NORTH TO THE PROMISED LAND, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

JANUARY

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A novelette by THOMA

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS • FU

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"North to the Promised Land"

THIS novel by Harold Channing Wire calls to mind Owen Wister's famous comment: "In three places in history men have been free and equal: in Paradise before the Fall; in the Declaration of Independence; and in the West before the barbed-wire fence came." It is published complete in this issue, beginning on page 125.

Next month we plan to give you as our plete book-length novel "Finders rs," a murder-mystery detective nov- Geoffrey Homes, who wrote "The Died at Dusk" and "The Man rdered Goliath." And this brings uestion we hope you will help us to answer: Do you prefer an adventure novel like "North to the Promised Land," "Blade of the Buccaneers" (October) and "War in His Pocket" (November), or a mystery-detective novel like "Murder in the Sahara" (September) or "As Good As Murdered" (December); or is there some other type of story you'd like to have?

Our own feeling has always been that the quality of a story is even more important than its subject matter, and that a varied literary diet is most interesting. This is your magazine, however; and we will be grateful if you will write and tell us what you like most—and least!—in Blue Book.

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BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1940 VOL. 70, NO. 3

A Book-Length Novel

A Novelette

Short Stories

A Serial Novel

Prize Stories of Real Experience

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

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Prize Offer

for

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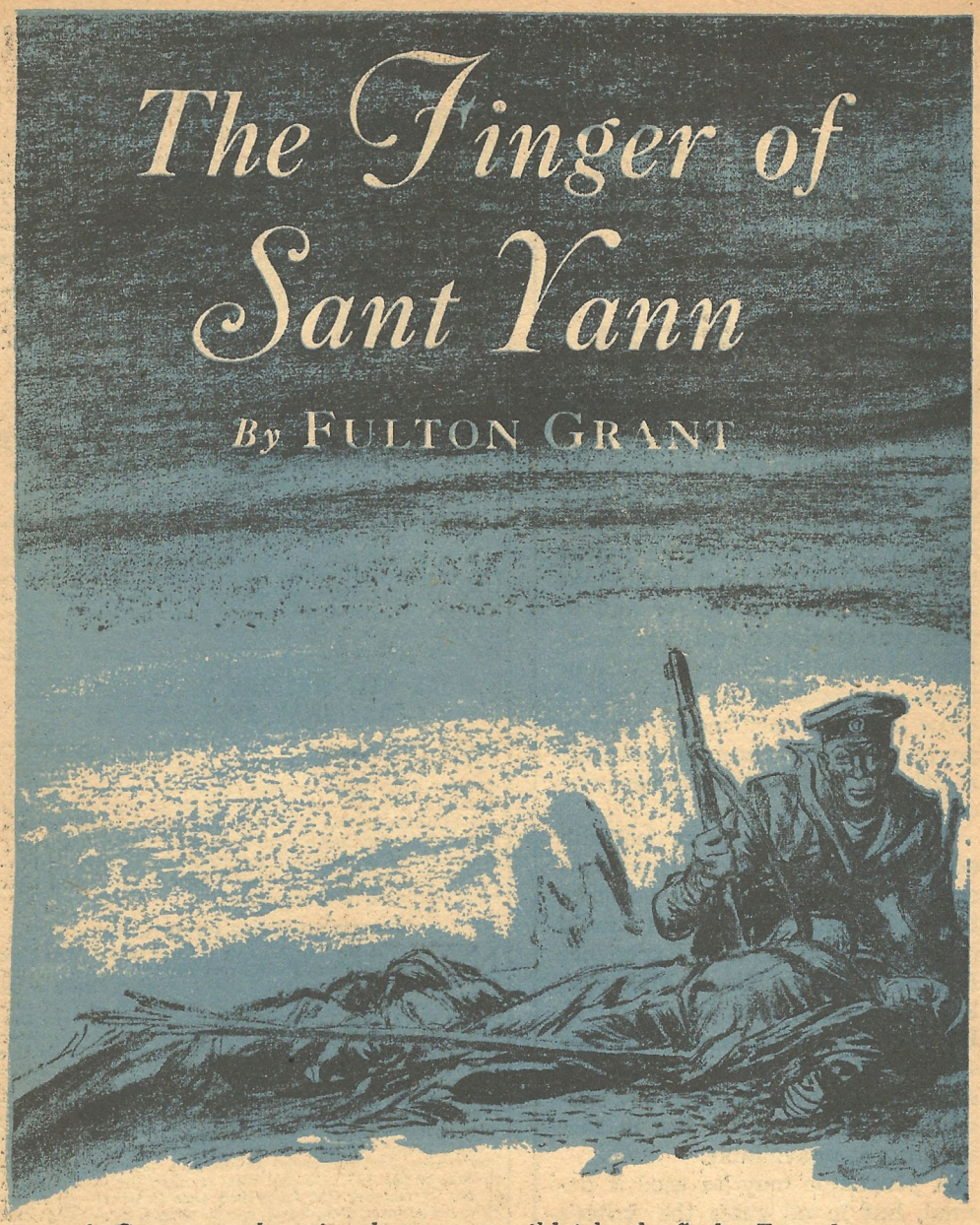
THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of $50.

