs was busted.

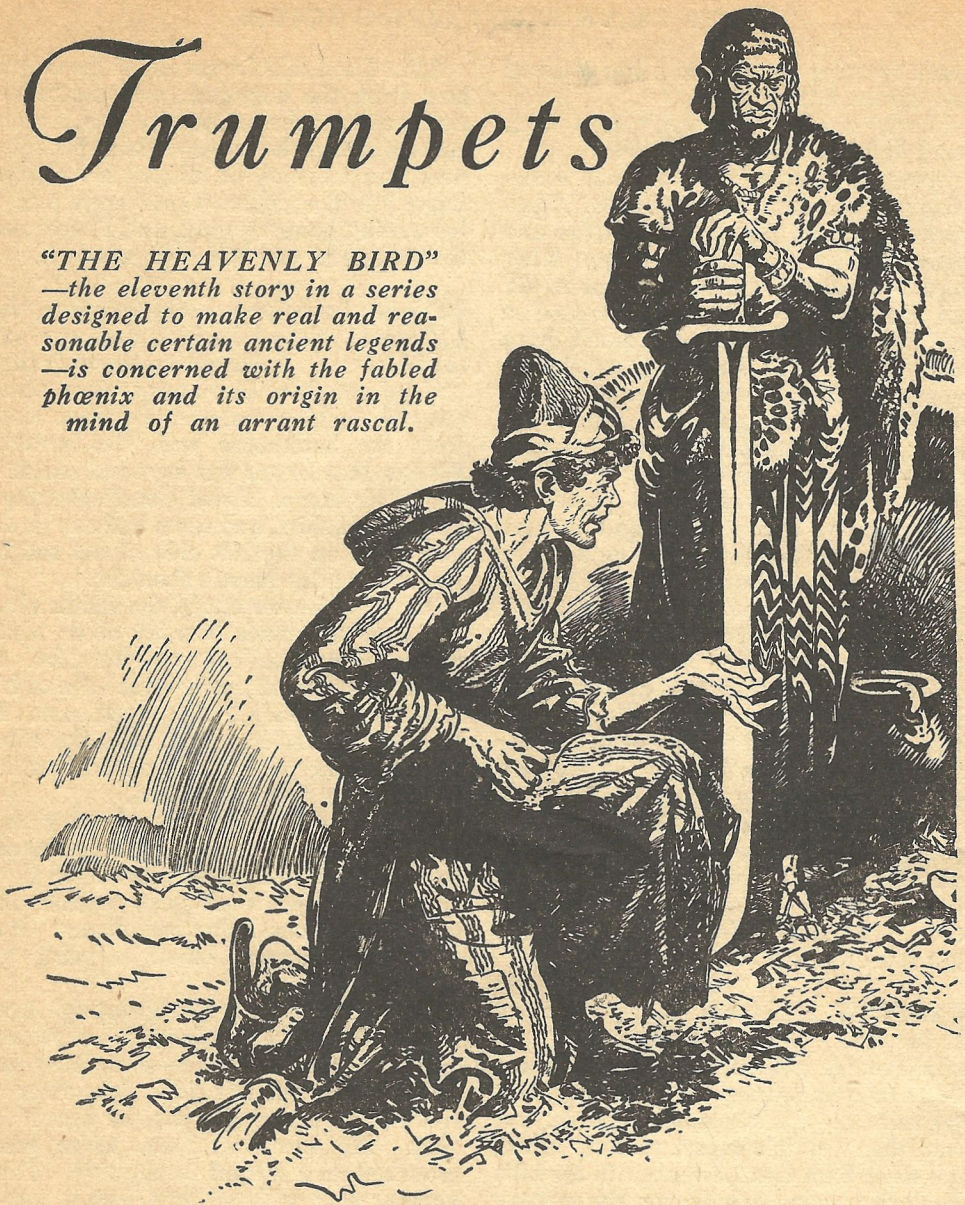
"You'll be as good as new in no time," Old Stan says. "Busted ribs don't amount to nothing if you get 'em bandaged tight enough so they won't poke around and gouge into your lights and livers. But you've lost enough blood to paint the barn."

Lester said he was riding through some sand-hills just before dark, not expecting nothing, when—*wham!*—something hot burnt him in the left side. Just after he felt the burn and the jolt, he heard the shot. He saw two men, white men, crouched on a hill off to one side. Then another shot whizzed past, but it was a miss. By this time Lester had his thirty-thirty out and shot back. He said he was pretty sure he had got one man, because he seen him take a tumble when he was almost out of sight behind the hill. He didn't see either man again, and was feeling pretty weak and sick and losing plenty of blood, so he turned and rode behind a sand-hill out of sight. He kept on a-riding slow and easy toward home, keeping in draws and follering low places in the hills. They didn't come after him because, most likely, they thought they had got him so bad he couldn't last long, and they didn't want to leave tracks around there. And one was dead, anyway, most likely.

Things continue to happen throughout the forthcoming chapters—in the next (the October) issue.

Trumpets

"THE HEAVENLY BIRD"
—the eleventh story in a series
designed to make real and rea-
sonable certain ancient legends
—is concerned with the fabled
phoenix and its origin in the
mind of an arrant rascal.



WHEN Norman Fletcher entered the office and invited me to lunch, I was amazed. The old Yankee inventor, greatest electrical genius of the age, almost never came into town.

"Well, I've got a whole day off," he said, laughing. He was the picture of health, with his ruddy cheeks and mane of white hair. "Looks like Washington for me, with this war-defense work—"

Brill, the senior partner of my outfit, burst in upon us in a rage; he had been to a lecture the previous evening, and had been fairly seething, all morning. He quite disregarded Fletcher.

"I'm telling you," he roared at me, "we ought to give some of these birds what we'd get in their place! Suppose

I went over to Germany and told the Nazis they were full of prunes, and talked about our glorious country and how much better it was—what'd they do to me?"

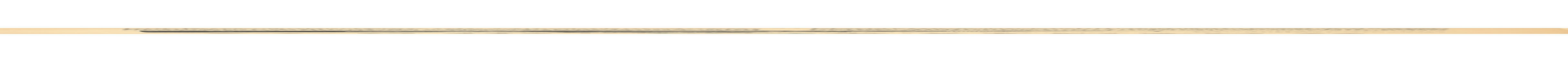
"Ship you back," I said, laughing.

"In a wooden overcoat!" he barked. "You're damned right. That's what—who's this?"

He saw Fletcher and checked himself. I introduced them, and Fletcher smiled.

"You seem all excited, Mr. Brill. Join us for luncheon and cool off, won't you?"

"Delighted," said Brill, and bristled again. "Still, it makes me hot under the collar! 'Risen like a phoenix from its ashes,' says he, talking about Germany. Phoenix! Oratorical bombast! There never was any such thing."



retary and factor to Hassan; he could not write a stroke, but he had a magnificent memory.

"We find him in Heliopolis, alone. The caravan had been sold, the camels had been sent back to the frontier; Hassan and his secretary remained in Heliopolis to collect the moneys due. Hassan, out on a party with some other merchants, drank too much, blasphemed the gods of Egypt, and made some insulting remarks about the Pharaoh; he was straightway clapped into jail by the priests of Ra, who were all-powerful in the city. This left Abdallah sitting in a rented room of a tavern, with nothing to his name except the clothes he stood in, a bird in a hooded cage, and what few effects of his master he had been able to save. There was just one word to describe that young man—impudence!"

IMPUDENCE was the word for it, no doubt about that. His face, which could be blank and witless on occasion, in repose was merry, with flashing impudent eyes, a wide pleasant mouth, and a saucy tilted nose. He had a way of flinging up his head in a bright, quick motion, which was a delight to see.

Just now he was morose, and kicked unkindly at the wicker cage in the corner, with a muttered oath. He drew aside the cloth cover of the cage and looked at the bird within—an enormous fighting-cock of weird coloring and shape, like no other. Some merchant in Arabia had brought the cock from farther east, and Abdallah had brought him to Egypt, only to find that Egyptians had other and more normal uses for such birds than cock-fighting.

"You blasted nothing!" he growled dimly. "You're worth too much money to eat, but I've nothing else. Stranded! Beached in a foreign city, like a pearl-fisher whose boat has sunk and leaves him perched on a reef! I'll have to wring your neck and eat you yet. Fool that I was to bring you to a land where they never heard of fighting-cocks! My credit's stopped, I can get no grain to feed you, no bread to feed myself, no money to help poor old Hassan. Nothing but bills payable—ha! Bills payable! And here's Hassan's seal. Ha!"

He stopped short in sudden thought. Then he made a dive for the plain cotton robe he had washed and hung up to dry. Slipping it over his head, he tied his sandal-strings tight, dabbed some water on his face, wiped it, and pocketed

the silver ring bearing Hassan's seal. From one corner he took a pile of papyrus slips, on which were scrawled some quite meaningless characters—his own writing, for he brazenly pretended that he could write—and with one of these in his pocket, he strode out.

Ten minutes later, he was closeted with Minos the Cretan, chief of his master's creditors; the office of Minos was close to the temple of Ra, and shaded by gorgeous plane trees.

"Good day, Minos," said Abdallah briskly. "In the matter of what you owe my master Hassan, as here inventoried—"

"Save your breath," said the Cretan, grinning. "Hassan's in jail and will probably die there. We'll talk of that little debt when he's out."

"Little debt!" Abdallah's eyes enlarged. "For the gold dust and the precious weaves and the girl slaves—well, well, let it be as you say, honest Minos. May I borrow your pen for a moment?"

He leaned forward, took the reed pen from the table, and made marks on the slip of papyrus. The Cretan eyed him curiously.

"Do you call that writing? You Arabians are fools. What are you doing?"

"Doubling the amount of your debt, good Minos." Abdallah looked up innocently. "You see, I've been ordered to visit the high priest of Ra immediately—in fact, I'm on my way there now—and bring the accounts of Hassan and his seal with me. It seems that the priests have levied an enormous fine against my master, and are going to collect all the accounts payable. So, to help Hassan, I'm doubling the amount you owe him."

Minos came up out of his chair with a bound. When the priests of Ra, with all the troops of the Pharaoh behind them, started out to collect anything, they either got it or got somebody's head.

"You're doubling the amount!" cried Minos. "Idiot! I'll pay the actual sum on the spot, since that's the case."

"Oh! Very well, if this is your pleasure," rejoined Abdallah. "But, since the amount is a large one, I beg of you to make three parcels of it."

"For which you'll give me a receipt over your master's seal."

"Of course! But my Arabian writing cannot be read by you; have your scribe write in Egyptian, and I'll sign and seal it."

Which was duly done. Abdallah's hen-track was accepted as a signature, unquestioned. . . .

Well aware that he might be watched, and having in mind the likelihood of collecting the other bills payable by somewhat similar methods, Abdallah left the merchant's office and went straight on to the big imposing temple, whose massive surroundings housed many hundreds of priests. Second only to the royal governor was the high priest of Ra in Heliopolis, and like all these priests of Egypt, Abdallah knew him to be a shrewd and subtle man. When it came to duping, these priests of Ra were adepts.

"If you've a sword to sell, sell it to the man who has one, as the proverb says," reflected Abdallah, entering the vast portals. An idea had come to him on the way over, and his eyes twinkled. Then, assuming his blandest and blankest air, he asked one of the guards where the high priest might be found.

"What, you rascal? Who are you, to seek the high priest of Ra?"

"I am the high priest of the great god of Arabia, El or Allah," said Abdallah in his simple way. "I bear messages from my god, and gifts, to the high priest of Ra."

The guards gathered, not sure whether they dealt with a madman or a real desert priest. One of the priests of Ra happened by, heard the argument, and took charge of Abdallah.

"Two of you follow, with weapons ready," said he grimly. "You may have use for them."

He led Abdallah through the temple precincts to the magnificent chambers of the high priest, who was an imposing person, even majestic, and came of royal blood; his name was Ra-enfer, and at his mere word, men were slain without question. The priest saluted him humbly.

"Lord, this man, obviously an Arabian, sought speech with you, telling the guards that he was high priest of some desert god, and had messages and gifts for you. But—" He came closer to the high priest and spoke softly, under his breath. Watching the eyes of Ra-enfer, Abdallah began to conjecture what this whisper could mean, and guessed at the worst. He knew the priests had an admirable spy-system.

NOW, the money of Egypt was not in coins, but in rings of gold and silver. Abdallah let one of his three packets drop to the stone floor, clumsily; the cloth wrapping it came away, and the rings of gold were displayed.

The high priest leaned forward.

"Who are you, Arabian?" he demanded.

"Me? Why, lord, I'm Abdallah, the secretary of the merchant Hassan."

"What? You confess it?" cried the high priest, but his eyes flitted to the money.

"Certainly," said Abdallah innocently. He had guessed aright, and now breathed freely. "I had to take such a position; I could not spend the money of Allah to travel here, as I was ordered by the god. So I took a secretary's place. We are poor people, in Arabia; even the high priest of Allah does not disdain labor. Now that Hassan is in prison, I am free to obey the orders of Allah. So I have come to speak with you, in private."

"This is an honest simpleton," said the high priest, and motioned his subordinate. "You may go. Let the guards wait at the door, out of earshot, in case I need them."

Thus alone with Ra-enfer, Abdallah took a chair, made himself comfortable, accepted a cup of wine gratefully, and smacked his lips over it.

"Lord Ra-enfer," he said, round-eyed and trusting, "I received a revelation from Allah, whom I serve, and who is the same you call Ra. I was ordered to come here with a certain gift, and to tell you that the phoenix will arrive in Heliopolis, in token that the gods favor your city and bless it, beneath your rule."

"Indeed!" said the high priest complacently. "And what, may I ask, is the phoenix?"

"A bird; the bird of heaven. There is only one phoenix, my lord. No other exists. He looks somewhat like a cock, somewhat like a pheasant, somewhat like an ostrich; his plumage is most glorious, being of divers hues, but the tail is yellow and red. He may be known by his beak, which is of a blue like the sky."

"He sounds not unlike the sacred bird we call *benu*," mused the high priest. Then his eyes sharpened on Abdallah. "Only one in the world, you say—eh? Only one? What manner of tale is this?"

"Lord, it is known to all priests in Arabia!" said Abdallah with glib simplicity. "Only one such bird exists. When he is old and comes to die, he seeks some sacred place where a nest of cassia twigs and frankincense must be made ready; he is laid upon it at sunset, and fire is set to it; this fire must be great enough to consume him utterly. While it burns, he sings his own dirge and praises the sun-god, though his voice is



"You tell of a great wonder, if true," said the high priest, repressing a smile.

not over-musical. From his own ashes he rises again with the sun, young and glorious to behold, with a hood over his eyes. When a priest removes this hood, he flies back to heaven."

Ra-enfer listened to all this nonsense, gravely appraising the man and the tale. His suspicion could not linger before the earnest conviction of Abdallah, who was obviously fool enough to believe every word he uttered.

"You tell of a great wonder, if true," said the high priest, repressing a smile.

"How often does such a miracle take place?"

"Every hundred years," said Abdallah promptly. "This is the hundredth year, lord; the occasion is only four days away. It was revealed to me that the phoenix has chosen this temple for his rejuvenation, and henceforth will accomplish this in Heliopolis every hundredth year. In token whereof, I have been ordered by Allah to make you an offering," and he touched the packet of gold rings, "which will pay for the burning-nest."

"Ha! By Isis and Osiris!" muttered the high priest, and his eyes glowed.

Here was a simpleton from the desert with a new idea, which was rare in Egypt. The fool believed all his own tale; so much the better. Magic was part of the religion in Egypt; every priest was a master of the art. Of course it was all nonsense about the wondrous bird; but it would be a spectacle marvelous beyond belief, and if the phoenix never showed up—well, that could be arranged. The gravely piercing eyes of Ra-enfer narrowed as he envisaged the possibilities from all angles.

BUT Abdallah, sipping his wine, read the thoughts behind those eyes. He had planted them deliberately; and he could scarcely repress a chuckle of impish delight.

"Four days, you say?" demanded the high priest suddenly.

"Counting tomorrow the first, the evening of the fourth day," said Abdallah. "Such was the revelation; it was repeated to me last night in a dream. There can be no doubt."

"Evidently not." Ra-enfer beamed upon him. "My son, I welcome the prodigy! You must let me put you up here in the temple in apartments befitting your rank; I'll furnish you with priestly robes—"

"No, no!" exclaimed Abdallah. "Thanks, my lord, but that cannot be. The priests of Allah are sworn to simple living and poverty. A single robe of cloth, and a turban for the head, is all the garment allowed us. True, this cotton robe of mine is somewhat frayed."

"Let me replace it with a robe of the finest linen," said Ra-enfer eagerly. This answer had banished his last suspicion. The man was certainly a fool. "And new sandals."

"If such be your desire, it would please me," Abdallah replied with simplicity. "Here is the offering I was commanded to bring. The nest, I repeat, must be of great size and sufficient to consume the phoenix to ashes."

He laid the packet of gold rings on the table. No doubt that they were genuine; the priests were bankers of all precious metals, and these bore the stamp of the Memphis temple of Maat. The high priest summoned a guard.

"Go to the treasury, and ask the treasurer for a robe of the finest mixed wool and linen, and sandals of the best quality, edged with gold. At once."

"Wait!" exclaimed Abdallah hurriedly, and slipped one horny bare brown foot from its sandal. "Take this to get the size right. Good. Now, my lord, will you have a writing given me, a receipt for this offering, which I may lay up in my temple at home as evidence that my mission was accomplished?"

"Gladly," agreed Ra-enfer. "But you must give me more details about the phoenix—at what hour he will appear, and where. How he must be treated and so forth."

Abdallah veiled his eyes and his confusion together; this was getting serious, and he had not yet accomplished his prime object.

"Tomorrow at this time, my lord, I'll come and inform you," he said, lifting to the high priest a gaze of childish trust. "You see, I must ask the god for a revelation on those matters, tonight. It will come; Allah never fails to answer."

"A remarkable god," observed Ra-enfer, not without irony.

"And there is one favor I must ask you," went on Abdallah. "Technically, I am still in service to the merchant Hassan. I must be released from it, must fast and pray and make my ablutions, before asking Allah for a further vision."

"Easily done," said Ra-enfer. "I will have the fellow empaled at once."

"No, no!" cried Abdallah in real agitation. "My lord, this would anger the god, my god, and the phoenix, the wondrous bird of Allah! Instead, I pray you, give me an order to visit this Hassan in his prison, that he may release me from his service by word of mouth. And, I pray you, send a guide with me, because this vast city bewilders me."

Ra-enfer regarded this simple fool from the desert with tolerance, and affably assented to his desires.

SO presently Abdallah went forth from the fine house of Ra, wearing one of the rare temple robes, with golden-edged sandals on his feet, and preceded by the temple chamberlain who cleared the way with imperious voice and whip. Word of the honors done this ragged desert fellow spread abroad widely.

Twice or thrice, in passing the offices of merchants who owed Hassan money, Abdallah halted the chamberlain and entered the offices, very briefly. Merely a word in passing—he would return presently to see about the payments due. Then on his way again, leaving consternation behind him.

The city prison, near the barracks, was a grim and loathsome place of dour granite. The entry, known as the Gate of Death, was spattered with blood, and was hung with heads of those lately executed. Floggings and tortures were daily matters here.

The order of Ra-enfer opened all doors. In the foul depths of the prison, with guards and the temple chamberlain to hold off the hapless wretches crowding around, Abdallah found Hassan. He saluted the amazed merchant with a kiss of respect, and spoke in a rapid Arabic dialect that none other could understand.

"I am working for you, master; trust all to me. I'll have you out of here in five days. When any come questioning you, say I am the high priest of Allah and took service with you; that's all you know. Say it's not unusual in Arabia. Now release me from your service, loudly, that all may hear."

Hassan had not become the richest merchant of Arabia from any lack of brains. He did as he was told, and asked no questions. So the chamberlain was enabled to make report, as Abdallah desired, to the high priest of Ra.

By sunset Abdallah had visited nearly all the creditors of Hassan; and without exception, made collections in full. So great was the sum, indeed, that he took half of it all to a merchant whom he could trust, and obtained bills of exchange on a house in Pelusium, a city of the frontier, for the amount.

With the setting sun he returned to his tavern, paid his bill to date and a week in advance, and ordered the best dinner to be had. Then he went to his room and removed the cover from his caged bird, and inspected the strange creature.

"You certainly look old and droopy, and no wonder," said he, with twinkling eyes. "And you'll look worse, four days from now! And it's certain that no fighting-cock of your queer breed has ever been seen in this land of marvels. So rest in peace! I'll feed you later."

ON the morrow, Abdallah came limping to the temple of Ra, complaining that the thongs of the new sandals were too tight. He was greeted like a royal prince this time, and could have had a dozen pairs of sandals for the asking, and solid gold at that.

Now, he had spent the morning wandering about through the bazars, which were open in the morning and until late

at night, being closed during the heat of the day. To his very real alarm, he perceived that he was being followed by an expert shadower, or possibly two. He had spotted one man, and suspected another. It was clear that everything he did was noted and reported to the temple, the more so as he was now a conspicuous figure in the city. Any suspicion would have unpleasant consequences; the kindest fate he could expect would be flaying alive, a regrettably common occurrence in Egypt.

SO he made no secret of his work in clearing up the affairs of Hassan; indeed, he bragged complacently of it, to the priests conducting him to Ra-enfer.

The latter received him promptly and graciously, introducing him to a number of the chief priests, and inquired after the promised revelation. Had it come?

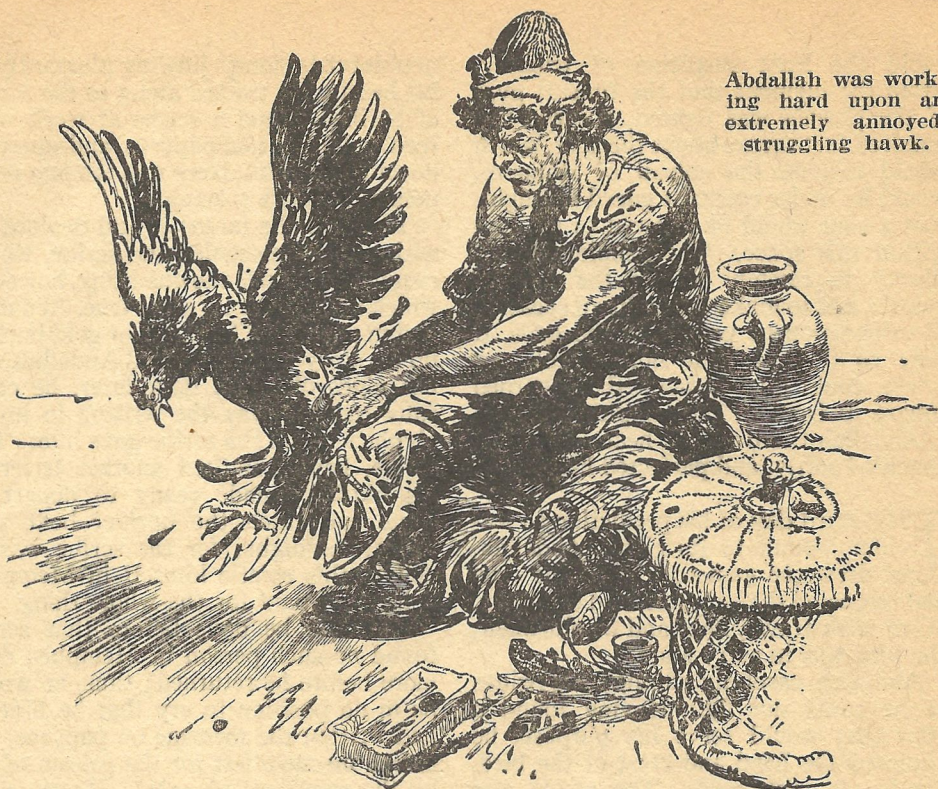
"Of course," said Abdallah in his most simple and matter-of-fact way. "The phoenix will arrive in the course of the third night, and will be found in the temple gardens at dawn. Capture him without fear; he is old and sick, and seeks to avoid his destiny, but the gods compel him to it. Give him water to drink, but no food. At sunset, tie his legs and place him on the fragrant nest. Light it as the sun touches the horizon, and then place guards and forbid any man to approach the spot until daybreak. He will then be found in his rejuvenated guise, ready to fly to heaven when you have loosed his hood."

The priests looked one at another, with a certain admiration. This was too good to be true; it was perfection. It had all the ingredients of an old legend of the gods brought to life. A simple man from the far desert, a perfectly incredible tale of an incredible bird, revelations and divine messages—and it could be made a tremendous public demonstration, to impress the populace and heighten the power of Ra and his priests.

"Oh! I forgot to say," added Abdallah, "that the word of Allah indicated a certain spot for the ceremony. This spot is on the front terrace of the temple, between the two great statues there."

A spot in full view of the whole city, where the populace could gather by thousands to watch the miracle! Ra-enfer could not conceal his satisfaction.

"Also," Abdallah went on, scratching his head, "there was something about a message: The bird would leave a message in the morning amid the ashes. I do not



Abdallah was working hard upon an extremely annoyed, struggling hawk.

know what it means myself. That is, provided the conditions were faithfully met, and the guards posted well away from the spot to keep all people away.”

The priests began to think that there might possibly be something really miraculous about this business.

Abdallah, refusing gifts and honors, took his departure. He eyed the two statues as he went, and was himself rather well satisfied with the whole business. He had previously examined them with the greatest attention. They were colossal figures, full thirty feet high, of the great Pharaoh Rameses, the Conqueror; seated figures, hands on knees, set out a little space before the temple entrance.

But, as he made his way home, he realized that the same man was shadowing him, a fellow deft and agile, marked by sloping shoulders and a heavy face. He took his course through the bazars, stopping here and there, buying a trifle of this and a trifle of that—all in small quantities. Like all Bedouins, he wore a sheathed knife slung about his neck, under his robe.

When he came back to the tavern, where he was now an honored guest, he fed and watered the fighting-cock in its wicker basket, then sat himself down and

pondered. He went over each detail of his project with the greatest care, and regretfully decided that if he were to live, another must die—at the proper moment.

This arranged in his mind, he went to work playing with his purchases—odds and ends of feathers, dyes, wax and needles and thread, glue and such like. Being a deft man of his fingers, he found his experiments successful; and this pleased his rather devious mind.

HE was not astonished, next morning, to find the whole town in a ferment. Heliopolis, while not one of Egypt's largest cities, was the city of the sun, and not unused to miraculous events; but this was something new. The bird from Arabia, the wondrous phoenix, which would come and rejuvenate itself in sight of all men, would be something worth the seeing! Not the least wonderful point was the schedule of the whole thing. To be produced by the priests of Ra before sunset; to be burned alive, burned to ashes; and from those ashes, with the sunrise, a new bird would arise and wing his way to heaven—eh? A great spectacle, if true!

If true! Ra-enfer the high priest, took particular pains in his proclamations to

avoid the least suspicion of trickery. From the moment that the funeral pyre of the phoenix was lighted, a space two hundred feet square about the spot, which would include the colossi of Rameses, would be under constant guard all night. Not a soul would be allowed to set foot within this space. The people were at liberty to remain outside the line of guards, and to make the night an occasion of celebration or prayer to the gods, if they so desired; but none, public or priest, could intrude upon that guarded square in front of the temple.

Abdallah the Bedouin, hearing all this, chuckled softly, and perfected his plans.

THE third day of his prediction to Ra-Enfer wound to its close. Abdallah, alone, drew the gamecock from his cage and inspected the gorgeous bird critically. What with travel, heat and confinement, the bird was in sorry state.

Abdallah carefully clipped his wings so he could not fly. Having found a gum that would serve his purpose, he anointed the head and crest of the bird, dusting it with gold. The result was gorgeous in the extreme, and would last the necessary time. He then, with the proper dye, turned the bird's beak to a brilliant blue. This done, he returned the cock to the basket, donned his temple robe and his golden sandals, and sallied forth.

As he left the tavern, openly, the accustomed shadow took up his trail. Abdallah did not go far; being close to the wharves and river, he sought an unfrequented spot where the stone-ships from the quarries far upriver landed their freight. Here he strode along rapidly; then suddenly turned on his heel and strode back. The trailer, unable to find cover, affected indifference; and Abdallah, in passing the starlit figure, swiftly turned and came to grips. His knife was deadly and he knew his business.

Without a shout or an alarm, the spy collapsed, stabbed twice through the heart.

Abdallah dragged the limp lifeless form to the water's edge, and thrust it in for Father Nile to sweep away downstream, then hurried home. He now had much to do, and not too much time in which to manage it all.

In his room, he doffed robe and sandals, and donned a tattered old blue robe belonging to Hassan—which, with a dark camel's-hair burnous, were still here. Thus attired, he slipped out of the tavern

unobserved, money jingling pleasantly in his hand. He trotted along to the Street of Scribes, found a scribe at work with reed and brush and papyrus, and squatted down to bargain. Here was the one weak point in all his scheme.

To detail the fantastic and devious lie with which he regaled the scribe, would require a volume; the one thing, however, which makes any lie seem true, Abdallah had in plenty. The jingle of gold backed up his story to the hilt, and Abdallah was not niggardly. An hour later, he carefully tucked away the writing in hieroglyphics which the scribe gave him. The scribe, having indited another letter at his bidding, made ready to depart in haste and catch the upriver boat that left at midnight; for the scribe was to deliver this epistle himself in Memphis, being well paid for the whole thing.

It would be days before that scribe found no such person in Memphis, days more before he returned; thus, he would be in no position to cry that he himself had written the message on papyrus, the sacred message left for the priests of Ra by the wondrous phoenix! However, he would profit well by the journey, reflected Abdallah cynically, and bent his steps to the shop of a certain dealer in falcons and other birds used in hunting.

When he departed, he carried a basket in which reposed an enormous hawk, trained like most hawks to fly the instant his hood was removed; and until then, to remain motionless.

HOME to the tavern he brought the hawk. Here he donned the dark burnous of Hassan; its hood would cover his face and head at need. With a wicker basket in each hand, he slipped quietly out of the tavern again and sought a boat-landing near by, where light craft could be hired.

He hired a tiny boat, and according to custom paid for it in full, to insure the owner against non-return. He put his two baskets in the boat, seated himself with the paddle, and let the current float him away. The Temple of Ra was downstream from here, well downstream; and the magnificent gardens of the temple ran down to the very edge of the water. As the Nile was high, Abdallah had nothing to worry about. The gardens ended in wide marble steps, where the priests and temple folk were wont to bathe.