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor,—especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

The Finger of Sant Yann

By FULTON GRANT



A German submarine base on a wild island off the French coast explains certain recent events—and gives us this remarkable story.

EVERY war has its crop of legends and mysteries, and the present tragedy in Europe seems to be starting off like all the other wars in history. A while ago, just after the tanker *Ganymede* was sunk by a U-boat in the home waters of the English Channel at the beginning of this war, a London paper printed a story which could have been the beginning of a legend just as wild as the old Kitchener theme, or Mata Hari, if the censors hadn't suppressed it directly. The paper claimed that H. M. S. *Athelstan* had reported the discovery of a German submarine, floating half-submerged and wrecked, with her crew all dead, off the coast of Brittany.

Now the *Athelstan* is a new destroyer, but it hadn't sunk that pig-boat. The Atlantic Ocean had just laid the prize in her commander's lap, apparently. Mystery came in when the story went on to say that there were visible signs suggesting that a hand-to-hand conflict had taken place on the sub's deck. Her propellers were fouled with fish-nets, and one of her main valves was entirely clogged and inoperative from the same cause. And

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

half the mutilated bodies taken off that sub weren't German sailors at all, but seemed to be coastal fishermen, or civilians at any rate, perhaps taken prisoner or held as hostages.

Where did it come from? Nobody knew. Was it possible that a small fishing-boat could wreck a submarine? Not likely. But there it was—take it or leave it, believe it or not.

All in all, it was a pretty good feature story of its kind, and it might have gone down beside all the others from the 1914-1918 war, with "lost battalions" and

"mystery guns" and the rest, only the British Admiralty didn't have any sense of humor. They jumped on that story and suppressed it.

I wouldn't know why. If a U-boat can be smashed by a fishing-smack, then there isn't any submarine menace. And if the *Athelstan* really captured the boat, then why not give them credit?

RIGHT here is where I put in my two cents. I'm only an American newspaper man working for my hire, and I don't know much about the British Admiralty's reasons for things, but I think I can tell you just how that submarine got wrecked. Because, you see, I was right there on the spot, and I saw it happen.

Who did it, then? Well, I'll tell you —not that you'll believe me. It was Sant Yann of Brittany who did that job. He's one of those old, uncanonized saints that nobody but a handful of Bretons knows much about. He came back across a thousand years of pure legend, when he found the Germans meddling with his miracles, and he is a great old warrior-saint when he is roused up. Yes, brother, it was Sant Yann, or St. Jean, or even St. John, if you like simpler names for him. He fixed that pig-boat's wagon, and he did it with his Little Finger.

Now, I said above that I'm a newspaper man. I work for the Transatlantic News Service in Europe, and when Hitler decided to grab Poland, I was called to the Paris office and told to stand by, study Polish, and get ready to go to Budapest, where an airplane would take me to Warsaw. I even had my bag all packed, and a tin hat and gas-mask ready, when Townsend Maker, my chief, called me in that morning.

"Charley," he said, "I've got an assignment for you. What do you know about Dr. Althès?"

"You mean Moses Althès, the cancer man?" I asked, not quite catching on. "Nothing that everybody else doesn't know. He is an Austrian refugee scientist who got naturalized American, and then came over here to France to do something with the Pasteur Institute. Last I heard, he had gone to the South Sea Islands to study and do research."