A few were splashing here and there in groups, as Abdallah's craft drifted down, for the water was pleasant at night.



There was a surprised squawk of fear; then the cord whipped about throat and neck.

Avoiding the groups, he drew in and came alongside the steps, briefly; long enough to reach the gawky gamecock out of the basket, dip him hastily into the sacred Nile and toss him ashore. Scandalized and outraged, the bird shook himself and scuttled away hastily from the water, up into the gardens.

"And if ever the priests saw anything like you, then I'm a liar!" murmured

Abdallah, as he sent the little craft out into the current.

He now considered that the worst was over, that ahead was nothing but wearisome though necessary detail, with all danger past. In this he was wrong.

He spent two hours in a riverside tavern, renting a room and presumably sleeping. In reality, he was working hard by lamplight upon an extremely

annoyed, struggling hawk, whose plumage and tail he augmented freely with gum and previously dyed feathers. He even managed to add a crest of variegated hues. A sprinkling of gold dust on undried gum provided the final touch.

IT was just before dawn, the darkest and dreariest hour of night, when, basket in hand, he approached the right-hand colossal statue of Rameses, before the temple of Ra. Through the top ring of the basket ran a long double cord, so long as to be bothersome, the end of which was attached to his left wrist.

Not a soul was about, not a soul was in sight. A dim light burned inside the temple entrance, and the guard was in there. The stone platform, facing the east, was deserted, and Abdallah's bare feet made no sound. Cloaked in the brown burnous, he was invisible in the darkness, for the haze of dawn covered the stars.

At the foot of the towering statue, he slipped out of the burnous and made it fast about the basket; this job was going to need a trifle of agility. Leaving basket and burnous below, to follow by means of the cord, he got up the pedestal, up to the enormous foot of the Pharaoh, and reached up for the knee high above. His hands, slipping over the polished granite, came upon a projection; by means of this, he started up. Then, with a sudden sweat of cold fear, he froze motionless.

"You damned rascal!" muttered a voice, a man's voice, above him. Above!

Abdallah clung, terror shooting through him like a hot knife. Fear of the supernatural leaped in him for an instant, of the gods whom he mocked. Then the voice went on:

"May Typhon curse you, blasted bird of hell! Bite my hand again, and I'll wring your neck, miracle or no miracle!"

Still Abdallah clung there; comprehension came to him, his brain cleared, he fought to check back the almost hysterical laughter that rose in him. A man was up there, indeed; some priest or servant of the temple. Up there, on his own identical errand!

"I should feel flattered," he reflected. "Those priests are clever; they've adopted my own private scheme! Therefore, it's bound to succeed. They're not taking chances on having no phoenix appear with miraculous qualities. They've provided the bird of miracle here; if the phoenix doesn't show up in the garden, they'll provide one at that end. Hm! This might save me a lot of time and trouble.

Unfortunately, they're aiming at a mere miracle, but I have another end in view."

He hung poised against the leg of Rameses, weighing the possibilities.

To let the priests of Ra go ahead with their own miracle, was out of the question. This would destroy the whole point of his scheming, which lay in the papyrus he had obtained. He must, therefore, go ahead as planned—which meant that he must remove the man hidden in the lap of Rameses above. His knife? He shrank from this. If anything went amiss, if he were detected, it would involve flaying alive; to spill blood in the temple precincts meant being nailed to boards and having the skin stripped off.

To spill blood—ah! He took a fresh grip, and reached up. Here was the means to his hand, quite literally. Hesitating no longer, he thrust himself up, up and over the granite edge. There was a surprised squawk of fear and consternation; then he had the man gripped. The double cord whipped about throat and neck, and sank in.

It was a silent, scuffling play of life against life, muscle against muscle; and the iron-hard Bedouin had the soft city man down and throttled in no time. Throttled, beating out with futile flailing hands, and sinking into death. The cord was anchored in the soft dead throat.

Abdallah explored. As he had anticipated, the lap of Rameses was not shallow but deep and ample; three or four men could hide here. He was further gratified to find that his mind and those of the priests had run alike, in that this hidden fellow was provided with a soft dark covering, for the same reason he himself had brought the burnous. Then, lucky happening, there was a small basket of food and wine—something he had overlooked!

THE bird, some sort of gyrfalcon, was nothing like his own splendid one; he wrung its neck, and shoved it and the dead man together far back in the recessed lap. There was plenty of room. Over them he put their own robe; when found, eventually, the priests might smell the ruse, but it would be too late. And if anything went wrong now, no blood had been shed.

"Decidedly, I should have been a priest of Ra myself!" thought Abdallah cheerfully, as he hauled in the line and secured his basket. Dawn was just lightening in the east.

His hawk he left hungry and thirsty this day; he himself feasted. The brown burnous, spread widely over him, kept off the sun, concealed him from sight of anyone on the roof-tops or temple roof, and blended with the granite. It would catch no eye, and from the ground below, this deep hollow was quite invisible.

The day passed; Abdallah ate, drank, dozed, ignored the heat. He could hear the feet and the voices of thousands, he heard the resounding news that the phoenix had arrived as the prophecies foretold; and lifting up a corner of the burnous, he was able to see the spot below where the pyre for the wondrous bird was built, as the afternoon waned.

Thence, too, with sunset, he glimpsed the ceremony in that guarded open space. The priests, hundreds of them, in full panoply; the chants, the music, the prayers to Ra. The figure of Ra-enfer, holding that luckless gamecock from somewhere beyond Arabia, and laying the bird with legs bound on the pyre of sticks and twigs. Amid a deep silence of awe, the pyre was lighted.

It was no small nest; the flames rose, the wretched cock flapped his gaudy wings as though fanning the flames, and sank down. From the awed crowd, massing the square and the streets, arose murmurs as the sunset died and the pyre smoked out into embers. Night came.

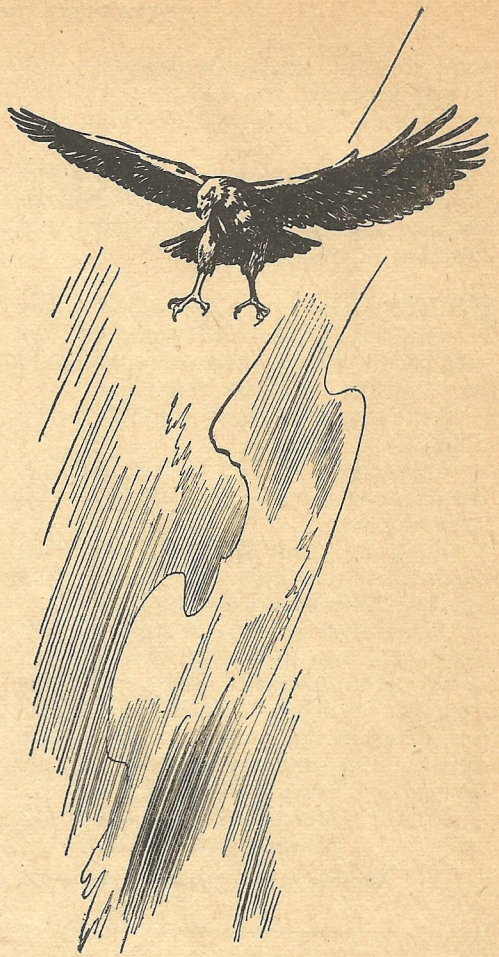
Within that square of guards, no man dared set foot, as the night drew on.

Outside the square, the crowd sang, danced, feasted, were gay; at midnight, came an end to the lights and the noise. Priests were chanting somewhere, solemnly. Abdallah waited, biding his time.

Not until the mist from the river, before morning, went floating across the stars, did he move. Then he fed and watered the hawk, abundantly; hooded the bird, put him in the basket, lowered the basket carefully, and followed. He was wrapped in the brown burnous, and the descent was awkward, but he made it. In the obscurity, a vague shadow, he drifted across to the ashes of the pyre, on its platform, and presently drifted back.

The dawn grew in the sky. Murmurs arose from the waiting, watching thousands, from the priests; awe deepened as increasing daylight revealed the thing there. A bird like no bird ever seen before, resplendent with gay hues, queerly feathered—the phoenix! The miracle was accomplished!

The sun appeared. The morning hymn to Ra was echoing from the great temple,



as Ra-enfer the high priest approached that silent, motionless, hooded bird. He prostrated himself before the pedestal, then came close, reached out, and removed the hood with trembling hand.

The phoenix glanced around, blinked around, moved a little. Suddenly he took wing and lifted. At first he flew awkwardly, darting hither and thither; a feather fell and fluttered down. (It was preserved for generations as a precious relic.) Then he soared up and up, and was gone in the heavens. Amid roars of applause and delight from the crowd, the high priest picked from the ashes a roll of papyrus, and opened it. The roars fell into dead silence. Ra-enfer, giving plain indications of his own awed wonder, read aloud a greeting from the phoenix of Arabia to the priests of Ra. Then his voice faltered, as though he disliked what he read, but he had to go on with it. After due thanks for the care and attention given by the priests, the message read:

“Let your noble work, I pray you, be completed by the release of the Arabian Hassan. Let him, who blasphemed the

gods, be set at liberty by the gods, that he may hereafter fear and respect them; and that all the gods may bless you, good priests!"

Roars of acclamation arose from the crowded thousands. And Abdallah, from his safe high perch, peeped down and chuckled in gratification.

FLETCHER'S voice fell silent. The scene he had painted was gone; we were back at the luncheon-table, and Brill was frowning as he lit a fresh cigar.

"So it was all a rank fraud?" he exclaimed.

"Apparently," said Fletcher, smiling. He also took a fresh cigar and lit it with becoming care.

"Well," broke out Brill, scowling, "that bears out what I hold. There's no sense in all this mythological tommyrot!"

"There must be sense in anything that has passed into the speech of the world, as has the similitude of the phoenix rising from its own ashes," Fletcher said gravely. "We see the symbol of the phoenix all around us, in every phase of life, under our eyes every day—"

"What?" interrupted Brill, scornfully. "Where, for example, here and now?"

Fletcher reached out to the ash-tray, which held cigar ashes, dead matches, the butts of three or four cigars. These last, he touched lightly.

"There," he said. "If I were a cigar-maker, I could take those unfinished bits of cigars, unwind them, and make a whole cigar again. From the ashes of themselves. You see?"

He rose, shook hands with us, and departed, laughing to himself. Brill scowled at the ash-tray, and finally spoke.

"Something wrong. Something screwy with that cigar business. It's one of those things that sound fine at first, until you look into 'em more closely. Cigars from ashes! From dead butts, he should have said."

"I think Fletcher was having a bit of fun with us," I observed. "Anyhow, we know the origin of the phoenix legend; and hanged if it didn't sound plausible!"

Brill started to his feet.

"He never told us how he knew it!" he exclaimed, with a startled air. "He never told us— Why, say! He put it over on us all the way! Where'd he get that yarn, I ask you?"

"Don't ask me," I rejoined, chuckling. "Ask Norman Fletcher."

Another of this attractive series will appear in the next, the October, issue.

Our October Issue

NEXT month comes "Blade of the Buccaneers," a complete book-length novel of adventure on the Spanish Main with Sir Francis Drake and his dare-devil company, by Donald Barr Chidsey—who wrote "Bonnie Prince Charlie" and other well-received books.

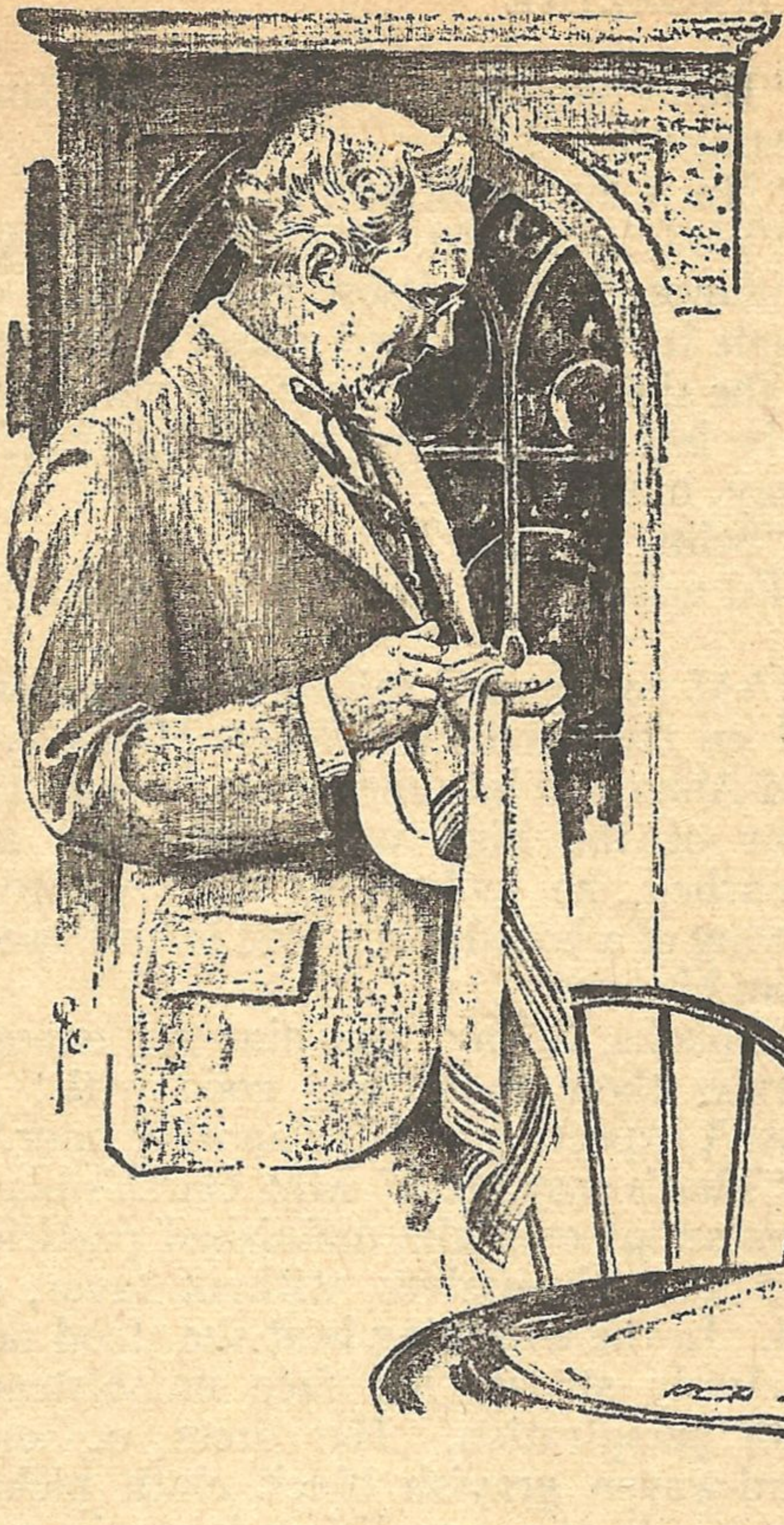
In our next issue, also, the indefatigable Ellery Queen goes to a prize-fight and walks into a heavy-weight murder mystery. And in this same October number Robert Mill will offer the first of the new and "different" group of detective stories with which he plans to vary his Tiny David series.

Next month, moreover, Mr. John Destiny winds up his daring exploits

with high finance and personal mystery in a blaze of excitement. And our new friend Gilead Skaggs endeavors to escape his fated career of crime by running off in company with two Indians—and he rides into a journey adventurous indeed.

"Woman of the Sea," a brilliant story based on the mermaid myth, will be H. Bedford-Jones' contribution. And there will be the many other good things that our new 192-page size enables us to give you.

(P.S. William Makin has just returned from a journey around this troubled world with the first of a timely new series about his Intelligence Officer the Red Wolf of Arabia. This in October too!)



The Twister



An able writer makes his first appearance in Blue Book with a spirited, human and specially amusing story.

By **WALTER DE STEIGUER**

THE July morning was already breathless and steaming when Ed Brockett hustled down his driveway and out onto the gravel road stretching eastward toward Paddon. He covered the mile between his own quarter-section and Mrs. Selina Garth's three hundred and sixty acres at a ground-eating lope. But when he had scissored his long legs over the gate into the Garth driveway, he paused to mop his face, and his mien became furtive. Instead of following the driveway, out of the walnut grove and on up the bare hillside to the house a furlong to the north, he edged still farther east, keeping himself out of sight in the wooded bottom along Sycamore Creek.

There were two elms and an old snag of apple-tree overgrown with wild grapevine, at the east side of the Garth house. When these blanked him from view, he left the woods and humped himself up the hill. A hundred yards behind the house, the long whitewashed sheds of the chick-

en-yard blazed in the merciless sun-glare. Alma took care of the chickens. If he was lucky, she'd be somewhere in the sheds, and he'd get a few minutes alone with her before her mother spotted him.

The last thirty yards he had to come out into view from the house; but there was no help for that. He strode rapidly to the wire-net-fenced acre of the chickenyard and let himself through its door.

Within, fifteen hundred shining White Leghorns scratched languidly and complained, in muted cluckings, of the sun's anger. The only other occupant—a weedy little man squatted on a box in the shade of a shed, turning a hammer meditatively in his hands—looked up and grinned. This was Samson Garth. Sam was Mrs. Garth's second husband; and when you said that, you said practically all there was to say about Sam. It was denied, roundabout Paddon, that Mrs. Garth had actually proposed to Sam. She had, it was asserted, merely notified him that they were getting married, and when.

Ed came up to him and said; "Where's Alma, Sam?"

"Seliny taken her down to the raspb'ry patch." Sam pointed a vague thumb over his shoulder. "Seliny aims to put up a mess of jam, 'safternoon."

Ed relaxed, philosophically. He hadn't been lucky. But there was nothing really unexpected about that. He seldom was lucky, where Alma's mother was concerned.

"It don't look like you showed good head-work, Sam, locating yourself there," he observed. "The sun'll catch you in another hour. You should 'a' put your box about five feet further east. Then you'd been shaded for three-four hours yet."

Ed was a graduate of State A. & M., but he usually reserved his book English for the classes in Agriculture and Animal Husbandry which he taught at the Pad-don high-school. In conversation with neighbors, and particularly in those bouts of solemn joshing engaged in by the Pad-don citizenry, he reverted easily to local idiom.

"I see your p'int, Ed," Sam agreed gravely. "But I figured it wasn't worth dragging the box that far. Seliny 'll catch me before the sun does. I'm reely just waitin' for an enlightenment on whether I better finish nailing up this here partition, before dinner."



"Don't you seem to get any spiritual message on it?"

"No, I aint—not so far."

"Well," said Ed, "if a man can't get guidance, I don't know what he can do about it." He glanced round the corner of the shed. "But I'd say you aint going to be left bogged down and helpless that-away, much longer."

"Seliny comin'?"

Ed nodded.

SAM got up and rained hammer-blows on the partition. When Mrs. Garth and Alma had let themselves through the door of the high wire fence and approached, he looked up from vigorous sawing of a board and wiped honest sweat from his brow.

"Shucks, Seliny, you aint got enough berries there to do any good with! I wasn't expecting you for another hour."

"That's easy seen." Mrs. Garth's black eyes swept over the unfinished partition and fixed themselves, without favor, on Ed. In the withering heat she stood tall, tirelessly strong, her face unmoistened with perspiration. Her dress, of some hard-woven grayish black cloth picked for its wearing qualities, hung in stiff folds which suggested a fabrication of sheet iron. "The sun's about got the last of the berries. What you doing here, Ed? I thought you was busy threshing."

"Finished this morning," said Ed briefly. "How you, Alma? Hot, isn't it?"

Alma smiled shyly. "Simply awful, Ed! I thought I'd melt, down there in the hollow at the raspberry patch." Her gentle brown eyes flicked, with a sort of hopeless appeal, to her mother's rigid face, then returned to Ed's. Alma was nineteen and very pretty, almost a beauty; but Mrs. Garth's iron domination had kept her still rather a child than a grown

"We—we was askin' a donation," Gabe stammered out. "Donation!" Mrs. Garth fairly spat the word. "That's what everybody wants!"

woman. Ed, freshly out of college, had taught at the high school during Alma's last two years there. Even yet it was hard for her to see him as he was—only twenty-six, young as she was young, a determined suitor for her hand—instead of awesomely a faculty member. Alma hadn't lacked suitors, but none of them had got to first base. Mrs. Garth had made short work of each as he entered the lists. Only Ed, big-boned, stubborn, not to be put down, his gray eyes meeting her black ones, had persisted. The intense silent battle had lasted for four years now, and the tempers of both were wearing thin.

"LISTEN, Alma," said Ed; "some of the young people are having a picnic at Bridger's Park tonight, and then we're all driving over to Hasselton for a moonlight swim in the new pool. How about letting me take you?"

"Why, I—I don't know—"

"Alma can't go," Mrs. Garth said flatly. "The idea! Traipsing off at night with a bunch of—"

"Judge Bennett and his wife are chaperoning," said Ed. "What's wrong with it?"

Mrs. Garth's face was unpleasantly mottled. She sensed, in Ed's making the invitation direct to Alma, another move in his long campaign to edge the daughter out of her own sphere of absolute dominance.

"The bathing-suits those little flibbertigibbets wear, for one thing," she snapped. "Indecent exposure, is what I call it!"

Ed cracked the thumb-joint of his big hand. "Alma and I won't go in, if you don't want. We'll just watch."

"Aw, Seliny," said Sam weakly, "a girl aint young but once—" He withered under his wife's glance.

"I don't want to hear any more, Ed," she said. "Alma can't go! Once I give out my word, I stick to it. Everybody in the county knows that. . . . Alma, you come along to the house. It's most noon."

It was all Alma could do to restrain tears from humiliation over this wrangle. She raised brimming eyes to Ed's, then dropped them.

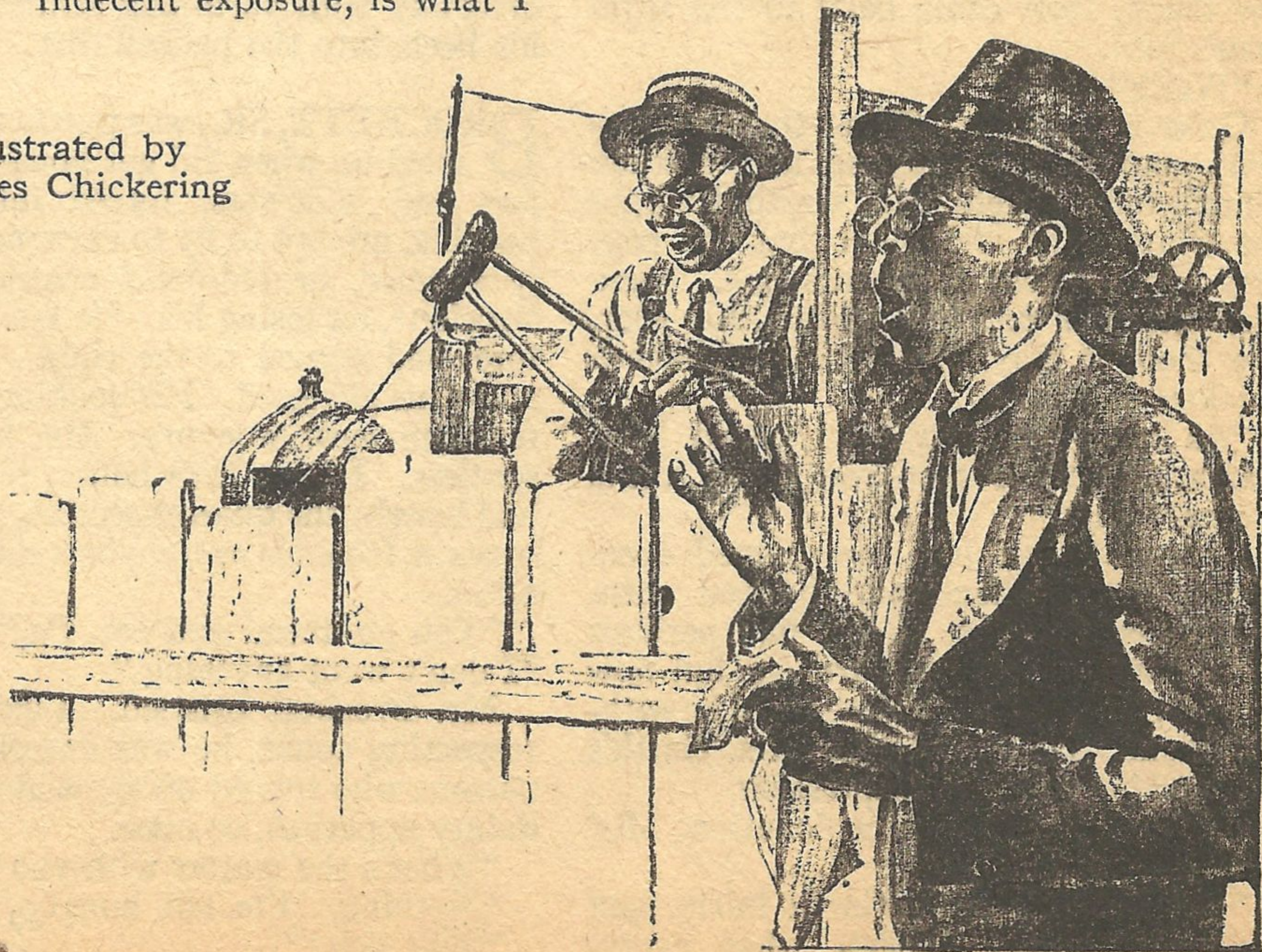
"I—I'm sorry, Ed."

Ed said, in a choked voice: "It's all right, Alma."

He thrust balled fists into his trouser pockets and followed the two women out of the enclosure, raging silently. The sultry breathlessness of the day, like a torment too long endured, had helped to heat the deep antagonism between Mrs. Garth and himself to the explosive point. Any protest from him, he saw, might bring an open quarrel fatal to his hopes.

As they neared the house, an ancient truck of incredible dilapidation, containing two negroes, jangled to a halt in the driveway. Ed knew both of them. So did everyone around Paddon. The driver was Cal Thomas, a cripple who eked a living by hauling ashes and tin cans from the alley dumps of town residents. The passenger was Gabriel Bone, pastor of the little church in Paddon's colored quarter.

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering





Gabe was an emaciated wisp of a man, gray as dead grass, mystical and otherworldly, who preached, without pay, sermons in which fervent ejaculation and long, rhapsodic, unintelligible sentences alternated. He lived, fed by gifts of food left at his door, in an abandoned shack behind the railroad roundhouse.

Gabe got out of the truck, approached, removed a deplorable hat, and greeted each of the party in turn.

"Howdy, Mis' Garth and Miss Alma! How you, Mist' Brockett? Howdy, Mist' Garth! Sho' is a hot day, aint it? Thunduh-heads pokin' up there in the no'th. Maybe we get some rain."

Mrs. Garth's eyes went to the driver of the truck, then came back to the little man's face.

"Well?"

Gabe stammered: "We—the chu'ch—givin' our annual 'possum and chicken dinnuh tomor' night, Mis' Garth. Charges the white folks and them that can pay, fifty cents. Poor folks eats free. Seem like 'possums is awful scarce this year. We thought maybe you'd let us have a chicken or two."

"As many as you want," said Mrs. Garth. "They'll cost you thirty cents apiece. Cash."

Gabe took off his iron-rimmed spectacles, wiped them, and hooked them back over his ears. They had perhaps fitted his eyes twenty years ago, but now he was purblind either with them or without them. He stared into Mrs. Garth's face, trying to see its expression.

"We—we was askin' a donation, Mis' Garth. For cha'ity."

"Donation!" Mrs. Garth fairly spat the word out. "That's what every-

body wants nowadays! Something for nothing! Well, I work hard for my living, and other folks can do the same. The trouble with your people is that two-thirds of them are just naturally bone-lazy and shiftless, Gabe. They won't look for work, or even take it when it's offered."

After a moment Gabe said, gently: "Plenty look and can't find no work now, Mis' Garth. Plenty hongry chillen, white and black both. The po' we have always with us."

He made a little bow and turned away, to the truck. The other negro got out, hobbled to the front, and twirled the crank.

"Gabe!" Ed called, over the clatter of the engine. "Drive on to my place and tell my father I said to give you half a dozen chickens."

Mrs. Garth turned a long look on him, then glanced at her daughter.

"Alma," she said, "go on into the house. Get dinner started. . . . Go on! You too, Sam."

She watched the drooping figure of her daughter until it had disappeared, then wheeled on Ed.

"I don't like you," she said. "I never did. After this, you keep away from here. Keep away from Alma. Stay off my land. Do you understand?"

Ed licked his lips, staring into her furious eyes. He wished she were a man. But she wasn't. There was nothing to do, nothing to say. He went down the driveway with yard-long strides, digging his heels into the packed dirt.

BROCKETT, SR., was putting the noon meal on when Ed got home. Bachelors and widowers, forced into house-keeping, are apt to fly to extremes: ghastly squalor, or old-maid neatness. Mr. Brockett, on losing his wife ten years before, had turned to the right. His pots and pans glittered. His cooking was better than most women's. His house was spotless. It was Ed's house, really. Ed had bought the quarter-section, at a great bargain, from his own savings since graduation.

"You go ahead and eat, Pa," said Ed. "I don't want anything."

Mr. Brockett bristled. Like all self-respecting cooks, he was exasperated by persons who turned up at meal-time with dainty appetites, or none.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I'm not hungry."

"You sick?"

"No. It's just too hot to eat." Ed picked up last night's Paddon *Intelligencer* and buried his nose in it, while his father examined him over his glasses.

"I bet I know what's wrong with you," Mr. Brockett said at last. "I bet you had a run-in with Seliny Garth. . . . That's it, aint it?"

Ed cast the *Intelligencer* aside. "Well, I suppose you got to know it, sooner or later. I did."

"What'd she say?"

"Said to keep away from Alma and keep off her land."

MR. BROCKETT balled his dish-towel and dashed it passionately on the sink drainboard.

"I s'pose she thinks you aint good enough for Alma, hey? You, that put yourself through college, and owned your own farm free and clear before you was twenty-five! Wait till I see her! I'll give her a piece of my mind that'll—"

"Now, Pa, don't run up your blood pressure. Let me handle this."

"Blood pressure be derved! Who does Seliny Garth think she is—the Queen of Sheby or somebody? Just because she heired nine forties of good soil and's been too lucky to live! Plants her creek-bottom to corn and it comes a dry season and everybody gets burnt out, but she makes a crop; plants upland, and it rains frawgs an' mud-cats, and she gets forty bushel to the acre when other folks' stands is half drowned. I never seen such luck! She's got to where she thinks gumption give out after she was handed her share. I don't wish nobody any harm, but it'd do me good to see Seliny Garth get herself into a box, just once, that'd give every body a big laugh on her! It'd half kill her, but it's just what she needs. And it's the only thing'll ever bring her down off her high horse, you mark my words!"

"I don't care anything about reforming Alma's mother," said Ed, miserably. "I just want to get Alma out of jail. She hasn't been off that place twice in the last year, without her mother was along; nor had a decent dress since she got out of school. Slaving her youth away for a bunch of damn' chickens—"

He got up, went to a window, and stared out unseeingly.

Mr. Brockett's rage appeared to evaporate. "Draw up a chair and eat a little something, Ed," he wheedled. "Come on, now! Look, I got chipped beef in cream and scalloped potatoes, fixed just the way you like them."



This was Samson Garth.

Ed allowed himself to be persuaded. His appetite, after he got started, was better than he'd thought it was going to be.

He was halfway through a quarter of blackberry pie when intermittent honking from the Paddon road drew him to the door. By the time Mr. Brockett got to the front porch, Ed had covered a hundred and fifty of the two hundred yards to the gate. Mr. Brockett recognized the Garth coupé. Sam, at the front, was peering into the radiator opening, and Alma was at the wheel.

Mr. Brockett descended the steps, stopped, clawed his beard, turned, and went back into the house.

Sam said, as Ed vaulted the gate: "Thought we needed water, but it don't look like we do, after all!" He winked, and added innocently: "Cream separator busted, right out of a clear sky, and we got to go to St. Joe for a new gear. Seliny don't trust me since I took off Ham Whitby's fender, so there wasn't nothing for it but for Alma to drive."

His eyes on the girl, Ed said: "Thanks, Sam!"

Alma looked back, nervously, through the rear window of the coupé. But the road from here on toward St. Joe was hidden from the Garth house by roadside trees.

"Ed, what—what happened this morning? After I went in the house?"

"Didn't your mother say?"

"No. She wouldn't."

Ed muttered, through set teeth: "Wanted you to think, when I didn't come back, that I'd quit! She told me not to come on her place again."

Alma flushed, then paled.

Ed took a bill-fold from his hip pocket and extracted a paper. He tumbled out words with a sort of feverish urgency:

"Alma, I've been carrying this for a year, now! Carrying it with me every-



where, so we'd be ready when the time came."

"What—"

"It's our marriage license. See? *Edward Brockett* and *Alma Crawford*. Alma, listen! If we don't take our lives into our own hands and live them, we'll never live them at all! Your mother'll block us if she can—nothing we can do will ever change her. Are you going to let her do that to us?"

"I—I can't—"

"Yes, you can! You can drive into Paddon with me this afternoon—right now—and we'll be married. . . . Alma! You know I—I've always been crazy

about you! Everything I've thought or done or planned, for five years, has been for the time when—Alma! Say yes!"

"Oh, Ed! I—I just can't. . . . It would be terrible, terrible—"

Ed's chest expanded with a whistling intake of breath. For a long minute he stared into the girl's eyes, his face grown bleak and haggard. Then he crumpled the marriage license, slowly, into a little ball, and hurled it into the tall weeds at the roadside.

"All right, Alma," he said thickly. "I can't fight you too. Good-by."

He did not look back, after he had vaulted the gate into his own land.



Stretched face downward under a tree, where Sycamore Creek cut the corner of his southeast forty, he tore at the long grass—a gesture mechanical, unconscious, regularly repeated. But after a time the clenching and grasping of his fingers slowed; ceased. He lay motionless, and his big frame seemed gradually to deflate; to collapse closer to the earth. It was as if the hope of five years was draining out.

He did not know how much time had passed—two hours, perhaps three—when the first long roll of thunder, startlingly loud, startlingly near, sounded in his ears.

He got up. Heavy clouds had pushed across all the sky. A streak of the south-

east horizon was still clear placid blue, but from the northwest boiling masses of vapor, blue-black, low-hanging, laced with streaks of fire, were rushing on him. Gusts of wind blew suddenly, then fell again to breathless calm.

By the time he had reached the oat-field east of his house, the day was half night. He halted for a moment, buffeted by the erratic winds. The white box of the Garth house, crowning its hill, was only faintly visible through the heavy murk. And now, behind it and to the left, a strange churning began among greenish-violet vapors which dipped always closer to the earth.

He thought: "That looks like— But Alma! . . . St. Joe . . . an hour there, an hour back."

Without any thought at all, he was running. Not toward home, but away from it, toward the Garth house. He leaped the fence into the Paddon road, crossed that on a long diagonal, leaped at its north boundary fence, caught a foot on barbs of the top wire, fell heavily, was up again running, running, his breath stabbing his lungs; cornfield, tall stalks crashing before his rush; pasture; hill of the Garth house rising under his pounding feet; and now, whirling, seething, roaring, a vast funnel letting itself down, there in the north, from the black ceiling so close above—its tip touching the fields, now—shocks of grain, fence boards, tree branches, whole trees leaping into its whirl—it coming on, not fast, but steadily, the tip wavering a little from side to side like the trunk of a titanic elephant snuffing the earth—

WIND solid as a moving wall hurled him to earth, rolled him over and over. He dug fingers into the grass, slid, rolled, dug again and held, to see the Garth house—stark now against the black funnel passing behind it—waver a little, shift cater-cornered on its foundation, and come to rest again as the cataclysm roared away southeast, toward Paddon.

Deafened, half blind, he got to his feet and ran to the house. Torrential rain began as he kicked in the jammed door of the kitchen. He was shouting "Alma! Alma! Alma!"—pounding through the rooms of the lower floor, up the stairs, crashing open the doors of bedrooms.

In the last of these he halted, staring. Half full of sudsy water, an old-fashioned tin hip bath sat on the floor, flanked by kettles evidently used to carry hot water from the kitchen.

On the bed, Mrs. Garth's invariable gray-black dress lay stiffly, with a pair of stockings and other more intimate garments.

Ed thought: "She must have been taking a bath."

Sanity suddenly returned. For the first time he remembered the "cold cave"—a cellar dug slantingly into the hillside east of the house, where fruits, vegetables, and preserves were kept.

Of course! That was where they'd all take out for, the moment they saw what was coming!

The rain was slacking as he came round the corner of the house, to halt, staring.

Every vestige of the chicken-yard was gone: sheds, fence, chickens, all.

"Boy, that was close!" he muttered.

Approaching the cold-cave, he saw its slanting, almost horizontal door rise, cautiously, a few inches. It held there a moment, then sank back. With a quick return of anxiety he rushed to it, grasped the hasp of its fastening and lifted.

As the door rose, a hand shot out of the opening and hooked round the edge, tearing the hasp from his fingers and slamming the door shut. Mrs. Garth's voice issued loudly, but with a panicky quality new to Ed's ears, from the cavern:

"Ed Brockett, leave that door alone! Go away!"

Ed fell back, dazed.

"Is Alma down there?"

"No! Nobody's here but me!"

"You'd better come out. It's all over."

"I'll come out when I get good and ready! You get away from here!"

"But—"

"Go away! Go right now! Don't you dare touch that door again!"

Ed was seeing visions. A vision of a hip bath of soapy water, and of what had lain on the bed beside it. A vision of fingers hooking round the edge of the cold-cave door, and of a flash of white arm, bare as far up as he'd glimpsed it. He was hearing voices. A voice scathing all half-clad flibbertigibbets. Another voice growling: "—get herself into a box that'd give everybody a big laugh. It's the only thing'll ever bring her down off her high horse."

A SLOW grin creased his cheeks. He squatted comfortably on his heels.

"Looks to me like that twister sort of addled your wits, Mrs. Garth," he confided. "You know, I've always felt you weren't quite right in your head, anyway! Account of your holding out against Alma and me getting married, I mean. Kind of crazy and unreasonable. And now it looks like you've gone clean dippy. I guess I better come down there and fetch you out, for your own good."

He rattled the door hasp, tentatively.

"Ed Brockett! If you—if you dare—Go away from here this minute!" The half-scream had a quality of real hysteria, now.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Garth! I wouldn't like to leave you alone, the shape you're in. If you were right in your mind, it'd be different. But you're not. Can't be, after the way you've treated Alma and me. So I'll stay right here with you, Mrs. Garth,

I won't leave—don't you be afraid of that!"

Silence.

"If you don't want me to come down there, of course I won't. I'll just wait here till folks begin to come out from Paddon, to see what's happened. There'll be a lot of them right soon now, I reckon. I'll explain to them about your being kind of out of your mind. Old Miss Sparks that gathers items for the *Intelligencer*—she'll be among the first, I bet. Got a great nose for news, Miss Sparks has. And talk! Biggest talker in the county, that woman!"

SILENCE.

"Of course, if something came up to convince me you're not *really* out of your head—if you was to say, for instance, that Alma and I could marry right away, with your consent and approval. . . . Did you say something, Mrs. Garth?"

Silence.

"There comes a car now. Looks like—yep, Miss Sparks' old blue roadster. Couple more right behind. Soon as they cross the Sycamore bridge, they'll be close enough to hear me shout, and I'll wave 'em to come on up. Don't you worry, Mrs. Garth! It won't be long, now."

"Ed—"

"Yes?"

"If—if I say you and Alma can get married, will you go away right now—and keep your mouth shut, always?"

"You know I will."

"Well—all right."

"You pass your word?"

"Yes. Go away, quick!"

Ed didn't need that last command, because he was already taking ten-foot leaps down the driveway to the gate. There was only one car coming, and it wasn't coming from Paddon, but from the other direction. From St. Joe. It was the Garth coupé.

Alma skidded it to a halt and fell into his arms as he jerked the door open.

"Ed! Ed! Oh, when I saw that terrible thing whirling ahead of us—and then your father at the gate of your place and he didn't know where you were—"

She burst into a passion of weeping.

"There, honey! There! It's all right! Everything's all right!"

Sam asked, anxiously: "Seliny?"

"Right as rain."

Alma raised her head. "Ed, if—if you still want me, I'll go with you now! This minute! I know now that you're the—the only thing that matters."

Sam turned his head away for a discreet interval, then cleared his throat raspily.

"Hey! Come up for air! Car coming!"

Sheriff Hanlon's coupé drew to a halt beside them. The Sheriff had a companion, and the companion was Reverend Mills, the gaunt, kindly pastor of the Paddon Methodist Church. Ed startled, but retained his hold on Alma's waist. He began to feel like he was sure-enough getting the breaks, this afternoon.

"Anybody hurt, out this way?" asked the Sheriff.

"Not that we know of," said Sam.

"How'd you make out, in Paddon?"

The Sheriff ejected a chew of tobacco. "No damage. That twister just went all to pieces, over the colored section at the near edge of town."

The Reverend Mills chuckled. "It not only went to pieces, but it dropped everything it was carrying. There won't be a hungry darky in Paddon, tonight. Chickens! I never saw so many white Leghorns in my life. Chickens in trees, on roofs, in alleys and back yards! Every darky we saw had half a dozen tied round his neck and was chasing another. We had to back up and go round the block, once, where the street was blocked by a great tangled mat of chicken wire, with hundreds of chickens wrapped in it; and whole families hacking at the wire with hatchets and axes and scissors and knives and pruning shears! And Gabe Bone standing by, kind of in a daze, quoting from the Acts—Chapter Ten, you know, where Peter has a vision of a great vessel let down from the heavens, filled with fowls of the air—"

Ed was tugging at his arm: "Reverend, you're just the man we need here! Alma and I want to get married! Right now!"

THE minister descended, his eyes twinkling; everyone in the county knew about, and sympathized with, Ed's long struggle. He cast a speculative glance up the hill to the Garth house.

"Got your license?"

Ed wilted. "Damnation! . . . Excuse me, Reverend!"

Alma's hand went to the yoke of her dress and came out with a folded paper. It was laced with a network of fine wrinkles which careful smoothing had failed to remove. She put it into Ed's hand, her face flaming.

"I hunted in the weeds and found it, Ed," she murmured. "I—I kind of felt, all the time, somehow, like we would need it pretty soon."

The Long Shot

A famous detective finds an exciting case at the race-track.

By ELLERY QUEEN

ELLERY QUEEN rubbed the lipstick from his mouth. "No oomph," his fiancée Paula Paris commented critically, holding him off and surveying his gloomy face. "Ellery Queen, you're in a mess again."

"Hollywood," mumbled Mr. Queen. "The land God forgot. No logic. Disorderly creation. The abiding-place of chaos. Paula, your Hollywood is driving me c-double-o-ditto!"

"You poor imposed-upon Wimpie!" crooned Miss Paris, drawing him onto her spacious maple settee. "Tell Paula all about the nasty old place."

So Mr. Queen unburdened himself. It seemed that Magna Studios ("The Movies Magnificent"), to whom his soul was chartered, had ordered him as one of its staff writers to concoct a horse-racing plot with a fresh patina. A mystery, of course, since Mr. Queen was supposed to know something about crime.

"With fifty writers on the lot who spend all their time—and money—following the ponies," complained Mr. Queen bitterly, "of course they have to pick on the one serf in their thrall who doesn't know a fetlock from a wither. Paula, I'm a sunk scrivener."

"You don't know *anything* about racing?"

"I'm not interested in racing. I've never even seen a race," said Mr. Queen doggedly.

"Imagine that!" said Paula, awed. And she was silent. After a while Mr. Queen said in accusing despair: "Paula, you're thinking of something."

She kissed him and sprang from the settee. "The wrong tense, darling. I've *thought* of something!"

PAULA told him all about old John Galt as they drove out into the green and yellow ranch-country.

Galt was a vast, shapeless Caledonian with a face as craggy as his native heaths and a disposition not less dour. His inner landscape was bleak except where horses breathed and browsed; and this

vulnerable spot had proved his undoing, for he had made two fortunes breeding thoroughbreds and had lost both by racing and betting on them.

"Old John's never stood for any of the crooked dodges of the racing game," said Paula. "He fired Weed Willison, the best jockey he ever had, and had him blackballed by every decent track in the country, so that Willison became a saddlemaker or something, just because of a peccadillo another owner would have winked at. And yet—the inconsistent old coot!—a few years later he gave Willison's son a job, and Whitey's going to ride Black Magic, John's best horse, in the Handicap next Saturday."

"You mean the hundred-thousand-dollar Santa Marita Handicap everybody's in a dither about out here?"

"Yes. Anyway, old John's got a scrunchy little ranch, Black Magic, his daughter Kathryn, and practically nothing else except a stable of also-rans and breeding disappointments."

"So far," remarked Ellery, "it sounds like the beginning of a Class B movie."

"Except," sighed Paula, "that it's not entertaining. John's really on a spot. If Whitey doesn't ride Black Magic to a win in the Handicap, it's the end of the road for John Galt. . . . Speaking about roads, here we are."

They turned into a dirt road and rode dustily toward a ramshackle ranch-house.



"With all his troubles," grinned Ellery, "I fancy he won't take kindly to this quest for Racing in Five Easy Lessons."

"Meeting a full-grown man who knows nothing about racing may give the old gentleman a laugh. Lord knows he needs one."

A Mexican cook directed them to Galt's private track, and they found him leaning his weight upon a sagging rail, his small buried eyes puckered on a cloud of dust eddying along the track at the far turn. His thick fingers clutched a stop-watch.

A man in high-heeled boots sat on the rail two yards away, a shotgun in his lap pointing carelessly at the head of a too-well-dressed gentleman with a foreign air who was talking to the back of Galt's shaggy head. The well-dressed man sat in a glistening roadster beside a hard-faced chauffeur.

"You got my proposition, John?" said the well-dressed man, with a toothy smile. "You got it?"

"Get the hell off my ranch, Santelli," said John Galt, without turning his head. "Sure," said Santelli, still smiling. "You think my proposition over, hey, or maybe somethin' happen to your nag, hey?"

They saw the old man quiver, but he did not turn; and Santelli nodded curtly to his driver. The big roadster roared away.

The dust-cloud on the track rolled toward them and they saw a small, taut figure in sweater and cap perched atop a gigantic stallion, black-coated and lustrous with sweat. The horse was bounding along like a huge cat, his neck arched. He thundered magnificently by.

"Two minutes, two and four-fifth seconds," they heard Galt mutter to his stop-watch. "Prester John's ten-furlong time for the Handicap in '37. Not bad. . . . Whitey!" he bellowed to the jockey, who had pulled the black stallion up. "Rub him down good!"

The jockey grinned and pranced Black Magic toward the adjacent stables.



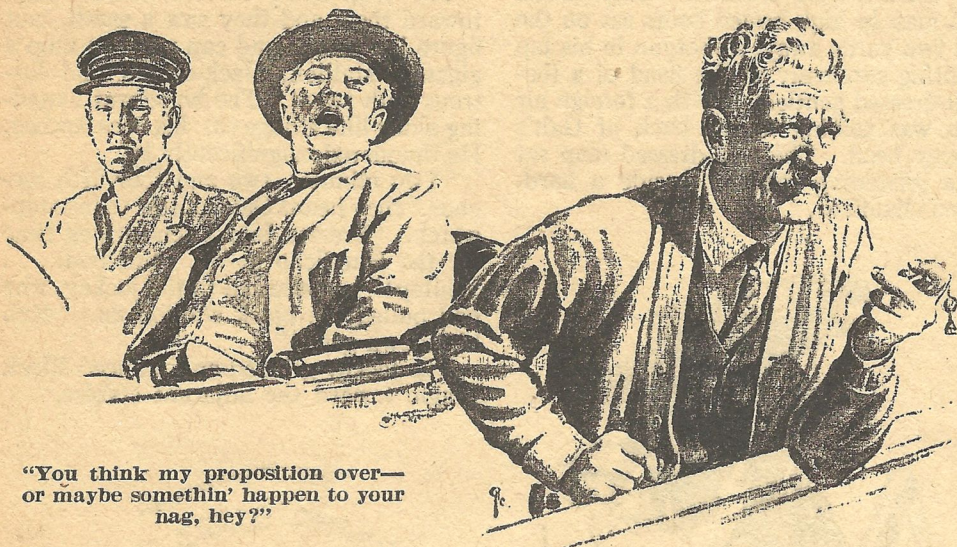
The man with the shotgun drawled: "You got more company, John."

The old man whirled, frowning; then his craggy face broke into a smile and he engulfed Paula's slim hand in his two paws. "Paula! It's fine to see ye. But who's this?" he demanded.

"Mr. Ellery Queen. But how is Katie? And Black Magic?"

"You saw him." Galt gazed after the dancing horse. "Fit as a fiddle. He'll carry the handicap weight of a hundred

"Lassie, lassie," sighed Galt. "I'm an old mon, an' I know these thieves. Handicap purse is a hundred thousand. And Santelli just offered me a hundred thousand for my stable! It don't wash—my whole shebang aint worth it. Black Magic's no cinch to win. Is Santelli buyin' up all the other horses in the race, too—the big outfits? I tell ye it's somethin' else, and it's rotten." Then he shook his head. "But here I am gabbin' about my troubles. What brings ye here, lassie?"



"You think my proposition over—or maybe somethin' happen to your nag, hey?"

twenty pounds Saturday an' never feel it. Did it just now with the leads on him. Paula, did ye see that murderin' scalawag?"

"The fashion-plate who just drove away?"

"That was Santelli, and ye heard what he said might happen to Black Magic." The old man stared bitterly down the road.

"Santelli!" Paula's face was shocked.

"Bill, go look after the stallion." The man with the shotgun slipped off the rail and waddled toward the stable. "Just made me an offer for my stable. Hell, the dirty thievin' bookie owns the biggest stable west o' the Rockies—what's he want with my picayune outfit?"

"He owns Tawny Tim, the Handicap favorite, doesn't he?" asked Paula quietly. "And Black Magic is figured strongly in the running, isn't he?"

"Quoted five to one now, but track odds'll shorten his price. Tawny Tim's two to five," growled Galt.

"It's very simple, then. By buying your horse, Santelli can control the race, owning the two best horses."

"Mr. Queen here, who's a—well, a friend of mine," said Paula, coloring, "has to think up a horse-racing plot for a movie, and I thought you could help him. He doesn't know a thing about racing."

Galt stared at Mr. Queen, who coughed apologetically. "Well, sir, I don't know but that ye're not a lucky mon. Ye're welcome to the run o' the place. Go over an' talk to Whitey; he knows the racket backwards. I'll be with ye in a few minutes."

The old man lumbered off, and Paula and Ellery sauntered toward the stables.

"Who is this ogre Santelli?" asked Ellery with a frown.

"A gambler and bookmaker with a national hook-up." Paula shivered a little. "Poor John! I don't like it, Ellery."

THEY turned a corner of the big stable and almost bumped into a young man and a young woman in the lee of the wall, clutching each other desperately and kissing as if they were about to be torn apart for eternity.

"Pardon us," said Paula, seeing them.

The young lady, her eyes crystal with tears, blinked at her. "Is—is that Paula Paris?" she sniffled.

"The same, Kathryn," smiled Paula. "Mr. Queen, Miss Galt. What on earth's the matter?"

"Everything," cried Miss Galt tragically. "Oh, Paula, we're in most awful trouble!"

Her amorous companion backed bashfully off. He was a slender young man clad in grimy, odoriferous overalls. He wore spectacles flourey with the chaff of oats, and there was a grease smudge on one emotional nostril.

"MISS PARIS, and Mr. Queen, this is Hank Halliday, my—my boyfriend," sobbed Kathryn.

"I see the whole plot," said Paula sympathetically. "Papa doesn't approve of Katie's taking up with a stablehand—the snob!—and it's tragedy all around."

"Hank *isn't* a stablehand," cried Kathryn, dashing the tears from her cheeks, which were rosy with indignation. "He's a college graduate who—"

"Kate," said the odoriferous young man with dignity, "let me explain, please. . . . Miss Paris, I have a character deficiency. I am a physical coward."

"Heavens, so am I!" said Paula.

"But a man, you see. . . . I am particularly afraid of animals. Horses, specifically." Mr. Halliday shuddered. "I took this—this filthy job to conquer my unreasonable fear." Mr. Halliday's sensitive chin hardened. "I have not yet conquered it, but when I do I shall find myself a real job. And then," he asserted firmly, embracing Miss Galt's trembling shoulders, "I shall marry Kathryn, papa or no papa."

"Oh, I hate him for being so mean!" sobbed Katie.

"And I—" began Hank Halliday somberly.

"Hankus-Pankus!" yelled a voice from the stable. "What the hell you paid for, anyway? *Come clean up this mess before I slough you one!"

"Yes, Mr. Willison," said Hankus-Pankus hastily, and he hurried away with an apologetic half-bow. His lady-love ran sobbing off toward the ranch-house.

Mr. Queen and Miss Paris regarded each other. Then Mr. Queen said: "I'm getting a plot, b'gosh, but it's the wrong one."

"Poor kids," sighed Paula. "Well, talk to Whitey Willison and see if the divine spark ignites."



During the next several days Mr. Queen ambled about the Galt ranch, talking to Jockey Willison, to the bespectacled Mr. Halliday—who, he discovered, knew as little about racing as he and cared even less—to a continuously tearful Kathryn, to the guard named Bill—who slept in the stable near Black Magic with one hand on his shotgun—and to old John himself.

Ellery learned about jockeys, touts, racing procedure, gear, handicaps, purses, forfeits, stewards, the ways of bookmakers, famous races and horses and owners and tracks; but the divine spark perversely refused to ignite.

So, on Friday at dusk, when he found himself unaccountably ignored at the Galt ranch, he glumly drove up into the Hollywood hills.

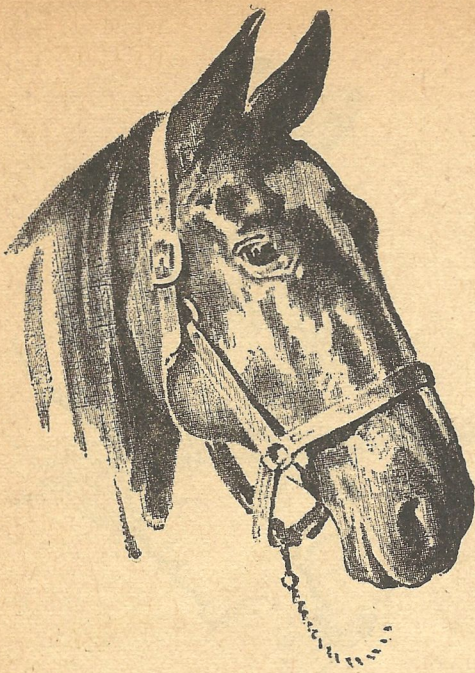
He found Paula in her garden soothing two anguished young people. Katie Galt was still weeping and Mr. Halliday, the self-confessed craven, for once dressed in an odorless garment, was awkwardly pawing her golden hair.

"More tragedy?" said Mr. Queen. "I should have known. I've just come from your father's ranch, and there's a pall over it."

"Well, there should be!" cried Kathryn. "I told my father where *he* gets off. Treating Hank that way! I'll never speak to him as long as I live! He's—he's *unnatural!*"

"Now Katie," said Mr. Halliday reprovingly, "that's no way to speak of your own father."

"Hank Halliday, if you had one spark of manhood—"



Mr. Halliday stiffened as if his beloved had jabbed him with the sparking end of a live wire.

"I didn't mean that, Hankus," sobbed Kathryn, throwing herself into his arms. "I know you can't help being a coward. But when he knocked you down and you didn't even—"

Mr. Halliday worked the left side of his jaw thoughtfully. "You know, Mr. Queen, something happened to me when Mr. Galt struck me. For an instant I felt a strange—er—lust. I really believe if I'd had a revolver—and if I knew how to handle one—I might easily have committed murder then. I saw—I believe that's the phrase—red."

"Hank!" cried Katie in horror.

Hank sighed, the homicidal light dying out of his blue eyes.

"Old John," explained Paula, winking at Ellery, "found these two cuddling again in the stable, and I suppose he thought it was setting a bad example for Black Magic, whose mind should be on the race tomorrow; so he fired Hank, and Katie blew up and has left home forever."

"To discharge me is his privilege," said Mr. Halliday coldly, "but now I owe him no loyalty whatever. I shall *not* bet on Black Magic to win the Handicap!"

"I hope the big brute loses," sobbed Katie.

"Now Kate," said Paula firmly, "I've heard enough of this nonsense. I'm going to speak to you like a Dutch aunt."

"Mr. Halliday," said Mr. Queen formally, "I believe this is our cue to seek a slight libation."

Mr. Queen and Miss Paris tore the lovers apart. . . .

It was a little after ten o'clock when Miss Galt, no longer weeping but facially still tear-ravaged, crept out of Miss Paris's white frame house and got into her dusty little car.

As she turned her key in the ignition lock and stepped on the starter, a harsh bass voice from the shadows of the back seat said: "Don't yell. Don't make a sound. Turn your car around and keep going till I tell you to stop."

"*Eek!*" screeched Miss Galt.

A big leathery hand clamped over her trembling mouth. After a few moments the car moved away.

MR. QUEEN called for Miss Paris the next day and they settled down to a snail's pace, heading for Arcadia, eastward, near which lay the beautiful Santa Marita race-course.

"What happened to Lachrymose Katie last night?" demanded Mr. Queen.

"Oh, I got her to go back to the ranch. She left me a little after ten, a very miserable little girl. What did you do with Hankus-Pankus?"

"I oiled him thoroughly and then took him home. He'd hired a room in a Hollywood boarding-house. He cried on my shoulder all the way. It seems old John also kicked him in the seat of his pants, and he's been brooding murderously over it."

"Poor Hankus—the only honest male I've ever met!"

"I'm afraid of horses, too," said Mr. Queen hurriedly.

"Oh, you! You're detestable. You haven't kissed me once today."

Only the cooling balm of Miss Paris' lips, applied at various points along U. S. Route 66, kept Mr. Queen's temper from boiling over. The roads were sluggish with traffic. At the track it was even worse. It seemed as though every last soul in Southern California had converged upon Santa Marita at once, in every manner of conveyance, from the dusty flivvers of dirt farmers to the shiny metal monsters of the movie stars. The magnificent stands seethed with noisy thousands, a wriggling mosaic of color and movement. The sky was blue, the sun warm, zephyrs blew, and the track was fast. A race was being run, and the sleek animals were small and fleet and sharply focused in the clear light.

"What a marvelous day for the Handicap!" cried Paula, dragging Ellery along.

Despite Miss Paris's overenthusiastic trail-breaking, Mr. Queen arrived at the track stalls in one piece. They found old John Galt watching with the intentness of a Red Indian as a stablehand kneaded Black Magic's velvety forelegs. There was a stony set to Galt's gnarled face that made Paula cry: "John! Is anything wrong with Black Magic?"

"Black Magic's all right," said the old man curtly. "It's Kate. We had a blow-up over that Halliday boy an' she ran out on me."

"Nonsense, John. I sent her back home last night myself."

"She was at your place? She didn't come home."

"She didn't?" Paula's nose wrinkled.

"I guess," growled Galt, "she's run off with that Halliday coward. He's not a mon, the lily-livered—"

"We can't all be heroes, John. He's a good boy, and he loves Katie."

The old man stared stubbornly at his stallion, and after a moment they left and made their way toward their box.

"Funny," said Paula in a scared voice. "She couldn't have run off with Hank; he was with you. And I'd swear she meant to go back to the ranch last night."

"Now, Paula," said Mr. Queen gently. "She's all right." But his eyes were thoughtful and a little perturbed.

THEIR box was not far from the paddock. During the preliminary races, Paula kept searching the sea of faces with her binoculars.

"Well, well," said Mr. Queen suddenly, and Paula became conscious of a rolling thunder from the stands about them.

"What's the matter? What's happened?"

"Tawny Tim, the favorite, has been scratched," said Mr. Queen dryly.

"Tawny Tim? Santelli's horse?" Paula stared at him, paling. "But why? Ellery, there's something in this—"

"It seems he's pulled a tendon and can't run."

"Do you think," whispered Paula, "that Santelli had anything to do with Katie's not getting home?"

"Possibly," muttered Ellery. "But I can't seem to fit the blinking thing—"

"Here they come!"

The shout shook the stands. A line of regal animals began to emerge from the paddock. Paula and Ellery rose with the other restless thousands, and craned. The Handicap contestants were parading to the post!