Maker shook his head.

"Not the South Seas," he said. "He went to an island right off the French coast. That was a month ago, and nobody has heard of him since. So you're going after him."

You probably know about Althès. His specialty is cancer diagnosis, and his claim to fame is the discovery that certain kinds of radioactive water will show one set of reactions, if the disease is really present, and another set if it isn't. But I was too disappointed and mad to care about medical diagnosis just then. I yelled:

"What the hell! You can't do this to me. Do you think I've been studying that damned Polish lingo just to duck off to some little island and play wet nurse to a quack doctor? There's war going on—or haven't you heard? The T.N.S. hires me to be a war correspondent, and I'll be damned if—"

"Sure, I know it's a lousy assignment," said the boss, keeping cool. "But you're the only man we have who knows French well enough to do the job. When you come back, you can go to Poland—if there still is any Poland."

Then he added in that mild but dangerous way of his:

"And while T.N.S. hires me to run this office, Charley, you're taking assignments from me. Is that clear?"

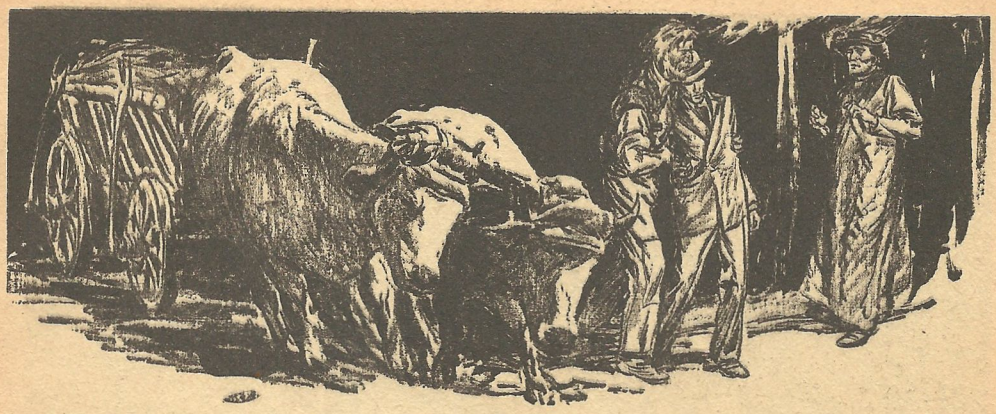
It was plenty clear.

Now let me paint you a picture. You want, God knows why, to go to a little channel island called Bihannoc'h. First you go to Brest and look for a man who has a power-boat and wants to earn a hundred francs or so. You find him easily enough, and the next morning you chug out into the Channel, telling yourself that this won't be so bad—no worse than a Calais-Dover crossing. You're a good sailor. You like the water. You think people who get seasick are sissies.

AND then, all of a sudden, you get tossed on your ear, grabbing for anything that will keep you from being washed overboard while the whole Atlantic Ocean comes and sits in your lap.

The sun gives up and there isn't any light. Dragons and fiends are screeching in the murk all around you. Sneering seagulls circle overhead, squawking insults. And for five long, dripping hours you are tossed and lifted and flung and plunged into black cañons of water so deep that you think you are going to hell by a shortcut.

The water around you is boiling white like milk-shake, and the rocks are snapping at you out of the sea like monsters, and over to the starboard somewhere is a terrible roaring sound that must come from that dirty hidden ledge of rocks



"This man is sick, Little Father—and so ignorant he does not understand plain speech."

called the Snoring Reef, where a million devils and ghouls are dancing while they wait for your mangled remains.

And then, when you are practically dead and so sick you wish you were, that splinter of a boat slips in between a couple of toothlike rocks called the Sisters, and there you are in a dead calm inside the gloomy little rock-bound harbor of Men-Mor, which is in the island of Bihannoc'h.

Bihannoc'h, the Littlest One, is the last tip of land before you jump off at the end of the world, and for some reason it is French. . . . Let them have it.

It isn't five miles long, and it isn't three miles wide, but every mile of it is an echoing hell of sea-noises and a parking lot for thunder-clouds, with only a few hundred people living on it, nobody knows why nor how.