There was High Tor, who had gone lame on the stretch at the Derby two years before and had not run a race since. This was to be his come-back; the insiders held him in a contempt which the public apparently shared, for he was quoted at 50 to 1. There was little Fighting Billy. There was Equator, prancing sedately along with Buzz Hickey up. There was Black Magic! Glossy black, gigantic, imperial, Black Magic was nervous. Whitey Willison was having a difficult time controlling him and a stablehand was struggling at his bit.

Old John Galt, his big shapeless body unmistakable even at this distance, lumbered from the paddock toward his dancing stallion, apparently to soothe him.

Paula gasped. Ellery said quickly: "What is it?"

"There's Hank Halliday in the crowd. Up there! Right above the spot where Black Magic's passing. About fifty feet from John Galt. And Kathryn's not with him!"

Ellery took the glasses from her and located Halliday.

Paula sank into her chair. "Ellery, I've the queerest feeling. There's something wrong. See how pale he is!"

The powerful glasses brought Halliday to within a few inches of Ellery's eyes. The boy's glasses were steamed over; he was shaking, as if he had a chill; and yet Ellery could see the globules of perspiration on his cheeks.

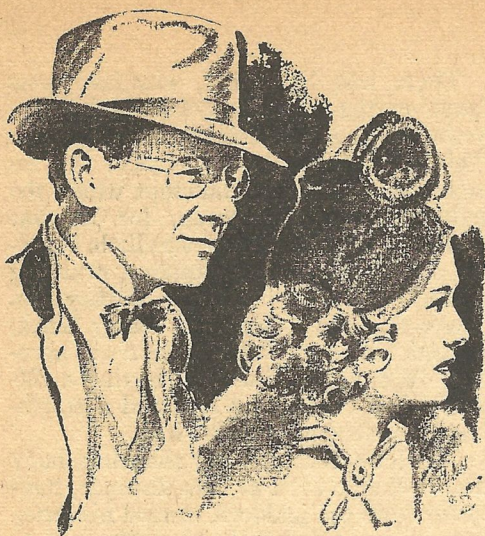
Then Mr. Queen stiffened abruptly.

John Galt had just reached the head of Black Magic; his thick arm was coming up to pull the stallion's head down. And in that instant Mr. Hankus-Pankus Halliday fumbled in his clothes; and in the next his hand appeared claspng a revolver. Mr. Queen very nearly cried out: for its barrel wavering noticeably, the revolver in Mr. Halliday's trembling hands pointed in the general direction of Galt, and there was an explosion.

PAULA PARIS leaped to her feet—and she *did* cry out.

"Why, the crazy young fool!" said Mr. Queen dazedly.

Frightened by the shot, which had gone wild, Black Magic reared. The other horses began to kick and dance. In a moment the place below boiled with panic-stricken thoroughbreds. Galt, clinging to Black Magic's head, half-turned in an immense astonishment and looked inquiringly upward. Whitey struggled desperately to control the frantic stallion.



And then Mr. Halliday shot again—and again—and a fourth time. And at some instant, in the spaces between those shots, the rearing horse got between John Galt and the gun in Halliday's shaking hand.

Black Magic's four feet left the turf. Then, whinnying in agony, flanks heaving, he toppled over on his side.

"Oh, gosh; oh, *gosh!*" said Paula, biting her handkerchief.

"Let's go!" shouted Mr. Queen, and he plunged for the spot.

BY the time they reached the place where Mr. Halliday had so fearfully discharged his pistol, the bespectacled youth had disappeared. The people who had stood about him were seemingly still too stunned to move. Elsewhere, the stands were in pandemonium.

In the confusion, Ellery and Paula managed to slip through the inadequate track-police cordon hastily thrown about the fallen Black Magic and his milling rivals. They found old John on his knees beside the black stallion, his big hands steadily stroking the glossy, veined neck. Whitey, pale and bewildered-looking, had stripped off the tiny saddle, and the track veterinary was examining a bullet-wound in Black Magic's side, near the shoulder. A group of track officials conferred excitedly nearby.

"He saved my life," said old John in a low voice to no one in particular. "He saved my life."

The veterinary looked up. "Sorry, Mr. Galt," he said grimly. "Black Magic won't run this race."

"No. I suppose not." Galt licked his leathery lips. "Is it—mon, is it serious?"

"Can't tell till I dig out the bullet. We'll have to get him out of here and into the hospital right away."

An official said: "Tough luck, Galt. You may be sure we'll do our best to find the scoundrel who shot your horse."

The old man's lips twisted. He climbed to his feet and looked down at the heaving flanks of his fallen thoroughbred. Whitey Willison trudged away with Black Magic's gear, head hanging.

A moment later the loud-speaker system proclaimed that Black Magic, Number 5, had been scratched, and that the Handicap would be run immediately the other contestants could be quieted and lined up in the stall-gate.

"All right, folks, clear out," said a track policeman as a hospital van rushed up, followed by a hoisting-truck.

"What are you doing about the man who shot this horse?" demanded Mr. Queen, not moving.

"Ellery," whispered Paula nervously, tugging at his arm.

"We'll get him; got a good description. Move on, please."

"Well," said Mr. Queen slowly, "I know who he is, do you see?"

"Ellery!"

"I saw him and recognized him."

They were ushered into the Steward's office just as the announcement was made that High Tor, at fifty to one, had won the Santa Marita Handicap, purse one hundred thousand dollars, by two and a half lengths—almost as long a shot, in one sense, as the shot which had laid poor Black Magic low, commented Mr. Queen to Miss Paris, *sotto voce*.

"HALLIDAY?" said John Galt with heavy contempt. "That yellow-livered pup try to shoot me?"

"I couldn't possibly be mistaken, Mr. Galt," said Ellery.

"I saw him, too, John," sighed Paula.

"Who is this Halliday?" demanded the chief of the track police.

Galt told him in monosyllables, relating their quarrel of the day before. "I knocked him down an' kicked him. I guess the only way he could get back at me was with a gun. An' Black Magic took the rap, poor beast." For the first time his voice shook.

"Well, we'll get him; he can't have left the park," said the police chief grimly. "I've got it sealed tighter than a drum."

"Did you know," murmured Mr. Queen, "that Mr. Galt's daughter Kathryn has been missing since last night?"

Old John flushed slowly. "You think—my Kate had somethin' to do—"

"Don't be silly, John!" said Paula.

"At any rate," said Mr. Queen dryly, "her disappearance and the attack here today can't be a coincidence. I'd advise you to start a search for Miss Galt immediately. And, by the way, send for Black Magic's gear. I'd like to examine it."

"Say, who the devil are you?" growled the chief.

Mr. Queen told him negligently. The chief looked properly awed. He telephoned to various police headquarters, and he sent for Black Magic's gear.

WHITEY WILLISON, still in his silks, carried the high small racing-saddle in and dumped it on the floor.

"John, I'm awful sorry about what happened," he said in a low voice.

"It aint your fault, Whitey." The big shoulders drooped.

"Ah, Willison, thank you," said Mr. Queen briskly. "This *is* the saddle that Black Magic was wearing a few minutes ago?"

"Yes sir."

"Exactly as it was when you stripped it off him after the shots?"

"Yes sir."

"Has anyone had an opportunity to tamper with it?"

"No sir. I been with it ever since, and no one's come near it but me."

Mr. Queen nodded and knelt to examine the empty-pocketed saddle. Observing the scorched hole in the flap, his brow puckered in perplexity.

"By the way, Whitey," he asked, "how much do you weigh?"

"Hundred and seven."

Mr. Queen frowned. He rose, dusted his knees delicately, and beckoned the chief of police. They conferred in undertones.

Then the policeman, looking baffled, shrugged, and hurried out.

When he returned, a certain familiar-appearing gentleman in too-perfect clothes and a foreign air accompanied him. The gentleman looked sad.

"I hear some crackpot took a couple o' shots at you, John," he said sorrowfully, "an' got your nag instead. Tough luck."

There was a somewhat quizzical humor behind this ambiguous statement which brought old John's head up in a flash of belligerence.

"You dirty, thievin'—"

"Mr. Santelli," greeted Mr. Queen. "When did you know that Tawny Tim would have to be scratched?"



"Oh, Paula," cried Miss Galt, "we're in most awful trouble!"

"Tawny Tim?" Mr. Santelli looked mildly surprised at this irrelevant question. "Why, last week."

"So that's why you offered to buy Galt's stable—to get control of Black Magic?"

"Sure." Mr. Santelli smiled genially. "He was hot. With my nag out, he looked like a cinch."

"Mr. Santelli, you're what is colloquially known as a cock-eyed liar." Mr. Santelli ceased smiling. "You wanted to buy Black Magic not to see him win, but to see him lose!"

Mr. Santelli looked unhappy. "Who is this," he appealed to the police chief, "Mister Wacky himself?"

IN my embryonic way," said Mr. Queen, "I have been making a few inquiries in the last several days and my information has it that your bookmaking organization covered a lot of Black Magic money when Black Magic was five to one."

"Say, you got somethin' there," said Mr. Santelli, suddenly deciding to be candid.

"You covered about two hundred thousand dollars, didn't you?"

"Wow," said Mr. Santelli. "This guy's got idears, aint he?"

"So," said Mr. Queen sharply, "if Black Magic won the Handicap you stood to drop a very frigid million dollars, did you not, Mr. Santelli?"

"But it's my old friend John some guy tried to rub out," pointed out Mr. Santelli gently. "Go peddle your papers somewhere else, Mr. Wacky."

John Galt looked bewilderedly from the gambler to Mr. Queen. His jaw-muscles were bunched and jerky.

At this moment a special officer deposited among them Mr. Hankus-Pankus Halliday, his spectacles awry on his nose and his collar ripped.

John Galt sprang toward him, but Ellery caught Galt's flailing arms in time to prevent a slaughter.

"Murderer! Scalawag! Horse-killer!" roared old John. "What did ye do with my lassie?"

Mr. Halliday said gravely: "Mr. Galt, you have my sympathy."

The old man's mouth flew open. Mr. Halliday folded his scrawny arms with dignity, glaring at the policeman who had brought him in. "There was no necessity to manhandle me. I'm quite ready to face the—er—music. But I shall not answer any questions."

"No gat on him, Chief," said the policeman by his side.

"What did you do with the revolver?" demanded the chief. No answer. "You admit you had it in for Mr. Galt and tried to kill him?" No answer. "Where is Miss Galt?"

"You see," said Mr. Halliday stonily, "how useless it is."

"Hankus-Pankus," murmured Mr. Queen, "you are superb. You don't know where Kathryn is, do you?"

Halliday instantly looked alarmed. "Oh, I say, Mr. Queen! Don't make me talk. Please!"

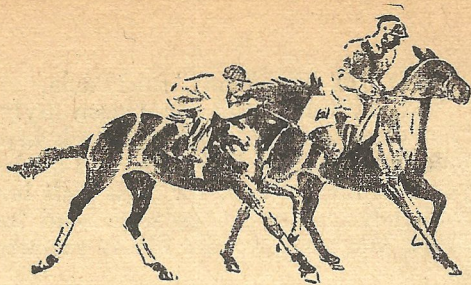
"But you're expecting her to join you here, aren't you?"

Hankus paled. The policeman said: "He's a nut. He didn't even try to make a getaway. He didn't even fight back."

"**H**ANK! Darling! Father!" cried Katie Galt; and, straggle-haired and dusty-faced, she flew into the office and flung herself upon Hank Halliday's disheveled bosom.

"Katie!" screamed Paula, flying to the girl and embracing her; and in a moment both the girls, Paula and Kathryn, were weeping in concert on Hank, while old John's jaw dropped even lower and all but Mr. Queen, who was smiling, stood rooted to their bits of space in timeless stupefaction.

Then Miss Galt ran to her father and clung to him, and old John's shoulders



lifted a little, even though the expression of bewilderment persisted; and she burrowed her head into her father's deep, broad chest.

IN the midst of this incredible scene the track veterinary bustled in and said: "Good news, Mr. Galt. I've extracted the bullet and, while the wound is deep, I give you my word Black Magic will be as good as ever when it's healed." And he bustled out.

And Mr. Queen, his smile broadening, said: "Well, well, a pretty comedy of errors."

"Comedy!" growled old John over his daughter's golden curls. "D'ye call a murderous attempt on my life a comedy?" And he glared fiercely at Mr. Hank Halliday, who was at the moment borrowing a handkerchief from the policeman with which to wipe his face.

"My dear Mr. Galt," replied Mr. Queen, "there has been no attempt on your life. The shots were not fired at you. From the very first Black Magic, and Black Magic only, was intended to be the victim of the shooting."

"What's this?" cried Paula.

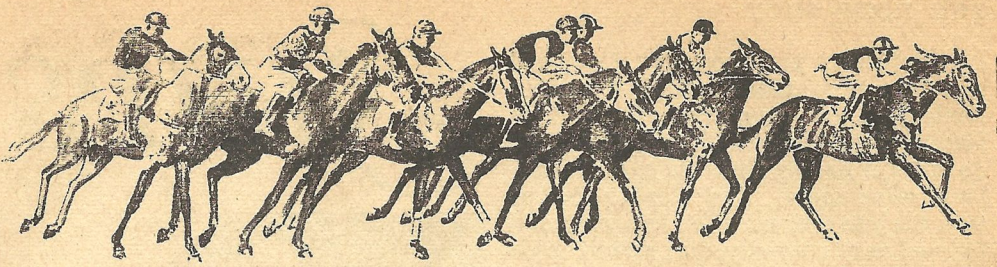
Someone moved abruptly.

"No, no, Whitey," said Mr. Queen, smiling still more broadly. "The door, I promise you, is well guarded."

The jockey snarled: "Yah, he's off his nut. Next thing you'll say I plugged the nag. How could I be on Black Magic's back and at the same time fifty feet away in the grandstand? A million guys saw this screwball fire those shots!"

Mr. Queen bowed.

"A difficulty," he replied affably, "that I shall be delighted to resolve. Black Magic, ladies and gentlemen, was handicapped officially to carry one hundred and twenty pounds in the Santa Marita Handicap. This means that when his jockey, carrying the gear, stepped upon the scales in the weighing-out ceremony just before the race, the combined weight of jockey and gear had to come to exactly one hundred and twenty pounds; or Mr. Whitey Willison would never have been allowed by the track officials to mount his horse."



"What's that got to do with it?" demanded the chief, eyeing Mr. Whitey Willison in a hard, unfeeling way.

"Everything. For Mr. Willison told us only a few minutes ago that he weighs only a hundred and seven pounds. Consequently the racing-saddle Black Magic wore when he was shot must have contained various lead weights which, combined with the weight of the saddle, made up the difference between a hundred and seven pounds, Mr. Willison's weight, and a hundred twenty pounds, the handicap weight. Is that correct?"

"Sure. Anybody knows that."

"Yes, yes, elementary, in *Mr. Holmes'* imperishable phrase. Nevertheless," continued Mr. Queen, walking over and prodding with his toe the saddle Whitey Willison had fetched to the office, "when I examined this saddle, *there were no lead weights in its pockets*. And Mr. Willison assured me no one had tampered with the saddle since he had removed it from Black Magic's back. But this was impossible, since without the lead weights Mr. Willison and the saddle would have weighed out at less than a hundred and twenty pounds on the scales.

"SO I knew," said Mr. Queen, "that Willison had weighed out with a different saddle, that when Black Magic was shot he was wearing a different saddle, that the saddle Willison lugged away from the wounded horse was a different saddle; that he secreted it somewhere on the premises and fetched here on our request a *second* saddle—this one on the floor—which he had prepared beforehand with a bullet-hole nicely placed in the proper spot. And the reason he did this was that obviously there was something in that first saddle he didn't want anyone to see. What could that have been but a special pocket containing a revolver—which in the confusion following Mr. Halliday's first signal shot Mr. Willison calmly discharged into Black Magic's body by simply stooping over as he struggled with the frightened horse, putting his hand into the pocket, and firing while Mr. Halliday was discharging his three other futile

shots fifty feet away! Mr. Halliday, you see, couldn't be trusted to hit Black Magic from such a distance, because Mr. Halliday is a stranger to firearms; he might even hit Mr. Willison instead, if he hit anything. That's why I believe Mr. Halliday was using blank cartridges and threw his pistol away."

The jockey's voice was strident, panicky. "You're crazy! Special saddle! Whoever heard—"

Mr. Queen, still smiling, went to the door, opened it, and said: "Ah, you've found it, I see. Let's have it. In Black Magic's stall? Clumsy, clumsy!"

He returned with a racing-saddle; and Whitey cursed and then grew still. Mr. Queen and the police chief and John Galt examined the saddle and, sure enough, there was a special pocket stitched into the flap, above the iron loop, and in the pocket there reposed a revolver. And the bullet-hole piercing the special pocket had the scorched speckled appearance of powder-burns.

"But where," muttered the chief, "does Halliday figure? I don't get him a-tall."

"Very few people would," said Mr. Queen, "because Mr. Halliday is, in his modest way, unique among bipeds."

"Huh?"

"Why, he was Whitey's accomplice—weren't you, Hankus?"

Hankus gulped and said: "Yes. I mean no. I mean—"

"But I'm sure Hank wouldn't—" Katie began to cry.

"You see," said Mr. Queen briskly, "Whitey wanted a set-up whereby he would be the last person in California to be suspected of having shot Black Magic. The quarrel between John Galt and Hank gave him a ready-made instrument. If he could make Hank seem to do the shooting, with Hank's obvious motive against Mr. Galt, then nobody would suspect his own part in the affair.

"But to bend Hank to his will he had to have a hold on Hank. What was Mr. Halliday's Achilles heel? Why, his passion for Katie Galt. So last night Whitey's father, Weed Willison, I imagine—wasn't he the jockey you chased from the Ameri-

can turf many years ago, Mr. Galt, and who became a saddle-maker?—kidnaped Katie Galt, and then communicated with Hankus-Pankus and told him just what to do today if he ever expected to see his beloved alive again. And Hankus-Pankus took the gun they provided him with, and listened very carefully, and agreed to do everything they told him to do, and promised he would not breathe a word of the truth afterward, even if he had to go to jail for his crime, because if he did, you see, something terrible would happen to the incomparable Katie."

Mr. Halliday gulped, his Adam's-apple bobbing violently.

"An' all the time this skunk," growled John Galt, glaring at the cowering jockey, "an' his weasel of a father, they sat back an' laughed at a brave mon, because they were havin' their cheap revenge on me, ruining me!" Old John shambled like a bear toward Mr. Halliday. "An' I am a shamed mon today, Hank Halliday, for suspectin' ye of such villainy! Here's my hand."

Mr. Halliday took it absently, meanwhile fumbling with his other hand in his pocket. "By the way," he said, "who did win the Handicap, if I may ask? I was so busy, you see—"

"High Tor," said somebody in the babble.

"Really? Then I must cash this ticket," said Mr. Halliday with a note of faint interest.

"Two thousand dollars!" gasped Paula, goggling at the ticket. "He bet two thousand dollars on High Tor at fifty to one!"

"Yes, a little nest-egg my mother left me," said Mr. Halliday. He seemed embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Mr. Galt. You made me angry when you—er—kicked me in the pants, so I didn't bet it on Black Magic. And High Tor was such a beautiful name."

"Oh, Hank," sobbed Katie, beginning to strangle him.

"So now, Mr. Galt," said Hankus-Pankus with dignity, "may I marry Katie and set you up in the racing business again?"

"Happy days!" bellowed old John, seizing his future son-in-law in a rib-cracking embrace.

"Happy days," muttered Mr. Queen, seizing Miss Paris and heading her for the nearest bar.

The incomparable Mr. Queen attends a prize-fight next month—and solves the mystery of a strange murder.

SHIPS



In this thirty-third story of "Ships and Men," the new propeller wins a dramatic tug-of-war against the paddle-wheel—and wins love and fortune for Dan Lowry.

and MEN

THE tale is to tell of Dan Lowry and the steam propeller. . . . Dr. Franklin fathered the idea of propelling ships by pumping water in at the bow and out at the stern, and the Royal Navy made good use of it later, but Dan Lowry did even better.

For, when death gave him his chance, he leaped at the opportunity.

He was designer and builder for old Jock Cummins, down the Thames below Greenhithe. Today it is practically all London Docks, but a hundred years ago it had green fields and country lanes and cows and river-pirates. Cummins had a little struggling shipyard of sorts, stubborn backward brain, and no family except some distant relatives with some sort of title. He was a hard and ugly old man.

The works had built a paddle-wheel collier for one firm, and they had ordered a duplicate ship built. Dan Lowry's work was good, and Lowry was the man who did the actual work. He tried to induce Cummins to install a propeller instead of paddles; Cummins laughed and sneered

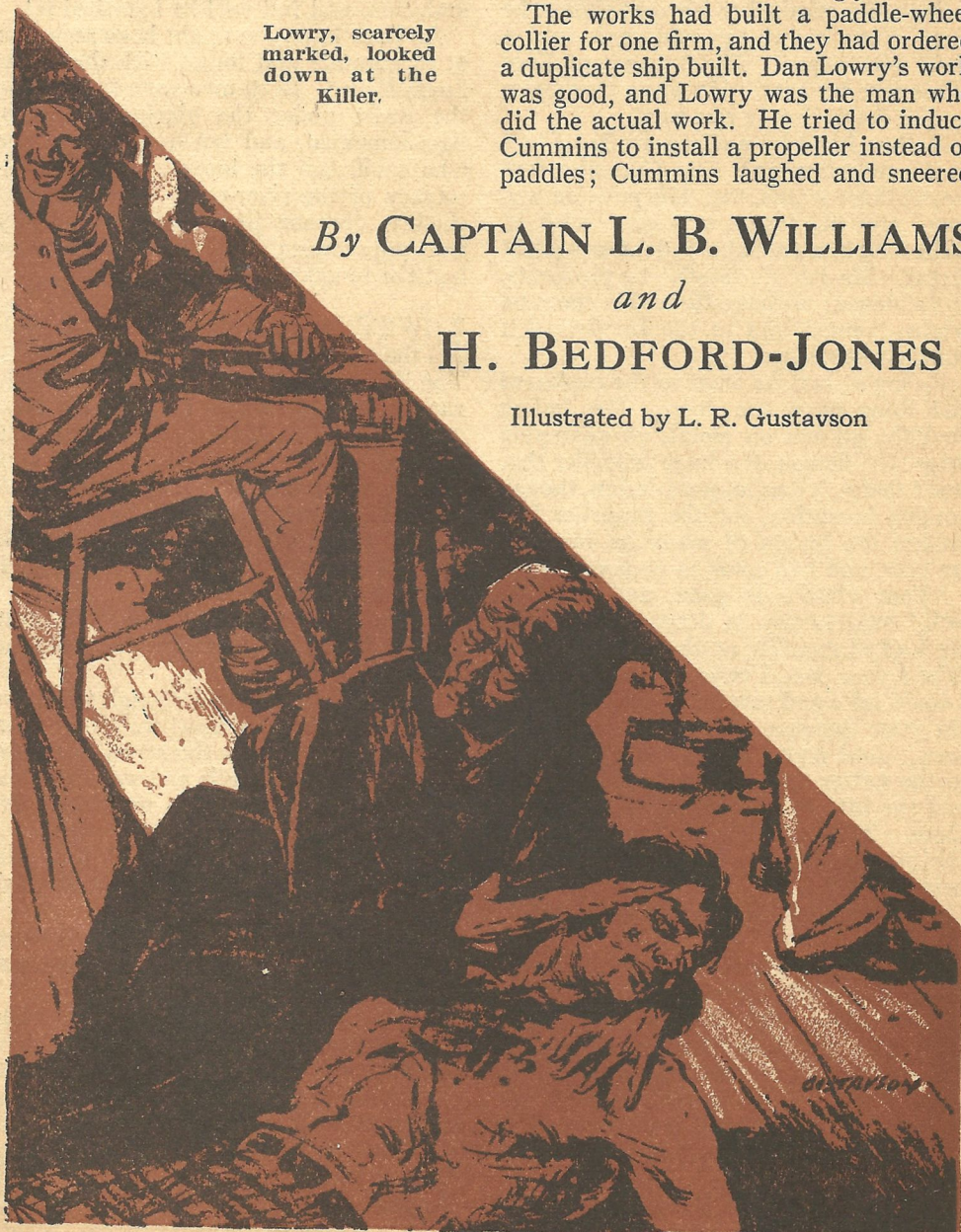
Lowry, scarcely marked, looked down at the Killer.

By **CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS**

and

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



at propellers, which he had never heard of, and swore at Lowry.

In the upshot, they had a terrific scene. Cummins told Lowry he was being fired in the morning, and meant it. An hour later, old Jock Cummins toppled over in the street, dead from heart-failure.

Now, Dan Lowry was a bit under thirty, and intelligent. He was powerfully built and could use his fists, for he had worked up from nothing; but when he went back to his lodgings on this late afternoon, he had lost hope and ambition together. Unaware that Cummins was dead, the future looked dark to him.

When he climbed to his own rooms, he flung down his things and sank into a chair, bitter-eyed. The strong bony lines of his face set hard. He was a man beset by the devil, if ever one was!

Rather, beset by a dozen devils. Fired in the morning, eh? Old Cummins had meant those words, too. His position was gone, and his future was gone with it. Debt held him enchained; debt and a lost dream. He had no family, no prospects, no influence; without these, his common origin damned him in the London of a hundred years ago.

Rising at last, he went to the cupboard and flung open the door. The fading daylight glinted on metal, on glistening brass: the flanges of a huge propeller that stood there; it was his own design, though not his invention, for the propeller had broken the hearts of many an inventor ere now, and had come to no good.

"Your chance is gone, and mine as well," said Lowry in despondent gloom. He kicked moodily at the shining brass. "For a year past, I've sunk every farthing I could rake and scrape, to get you made. On your account, I'm deep in debt to boot. And now I'm discharged! Back to the gutter that spawned me, says he; and the bitter old man said a true word there. The only friends I know are in the gutter—I'm off for the same place, here and now!"

He caught up his cap, and departed.

IN his morose mood he wronged himself. He had made friends, plenty of them, in the office and in the little shipyard, with men who knew Cummins, with the shipping firm that had ordered the new collier. But, at the moment, the words of that bitter old man burned like fire, for Jock Cummins had ever a harsh tongue.

Along the river, in those days, was no lack of gutter, from Limehouse to Roth-

erithe; packet-rats, foreigners, thieves, river-pirates galore.

Hungry and tired and savage, Dan Lowry stumbled into what, long ago, had been the Bellerophon public-house; now it was the Bell & Ruffian, and deserved the second part of the name. He plumped himself down and called for supper.

"Dan Lowry's back! Lowry, lads!" went up the word.

Hard drinks and a hard world, but loyal in its own fashion. Years ago, Dan Lowry had left off all drinking but tonight he had left off all hope. Now he drank deep to banish the misery of broken ambition, and full well he banished it!

An hour later you might have seen him at it, hammer and tongs, with the Limehouse Killer. Both men were stripped to the waist under the glaring gaslights, bare-knuckled, and ten quid to the one who could last the longer. All the aristocracy of the river-scum were gathered thickly, obscene jests flew fast, cruelty was uppermost; men and women alike had the tongues and faces of hell.

LOWRY, scarcely marked at all, took the ten gold-pieces and looked down. The Killer lay stretched out on the bloody canvas, an old woman hugging his head and moaning at his ear, and not a soul noticing them. All tongues were for Dan Lowry, slaps on the back, drinks proffered, eager hearts swelling to him. He shoved them roughly aside and went to the old woman, and pressed the gold-pieces into her hand.

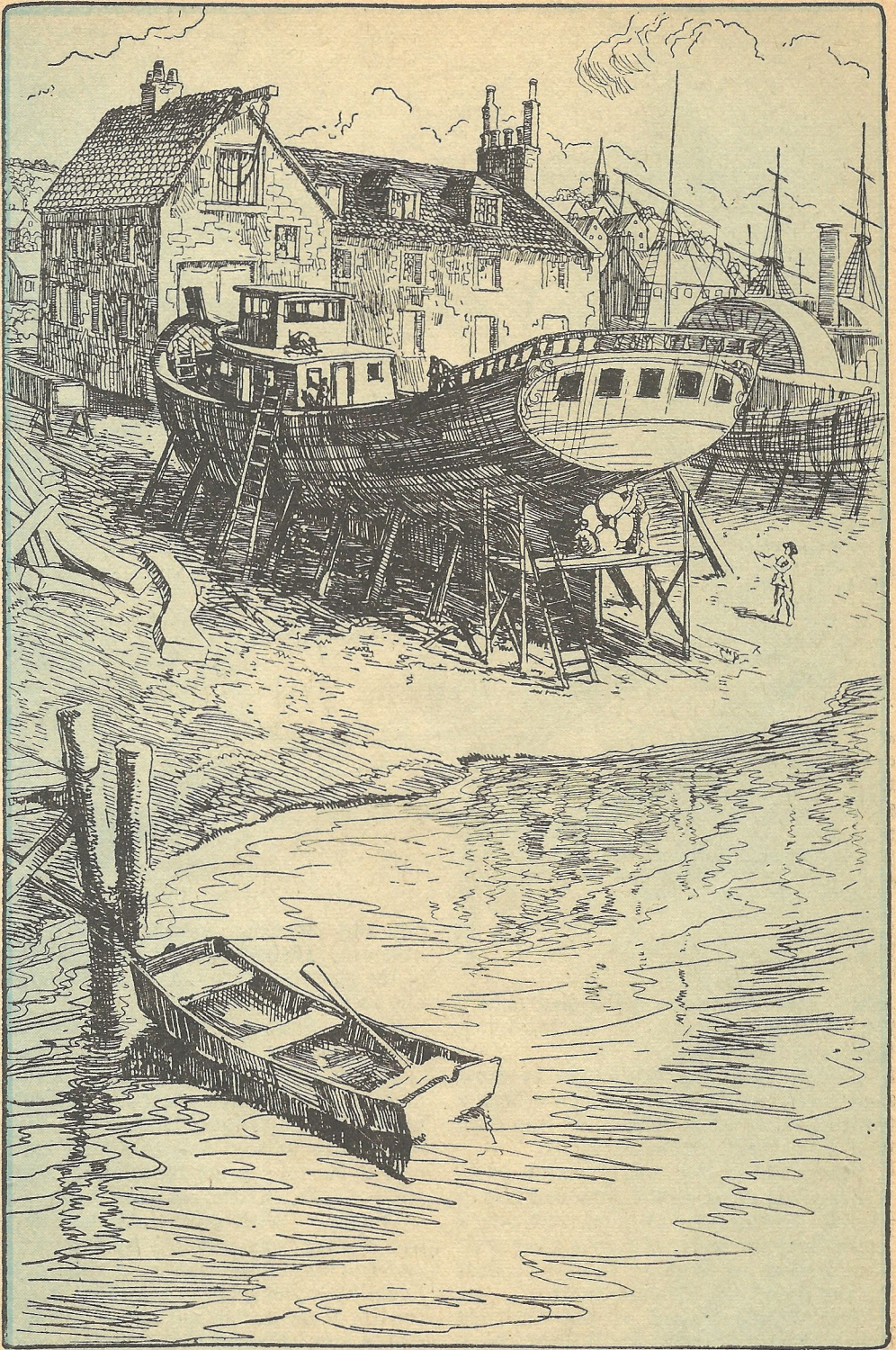
"Take what your lad fought to earn, granny," said he. "You need it sore, and I don't."