I was so sick when they pushed me out on a reeking fish-wharf, that I hardly noticed that the harbor was filled with a lot of small sailboats and that the wharf itself was cluttered with people dressed up in crazy Breton costumes, and all singing.

As a matter of record, I passed out. The shock of getting my feet on something that didn't plunge like a bronco made me dizzy. And when I came to, probably fifteen minutes later, I was being hauled in an ox-cart which was driven by a mossy giant with leathery skin, a red scrub beard and the most sinister face I ever saw in my life.

And he was singing! Everybody was singing—or they were yelling or bellowing, in that guttural language of Brittany which is pure Celtic and not French at all. A hundred or more of them, singing in a wild, minor monotone some chant that probably went back as far as the Druidic bards. What blood was left in my veins fairly curdled at hearing it.

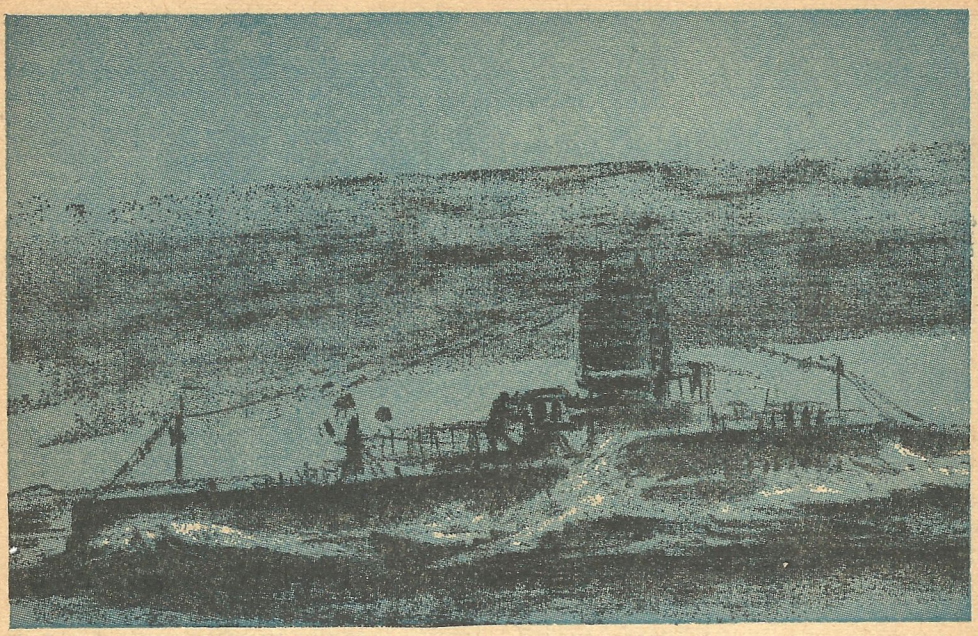
I leaned out of the ox-cart to ask my gigantic chauffeur if he knew Althès, but one look at his face made me decide to wait. Not *evil*, exactly, that face, but sinister, grim—a little mad. A little as though it didn't belong to this world at all, as though it might have been the face of some fanatical Druid priest in the days before man's history.

Besides, I reflected, probably he didn't speak any French, and I didn't know any Breton. Better ask somebody else.

THIS village on Bihannoc'h is called Men-Mor, and it's only a handful of thatched cottages, with a little church, a marketplace and perhaps a dozen crude stone or wood statues scattered all over the lot. The statues are saints. The Bretons go in for saints in a big way, mostly saints that never got canonized and are still unknown outside of Brittany; but all of them are locally famous for very special miracles. I had read about all that.

When we rattled into the village, the place was jammed. There was hardly standing-room. There must have been five hundred people in that little clump of houses. I guessed I had the bad luck to stumble on a local fair or something, and I was worried about finding a place to stay in case I couldn't find Althès right off. But the ox-cart stopped now right in front of the church, and my gigantic islander started talking at me in guttural Breton which might as well have been Chinese.

I answered in French. He didn't know any French, which made him mad. He glared and roared and waved his arms and acted as though he might clout me one with his fist, until the church door opened, and a nice little old Abbé in a pancake hat and black skirts came out



and said something to him that calmed him down.

"Va zadik! Va zadik! He man a zo klanv, va zadik," said my giant finally, which, I learned later, meant: "This man is sick, Little Father. From a boat he comes, and he is so ignorant he does not understand plain speech."

The priest waved him away and said to me, in good French:

"Welcome, my son. You are not well, then? You come for the miraculous cure of our good saint?"

I told him no—not that I knew anything about his saints. I told him I was sick, all right—seasick; and that I was looking for a stranger who was supposed to be out there for a month.

"Althès, his name is," I was saying. "He's a doctor. He came here with authorization to experiment—"

And that is as far as I got.

The priest stepped back with a slight stagger, as though I had slapped him. He crossed himself, muttering something under his breath. You'd have thought I had mentioned the Devil himself.

"You must go back, my son!" he said. "It is not a good thing that you are here. You must go at once—tomorrow—tonight, if I can find a boat for you. You must leave the island."

"Go back? Why?" I wanted to know.

"Because he whom you seek is not here. He is dead."

I gaped. I could only repeat: *"Dead?"*

"Or worse," he said. "The body of this unfortunate doctor, my son, lies in the church. As to his soul—only God and Saint Jean can know."

He took me by the arm and led me into his little cottage which joined the church, and he told me a weird story. And all the time he was telling it, the whole village, outside, was singing and chanting some crazy forgotten canticle that gave just the right background to confuse and bewilder me still more.

The priest's name, he said, was Gonical—the Abbé Gonical. He had only been on the island three years, taking the place of some old missionary-abbé who had died after spending his life out there, but I could see that those three years had had quite an effect upon him.

He went on:

"Your doctor, my son—he came bearing letters and accompanied by an assistant who was French. When the mayor, who does not have the French, sent them to me, I made every effort in God's name to stop him from this work, knowing that the *Pardon* of Sant Yann was close at hand, and fearing the superstition of these people."

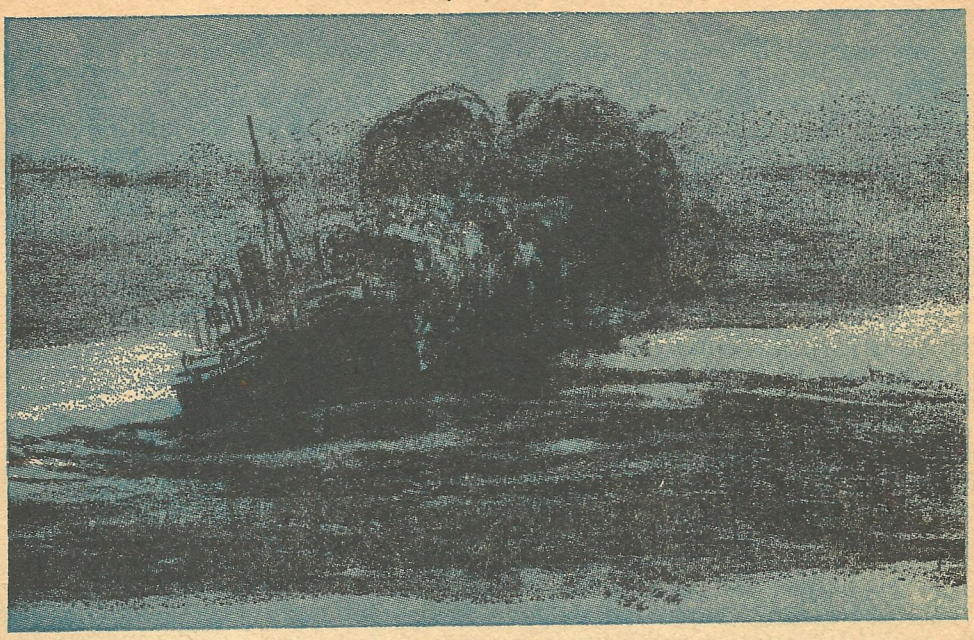
"Stop him? Why?"

"Because that spring, my son, it is not an ordinary spring. It is a miracle. It is sacred. It is called the *Feunteun-ar-Bis,* the Fountain of the Finger. Each year it is visited by pilgrims from miles around—"

"Finger? Why *finger?"* I asked.

"The finger of the glorious Sant Yann of Brittany."

And he told me the queer little legend.