He had been fuddled enough when the fight began, but his head was clear now. As he headed out for the street, sickened by the sight and smells and sounds of the place, a tap came at his shoulder. He turned to see Slasher Grimes.

"I'll walk with you, lad," said the Slasher, "and we'll finish our bit of business."

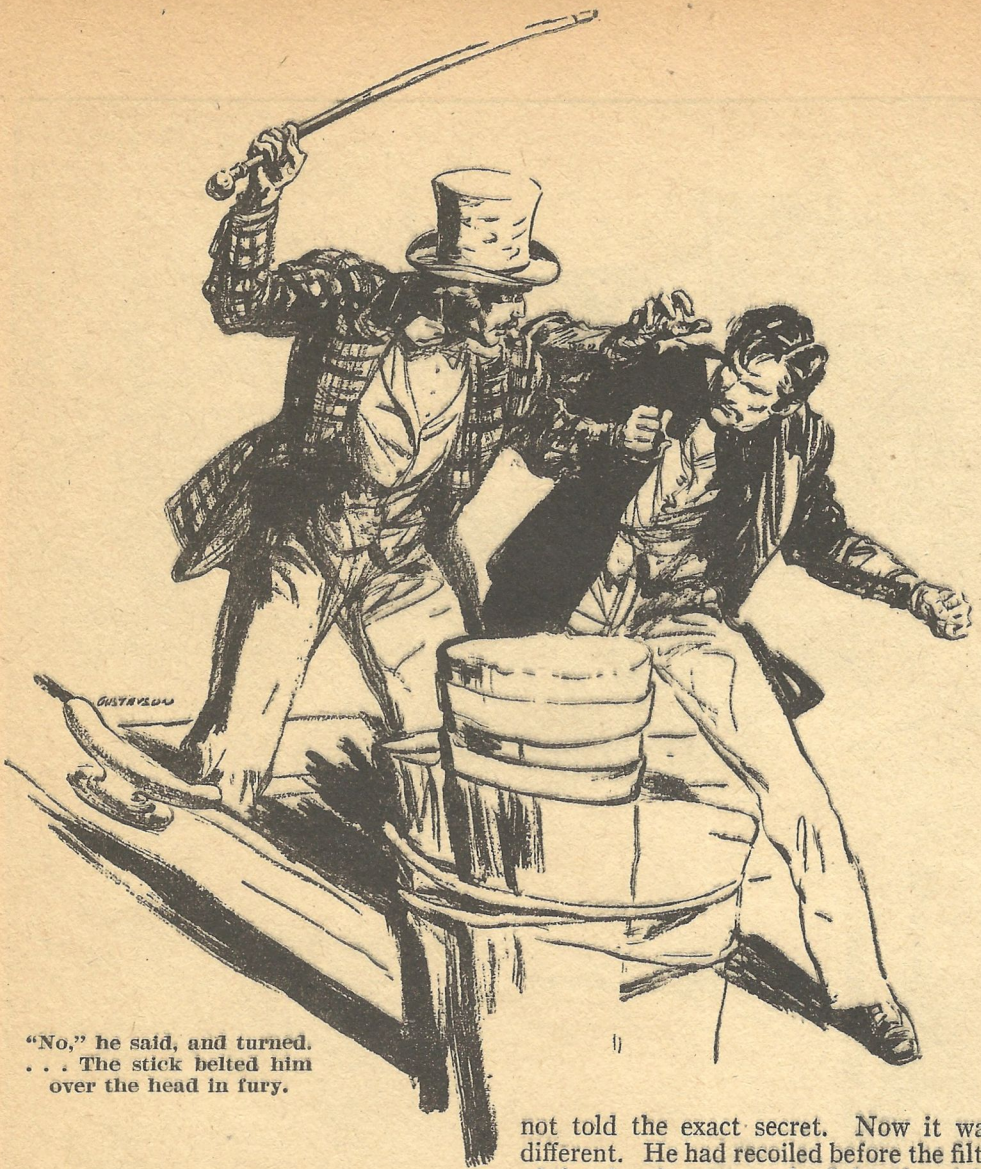
Dan Lowry, only vaguely recalling their conversation, growled something as Grimes fell into step with him.

He knew that Slasher Grimes, who had made a name and many a golden guinea fighting, was now the biggest man along the river, drawing tribute from all the dark sources that hid in dark places from the law. To those in the know, Slasher Grimes had a gang of river-pirates that laughed at the Thames police. Not all Grimes; sometimes the laughter turned



Y. C. Lowrey

In the little shipyard the collier was being rushed to completion. . . . Things had come to a point of decision—either Dan Lowry was to put in the paddle-wheels, as Cummins had planned, or the new propeller, as Lowry had planned.



"No," he said, and turned.
 . . . The stick belted him
 over the head in fury.

sour—and of late the police had done a lot of damage among the liberty-loving heroes of the docks.

Grimes aped the gentleman in dress and speech; perhaps he had once been a gentleman at some time. He was dark and sinewy and strong as an ox.

"One minute, my lad," he said, pausing, as they came to the dark and empty docks. "For a hundred quid, says you, I could have the secret of a snug river craft that'd show her heels to any police boat on the river. Here's your money."

Dan Lowry looked at the extended notes, then at Grimes. It all rushed back on him; he had told the Slasher the truth. That propeller in his room, or a smaller one like it, fitted to a tiny steam-launch, would turn the trick.

Aye, he had poured it all out, thanks to the liquor and his mood, though he had

not told the exact secret. Now it was different. He had recoiled before the filth of the ghastly gutter; the fight, the night air, had cleared his head.

"Sorry, Slasher," said he, refusing the money. "It was the drink in me talking."

"Don't lie," rejoined Grimes harshly, tapping Dan Lowry's chest with his gold-headed stick. "Liquor doesn't lie. If ye have what ye say, lad, this hundred is only a starter; it means wealth, to you and me both. Come, out with it!"

Wealth? With everything lost as it was, Lowry was tempted by the word, and had the temptation come earlier, he might have yielded; but his little dip into the life of the gutter had caused revolt to rise in him. He saw things as they were, now; he saw from what he had arisen in these years, knew he had worked himself up to a new and totally different level. He was no longer a creature of the gutter.

"No," said he, and turned. The hand of Grimes clutched at him. He struck it

away. The stick belted him over the skull in fury; then he let Slasher Grimes have it right and left, to go sprawling and slithering in the slime of the street.

"You'll hear from this," gasped the voice of Grimes, with a volley of oaths.

Not unlikely, he thought, as he went to his lodgings. Despair settled upon him again, because he had reverted for this little hour or two into the old life. The one decent thing he had won in these long years, was sullied and tarnished. Was he, after all, doomed to gin and tatters and sordid filth for the rest of life?

"By heavens, no!" he told himself savagely. "It's a good thing, perhaps, that I took the dip tonight; it's made me realize what I am and might have been. Good! We'll start fresh from the bottom tomorrow."

But, getting home, he heard that old Cummins was dead.

And he had not been fired. Instead, he was now the unquestioned head and authority in the struggling little shipyard with its one boat a-building, its little offices and its three accountants and boy. Across the desk of old Jock Cummins, which was now his desk, the lawyer told him so; the dry, precise Queen's Counsel, an eminent man and well tailored.

"FOR the present, Lowry, carry on in full charge; it's the wish of the heirs," said he. "I talked with them this morning. They're highly placed and titled, though lacking in money. They can't afford to have the name linked with this place, or to have it known that they own it. At least, such are the orders for the present."

"Too blue-blooded to be in trade, eh?" commented Dan Lowry. "Thank God, I'm not! Will they put money into the business, perhaps?"

"They need what the business earns for them, in order to live," said the lawyer. "Can you carry on this ship to completion?"

Dan Lowry laughed harshly. "More than that. If Cummins had listened to me, I'd have made money steadily for him. Give me the authority to buy those barges tied up at the next dock. I can repair 'em in the spare time of the hands, and sell 'em in a fortnight. Give me authority to do a dozen things that need doing—"

He named them. The eminent lawyer departed somewhat dubiously, but returned that same afternoon, bringing a young woman with him, a Miss Colson.

"You shall have full authority," said he, "provided you give Miss Colson a place in the office, to handle all accounts on behalf of the heirs. I don't think you will regret it."

Regret? Dan Lowry wanted to kick the man out and then laugh in his face. What—set a woman to spy and interfere? Put a woman into a business office? It was unheard of, and an absurdity! Suddenly he recalled that Cummins had used those same words about his propeller.

SHE was a quiet but capable young woman, and her shy smile conquered his instinctive dislike. He agreed, since he must. Miss Colson went down to the waiting cab, and the lawyer paused for a word regarding her.

"You'll find her rather exceptional, Lowry, in that she has a gift for business. I might add that she comes of a very good family; a gentlewoman in distress, if I may say so, who is compelled to support herself."

Dan Lowry merely grunted, being skeptical of gentlewomen, especially in distress. . . .

To his astonishment, he discovered that Miss Colson was not only intelligent in business ways, but had a swift comprehension of what it was all about. She interfered not at all. She assented to all the reforms and changes he had vainly urged on old Cummins, and even suggested a couple herself. Their relations were not inimical, but friendly.

When she vetoed his proposed contract with a supply firm at Limehouse, he was furious, but assented with a growl. A week later, he found the firm was in trouble with the Admiralty. She only nodded when he told her. She had known this all along.

"And how, may I inquire?" he demanded.

"That I can't tell you, Mr. Lowry. I have family connections, and I use them."

"Well, you were dead right!"

He came to have a vast admiration for her ability, in fact. So did the clerks. The dingy old office became clean, and even took on an air of well-being. The hands always had a smile and a touch of the forelock when she hove in sight. Dan Lowry learned very little about her personally, and was too busy to try: besides, she had an air that discouraged any curiosity. A lady, as the clerks said; the word spoke volumes.

Meantime, two things pended: the ship on the ways, and Slasher Grimes.

With the ship, things had come to a point of decision; for here, Dan Lowry trembled under a temptation that was tremendous and overpowering. Either he was to put in the paddle-wheels, as Cummins had planned, or he was to put in the new propeller—as he had it planned. He could go ahead and do this, and say no word about it to Miss Colson; but he scorned the evasion. But he had to do something, and do it immediately. The audacity of his temptation, the audacity of what he planned, did not occur to him as such. He had even brought the big brass propeller up to a corner of the office, pending decision.

While it pended, Slasher Grimes walked in on him one noonday. He was alone in the office with Miss Colson, who was eating her luncheon in the inner room. Grimes strode in and came up to his desk, hard-eyed, and extended a sheaf of bank-notes.

"Well, Dan Lowry? Here's your hundred quid. Do you keep your promise or not?"

"I thought you'd forgotten all that," said Lowry.

"I forget nothing, my lad—nothing!" was the significant reply. "Yes or no?"

"And supposing it's no?"

"You'll have the week-end to ponder, this being Friday. Bright and early on the Monday morning," said Slasher Grimes cheerfully, "I'll offer you the hundred quid for the third and last time. If ye say no, I blow my whistle, and up pops the devil! In other words, gents with a warrant for your apprehension. No doubt you've forgotten the little matter of Magistrate Herriott and the case o' schnapps. But the law, my lad, never forgets. Like me—never! Think it over, till the Monday morning; it's friends or enemies, your own choice."

And, cocking his beaver over one ear, he walked out.

DAN LOWRY sat, white to the lips, eyes blazing, a sick dismay in his heart. He looked up to see Miss Colson staring at him from the doorway of the inner office.

"Who was that man, Mr. Lowry?" she asked. "What did he mean, about the schnapps?"

Lowry swallowed hard, and drew a deep breath.

"God help me!" he said, then squared his shoulders and smiled into her eyes. "I can't tell you now; there are feet on the stairs—the clerks are returning. I'll

tell you later, this evening. Perhaps you'll have supper with me. But it's a dismal tale—nothing for a fine lady like you to hear from a gutter-rat like me."

His bitter words belied his smile.

She nodded slowly.

"I'll be very glad to have dinner with you, Mr. Lowry. But that's not what's been worrying you all day, and yesterday too?"

"No," said Lowry, as the two accountants reëntered. With an effort, he put away all thought of Slasher Grimes, for the moment. The dikes were broken, now; out poured all the flood of his perplexities, which had suddenly taken second place. A warrant, and jail!

"Draw up your chair, Miss Colson; rather, let me draw it up for you," said he, and suited action to words. Then he produced a portfolio of diagrams, designs, figures, and spread them all out; and with them, his dreams.

HE talked to her, low-voiced, quietly, steadily, for an hour or more. His enthusiasm was quenched, now; nothing mattered, for a man who was going to prison on the Monday.

There in the corner was his propeller—his own, for which he was still heavily in debt. He showed her the calculations, the theories; he showed her the proofs gained by other propellers, and discarded; he showed her letters, his rebuffs from the Admiralty, from ship-owners, from builders. He showed her the comparative costs, the cheapness of the propeller as opposed to paddle-wheels.

"I talked with the firm who ordered this collier from us," he said. "They agreed that if Cummins, meaning this firm of ours, wanted to install the propeller instead of paddles, they'd accept the craft subject to its efficiency. Cummins is dead. I'm in charge."

"The contract covers such substitution?" she asked. He nodded. "And you could do it?"

"Not honestly, Miss Colson, without your consent. I believe there's no risk at all, but the owners of this business depend upon it, I understand; if anything went wrong—well, you see what it would mean. Monday morning, we have to know whether the propeller is to be installed or not; the work now depends on this."

"It would cost no more; it might mean a tremendous improvement. Hm! If it's as you say, the Royal Navy should use propellers instead of paddles."



"Monday morning," he told her, "I may be gone—to prison."

Lowry laughed. "Admiralty clerks laugh at innovations, as you should know."

"Indeed I do," she agreed. "But if I authorize the substitution—"

"Then we'll go ahead."

She hesitated. "Let me borrow all these papers until Monday. I'll not be down in the morning; I'm spending the week-end with relatives at Richmond. Monday morning, I'll give you my ideas about it. Yes?"

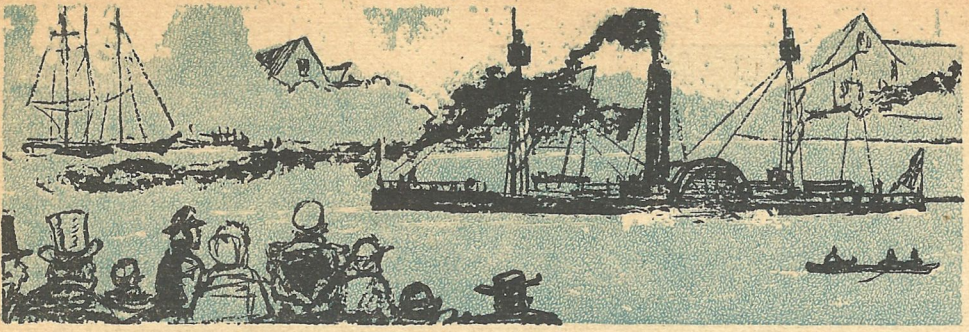
"Yes, by all means," he agreed. Leaning forward, he picked out one of the papers and showed it to her. "There are

figures covering two craft of approximately equal tonnage. They're correct. They prove that this ship on the ways, when finished, could actually tow backward any equal ship equipped with paddle-wheels! That is, with my propeller."

"Oh!" A trace of color leaped in her cheeks, and her eyes danced. "What an idea! I'd love to see it tried out here in the Thames!"

"But,"—and his face darkened with sudden recollection,—"be here early Monday morning, please. If you're late, I may be gone."

"Where?" she asked in surprise.



"To prison," he curtly rejoined, and walked out of the office to oversee the yard work. But her eyes followed him in memory—her eyes, wondering, incredulous and hurt.

THEY bore the same hurt look that evening, as they faced him across the dinner table. He spoke with plain blunt words, not bitter, but strong and forthright as his strong face and level eyes.

"I'm no genius, Miss Colson. I didn't invent that propeller, as I told you today; but I've perfected it, and I've perfected the engine connections, as I've perfected a lot of things, including this little shipyard; but I can't perfect myself—that is, in eyes like yours."

She regarded him steadily, as if searching the meaning behind his words.

"Do you think it necessary?" she asked in her cool way, which might have meant anything.

"Perhaps not. My father was a ship captain; I grew up along the wharves of this river. I was left alone when young, and went with the only crowd I knew. I forged ahead little by little; meantime, I had to live. I did odd bits of thieving at times."

"Who hasn't?" she asked idly. "I stole apples, once, and got a sound birching."

His eyes darkened impatiently. "I don't mean childish things; I mean actual theft. Once, with some river-pirates, I broke into a warehouse. A case of schnapps was stolen; we were caught; because I was no more than a boy, Magistrate Herriott gave me only five years in prison, instead of life. I never reached prison—I got away."

"Oh!" Her eyes dilated upon him. "So that was it! How long ago?"

"Nine years, when I was eighteen. It was nothing of great account, perhaps; still, the whole thing taught me what I needed. I went in for fighting, boxing, and broke away from the river gangs. I made a little money, and went to work, leaving fighting behind me. Step by

step, you see. Every step meant cruel work."

He traced those steps for her, sparing himself nothing in the accounting, spurred on by her interest and attention. Then he came to the evening when old Jock Cummins had fired him, and told her what had been said.

She nodded.

"I know. He left a memorandum to discharge you in the morning. I found it among his papers one day."

"What? And you said nothing?"

"Don't be silly." She smiled slightly; and not for the first time, he noted how a smile transfigured her whole face and lighted it. "Go on, please."

"All right." With that, he plunged, and did not spare himself here, either. That wild idea of turning over his propeller, or one like it, to the river-pirates, was not so wild as appeared; the Thames police would have been helpless before any thieving launch so equipped. He told about the fight, and then, hesitant, skipped to his interview with the Slasher.

"Wait." She checked him. "Where are the ten sovereigns?"

"I—well, I gave them away," he said lamely, and told how. Her eyes warmed, and she nodded. He finished his story, and told just what Grimes had said this morning, and there it was all out.

"You see," he concluded, "the rascal thinks he has me in a cleft stick."

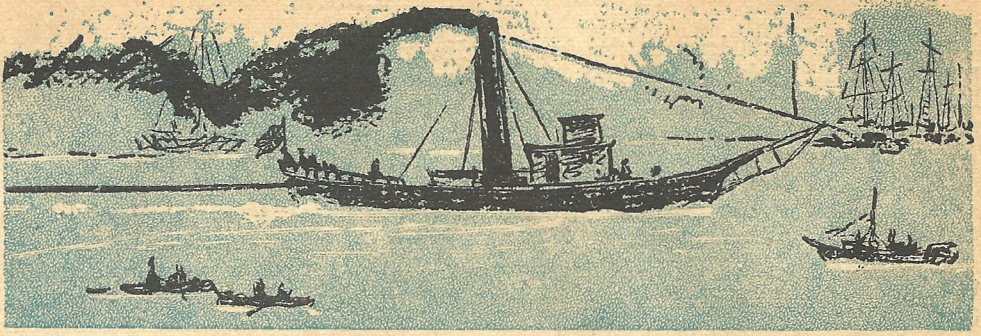
"Hasn't he?"

"Devil a bit of it. I'll take my medicine, though it'll be hard. The law has no mercy, and I've no influence."

"You have what's better," said she. His brows went up inquiringly, and she smiled. "I don't think there's anything so terrible in all you've said, really."

"You? A lady?" He threw out his hand. "Me—a product of the gutter?"

"Well," she observed with staggering perception of values, "until the present reign, our royal family has been remarkably content to remain lower than the gutter; and if you knew the origin of



our noble families, you'd realize that some of them have come far, very far, from the accident of birth! You shouldn't be so conscious of inferiority that does not exist."

"I'm not!" he disclaimed swiftly. "It's not that; it's only that there's no chance for me. Now I'll be a prison bird, and down goes Dan Lowry for good. I'm telling you all this because it's your due. You can take proper action on behalf of the owners, when I'm gone."

"Is that the only reason?" she asked, looking at him.

He flushed slowly.

"No, by God!" he began impulsively, and flushed more deeply. "No. But it's all I can say now, except that—well, we've been friends."

"Not have been, but are," she said, and smiled again. "Now, let's forget the whole thing, please. What shall you be doing between now and Monday?"

"Completing plans and designs for the work, if you decide to go ahead with my scheme. There's a lot to do on them. Then, my plans for the shipyard. If this collier succeeds, I'd thought of taking on the adjacent land and going in for larger operations."

"Tell me about it," she begged, and he complied.

When Dan Lowry went home that night, he found himself light-hearted despite the doom that overhung him.

MONDAY dawned ominously, with a drizzle of rain; and there was no Miss Colson at the office. Instead, a messenger boy arrived, bringing the portfolio of plans and a note.

Dear Mr. Lowry:

I am not returning to the office at once. You have my authority to install your propeller in the new craft, and the owners have also consented. I wish you the best of luck.

Cecily Colson.

Dan Lowry swallowed hard.

The best of luck! And prison facing him. And she was not returning at once. She, a fine lady, had heard a bit too much of his story. When he was safely stowed away, and gone from the place, she would show up again; or the owners would come and take over, noble name and all. And they would profit by his work, if this propeller did its work.

With a harsh laugh, he gave the orders, and sent the foreman his designs.

The office was bleak without her. When he told the clerks she was not coming back at once, their faces fell; a feeling of absence was upon the whole place. And then came a tread of heavy feet upon the stairs, and Dan Lowry faced about with heavier heart. As he feared, it was the Slasher. Into the office came Grimes, and smiled wickedly at him.

"Ready, my lad? It's touch and go, so speak up prompt. Is it yes?"

Dan Lowry came up to him. "Slasher, you wouldn't do it? You wouldn't turn me in?"

"Like a shot, my lad, if you don't come across—"

"Then do it and be damned to you!" said Dan Lowry, and cut loose.

Grimes did have a whistle, and blew it shrilly, before Lowry knocked it down his throat. The Slasher put up a creditable fight, but it did him no good at all; the ferocity with which Lowry tore into him was something unholy to watch.

The whistle brought no runners or constables. It did bring a tall, elegantly attired gentleman with chiseled features and an air of authority, who came into the doorway and stood leaning on his stick with an air of keen enjoyment as he watched proceedings. He even lifted his voice in delight, as the Slasher went staggering.

"Well hit, well hit! A noble right, man! Again!"

Lowry flung him a glance and continued, hoping to get his money's worth before he was torn off. And he got it. Grimes was no coward, but not the

bravest could stand long to the fearful punishment he took. As he went down for the last time and tried unavailingly to get on his feet again, the stranger stepped forward.

"Mr. Daniel Lowry, I believe?"

"I've no time for business now." Lowry turned to him. "Who are you?"

"Patrick Lowther." The stranger gestured at Grimes. "Have your clerks throw this rascal out."

"Eh? He has men downstairs—"

"I've dismissed them, Lowry."

Then, suddenly, Dan Lowry felt that name crash through his brain. Patrick Lowther! The famed jurist, of course—Lord Durwent, Lord Chancellor of the Queen's Bench, one of the greatest men in London! While the two clerks hustled the Slasher out and away, Dan Lowry stood staring. Then the visitor smiled.

"Very well done, Lowry; I follow the fancy a bit myself, or used to do so in my younger days. Rather lucky that I showed up, what? This business of yours—Magistrate Herriott and the case of schnapps, you know. It's been brought to my attention."

"It's—what?" stammered Dan Lowry. "Your attention—you—Lord Durwent? Your attention, My Lord?"

The other chuckled. "Yes, I understand that one of your people here brought it to the right quarter, and I was asked to handle the matter. I have done so. In due course, the entire affair will be written off and the case closed, though it may be necessary to obtain a pardon from the Crown. You may rest assured, Mr. Lowry, that you have nothing more to fear. By the way, my men below will hold that rascal; you may care to prosecute him for attacking you."

"He didn't," Dan Lowry said dazedly. "He didn't. I attacked him."

The visitor laughed heartily, bowed, and departed, still laughing. When Dan Lowry rushed to the stairs, wakening from his daze, he reached the bottom to see a dispersing crowd and a coach vanishing down the street.

HE shut himself in the private office and sat staring at nothing. "*One of your people.*" The phrase buzzed in his head. Miss Colson, of course. She must have acted quickly. She had reached the owners; even though impoverished, the nobility could work wonders. And they had somehow reached Lord Durwent.

In a glow, Lowry reached for pen and paper, and wrote her a letter of thanks.

He wrote a long, long letter, and poured out a great deal of himself in the words; he begged her to return, and gave her a dozen excellent reasons why she should return. He wrote so much, in fact, that the penny post would not serve and to send the letter cost him thruppence.

Then he went down to the shipyard and hurled himself into the job there.

Three days later came a short reply; she was detained by illness and would come back to the office when and if possible. It was a curt and formal note, but had a postscript of a few words: "*Your letters are lovely. Write again.*"

He read that, grunted to himself, and went back to work. These days, work absorbed and swallowed him; he was rushing the collier to completion as fast as possible; and he was a new man. The past had been wiped away by a word from her. He wanted to rush up to the City, see the estate lawyers, and find her; half a dozen times he even started, only to come back and hang up his hat with a grim shake of the head. . . .

They launched the craft, with no ceremony at all, and began to finish the job and get the engines installed. Dan Lowry was with the work day and night. He could not wait to get those engines turning over and make sure how his propeller worked. One night he made a try of it, in secret, with three of the hands whom he could trust. They got a fire going, got steam up—enough to run her for two minutes. When she nearly tore her cable out of the riverbed, he knew all was well; and he raked out the fires. The propeller worked. The real tests would come in another fortnight.

But before they came, arrived a hansom at the street door, and a tall, weather-eyed gentleman whose card said he was Captain Sir Adolphus Brett, R. N., of the Admiralty.

"We've heard something about this craft you're building, Mr. Lowry," said Brett very pleasantly. "In fact, I have copies of your correspondence with the Admiralty, sometime in the past, regarding a proposed propeller."

Dan Lowry eyed him in bewilderment. "I never got to dock-ends with your Admiralty clerks," said he.

"I am not an Admiralty clerk," Brett rejoined. "In fact, I've been ordered to handle this matter and propose to you a certain test. We're much interested in this steam propeller. The First Lord of the Admiralty himself, I may say, has it under advisement."

"My God!" said Dan Lowry. "It's like a fairy tale!"

He could not realize it, even when Brett broke out laughing and informed him that while the Admiralty was slow, it was after all sure. It let nothing escape its eagle eye, and so forth—an affable and quite convincing speech.

"The test," said he, "should be very simple. Out here in the reach of the river. A cutter with paddles will pass a hawser to your craft; they'll be of approximate tonnage; they'll pull in opposite directions. I warn you, sir, that the general opinion is that the cutter will pull your craft very easily, which will mean the end of your steam propeller."

A spark leaped in Dan Lowry.

"Very well, Captain Brett," said he, and named a day for the test. "Do your best, and it'll mean the end of paddle-wheels in the Royal Navy!"

IT was arranged as simply as that. Dan Lowry plunged back into his work, carried on from day to day by a heart-hurried smother of eagerness. The craft was finished, her engines were tested, all worked like a charm. And then came the day.

To Dan Lowry, it was like a dream. He could not believe it was actually happening to him, out there in the long reach of the river. He was aboard the craft himself; so was a party of Admiralty men. An Admiralty launch hovered near with gold lace showing on a uniformed figure: old Admiral Duckworth, they said, the First Lord himself.

The hawser was passed, the trim navy cutter churned and churned, her paddles slapping the water. Dan Lowry shouted at his engineer. The hawser tautened, grew rigid as steel; a huge fourteen-inch hemp, brand new. An inch or two, a foot or two—slowly, puffing and churning, the Navy cutter moved astern. The collier moved forward, gained speed and power and momentum, and dragged the trim cutter a half-mile before the hawser broke asunder. No more was needed. . . .

An hour later, Dan Lowry sat in his private office, alone. The day was dying. The clerks had gone. He was trying to scratch a letter to Miss Colson. For the whole future had burst gloriously open, and he could hardly realize it.

A light, quick step on the stairs. He looked up, startled. The door opened, and she stood there, smiling at him.

He leaped to his feet.

"You! You! I was just writing you." he cried. "It's really you!"

"Really me, Dan Lowry," she said, and laughed as she gave him her hand. "Oh, it was a grand sight to see! I was watching it all. You've won, you've won!"

Before he knew it, he had won more than he had ever dreamed. Somehow, it happened they were clinging together, looking at one another hungrily.

"I can't realize this crowning marvel!" he said huskily. "That you should care—"

"A lot, Dan Lowry," she broke in upon him. "Don't you?"

"Don't I? With every breath in me, with everything that I am and have!"

"That's plenty," she said. "And will be more, before long. Fame and wealth and new horizons—all ahead of us, Dan Lowry. Agreed?"

"With all my heart," said he, and met her lips with his.

Then she drew back.

"You're no longer worried because—because I'm a lady, as you used to say?"

"Lady be damned!" said Lowry fervently. "You'll be my wife."

"Praise God," she said softly. "And you'll be my husband. . . . Now—I'll have to tell you something—a confession. It's hard to make. I fear you'll hate me for it; I do indeed." She eyed him anxiously. "I've never lied to you, Dan, but I have deceived you a little, and now I'm in fear to tell you of it, lest you resent it."

He broke into a great laugh.