SANT YANN is Breton for Saint John, meaning John the Baptist. The legend says that when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem, they found the body of Saint John preserved with many other holy relics. One of the soldiers, a Breton from Bihannoc'h, stole the little finger from the Saint and brought it home to Brittany. Then, dreaming that his theft was discovered and being afraid, he tossed it into this spring.

"And immediately," said Gonical, "the water began to boil as though by intense heat, and it spouted high in the air, scalding to death the soldier who had stolen the relic. And thereafter, my son, once a year, at the Feast of Sant Yann, this water boils and spouts miraculously; and it has been discovered that those who drink of it are miraculously cured of a goitrous disease which is prevalent in the islands. A miracle, my son—the miracle of Sant Yann."

"You believe in it?" I asked. "You wouldn't guess it is a geyser? You wouldn't suspect it of being volcanic?"

He smiled at me. He wasn't shocked or offended.

"But still, my son, there remain the cures. I have seen with these, my eyes. Your skeptical science cannot explain—"

But it could. My skeptical science was ready for that one.

"Althès came here," I reminded him, "to study that water. French geologists list it as radioactive. That disease you call *goître* might easily be a malignant growth, and if that's true, it all fits—"

But even then he wasn't impressed.

"Be that as it may," he said, "still, to my little island people here it shall always be a miracle."

"Superstition—" I began.

"Let us substitute the word *faith*, my son," he said gravely, and I began to be a little ashamed. "Yet if you must have science, my son, let your scientists explain how it is that although the spring is warm, the water does not gush and spout save one day each year—the day of Sant Yann's *pardon*."

Oh, I could have argued him there too. I could have gone into the possibility of the effect of the sun and seasons upon the atomic structure of the earth, and the volcanic action associated with it. But I went back to what he had said about tampering with the spring. I began:

"You mean the islanders killed Althès, because—"

He shook his head. "Thank God we were spared that crime, my son. It was a sea-monster which killed that poor man."

I just grinned. I couldn't help it.

"Did you say 'sea-monster?' Are you amusing yourself at my expense, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

But he was serious.

"No, my son," he said. "It is not to *blaguer* in such matters. I swear to you that there is such a monster. Only yesterday it came here—attacking the sardine fleet at its seining—crushing and sinking one of our boats and killing the brother of Ervan Tual, the man who car-

ried you here in his ox-cart. It is a curse, a doom upon us, my son, for that sacrilege has been done at the blessed Spring of Sant Yann."

"Or a visiting whale," I suggested ironically.

"No whale is fifty meters long and ten thick, my son; nor does a whale enter upon the land to kill."

"On land?" He nodded.

"When the—the *thing*—drove our sardine boats from the banks to the north of the island, monsieur, it was seen to enter into a small lagoon to which access from the sea is through a sort of natural tunnel, deep under the water except at low tide. It is on the other side of this lagoon, monsieur, where is situated the Shrine of Sant Yann and the holy *Feunteun-ar-Bis*. And it is there your poor doctor and his man had built a cabin."

This was getting deeper and deeper into the Fifth Dimension, and it was only some vestiges of reverence and remembrances of my Sunday-school days when I was a pretty decent boy, that kept me from laughing in his face.

"Last night," he went on, "there were thunderous noises in that lagoon, and a great churning of water. A woman gathering herbs heard devils talking in strange tongues. And later a man whose very soul must have been in torture was heard to scream.

"And this morning, monsieur, they found your doctor's body—what was left of it."

"What was left of it?" I was getting a curious feeling now.

He nodded. "It was nearly cut in two, my son, and mutilated beyond recognition. That of his man was likewise found—on the pathway which leads to the Spring of Sant Yann—terribly clawed by the monster and torn by his fangs. You do not believe? If you will come into the church, my son—"

I WENT with him. I didn't like it, but I went. And at the foot of the altar in that crude little church, with candles burning around them, were two bodies wrapped in coarse blankets. He lifted the cloth from the face of one. I didn't want to see any more. It was—well, pretty awful.

"There is another legend," the Abbé told me, as we returned to his cottage. "It is that this lagoon was once the home of a terrible monster which laid waste all of Brittany until one of our blessed saints, St. Brieuc, came and slew him."

I just gave up then.

"There may be some explanation," I said lamely, and he nodded.