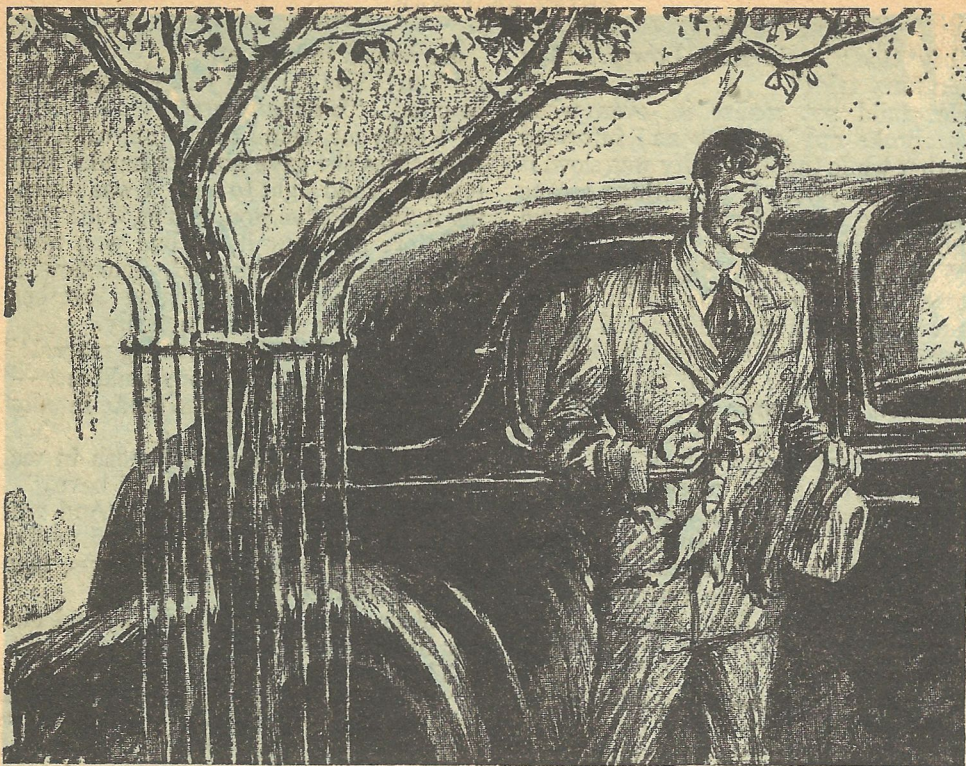
"Hate you? Resent it? My lass, my lass, I love you with my whole heart! Nothing you could say or do, nothing now or in the past or in the future, could waken any such feeling within me!"

"Swear it!" she said, doubtfully. "Hold up your hand and swear it, Dan!"

He did so, smiling and yet deeply earnest. She drew a long breath.

"Very well; then you'd best have everything at one blow. I'm Cecily Colson; I needed the money that I earned here, it's true. I'm also Lady Cecily Colson; except for this place, I was dependent on the charity of my uncle, Admiral Duckworth, the First Lord. That's how I was able to help you, in one way or another. I did it because I knew you loved me, Dan Lowry, and because I loved you. And now don't you dare to jilt me!"

Dan Lowry came out of his daze to find her in his arms. And, as he should very properly have done—he kept her there.



A Million for

Wherein a young man undertakes to make a million dollars in a single year through the exercise of "Personal Mystery."

The Story Thus Far:

BENTLEY DEWERT had lost his job as a reporter, and was all but broke when Hartswell, the city editor who had fired him, recommended him for a strange job to Ephraim Brood, the wealthy soap-manufacturer.

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded of Dewert. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-actor. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula for success to the world. Personal mystery, my boy, is the secret of worldly success; and we're going to prove it. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes*, in 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him. Didn't talk about himself. Lawrence of Arabia was another: an able officer, yes; but personal mystery made him a world figure."

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood," said Dewert, "but I don't see—"

"You will! I need a stooge—some one

to demonstrate that this formula of mine for success really does succeed. Then I'll write my book about it. That's your job. You'll make a million dollars."

Dewert accepted the fantastic offer. Putting up at the fashionable Washington Towers, he bribed the clerk *not* to let another guest, a French airplane-buyer, 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 before the dust settled, a certain airplane-manufacturer had paid Mr. Destiny six thousand dollars to keep away from the buyer.

Personal mystery worked even in hard-boiled Wall Street too. And it worked in the promotion of a fuel-saving invention. Personal mystery won Dewert a huge sum for a month's work in advertising a mineral water. And personal mystery, plus the capital he'd acquired, enabled him to make a killing in a mercury-ore mine.



John Destiny

By FULTON GRANT

In another quarter, however, Dewert ran into trouble. One night he 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 the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms, called a doctor, and politely left them alone. When he returned, they had gone, leaving no word.

The newspapers soon supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared.

Dewert learned that Graymaster's supposed insanity was based on his knowledge of a certain paralyzing light-ray which would be of the utmost value in war. Bentley was able to save Graymaster from a gang of foreign conspirators determined to get possession of the

old man's secret, but was himself captured by them. . . . Personal Mystery—and plenty of nerve—worked again, however: Dewert came out of the fracas with a whole skin and a check for fifty thousand dollars. But later Lorraine, believing him responsible for certain newspaper stories about her, turned against him. (She did not know, of course, that Bentley had invested a hundred thousand dollars of the half-million he had so astonishingly acquired, in her old uncle's military lamp.)

And then disaster befell: Bentley's fortune had come too easily; and in his overconfidence he lost it all to three smooth scalwags who called themselves the Kelsdro brothers, in a phony cotton-export deal. (*The story continues in detail.*)

HE woke up suddenly, explosively, with a jerk. He was chilled to the bone and wet and soggy. This was a park—he

was on a park bench. His eyes saw raw sunlight and green trees, but in his mind there was only darkness, a blank.

"Oh!" he groaned. "Now where did I get this hangover?"

Then it came back, brutally. Pictures throbbled in his head—hateful pictures.

"Hartswell," he said aloud. "Hartswell! My God, I—I hit him. I hit old J. C. Oh, my God!"

He remembered that bit of it: Hartswell saying: "You're yellow, Dewert. You're playing ostrich—hiding your head in the sand of self-pity. You're being a yellow dog, Dewert."

And then he had hit him. Imagine that—he had hit old Hartswell. The shame of it!

Then suddenly it was all clear—days and days and days of it came horribly back to him. It seemed ages ago, now; but it could only have been days. John J. Destiny, the smart-alec young millionaire. A trio of smooth crooks flattering him into putting up all the money he had made in six months—flattering him, that was it. Their smooth Southern-gentleman ways, their punctilious honesty, their grand manner. What a dumb sap, what a fool! And then when he learned how he had been taken in, when Jo Caddis had come and told him, when he saw the whole thing lost, he had just run out—gone off into space.

DAYS and days of that. He didn't remember much about that. Business of loafing in a dive called Joe's Place. Business of a cop, somewhere, and a welfare house and a mealy-mouthed little shrimp giving him a welcome-brother line, and getting him a job—call it a job—cleaning up after a bunch of mangy mongrels in the doghouse. John J. Destiny, doggie's janitor in the Municipal Canine Clinic! That was a wow!

And then Hartswell—old Hartswell, doing a newspaper man's snoop, covering all the welfare houses and the free kitchens, and running him down and busting in on him like that,

"Hello, Dewert. How about a little drink?"

He had started off like that. But then he had gone on with that holier-than-thou kind of a penny lecture. Imagine talking to a man that way when he's just on the edge of jumping into the river, when he's been eating shame and drinking humiliation for a week!

"Better snap out of it, boy. Know how you feel, but you've got to go and face

things—can't run out on us. Can't run out on old Brood; he believes in you. Can't run out on me either, Dewert—five hundred dollars' option, you know. Stop this ostrich-playing. Brace up and act like a man!"

That was the sort of rot he had talked. Bertswell had been drinking that rat-poison whisky in Joe's Place. He didn't mean to get mad, but Hartswell had asked for it.

"Man's got his rights, Hartswell," he had said, drunkenly. "Man's got a right to quit when he knows he's through. Hell with your old contracts—man, not a mouse—not Brood's puppet, either. Let me alone, Hartswell. I'm doing all right."

Then Hartswell had used the word:

"Yellow, Dewert."

Even then he hadn't lost his head.

"Lay off me, Hartswell," he had said. "Don't get me mad."

"Canary—yellow canary," Hartswell had sneered. "Can you also sing?"

Then, *smack!* His fist had acted automatically; he didn't mean to do it. It sobered him up, too. He had apologized, but you can't ever apologize for a thing like that. Hartswell standing there with blood on his face, saying:

"I'll have to take that, Dewert—you're drunk. I'm letting you go, Dewert, but I'd hate to have your conscience."

And now here was a morning sun, sneering at him while shame and humility gouged deep in his soul.

"Oh, my God, think of it! I hit him—old Hartswell!"

It was no way to begin another day. But you can't help it, can you? You can't just wish a thing away because you hate it, because you're ashamed of it. A thing that you've done, you've done.

HE was out of the park now. He was going east. He could see the misty line of the East River with the little tugs doffing their white caps of smoke as they passed. Somewhere a chime-clock chimed out seven little *dings*. Then six seagoing bells tinkled from somebody's nautical clock in the apartment building where he was passing. Seven o'clock. In half an hour he was due at the doghouse.

There was a proud, fine thing for you! John J. Destiny, Young Kid Destiny himself, taking a handout job in the Municipal Canine Clinic, wet-nursing sick doggies! Wouldn't the papers have fun with that if they only knew?

But the past still mingled with the present. He couldn't shake it. He

couldn't get away from the pictures—pictures of himself, just starting out from old Brood's office. Pictures of himself leading the airplane magnate on to bribe him not to do something he never had any idea of doing. Pictures of catching Ryster, the Wall Street stuffed shirt, in his own web. Dollars rolling in, conceit inflating him, swaggering, playing make-believe, playing White Knight, until he began to believe it himself. Pictures of old Senator Pinkton offering him a million-dollar job—imagine it, a million-dollar job! He turned it down; think of the arch-conceit of it! But still more dollars poured in—fuel syndicates buying useless patent rights; a crook trying to dump a mountain in Haiti on him, and then wishing he hadn't, and Bentley selling it for a quicksilver mine—mountains of dollars and conceit and cockiness. And then the Big Flop! Just a flop. Smugly letting those crooks trim him because he wanted to be so cocksure of his million!

Well, it was all over now. John J. Destiny dead, the newspapers printing jeering headlines, then forgetting him. But it would be something if they knew he was playing nursemaid to a flock of pups.

Then there was the long low building of the Municipal Canine Clinic, and the aroma of disinfectant that hung over it like a cloud, and the incessant yapping of the poor dogs inside, and no doubt fussy little Doc Vrooman squeaking at the other clean-up men, and the assistant vets coming in with hangovers, and Pop Farley, the watchman, going out to get his nose red before breakfast. . . .

He pushed open the door and slammed it shut against the ghosts behind him.

"Didn't I tell you that was sarcoptic, you young fool!" old Doc Vrooman was squeaking. "Take that dog down into the lower kennels, and don't you ever let me—"

The day had begun.

AT lunch-time you had a choice; you could go out for your beans if you had money; if you didn't, you could take one of Mrs. Vrooman's dog-biscuit sandwiches and eat it standing up. Nobody cared what you did as long as you were on the job at one o'clock before Doc Vrooman came back full of bad temper and bad beer. Bentley took the dog-biscuits, so called because Mrs. Vrooman gave them to the dogs when there were any left over. They were good, thick

sandwiches, really, even if the other boys did make cracks about the chopped ham in them being made from chunks of the mongrel Dane who had bitten Doc Vrooman a couple of months ago. He went out into the dead-end of the street where it dangles off in the East River where they are digging up sand to make another wharf or something. Maybe if he stayed by the river, watching the steam shovel, the ghosts wouldn't catch up with him again.

But they did. They came flocking and crowding and shaking long accusing fingers at him and whispering:

"Yellow, Dewert—as yellow as hell! You've let 'em all down. You let Brood down, and he trusted you. You let Harts-well down."

It got pretty bad before the dog-biscuit was eaten.

TOWARD the dead end of the street a big black limousine was nosing, coming heavily down from the Avenue. It lumbered like a great shiny animal, a hippopotamus with a black tin skin. Now who would be coming into this lost end of the city in a big car like that?

The machine wallowed through the mud and rolled to a stop in front of the Municipal Dog Clinic. Bentley stopped and stared. There was no sense to it. The Mayor, maybe—or a commissioner's wife with her bonbon-nibbling little Pekinese.

But this was no commissioner's wife who climbed out of the car, resting a neat, little foot gingerly on the pavement edge, showing a smart tailored suit of tweed, a chic little cockeyed hat askew. And then—a small cyclone in the shape of a dog came bursting from the car, yelping in high glee, jerking his leash from the girl's hand, catching her foot in his leather noose and sending her almost sprawling in the muddy gutter, while he scampered away, still barking, past Bentley, down toward the river of mud where the steam-shovel labored and puffed.

"Tinker! Tinker, you fool dog, come back here!"

Bentley started at the voice. It was a familiar voice. It seemed to echo all voices he had heard with pleasure. But in that fraction of a second while he stood paralyzed, the girl had recovered her footing and stood on tiptoe, scanning the street for her pet. Bentley went alive then. An almost forgotten social instinct spun him around, and he dashed out in pursuit of the erring animal.



"Losing a few hundred thousand dollars isn't exactly wiping me out," was his attitude. "Any questions, boys?"

Not much of a chase, but it served its purpose. He caught the little dog when the steam-shovel spat a hissing puff of steam, sending the pup terrified toward the nearest human. Bentley was that human. He picked up the small beast, got himself wetly kissed by a flickering tongue; and a hurt little paw, neatly bandaged, was thrust into his face as though to prove the right by which Fido had come to the doghouse. He carried the now willing canine back to its owner, who stood in front of the Municipal Clinic, a little muddled from her fall, but entirely able to maintain her dignity none the less.

"Here you are, madam—" The words came haltingly from Bentley's lips. "I hope that you had no serious harm. . . . Oh—"

He stopped there, staring. For that exquisite face, those crisp brown curls, those level gray eyes staring into his grimy, unshaven face, belonged to Lorraine Graymaster.

"Hello, John Destiny."

She held out her hand, simply, frankly. Those three easy little words burnt him like a flame. This was condescension. How could she come down into the mire, into which he, Bentley Dewert, had fallen and merely say: "Hello, John Destiny!" John Destiny was dead. Let him be buried. He stared at her with shreds of cold dignity. He said: "Some mistake, madam," and turned on his heel.

IT was just a coincidence, of course—I wounded dog to the hospital—had to be *that* hospital—had to be *her* of all people—seeing him in his shame . . . patronizing . . . and handing him that hearty hail: "Hello, John Destiny." Just as if she hadn't seen the newspapers with their jeering, insinuating stories: "SMARTEST SMART-ALEC OUTSMARTED: DESTINY TRIMMED OF MILLIONS."

He walked rapidly, in a sort of fever-panic, stung with shame that she could have seen him like that—dirty, unshaven,

down, lost, forgotten. Then he remembered—her uncle—Buntsman Graymaster and his gadget. That was it, of course. A hundred thousand dollars he had given away to the old buzzard. Imagine it! Silent partnership, and all that sort of rot. And the uncle must have read the papers and, acting like a stuffed shirt, believed he was using crooked money for his new company. So *she* would come mewling around, trying to make him talk.

FOOTSTEPS pattering behind him. A gentle hand on his arm.

"Please—" She said it with pleading. "Oh, please," she said, "don't be—like that."

He squared and faced her.

"Never mind the rest of it, Miss Graymaster," he said brutally. "I know all the answers. Thanks, but I don't need any today. I'd give my right arm if you hadn't stumbled on me down here, but since you did—let's have it straight. I'm nobody you know. John Destiny is dead; anyhow, I never heard of him. I'm just another guy named Gus—a doggie's nursemaid. I'll collect your pooch for you and have one of the vets look him over—if you want. Otherwise, I'd be glad if you let me alone."

She looked at him out of her troubled gray eyes, touched with surprise which was evidently quite real, but tinged also with sudden anger.

"I see," she said. "I shouldn't have tried—not after what Mr. Hartswell said. I should have known better."

"Hartswell!" The name burst from Bentley's incredulous lips. "What about Hartswell?"

"He sent me. He came to me and pleaded with me to come. That's how I knew where you were. In a weak moment I—I said I would. I might have known better. I'll go now before you treat me as you've treated Mr. Hartswell."

She stopped there, then,

"And I had a personal reason, too—my uncle." She seemed strangely hesitant, still angry yet anxious. Bentley read a meaning into it, remembering suddenly that John J. Destiny, the white-haired boy, had loaned a hundred thousand to her uncle. Well, she needn't worry about that.

"I don't want that money, Miss Graymaster," he said, "if that's what you mean. I'm through. I wouldn't touch any of that money. I just want to be let alone. You can tell your uncle."



"My uncle," she said, "may not be alive. Not that you'd care."

And then she turned and walked away toward the car, her head proudly high, picking up her dog and tossing him into the tonneau before Bentley could grasp what she had meant. Then, as he called out to her futilely, the big car lumbered away.

Bentley stood gaping at the empty space where the limousine had stood, long after it had rounded the corner of First Avenue and vanished into traffic. "*May not be alive—not that you'd care!*" What an extraordinary thing to say! Did it mean that the ancient eccentric doctor was finally yielding to age—was he sick, was he dying? Or did it mean something else? Surely Lorraine Graymaster, so sure of herself, so disgusted with the John Destiny she thought she knew, would not have come *merely* because Hartswell had urged her. He could understand Hartswell's reasoning. "You kinda like that Graymaster frill—" he had said once. Good old Hartswell, not holding that blow against him, trying hard to bring him back into a life which had beaten him, asking Lorraine to try.

But she must have had other reasons. And it wouldn't be that her uncle was sick. It must be something else—something big, tragic perhaps.

Then he remembered Ross, the sleek foreign agent, His One-eyed Highness and his deadly crew. They had tried repeatedly to steal the secret of Buntsman Graymaster's terrible light, which the old man planned to give to Uncle Sam. Had *they* found out? Had *they* struck again? And had *they* caught the old man?

Bentley Dewert did not go back to the doghouse. Instead he went down along the River, close to the embankment, where the cool salt smell crept into his nostrils, where calm lived, where he could think.

"I've got to go," he decided at last. "I'll go back—for her. I'll go to Brood first. As John Destiny, maybe I can help. As plain Bentley Dewert I'm a nobody. Brood first, too. I owe it to Brood—he trusted me. I'll start in by facing things. Maybe it won't be so bad. Maybe a little Personal Mystery will fix things—fix those damned foreigners too."

Twenty cents—you can do a lot with it. For one thing, you can get a shave with it. Take off the whiskers, Bentley found, and a new man stared at you in the mirror. Maybe it was his last twenty cents, and maybe he had to walk all the way downtown to Brood's office; but what's the matter with walking?

IN the reception-room he stood at the desk, knowing his shirt had been washed in his washbowl, and he said, briskly:

"Tell Mr. Brood I'm here. . . . The name is Destiny."

What surprised him then was the receptionist's reply.

"Mr. Destiny? Oh, yes sir, go right in. Mr. Brood is expecting you."

That short march through the typists' room was a bad instant, full of sudden and inarticulate misgivings. What did she mean, Brood was expecting him? How could he be? And in fancy he heard the thunder of Brood articulating all the charges, accusations and shames which he himself had been nursing in his own inner consciousness until their pain was almost unendurable.

And then the moment was over. He was knocking at Brood's door. He was hearing Brood's voice behind the partition saying:

"Yes, come in."

He was inside the plain office, seeing Brood's rotund body in silhouette against a window, the head and shoulders rising like a miniature mountain behind the soap-manufacturer's desk. He was conscious of his legs trembling. He started fumbling with words.

"Hello—Mr. Brood. I—I—I'm sorry that I—"

HE got no farther, because Brood was getting out of his chair and coming toward him and holding out his hand, taking Bentley's in a firm grip. Brood was looking up from his five feet three into Bentley's six feet with a wistful, almost childlike expression, and saying:

"Don't be sorry, Dewert. Don't say anything at all—not a word, boy. Just answer me one thing: Tell me straight—you came back to go to work, didn't you, boy? You did, didn't you, Dewert?"

"Why—why, yes sir—if you want me. I thought—"

"That's all I want to know," said Brood, and there was a ring of joy in his voice. "Never mind what you thought. Nobody cares what anybody thinks. You came back to work, and that's all I want to know. That's fine, Dewert. Thought you would, pretty soon."

"But I—I wanted to tell you, sir, that—well, I might as well admit—"

"Bah! Don't admit anything. Never admit anything. Didn't ask you, did I? Then shut up."

"Yes sir, but I ought to report—"

"Shut up, I say. What you want to report for? Think I can't read the papers? Think a feller like John J. Destiny can just up and disappear without the newspapers knowing it? Think a bunch of crooks can get off with half a million and not make a story in the papers? Think you can hand a couple of rubber checks to a big bank like the Sphinx and not make a noise? Don't be a fool, boy. I don't need your report. I can read; I can think, too. I know what happened. Knew all the time. Knew why you ran out. I'm no fool, boy—but I might have done it myself. Now you just—"

"But there's more than that, sir," Bentley broke in. "There's a lot more—the papers couldn't get it. I didn't read a paper since I've been—away; but I know they couldn't know it. I want to tell you, sir. It's only honest—"

Brood gave him a queer look. For an instant there was a new, warmer, gentler light in his face. Then he snatched his

hand away and scowled, and said in a rough voice which was his own voice:

"Bah! Rot! Who cares a hang about your two-penny honesty? Think I'm a father-confessor? Think I'm a psychiatrist? Think I'm your papa, boy? Don't be a fool. Know what I am? I'm a stockholder, that's what—hold a hundred per cent stock in you. Personal Mystery stock, that's what. All I want you to do is to go out and get that million: that's all. Not much time now, boy. Got to work fast. So you shut up with all that palaver—just shut up and go to work. That's what you do."

"But—but I can't make a million dollars in a few months like that, Mr. Brood. I flopped."

"Shut up! Who said you can't? You got Personal Mystery, aint you? What more d'you want? Now, you listen here and keep still while I tell you what you're going to do—"

And Bentley listened.

"The big thing for you to remember," Brood had told Bentley before their four-hour conversation had ended, "is that a man is never so strong as when he *appears* to have been beaten but comes back for more. That's Personal Mystery right there, boy, and don't forget it."

There was, Bentley had to admit, a lot in the idea.

"Biggest asset you've got, boy, is the newspapers." That was another of Brood's contributions. "They butchered you; they printed all kinds of insinuating, almost incriminating stories about you—and now you suddenly appear. Puts 'em in a spot, eh? First thing you do is handle the press. Personal Mystery! Act surprised—you can't understand where they got all that stuff, nor why they printed it. You only went off on a private matter—none of their business. Treat 'em small. Act as though it didn't really matter what they've printed. Treat the reporters like bad children—they'll eat out of your hand. Got the idea?"

And Bentley had got the idea.

THAT very night, after astounding the Hotel Washington Towers by walking into the lobby as though nothing in the world had happened, demanding his key and going straight to his rooms without appearing to notice the scandalized and befuddled countenances of clerks, and bellboys, he had awaited the rush of newspaper men. It was not long in coming. News gets out quickly from hotels, and this was big news indeed.

When the crowd of some fifteen reporters had finally gone, it was almost midnight, he was tired—weak from a sort of nervous exhaustion; but he felt, inside himself, that he had handled that situation very well.

"I don't wish to be too hard on you boys," was his general attitude, "but it is pretty obvious that I could sue all your papers for libel—and collect. If a man can't leave the city on private business without having himself dragged before the public as an embezzler, swindler, crook and imbecile, things are in pretty bad shape. Well, luckily, it's not important. I'm strong enough, I hope, to carry on without being troubled with public opinion. As you see, I'm here—in the flesh. You can print that. Also you can print that losing a few hundred thousand dollars isn't exactly wiping me out. Any questions, boys? Stop at the bar as you leave and have yourself a drink—on me."

And so the evening ended.

MORNING, however, was less amusing, a trifle disconcerting. As he sat in his rooms over the breakfast which a round-eyed service-boy brought him with the morning papers, he grew painfully conscious of his own false position as he read the stories those reporters had written.

"Out of the frying-pan," he concluded, "and into the fire."

That summed it up pretty well. If he had been a mysterious and romantic figure in the city before the Kelsdro business, he would be doubly so when the public had gasped at these stories. If he had ridden on a pinnacle of public opinion before, he was higher, now, than ever. His least gesture would be news. He felt as though a million eyes were staring at him as, a manner of speaking, they were.

J. DESTINY'S AMAZING RETURN GIVES
LIE TO CRITICS.

A nice bit of backing water in that headline.

YOUNG MYSTERY MAN NO FAILURE:
WANTS MORE MONEY.

There was another of the same.

WHITE KNIGHT DESTINY MAY BE
SERIOUS FINANCIAL FACTOR.

"Now, that's just dandy," Bentley mused, albeit with irony. "But what does it make me?"

There seemed no good answer to that.



"You've got the wrong party," Bentley said. "I don't have any laundry."

All that morning he did not leave his rooms. His pencil was busy filling paper with endless columns of figures; he made frequent telephone calls to his bank, his frown deepening with each call. For with each call, with each figure set down, the story was growing more painful. It was almost noonday when he finally sat back and contemplated his handiwork with a rueful stare.

"May be a serious financial factor, hey?" he said aloud. "I wonder what they'd say if they could see just how serious my own finances are. What a laugh—boy, what a laugh!"

For when the totals were done, when the deductions were made for what the fake Kelsdros had taken, for uncouped checks, for taxes due an inexorable State and Federal government, for unpaid hotel bills and an amazing list of minutiae

which, in his former halcyon days he had scarcely bothered to notice, the total of money remaining in his bank was exactly \$1533.47.

"Quite a come-down for John J. Destiny, the billionaire!" he reflected with a touch of wry humor. "But a lot better than nothing at all. What I don't see yet is how I'm going to run that into six figures in six months, Brood or no Brood, Personal Mystery or none."

Then after a moment of hesitation, he added:

"Well, we can always try. Besides, I've got to show Lorraine."

JUST then the telephone rang. It was the clerk at the desk saying:

"Your Chinese laundryman is on his way up, sir—service elevator—thought you'd like to know."

"Chinese laundryman? You're crazy. I don't use any Chinese laundry. Some mistake." But a gentle knocking at his door made him abandon the telephone.

A little moon-faced Oriental stood at the door, carrying a vast laundry-bag which all but enveloped him. He was bowing and bobbing, ridiculously, shapelessly. His entire little body seemed to be lost in the folds of a great black alpaca tunic that draped him. He clutched a crisp paper bundle in his arms, and seemed not at all disconcerted when Bentley said:

"All right, Charley. You've got the wrong party. I don't have any laundry—no catchum tickee, no wantum shirtee."

But the Chinese only beamed the more, and advanced the package insistently toward Bentley.

"I tell you, this is a mistake," Bentley insisted. "Better go back to the desk and find out whose shirts you've really got."

But the Chinese merely thrust the package into Bentley's unwilling hands, shuffled off down the hall and vanished.

"The devil!" muttered Bentley. "You'd think a laundryman would learn a little English in time. Some poor fish is going to miss these shirts if—"

With this thought in mind he returned to the telephone, laying the package on his table. And then he saw it—a little white envelope attached to the bundle by a pin. To his amazement, he saw that the typewritten name written across it was, "MR. JOHN J. DESTINY."

Just that. No address, no further mark—merely his own name.

He picked up the envelope, detaching it from the paper.

"Now, here's a queer gag," he decided. "I wonder what in thunder—"

Then he opened it, stared at the crisp bond paper inside, and staggered under the impact of surprise. The message read:

John J. Destiny, Esq.,

A proposal of considerable financial advantage will be made to you, honorable sir, if you will have the kindness to dine this evening at the restaurant known as the Celestial, on Broadway.

Sincerest compliments of,
PREPAREDNESS

And under the quasi-signature "PREPAREDNESS," he saw two odd-looking Chinese characters which did nothing to diminish his utter puzzlement, bewilderment and confusion.

"Somebody," he mused, "is trying to rub me out in a nice clean way. . . . Or," he added after a moment of reading the strange document again, "are they?"

THE Chinese restaurant is a strictly American institution, whose only claim to Oriental flavor lies in the plaster Buddhas and the *papier-mâché* dragons which adorn its corners, the misleading word "chop-suey" on the menu, and the faint odor of lichee nuts and soy sauce. Yet it offers to the modern youth a sort of mystic retreat where, to the music of swing bands and in the comparative seclusion of convenient booths, they may indulge in all the et-cetera of the boy-meets-girl pastime. But it is the last place in which one may find, save for the dishwashers and service, a real Chinese.

This was precisely the sort of place Bentley found the Celestial to be, and it only served to increase his suspicion of that incomprehensible message. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, he dined there that night.

"If somebody's pulling my leg," he decided, "I'll not have lost anything. But I have to eat somewhere, so why not at the Celestial?"

Two hours of it, and nothing happened. Not a glance was given him by any of the four Chinese waiters or the Chinese manager or yet the pretty little Oriental girl who took his hat and coat, which could be construed that they recognized him as anything but just another customer. Abruptly he had had enough. He got from his seat, paid his check and marched to the coat-check window for his things, feeling let down in spite of himself. If it were a joke it was a poor one.

He handed his coat-check to the girl. She took it, vanished among the stacks of garments, while he waited and tapped nervously with his fingers on her counter. Suddenly he was conscious of the smiling, bobbing manager of the restaurant, who stood at his side, saying:

"Will you come with me, Mr. Destiny, please?"

And right then he knew he had stepped out of all normal dimension.

He followed the man—why not? That is what he had come for. He followed him back through the kitchen where three cooks were very busy. A plain door gave from the kitchen into a small back room in which there was only a chair and a small pantry-closet door. The Chinaman walked straight to this closet, opened the door, and disappeared into the darkness within. Bentley stopped short. This was not making sense. One doesn't go into anybody's two-by-four closet, and may-be—

"Step right in, Mr. Destiny, please," came a voice which seemed inside the closet. "You will observe that the closet is a false entrance. Do not be alarmed, please."

He opened the closet door gingerly. Some old clothes and rags were hanging from hooks. There seemed nothing extraordinary about it. But the Chinese manager was definitely not in it, and a faint light came from behind the row of hanging things. Curiosity made him push his hand through these, and presently he saw that there was a small low door behind them.

"Well," he decided abruptly, "I might as well see it through. Here goes!" And he stepped through—into another world.

It *looked* like another world. It was a brightly lighted room, suggesting a rich business office. At a large metal desk sat an Oriental gentleman in American evening attire, while in overstuffed club chairs facing him, sat three more Chinese gentlemen, all similarly attired in Occidental costume. The restaurant's manager stood at the right of the desk.

ALL eyes were turned on Bentley as he stepped in, and every man seated arose and bowed to him as he came into their presence.

"Allow us," said the man at the desk, "to thank you for favoring us with your presence, Mr. Destiny, and to apologize for the somewhat unconventional manner in which our invitation was extended to you—a somewhat necessary bit of mys-

terious business, I assure you." The man was very tall, very powerful, very bald save for a tuft of black hair in the center of his yellow dome; but he had the look of a leader. Bentley could scarcely avoid a moment of surprise at the excellence of his English. He tried to control his astonishment as he began:

"I'm afraid I don't know, gentlemen, just what—"

But the tall Oriental cut him off.

"Naturally, Mr. Destiny. Permit me to introduce myself—Abraham Lincoln Soo, of the American-International University. And these other gentlemen, all Americans like myself, although of Chinese ancestry, are Mr. Charles Chung, president of the Transpacific Import Company; Mr. Lin Fu Kai, of the Sino-American Bank, and Mr. Hamilton Meng, editor of the *Chinese-American Weekly*. Please to be seated, Mr. Destiny, and let us, as is the custom in America, get down to business."

He indicated the single empty chair in the room, which was situated to the left of his own desk and placed at an angle from which Bentley would be partly facing the entire assembly.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN SOO—Bentley recalled having heard the name. The others meant nothing at all to him; but Soo, he recalled, was something of a celebrity, holding a chair in Oriental languages and philosophy in the International, a writer of several books on Chinese questions, and more recently active in organizing relief committees for the homeless non-combatants in war-desolated China. But why should they have wanted to talk to him, of all persons?

"Ah—Mr. Destiny—" This was no longer Soo, but Lin Fu Kai, the banker. "Believe me, sir, we are entirely aware of the probable discomfort of your immediate position among us. We ask you, however, to endeavor to overlook your personal feelings for the moment inasmuch as you should understand that, should it be learned by certain parties that you were brought here tonight, not only would our purpose be defeated, but even your own life might be in danger. We are not quite the men to employ measures of mystery for the mere sake of mystifying, I can assure you. And to put it bluntly, this is a conference among business men with a purely financial end in view. Should you doubt our identities or the sincerity of our purpose here, you are at

perfect liberty to leave, and to make such discreet inquiries as your judgment may dictate. Otherwise, my dear Mr. Destiny, we shall proceed—with your permission."

IT was a bit flowery, that speech, and yet Bentley could not help feeling that the man was sincere. He had to say:

"Since I'm here, gentlemen, I shall take your word for whatever you have to say. I admit I'm puzzled as to what you can want of me, but since you seem to want something—I'm listening."

There was a general movement of settling back into chairs.

"The true purpose of this meeting, sir," Mr. Kai went on, "is briefly that of asking you for money—a very large sum of money."

"Money!" Bentley gasped the word in sheer surprise. "But I—" Then he checked himself. Kai went on, nodding:

"You are known as a young man of great wealth, sir," he said. "Diminishing such reports even by one-half, you are able, if you choose to accept our proposal, to give us the aid we need. Moreover—" He paused a moment, weighing his words. "Moreover," he repeated, "you are reputed to be one of the most daring gamblers in the country, Mr. Destiny. Your fortune has been created out of your extraordinary ability to seize an opportunity invisible to others, and to plunge into it with rare courage. We have followed your career in the newspapers, sir, and we have found you to be perhaps the only person in this country—or any other—who can, if you will, come to the aid of our cause."

Kai let this sink in. Bentley's head was reeling. "Young man of great wealth!" What cruel irony, what a bitter laugh!

"This is very complimentary, gentlemen," he managed to make himself say. "But just what is this proposition? How much money?"

Mr. Soo picked up the tale here.

"In three simple words, sir," he said, "China needs arms. This is America, our country, Mr. Destiny. We are Americans, born and bred, whatever our race. But if our country is America, our blood is China. Nor can we, as Americans and lovers of freedom and liberty, sit quietly by, observing dispassionately the slow, cruel, bloody dismemberment of China by Japanese imperialism. We cannot sit unmoved while millions of harmless innocent people are murdered, peaceful farm villages destroyed by aerial bombs,

women and children shattered and torn and sacrificed on the altar of Moloch. We cannot, Mr. Destiny—the world cannot—” He paused to control himself.

“To obtain the huge funds needed to finance a modern war, Mr. Destiny, international credit is necessary. China has little or no credit left. What nation, what banking organization would accept Chinese bonds when, should Japan succeed in her plan, any nominal Chinese government would vanish like smoke and such bonds would be defaulted. No, Mr. Destiny, if China is to hurl back the armies of Japan and drive Japanese warships from the blockade of her coasts, some man-made miracle must take place. There is such a miracle, sir. A plan has been forged—a bold plan of such dimension that in a few hours the very complexion of the struggle in China would change. Japan would perforce withdraw—in short, a miracle. But to accomplish it, sir, funds are needed. There, sir, is our reason in calling you here tonight: To ask you to give us the funds.”

Bentley was numb beyond the power of voluntary speech. As through some dim haze he seemed to hear his own voice saying:

“But, gentlemen—no one man can possibly possess the tremendous sum of money needed to arm China against Japan—to work your—your miracle!”

“In this case, yes.” That was Kai, now. “In this case, sir, the sum required is within the reach of a single wealthy man—a huge fortune, sir, but a trifle in the language of armaments and national finances. We require exactly four million dollars. Only that.”

THERE was silence. Then Bentley said, like an echo:

“Only—four million—dollars!” Only four million! The thing was laughable, hilarious. Only four millions of dollars—only!

“You see,” said Kai, “it is a sum which might be called feasible. We can raise that sum, sir, without help from you or anyone. There are eighty thousand Chinese-Americans in this country. There are nearly forty thousand Chinese families. Should each family contribute a mere fifty dollars, we can raise that sum, sir. We have already received the pledge of each Chinese-American family in the country. The money is within our reach. And yet—” He halted.

Soo continued for him:

“And yet we cannot raise such a sum in the time required, Mr. Destiny. To utilize it, to use it to effect the miracle of which Mr. Kai has spoken, that money must be in China within thirty days. Therefore, sir, we have come to you. We must have that sum at once.”

“But—” Kai anticipated him and cut in:

“We understand your hesitation, Mr. Destiny. Money is not loaned without security, nor without—profit to the lender. We have thought of that, sir. We can offer you both—ample security and a profit worthy of the sum.”

“But I—” Bentley tried to speak, but words would not come. Inwardly he was groaning: “Good God, they think I have real money. They think I’m the billionaire the papers have made me out. The poor devils, they really think it!”

HE must hedge, he knew that. “But, gentlemen,” he said, “I don’t quite see how four million dollars would do what—”

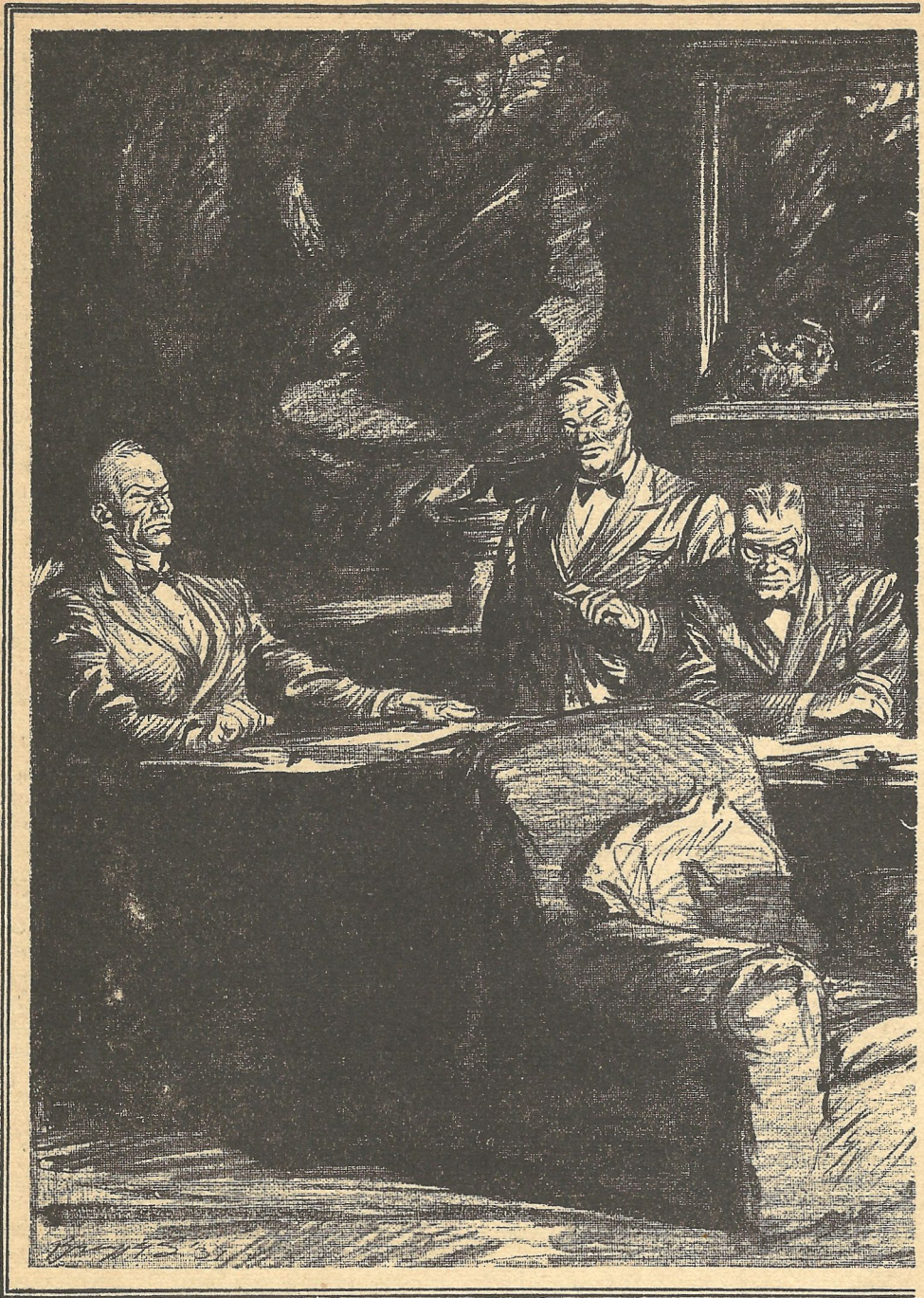
It was Meng, the editor, who checked him now.

“It is your right, Mr. Destiny,” he said, “to know the plan which, if it is carried out with your money, will free China. That is your right. And yet, sir—” He hesitated and glanced at the other faces. “It is no aspersion on your honor nor honesty that we are forced to clothe that plan in something even deeper than secrecy. Not only do we ask your word of honor that you will not reveal to a living soul even the fragmentary outline of it which we will give you; but we warn you that we, in this room, and one person in China only, are the sole persons in the world who know of this plan. We warn you that should this plan fail through any leakage, Mr. Destiny—”

He halted again, and then resumed with slow, careful words:

“Then, sir, there is no corner in this world dark enough, remote enough, safe enough, to hide you from the punishment of death which would surely come to you if the plan should fail because of betrayal. This is not a threat, sir. This is a simple statement of fact. It is your right to know the plan if you will lend us the money, Mr. Destiny; but it is our right to protect it. We have no choice, sir.”

Bentley was overwhelmed at the sudden grimness of the man, the seriousness of his purpose. And for a moment Bentley was tempted to tell them that they



"I—I must have time to consult my bankers. Four million

were mistaken in him, that he was virtually penniless. But something, not un-mixed with human curiosity, checked him. Something in him was whispering:

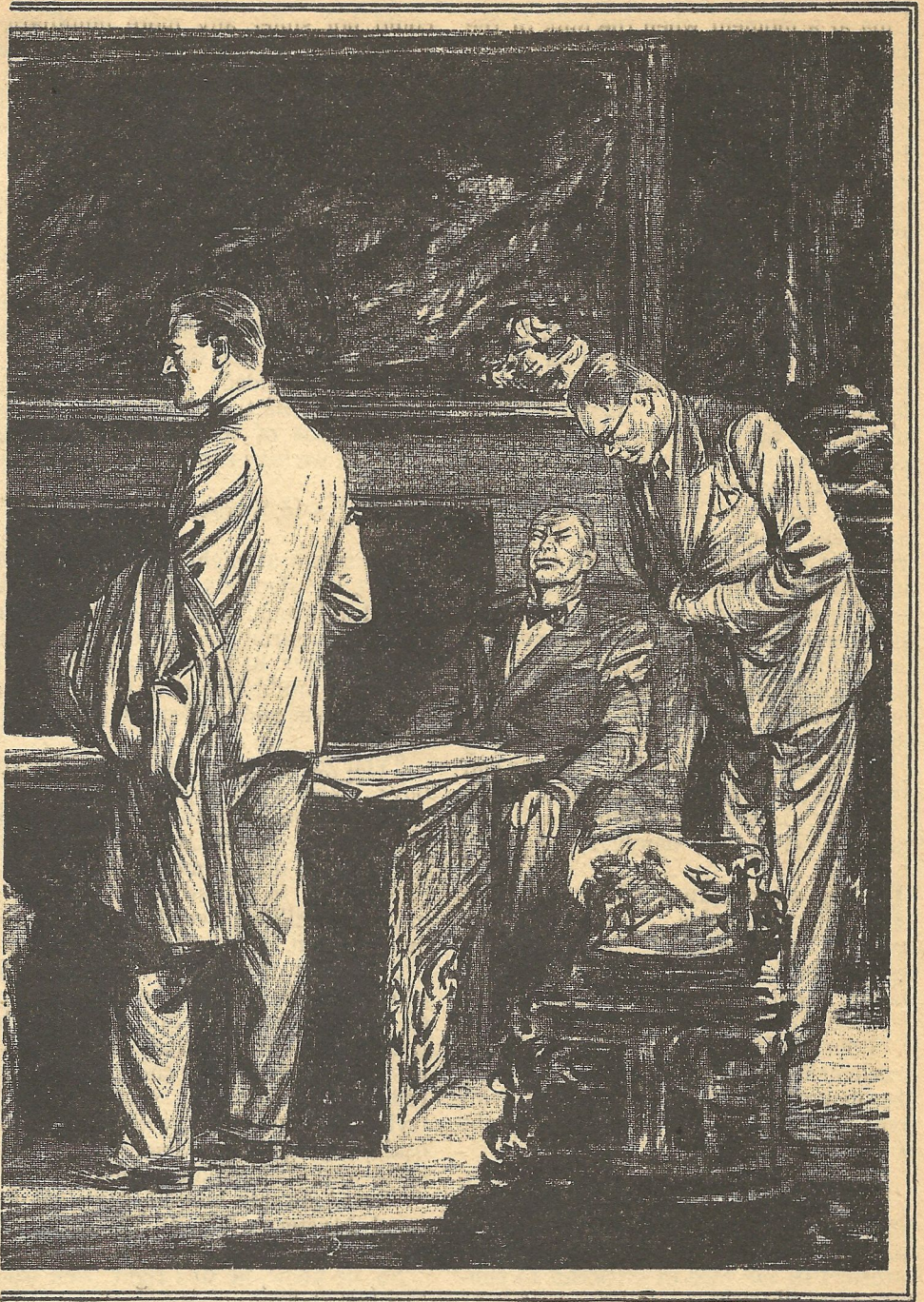
"Hold it, Dewert—don't toss this away yet. This is Personal Mystery. This is the biggest thing you've ever stepped into. Get the whole story before you shy off."

So he said:

"I understand, gentlemen. I give you my word, and I take all risks."

It was Soo who told of the plan.

"China is overwhelmed by Japanese airplanes; it is wrecked by their bombs, mowed down by modern weapons. Chinese rivers are blockaded by Japanese gunboats. China has neither air-force



dollars is not an easy thing to—" Bentley began.

nor navy, save a few planes manned by well-meaning foreign friends whose numbers are sadly too few, and a handful of mere rowboats and junks. Yet if China could strike at some point vital to Japan—in her home waters or from the air on one of her great cities—the surprise element would be such that, alone, it would change the tide of Japanese conquest. If

China could, at a blow, destroy Japan's air-force or cripple her navy, then, sir, we would have that miracle of which we have spoken. You agree?"

"Of course," Bentley admitted. "But it's rather impossible to—"

"Not impossible," said Soo. "Quite possible, in fact. A single submarine, Mr. Destiny, guided to the port of Yoko-



"Hell," he said grimly, "maybe it's my sense of humor I've lost."

There had been a lot of humor mixed up in this Personal Mystery business. There was a laugh in making old Hartlow, the airplane man, think Mr. Destiny was somebody he wasn't and pay him for not being. Humor in that lark with poor little Jaffley and his vaporifex. Humor enough to fool those fuel syndicate men—what were their names, now? Leverford—Sundley?. . . There had been a laugh in putting one over on old Colonel Jossop, too, and in bluffing His One-eyed Highness out of fifty grand. Sense of humor—that was it. Even wangling real money out of that practically non-existent quicksilver mine had been plenty of fun. Humor, that was what seemed to be gone. If he could only work up a real, honest-to-goodness belly laugh about that four million dollars, maybe he could use a little Personal Mystery and *do* something.

And that spoiled his night. He did not go to bed, after all. . . .

Hours passed uncounted. When Bentley finally did drop exhausted into bed, a gray light was making in the streets of New York; and had there been birds to chirp, they would have begun their morning chorus. Exhausted he was, but as he stretched out and sprawled into the delayed comfort of clean linen, he was smiling. Across from his bed was the large dressing mirror in which he could just catch a glimpse of his own countenance, grinning at him. He saluted it.

"Hya, John J." he said. "Maybe you had one more brainstorm left, hey? Well, if it works, it's a wow—the best Personal Mystery gag ever pulled. And if it doesn't work, it's still been a lot of fun trying. See yuh in the morning, feller."

Then he slept.

MORNING was not delayed in coming. His regular call from the hotel switchboard came at nine o'clock, and regardless of his brief sleep, he was out of bed, washed, and dressed in but a few minutes. Then he went to work.

"Here's where," he said aloud, as he seated himself at his desk and began scribbling rapidly on innumerable pieces of paper, "we may pour more oil into the troubled lamps of China. . . . Cross your fingers, Mr. Soo!"

And then he was silent for two long hours.

Two hours, and the draft was made. A mass of crumpled paper lay about the

room, scrawled with discarded compositions, but the precious document he held in his hand was, as he contemplated it, apparently just about perfect.

He read it again.

"That," he decided, "ought to bring 'em here. They all know me. They've all either paid me money or else they've made money on me. They'll all take at least that much of a chance. Then—it's up to me and Personal Mystery." He turned to his mirror and saluted his image once more.

"Greetings, feller," he said to it. "We're on our way either to our million bucks—or the grandest flop anybody ever made. So those Chinese want a gambler, do they? Wow!"

Then he telephoned to the service desk.

"Send me," he instructed them, "a public stenographer, right away."

HE chuckled inwardly as, while he waited, he opened his check-book. That same total of \$1533.47 stared at him from the left-hand balance column, but it made him only chuckle the more as he took his fountain pen and wrote out a check against that pathetic figure.

It was a check for \$125,000, payable to bearer. And before the public stenographer had rung at his door buzzer, he had written three more checks of the same high denomination. He greeted the prim young woman with a hilarious sort of eagerness.

"Sit right down," he told her, "and start taking notes. I want exactly the same letter to go to each one of the four names I'll give you. Here's the letter."

Then he dictated:

"Dear Sir:

"Enclosed is my check for one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$125,000), dated June 15, which, as you will observe, is thirty days from next Thursday.

"In order that the details of this transaction may be clarified and that your inclusion in this rather unusual deal may be settled, it will be necessary that you call at my hotel tomorrow afternoon not later than three o'clock.

"Best personal regards,

"John J. Destiny"

"There," he told the stenographer, "is the letter. Now take the names and addresses and bring me the letters to mail as soon as they are finished."

And the names he dictated were:

Julius Hartlow, Aircraft Corp., N. Y.

Senator Axel G. Pinkton, Washington, D. C.

Morris Leverford, New World Fuels, N. Y.

Joseph Caddis, Esq., Caddis Promotions, Broad St., N. Y.

He chuckled as the girl left his rooms, her eyes bulging. People did not, in her experience, mail checks payable to cash, to the sum of a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, in hotel envelopes.

When she had gone, he squared at his mirror, touching his forehead,

"Now, friend Destiny," he said, "let's see just how far Personal Mystery can really work."

JO CADDIS came, with a leer on his face, saying to Bentley in his gruff, almost brutal way:

"Listen, son—you gone nuts? You tryin' to kid old Jo Caddis? What the hell is this gag you got here, sendin' me a hundred an' a quarter grand?"

And Bentley pointed to a chair, saying: "I'm all right, Jo. And I'm not kidding. I figure I owe you something—for a lot of things, really. I'm just cutting you in on something. Sit down and take it easy. There are some more people coming. Have a drink, Jo?"

And Jo Caddis accepted the drink.

Julius Hartlow loomed in the door like a gray ghost.

"My dear young Mr. Destiny," he said in his suave irony, "if this is one of your—ah—clever publicity gestures—something on the order of the White Knight episode, I confess that I resent being called into a—"

"That's all right, Mr. Hartlow," Bentley told him. "This isn't a publicity gag. I'm just paying my debts to—well, call it society. I owe you something, you know. And by the way, I trust you were able to secure your airplane contracts without my—er—interference."

Hartlow's white hand, shaking Bentley's, stiffened. Hartlow did not quite like to be reminded of that incident.

"We got the French contracts," he said, more stiffly. "I hardly—"

"Good," said Bentley. "Please sit down, sir."

Mr. Leverford, the master-mind of World Fuels, was not the man to be trifled with by any young whipper-snapper who played upon newspaper publicity to achieve his possibly shady schemes.

"Are you Destiny?" he barked as he was shown in. "What's this imperti-

nence? Who asked you to send me a check? I have nothing to do with you, young man, I—"

"Quite all right, Mr. Leverford," Bentley said. "I apologize for taking advantage of what is no more than a hearsay acquaintance. Please sit down for a moment, and I will explain everything to you."

Senator Pinkton, however, came in with his fine rich smile and greeted Bentley heartily.

"Hello, you young rascal! Glad to see you. Had to fly down from Washington, anyhow—so I stopped in. What's this ridiculous business, handing me a bogus check for a hundred thousand or so—"

"Not bogus, sir," Bentley assured him. "I'm very glad to see you, Senator. That check is a partial payment on what I consider my debt to you." And he added, grinning: "And it gives me the fun of turning the tables on you, just a little. Please sit down. Meet these gentlemen, Senator—" And so on.

There they sat, the four of them, each with his own brand of skepticism written upon his face, each with the restlessness of men conscious of their importance and wary lest a lesser importance presume upon it—all, that is, save Senator Pinkton, who sat in his stately bigness with a half-smile of expectancy on his lips.

"Gentlemen," Bentley said, "let me be brief. Each of you holds my check for one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, dated June 15. That sum, gentlemen, represents the net profit to you, each of you, on the investment we are about to make together."

HE got no farther. Jo Caddis exploded.

"Investment! Hey, what the hell is this, you dumb bunny? D'you think I'm gonna hand you real money to—"

Hartlow was quite as resistant, if less brutal.

"I had hoped, Mr. Destiny," he said in his cold, calm way, "that this would not be one of those little—ah—tricks of such bad taste as—"

The Senator merely said:

"Great God, young feller! This is not the way to—"

And Leverford simply laughed.

"Another come-on investment salesman, eh? We seem to be in the wrong place, gentlemen," he said.

But Bentley was not to be so easily rebuffed.



"Ye'll be Mr. Destiny, huh? Well, ye're under arrest—and it looks like a murder rap."

"Just one moment," he said. "Before you make a snap decision about what I am about to say, let me say it all, if you please, gentlemen. I spoke of an investment. Would any of you feel that ten per cent on one's money in thirty days risk, is a good investment? In these days of fallen interest-rates, of call money at unheard-of lows, when—"

"Perhaps you dislike the word *speculation*?" suggested Hartlow. "Not, of course, that the choice of words matters. I think, gentlemen, that we are all wasting our time. I suggest that we leave together. Personally, I have a great deal to do this afternoon." He would have gone, too, had not Senator Pinkton checked them all.

"Hold on, now," he said in his loud, mellow voice. "This young feller has made millions for me, I'm bound to admit. Hear him out, at least, gentlemen. That's the sporting way."

They paused. Bentley nodded to the Senator.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "But I must admit that Mr. Hartlow and the others are quite right. It is rather presumptuous of me, to say the least, to

propose that any intelligent men in their right minds should invest a million dollars apiece in a project whose very name and kind they don't know—on the mere word of a mere boy, half their age. I know that. I admit it."

"A million! Better get your head examined, son." That was Jo Caddis. But Bentley was talking now, and he would not yield the floor.

"I admit all that, gentlemen," he was saying. "But there is perhaps more logic in it than you may have seen at first glance. You all read the papers. You all are aware, from one source or another, that John Destiny passes for a rather wealthy person—"

"Yeah?" Caddis again. "And he got himself trimmed by a trio of fancy boys! Five hundred thousand smackers, aint it?"

"That is true, Caddis," Bentley said. "But you may notice that he is back in the fight again. A burned man is often fireproof. What I'm getting at is that having made a bit of money in what passes for a short time, it seems obvious, does it not, that I might have access to information of a special and privileged sort. To be brief, gentlemen, such privileged information has come to me. An opportunity for making money which is not less than extraordinary has arisen. I myself am taking advantage of it. I offer you gentlemen the chance of profiting by it with me. In short, I give you

the chance of following my own example."

"Very interesting indeed," said Hartlow with cool irony. "And just what is the example?"

Bentley was prepared for him. He produced a checkbook and wrote calmly, deliberately, while they all stared. Then he blotted his check with aggravating deliberation and tore it from the book.

"Here you are, sir," he said to Hartlow, passing the check across his desk. "One million dollars."

Hartlow stared; he had not quite been prepared for this. But the old gleam of skeptical amusement came back to his face. He passed the check to Leverford.

"A million dollars," he said, evenly. "A check written to some vague name, 'Preparedness.' Not a bad bit of buffoonery, Destiny. But anyone can write checks. It is the cash that counts in these days. I trust you are impressed, Mr. Leverford."

Leverford lifted his nostrils at the paper and merely passed it on.

"The boy's insane," he said.

Caddis took the check, puffed his cigar and said:

"My, my, only a million, son? Where's your courage, huh?"

Senator Pinkton, however, took the check with a different spirit. He looked at it carefully, then said:

"Check to 'Preparedness.' . . . Can't write a million-dollar check like that, you know."

"Why not? Any law, sir?"

"Law of common sense."

"Sorry, sir, but not in this case. I have written it with the express purpose of avoiding any chance of your discovering the identity of the payee. Point of honor, sir."

Caddis jumped at that.

"So we should hand you a million dollars each, just like that, hey? And you don't even say what for? Boy, but you're dumb. Folks who got money have got it on account they aint such saps, feller. You wouldn't wanna let us in on what kind of a investment you got, now?"

"Yes," said Bentley. "It is an investment in the Chinese Government."

SILENCE met that. Every man in the room was startled.

Pinkton said:

"Which Chinese government, young feller? There's war in China, or didn't you know?"

"That," said Bentley, "is just the idea. Listen, gentlemen: I am under oath not to disclose the purpose of this money, but I am free to say that the Chinese Government has approached me, asking me for money. As security, I have seen the written pledges of forty thousand Chinese-Americans. Your money will be returned to you, plus ten per cent interest, out of contributions made by every Chinese-American family, exactly fifty days from tomorrow night. That is all, gentlemen. I shall leave it there. It's a case of take it or leave it. Do not refuse me now. Think it over. Sleep on it. Decide tomorrow. If you decide to take this profit, make your checks payable to me personally. Send them to me by Western Union messenger before five o'clock tomorrow evening. If not, then I merely ask you not to mention this meeting to anyone. That is all, gentlemen. I have nothing more to say. Please feel free to remain here and discuss my proposition as long as you care to. For myself, I regret that pressing business forces me to leave you now."

And he walked straight out of the door. "Jeepers, creepers!" said Caddis.

"My word!" said Hartlow amazedly.

Leverford said: "The devil! Now there's a pretty bit of acting, gentlemen. Either that boy's crazy, or we are."

But Senator Pinkton got up and went to the desk. He produced his own checkbook and faced the seated men.

"I have a rather high opinion of that young man, gentlemen," he said. "A million dollars is a large sum to gamble with; but money is cheap at present, and he has profited me more than a million already. For my part, I trust him. I'm leaving my check here."

And he wrote a check payable to John J. Destiny.

Confusion and pandemonium broke loose then.

THE agony of suspense is a torture of such exquisite refinement that not even Torquemada's inquisitors, not even the delicate cruelties of the Orientals, can equal it.

Or so, indeed, Bentley was discovering.

It had not been so bad in the morning. He could still laugh a little then. He could still say, with gayety:

"What the hell—all I've done is write a million and a half dollars' worth of bogus checks that I can't even get arrested for. But it really ought to spell-bind 'em. If there's anything in this

Personal Mystery business,—anything big,—it ought to come out now.”

That was all right. That was fine. But underneath the swagger of it, lay cold, clammy fear. All that was whistling in the dark. And to prove it, he did not even return to the hotel that night, but spent the hours of waiting in a Turkish bath.

“I’d rather,” he told himself lamely, “take the wallop all in a bunch than just hang around there waiting for nothing at all to happen.”

AT noon, taking a thin lunch at a corner restaurant after having spent the morning strolling anxiously through the park, the suspense of it began to bite deeper.

“If they only would!” he kept saying. “If they only would—if it would only work!”

By three o’clock he was in a cold sweat.

“They must all be laughing up their sleeves,” he told himself. “They must all have found it a hell of a joke, a young squirt like me pulling that spiel about millions. What a lot of stupid crust! It’s a wonder they didn’t just laugh in my face and walk out.”

But he could not avoid the pleasurable thought that they had not, precisely, laughed and walked out.

“Old Pinkton fixed that,” he admitted. “Lucky for me, the Senator thinks I’m a real smart guy. Caddis and that Leverford animal are the ones who—and Hartlow too, for that matter. Lord, I wonder how I had the nerve to pull it.”

At four o’clock, however, he couldn’t stand it any longer.

“Well, I’ll go back and face it,” he determined. “Might as well take it on the chin as sit on a park bench worrying myself sick. Maybe I’d better start figuring out how to get by those Chinamen without a red face.”

And he called a taxi at the park entrance and returned to the hotel. . . .

In the lobby the room-clerk called to him.

“Mr. Destiny—a message for you, sir—Western Union.” Bentley could hardly keep his feet in his rush to the desk. The envelope bore the firm name of “Caddis: Promotions” in the upper left-hand corner; Bentley’s fingers trembled as he opened it.

There was no check inside. A sort of darkness nearly overcame him. He clung to the desk. The clerk, seeing his pallor, said:

“You’re not well, sir. Shall I call a doctor?”

Bentley pulled himself together and shook his head.

“No, thanks,” he said. “I’ll be all right—I guess.”

Then he walked as steadily as he was able, to a remote chair in the reading-room. He opened Caddis’ letter, grimly determined to learn the worst and to take it, once for all, as a strong man should take defeat. But he gasped as he read:

Dear Destiny,

One time Jo Caddis is seven kinds of a damn fool. Lucky I made some paper money on a rise in Norfolk & Eastern in that slot-machine they call a stock-market, so if you go to Coln, Nachman & Coln, you can find a call on six thousand shares of the stuff which I put in your name. I only paid \$75 a share for it, but if you catch it before the bears take it down, you can have your million. Me, I’m just a sucker. Jo

HE fairly jumped from his chair. The elation in his voice as he called out to the clerk again made that sleek individual stare.

“Say,” he cried, “no other Western Union messages?”

“Why, no sir,” said the clerk. “Nothing else.”

But even this, which should have been a disappointment, did not keep Bentley from walking to the lift on fairy feet and riding to his own floor on a misty cloud.

“Personal Mystery!” he muttered. “Brood, you’re a real wonder.”

In his room, neatly laid on his writing desk where he could not fail to see it, was a carefully written note signed by Senator Pinkton, and to it was attached the bluff old legislator’s check for one million dollars.

“You may be a dreamer and a visionary, young man,” said the note, “but I’ll back you for that same million I offered you once—with the understanding that if this gamble of yours fails, you’ll come back to Pinkton and work for it.”

Two million dollars! Bentley fondled the handful of paper, the Senator’s check and Caddis’ letter, as though it were rarest silk. Once more he was reeling but not from disappointment now.

“Two million!” he said aloud. “In my hand! That’s more money than I ever even saw in my life.”

And then a clock struck four-thirty, and his face went gray. Two million was all right, but this was no time to gloat

over it. Not two but four million dollars he must hand to Mr. Soo within a few hours. Two million was just a kindly sort of failure. Two more millions—fancy it! Two million dollars must come to him in thirty minutes, or those two were not worth the paper upon which they were written.

FOUR thirty-five, four forty—ticking minutes of anguish, like oozing drops of blood. Four forty-two.

His telephone was ringing.

"Western Union, sir," said the downstairs clerk. "I'll send the boy up."

Bentley was hardly conscious of an elapsing time before the boy was handing him another envelope through the door and taking with wide eyes a five-dollar tip.

The letter bore the stamp of a prominent aircraft corporation.

"Hartlow!" Bentley almost gasped it. "Hartlow! He couldn't be—it isn't possible." But as he discovered, it was quite possible. The letter said:

Permit me to say, in handing you this check, Mr. Destiny, that I do it against all good judgment. Had it not been for the example of the Senator, a man whom I revere and respect, I should not have taken this venture, which on the face of it, seems foolhardy, not to say absurd. As it is, I must recall to you that we are still under agreement, you and I, in another matter, and that I am your debtor to the extent of sixty thousand dollars—your commissions at one per cent for an act which has already proven my judgment of you to be faulty.

He stared at the letter. Sixty thousand dollars! What did the man mean? Then recollection came—six months too late. It was true. When he had bargained with Hartlow, when Hartlow and his lawyer had forced him to forge that check for six thousand, to be held as a sort of hostage against him, back in the first days of his Personal Mystery adventures for Brood, he had demanded a one-per-cent "commission" on the sale of airplanes to the French. It had been of no consequence, a gag, just something to make the deal harder for Hartlow. He had put it out of his mind. The six thousand dollars he had got from the airplane magnate had, in those days, seemed a tremendous sum. Yet Hartlow, the scrupulous, the careful Hartlow, had not forgotten it. And here, in some queer psychological way, it had activated to bring Hartlow to

the point of trusting him in a million-dollar deal!

He was walking on air. These things could not be—but they were!

And yet in the midst of his elation came that ever-punishing thought: even with Hartlow's money, it was not yet enough. There was Leverford's contribution. Without it, the deal with the Chinese organization was off. He would fail.

And his wrist-watch told him it was now one minute to five o'clock.

His spirit sagged. Of course Leverford would not come in. Why should he? What did Leverford know of him? He had been skeptical from the first, Leverford had—a hard, steel-built man. No, he should never have picked Leverford.

Five o'clock.

He turned to his mirror and gave his reflection a wry smile.

"Well, old friend," he said with a wink, "it was fun while it lasted. You tried. And you certainly proved Personal Mystery for Brood. It will make good copy for Hartswell's newspaper story, anyhow."

Then, glumly, suddenly exhausted, he thrust the letters in his pocket and went down to the hall elevator. . . . He had almost got through the lobby when the clerk called him.

"Mr. Destiny? Sorry, sir—I have another message here for you. There was some delay in getting it to you, sir."

Bentley fairly leaped to the desk. He snatched the envelope from the clerk's hand, tore it open.

It contained only one small piece of paper—a check, payable to John J. Destiny. It was a check for one million dollars, signed "*World Fuels, Inc.*" and countersigned, "*M. Leverford, President.*"

AT nine o'clock that night, as Bentley departed from the Celestial Restaurant, his elation knew no bounds. He walked like a man in a dream. He was, indeed, a man in a dream. Within fifty days from the time he had handed to Mr. Abraham Lincoln Soo and Mr. Kai, a sight draft for four million dollars against the renewed bank account at the Sphinx National, he would have regained, in a few vivid hours, all the financial ground for which he had struggled six months, only to lose it. The figures floated through his head like kaleidoscopic colored thoughts.

"Twenty-five percent of four million," he told himself, scarcely crediting the very concept of it in his mind. "Why,

that's a million. Four times the ten percent I promised those gents is four hundred thousand. That leaves me a net on the whole business of six hundred thousand bucks! What was that crack they made about Destiny's million-dollar flop? Well, Doctor Brood, here we come—right on the Personal Mystery bandwagon."

He walked and walked. "Well," he mused, treading on air, "all I have to do now is to clean up another four hundred thousand in about four months. That's all." He snapped mental fingers. "That's all—a mere detail."

MR. AVERAGE MAN, a human, gregarious animal, is so constructed that he does not, as a rule, prefer to growl over a hard-earned bone in a dark corner, but delights in sharing his brightest joys with others. This same urge was strong upon Bentley that night.

"I," he declared, "am going to celebrate. Here's where the old White Knight gives himself a real fling. This rates bright lights, wine, woman and song. I'm going to spread it out, tonight—and this time it isn't just a gag."

He went to his rooms at the hotel and unpacked the white costume which, long since, had been such a thrilling mystery to good New Yorkers. It was a proper uniform for his spirit. A proper uniform for the "celebration" he contemplated.

But as he thrust his feet through the trousers, a sudden thought came to him.

"Lorraine!" he said aloud. "That's what I'll do, I'll show that girl. At last I can do it. I'll show her I'm not such an oaf as she's been thinking. She wanted me to come back and do something—well, I've done it, haven't I? Here's where I step right into the picture again—now, what's her telephone number?"

He fumbled through a directory, located the name, *Graymaster*, at a prominent Park Avenue address, and put in his call. A loudish male voice answered:

"Hello—what is it?"

"Is this Mr. Buntsman Graymaster's apartment?"

"Yes."

"Is Miss Graymaster there?"

"Who wants to know?"

This was not quite the demeanor of the well-trained butler, but perhaps Graymaster's eccentricities might include a considerable latitude toward servants.

"Just tell her—" He thought rapidly. "Just tell her it's a friend."

"Yeah? What friend?" This was certainly not like a butler, not even an eccentric's servant.

"Tell her Mr. Destiny would like to talk with her," he said.

"Destiny, huh? Well, she can't talk to you now. She aint here."

"Will she be in? I—I wanted to see her."

"You— Oh, sure—sure—come right up. She'll be waitin' for yuh, Mister Destiny. That's fine—come right up."

And the telephone went dead.

This was a strange performance for a servant in a Park Avenue home—an extremely strange performance, in fact, for any home!

"Well," Bentley told himself, "that's what I'll do, anyhow. I'll go up there. Maybe she'll celebrate with me—why not?"

And he began to dress.

Presently he changed his mind, he took off the white costume and packed it again.

"Not tonight," he said in his self-addressed conversation. "I'll show her that John Destiny isn't quite such a show-off as she thinks."

Downstairs and in the street, he gave the address to a taxicab. The elation still held. His elation doubled and redoubled as he contemplated his first evening with Lorraine, his first chance to meet her and talk to her on equal terms. And it was with a happy soul that he entered the vestibule of the building and demanded the Graymaster apartment.

"The name," he told the uniformed flunkey, "is Destiny."

HE did not notice the odd look which the man gave him before he said:

"Right, sir. Seventh floor, Apartment Seven-A, sir."

The lift wafted him upward. His heart was pounding, his spirit was soaring. He stepped from the car, pranced down the corridor, stopped at 7-A, rang the bell, and waited with eager impatience.

The man who opened the door wore a uniform. It was not a butler's uniform. It was, in fact, a policeman's uniform. And it was a big, brawny policeman's arm that reached from the door to fasten a strong grip on his shoulder, and to haul him in with no ceremony at all.

"Ye'll be Mr. Destiny, huh? Well, that's just fine. Stick out yer hands, lad, till I put on the bracelets. Ye're under arrest—and it looks like a murder rap."

The surprising climax of Mr. Destiny's daring ventures will appear in our forthcoming October issue.

Black Tom and Blue Book

"I'm thinking you will be a good one to
 say it."
 His narrowed eyes held a cold glit-
 ter. "Why?"
 "You must know he is innocent. You
 must—"
 "I know only what the evidence
 shows," he cut in warily on his guard.
 "He may or may not have been one of
 my attackers. From the first blow I
 was dazed. But everything points to
 what he hired."
 "Oh, no!" interrupted the Irish girl,
 her dark eyes shining softly. "The
 way of it is that he saved your life, that
 he fought for you and that he is in
 prison because of it."
 "If that is true, why doesn't he bring
 the proof of it?"
 "Prove it she tried scornfully. "Be-
 tween friends."
 "He's no friend of mine. The man
 is a meddler. I despise him."
 "And I am liking him very much,"
 she flung back sanchly.
 Macdonald looked up at the vivid,
 flushed face and found it wholly charm-
 ing. He liked her none the less because
 her fine eyes were hot and defiant in
 a half of his trial.
 "Well, he smiled. "I'll see him to-
 morrow."
 "Thank you. It's a bargain."
 "Then sing to me."
 She moved to the piano. "What
 shall I sing?"
 "Sing 'Divided.'"
 Her long lashes veiled her soft eyes
 while she considered. In a way she had
 tricked her into singing for him a love-
 song she did not want to sing. But she
 made no protest. Swiftly she turned
 on the bench. Her fingers
 plucked the keys and she began.
 He watched the beauty and was wuth-
 if her faint youth with eyes that sur-
 vived the hunger of his heart. How
 quietly she carried her dusky little
 head! With what a gallant spirit she did
 all things! He was usually a frank pagan,
 but when he was with her, it seemed to
 him a God spoke through her person-
 ality all sorts of brave, fine prophecies.
 She had paid her pledge in full. After
 the first two stanzas were finished,
 she sang the last ones a woe.
 "I wish about the weather when
 I'd have could find the boat?
 Is it me that would be feared to
 Grip the oars and go aloft?
 Oh, I could find him by the light
 Of star or moon or star.
 But there's cauldier things than salt waves
 Between us, so they are.
 Oh, ancel!
 Sure, well I know he'll never have
 The heart to come to me,
 An' love is wild as any wave
 That wanders on the sea.
 'Tis the same if I was near me;
 'Tis the same if he is far.
 His thoughts are hard an' ever hard
 Between us, so they are.
 Oh, ancel!
 Her hands dropped from the keys,
 and she turned slowly on the end of
 the seat. The dark lashes fell to her
 hot cheeks. He did not speak, but she
 felt the steady insistence of his gaze.
 In self-defense she looked at him.
 The pallor of his face lent access to
 the fire that smoldered in his eyes.
 "I'm going to marry you, Shaba.
 Make up your mind to that girl," he
 said harshly.
 There was infinite pity in the look
 she gave him. "There's cauldier things
 than salt waves between us, so they
 are," she quoted.
 "No, if I love you and you love me,
 I'll trample down everything that comes
 between us."
 He swung to a sitting position on the
 lounge. Through the steel-gray eyes in
 the hooding face his masterful spirit
 wrangled with hers. A lean-lined
 Samson, with broad, powerful
 chest and deep chest, he dominated his
 swifter, ruthlessly. But this slim Irish
 girl held her own.
 "Must we go through that again?"
 she asked gently.
 "Again and again until you see
 reason."
 She knew the tremendous driving
 power of the man, and she was afraid
 in her heart that he would sweep her
 from the moorings to which she clung.
 There is something in me I have
 told you."
 She embarrassed herself
 lifted bravely from the flushed cheeks
 to meet steadily his look. "I don't think
 that I care for you. 'Tis I that am
 ashamed at my . . . recklessness. But
 I don't—not with the full of my heart."
 698

One page of the fa-
 mous message written in
 lemon juice by a sabo-
 tage agent across
 several pages of the
 January, 1917, Blue Book

ON July 30, 1916, occurred the Black Tom
 explosion and fire in which many million
 dollars' worth of supplies destined for the al-
 lied powers were destroyed. In June of 1939
 Associate Justice Owen J. Roberts of the Su-
 preme Court, official umpire of the German-
 American Mixed Claims Commission, held the
 German Government responsible for this and
 the Kingsland explosions, and awarded fifty-
 three million dollars damages to the American
 claimants.

Of special interest to BLUE BOOK readers is
 the fact that one of the most important links
 in the chain of evidence that won the case was
 a letter written in lemon juice across sev-
 eral pages of a January, 1917, copy of BLUE
 BOOK. The magazine with its message was sent
 by courier from a sabotage agent (who had
 fled to Mexico City) to a man in Baltimore
 who had acted as paymaster of the sabotage
 agents in the United States before we entered
 the war. Presumably BLUE BOOK was chosen
 as the vehicle for the message because it

anti-German flavor made it about the last pe-
 riodical likely to be chosen by a German sym-
 pathizer. (Clarence Herbert New in his "Free
 Lances in Diplomacy" wanted to declare war
 about 1912, and we had a hard time to keep
 him within the bounds of technical neutrality.)

The famous message as deciphered by the
 American experts read, in part:

*"Have seen 1755, he is suspicious of me.
 Can't convince him I come from 1915 and
 1794. Have told him all reference 2534 and
 I 2384, 7595, 3106, 4526, and 8545 he doubts
 me on account of my bum 7346 confirm to him
 thru your channels all O.K. and my mission
 here. I have no funds 1755 claims he is short
 of money. Send by bearer U.S. 25,000. Have
 you heard from Willie? Have wired 233 but
 no answer. Be careful of her and connections.
 Where are 2584 and 9107? Tell 2584 to come
 here. I expect to go north but he can locate
 me thru 1755. I don't trust 9107, 3994, 1585
 and that 4776 bunch. If cornered they might
 get us in Dutch with authorities. . . ."*

Men in the Air

"The First Parachute" is described in this vivid story—a primitive contraption designed for an escape from a tower prison.

By MICHAEL
GALLISTER

"We understand that last week the worthy doctor Lenormand, of Montpellier, jumped from the tower of the Observatory at that place and reached the ground uninjured, thanks to a heavy parasol he had constructed."

—*Courier de Lyon, 1784*

"**H**ERE, then, if you must know! Read this," Druart directed. Garnerin took the faded, dog-eared clipping handed him by the older man, read it, handed it back.

"I've heard of Lenormand's jump, yes. He wrote a memorial regarding that parasol of his; parachute, he called it. That was eleven years ago—think of it!"

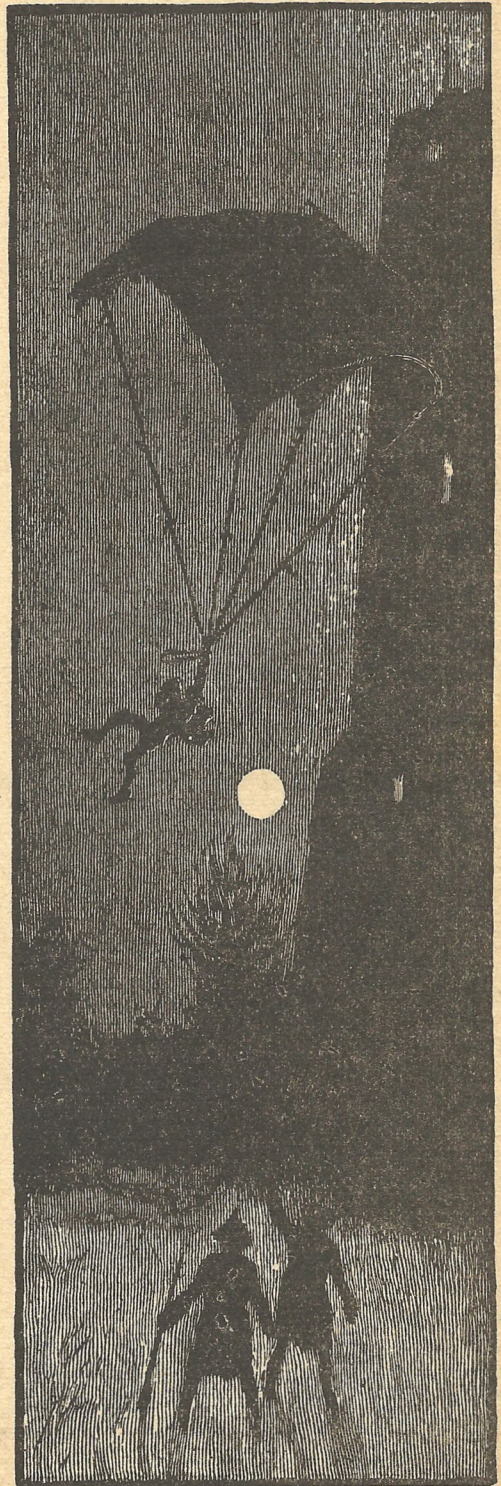
"Bah! We'll be in prison for life, if we don't do something about it!" rasped Druart, scowling. "I mean to get out of here, if you'll lend a hand. We can both get out."

"With all my heart," said Garnerin, with his gay smile. "How?"

"This." Druart stowed the old dingy clipping carefully in his wallet again. His sombre gaze burned upon the younger man's face. "With a parachute, of course. Yes?"

Garnerin nodded. "An idea, my friend. Enough talk now; they might suspect something. Until tomorrow!"

Spielberg, in Moravia, was no pleasant place to French eyes, in this year of 1795. Garnerin was newly arrived, but for two years past had been a prisoner at Buda on the Danube. He and gruff old Druart were given treatment due officers, and it was surprising in its latitude; but as Garnerin left the courtyard, where they had perfect liberty, he could scarcely contain his laughter. If Druart only knew!



Wood engraving by L. F. Grant

With sure instinct he had kept his mouth shut. He distrusted Druart, not as a traitor but as an inefficient man. It was Druart who had captured the escaping Louis XVI at Varennes, had come to Paris as a great man in consequence, was sent as commissioner to the army—and the Allies captured him. Now he growled and grimped at mankind in Spielberg, disappointed and surly, his little hour behind him forever.

GARNERIN felt that his own hour lay ahead, and a glorious hour!

A young man, he had gone mad with all the world over the discovery that a bag filled with gas or smoke will float in air, and even carry man. His destiny was in the air. He felt it, he was convinced of it. The Revolution caught him up, and the Austrians nabbed him.

For two years he had rotted in Hungary, until he was transferred here as an incorrigible and desperate prisoner. Why? There was the huge joke, if only Druart had known it! He, too, had heard of that physician in Montpellier who jumped off the Observatory tower with a parachute, and landed safely. He had tried the same thing in Buda, had been caught at it, and was sent on to Moravia in consequence.

"If I told Druart, he'd suspect me of something," reflected Garnerin as he sat alone in his barred room that night, a room in the outer tower adjoining that of Druart. "The man suspects the whole world. If I let him think the discovery is his alone, we can go at it together. A little man, he craves to do something great, as he once did at Varennes; he'll die with the craving unsatisfied. Fool!"

His judgment was, it must be confessed, justified in fact.

Here, caged, the young Garnerin sighed with fervor for the freedom of the air. Balloons filled his dreams night and day; the thought of drifting through the upper spaces fired him. He had never been aloft, yet knew perfectly how to handle a balloon. The invention was younger than he himself; war and the guillotine had temporarily halted science. Balloons were crude things, with a platform and stove in which one burned straw to keep aloft; the use of hydrogen gas was expensive, only for scientists or rich men, but any fool could burn straw and look down on the world.

Coming back to earth—there was the risk, the terrible risk. To get the thing down, to hook the grapnel, to reach the

ground without being dragged to death or smashed or burned—there was the difficulty. It left everything to chance.

The prisoners were allowed three hours of freedom in the afternoon, in the garden or courtyard of the fortress. They tramped in the snow, talked, played games, did as they wished without interference, for the Austrian guards were indulgent. There was no moat around Spielberg, but the walls were high, escape was impossible, and the snow was deep.

Next day the two walked again in the little garden off the courtyard, where the bushes were winter-stiff, the flowers vanished. Most of the other prisoners remained in the courtyard. The two had the smaller place to themselves as they strode up and down, puffed at their pipes, and talked. From here, they could get a glimpse of the outer turret which prisoned them.

"IT'S high," said Garnerin. "A hundred feet, I think, to the ground. Outside our rooms is the little platform for sentries, but I've seen no sentries."

"An admirable spot from which to jump," Druart stated with perfect truth.

"How far have you planned this parasol of yours?" queried the younger man.

Druart gestured vaguely.

"Bah! Tie blankets together, tie cords from the corners, and one has it!"

"That is not escape," said Garnerin. "That is suicide."

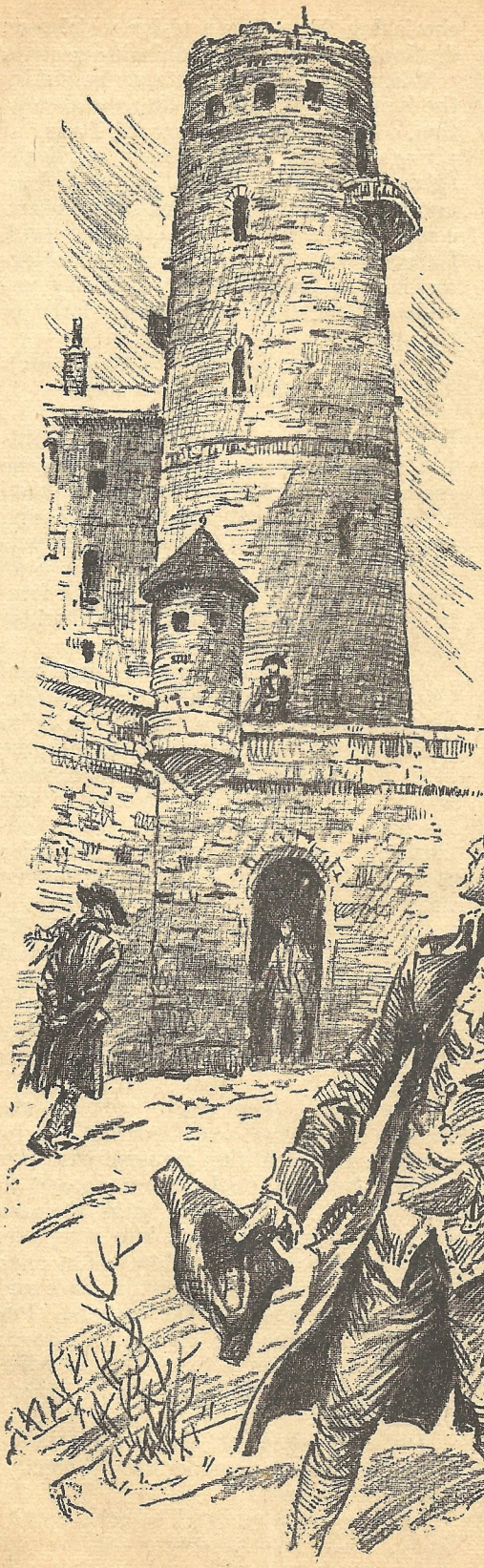
Druart glared at him. "Why so?"

"First, you must be sure that the parasol will open; therefore, you must start with it open," Garnerin said gravely. "These blankets are useless for such a purpose. They're porous, and the air passes through the weave very readily. Again, one must calculate on the impetus of falling bodies; at one hundred feet, one is falling faster than at fifty feet. The size of the parachute—suppose we stick to the word—would depend upon this, and also upon the weight of the person who jumps."

"The devil!" muttered Druart, in mingled chagrin and admiration. "You have a head, I'll admit. If not the blankets—what?"

Garnerin smiled. "We have big German beds with curtains all around. Have you noticed those curtains? A thin but heavily woven material; linen, I believe. Precisely the thing to serve our purpose."

"Oh!" exclaimed the other, then his heavy face fell. "But they would be missed!"



"Certainly. Therefore they must be put to use at the last moment. Now, my friend, consider; in order to effect this escape, we must start with the beginning, not with the end. The first step is to get out of our rooms. Either by the locked door, or by the barred window. I suggest the window, since we'd then be directly on the platform."

Druart laughed and spread out a ham-like hand.

"That difficulty is already behind us. My bars are ancient. They're loose. I've tried already, and with my bare hands can bend them. Beyond doubt, you're in the same case."

"Yes. Mine are old, rusted, loose in the sockets," said Garnerin. "Good! Next comes the construction of the parachute. We need some sort of framework. If a circle, I think it should be at least twenty feet in diameter."

"Twenty feet!" cried the other, aghast. "Even if we could make such a thing, how could we get it out to the platform? The window is only four feet high!"

They could get a glimpse of the outer turret which prisoned them.

"I don't know," said Garnerin. "That's one of the nuts we must crack."

"You're a fool!" exploded Druart savagely. "I want to escape, not spend years solving crackpot problems! The thing to do is to make a brave venture. Nothing risk, nothing win! Do you imagine that Montpellier doctor figured out all these silly things?"

"Every one of them and far more. I've read his memorial."

"I want to escape, not to create a flying machine!" growled Druart, and stamped away in bad temper with a mutter of oaths.

Garnerin looked after him, smiling. The man would come around; his vague notions were helpless and absurd. A little reflection would show him the light.

In this, Garnerin was correct. Druart fell into talk next day as though nothing had happened, recognizing that the younger man had the brains he lacked. Rough, determined, forceful in a vague way, Druart was none the less a bungler. With such a man, fine probing reason was useless.

Garnerin began to view his friend, for whom he had scant liking, in the nature of an experiment—an experiment of his own.

HERE Kathie came into the affair, a girl who lived in a private world all her own which no one except Garnerin suspected.

Kathie was the daughter of Obermann, the chief hostler of the fortress, who was also veterinarian and whatever else offered; he was very greedy for money. Somewhere he had picked up a French wife, recently dead. Kathie helped the family budget by working as maid, caring for the rooms of the officers and of such prisoners as could pay a trifle.

She was an odd creature, hating the life around her, turning with all her heart to the captive Frenchmen whose tongue she spoke well. By the garrison, she was regarded as a piece of the castle furniture; that is to say, disregarded. She was thin, dark, with large eyes and a cough. She went about her work silently, impersonally, never smiling, and the idea of making love to her would have seemed rather ridiculous to anyone in Spielberg.

But, with Garnerin, she was a totally different person. He alone divined the strange depths and fancies within her; his acuity pierced to her secret places. He, too, was tall and thin and burning-eyed, devoured by secret aspirations,

cherishing these days a vision which was destined to slow but astonishing growth.

When he played his flute, as he did by the hour, she listened in dreamy absorption. He talked with her of Paris, of poesy, of music and romance, of all the things her starved spirit craved. And, uncovering the ardent flame in her heart, comprehending her dancing spritely soul, Garnerin lost his usual cool cynical detachment. Any creature so utterly unselfish attracted him by sheer force of the opposite.

They became friends and confidantes. They became, perhaps, even more.

NO iron discipline obtained in this prison fortress. Occasionally the rooms were searched, all letters were read and censored, roll call was heard night and morning; and there, to all practical purposes, it ended. Until the doors were locked for the night, visits might be freely exchanged in the rooms. The corridor guards were indulgent, careless.

As their intimacy grew, Druart and Garnerin avoided one another in public, visited much in private. Garnerin, quite literally, now cut his pattern to suit the other man's cloth. He gave Druart what was wanted, and guided matters to suit his own secret desires. The linen bed-curtains were measured, for example; after a bit of figuring, Garnerin looked up, smiling.

"A round parachute twenty feet in diameter is out of the question; but I find that these curtains will provide a square one of the same dimensions, my friend."

"Eh?" Druart tugged at his untidy mustache. "A square one, the same as a round one?"

"Precisely. The effect will be the same. The square one, however, can be constructed with the greatest ease, by simply crossing sticks from corner to corner. In half an hour these curtains can be cut up and sewn into a square. The sticks go out the window one by one; on the platform, they're put in place and the cords fastened to the corners. Put the sticks below the cloth, not above; their sole function is to make your parachute stay open and catch the air. Here. Look at this."

Druart looked at the rough sketch Garnerin made, and understood perfectly. His face cleared.

"But you're a genius!" he cried admiringly. "The sticks, however—where will they come from? The cord? The needle and thread?"