"Perhaps. Yet in the minds of these people, a curse is upon us which must be driven away by the good Sant Yann himself. That is why you cannot remain here. If it were known that you came for the Doctor—"

He shrugged. I understood. You can't be scientific with people who prefer to be superstitious.

OUTSIDE in the village the great Feast of Sant Yann was going on in its odd, incomprehensible ceremonies. I went with the Abbé to watch it, for I had never seen a Breton *pardon*, and I'll never forget this one.

It was a fantastic sight, this *pardon*. Banners and brightly hued cloths fluttered from every high point. Young men in their queer hoselike trousers and ridiculous round hats with streamers were shuffling in a kind of marching dance with brightly dressed girls in their *pleyben* caps and tight, gaudy bodices, while even grizzled old fishermen, reeking of their trade, intoned the wild, savage chant at the top of their leather lungs.

Ragged beggars squatted by the church or moved through the crowd, holding out maimed or diseased limbs and screaming their ghastly cry:

"Bara! Bara! Bara! Eur gwennegad bara!"

Which the good Abbé told me was a cry for bread, a sou's worth of bread.

As the sun dropped low and thick dark clouds were making over the water below, a sort of procession began to form, and men began to appear with fagot bundles on their heads, while others carried sick people in crude stretchers, all forming a vague sort of line in the single street. Presently there was a pounding of a drum, somewhere, and all of a sudden I saw my sinister driver, the giant Ervan Tual, stalking through the mob with a tremendous purple banner lifted high on a great pole.

"It is time for the pilgrimage to the sacred fountain," the Abbé told me in a whisper. "See? Tual will lead them there. Not even a monster can keep the sick from the miracle of Sant Yann's finger."

Then he stepped away from me and stood at the head of the forming procession and lifted his hand high in a silent benediction. And then I heard his shrill vibrant voice droning a prayer:

Hou Tad pehani zou en Nean,
hou c'hanjue revou santifiet,
hou ranteleah digasset d'emb.

And even I could recognize that as the Breton version of our Lord's Prayer, but richer, deeper, more stirring in the explosive consonants and full-mouthed vowels of that savage tongue of Brittany. . . . And right at that instant, as though in defiance of that prayer, came tragedy.

There was a muffled, distant explosion. *Boom!* It came from the sea. It echoed and reverberated across that tiny island until the very rocks cried out. *Boom!* It came again. It struck silence and terror into all those people. *Boom!* The gulls, wheeling overhead, staggered in their flight, swooped and winged away, screaming in protest.

"Holla-ta! Gwelit! Look, look there!" cried a voice. Then another and another shouted, and every eye turned toward the sea. A mist had been pouring in, and a stiffening wind had whipped the waves to a foam; but in the distance, scarcely a mile from the rocky shore of Bihannoc'h, I saw a ship—a laboring freighter or tanker, with black, ugly smoke pouring from between decks, and listing badly to port.

And even while those startled islanders and I stared at this disaster, came a flash, then a crack like rifle-fire, only louder. And before our very eyes the superstructure of the ship vanished. Flash! Crack! Flash! Crack! The sound and the light seemed to come from the very surface of the angry sea. Another flash, another crackling report. The suffering vessel was seen to lift a little from the water, then to break in twain and sink like a plummet as a hoarse swishing explosion echoed across the island.

FOR a moment not a man breathed, not a woman.

Then there was a wild shout, and every man broke and ran to the shore down below. I followed, of course. The air was thick with disaster; unknown, unfathomable menace hung over us. But the islanders, all their lives at war with the elements, made this disaster their own. With a frenzy that might have been that of an army going to battle, they ran boats out into the surf. I saw a little cannon fire a shot that hurled a thin line and a float far out over the raging waves. Ropes and blankets and paraphernalia appeared as though by magic. The women formed a sort of vast square on the *strang* behind the rocky shore, while some of them knelt in silent prayer for a husband, brother, father, lover rushing out in those boats to face God knows what mysterious disaster.

The Abbé touched my arm.

"You saw it, my son?" he asked me.

"Saw it? Saw what?"

"The monster. It was out there, spitting flame and death. It was the monster that wrecked that ship. It has gone north now to its refuge in that lagoon. Ah, my son, this is a strange place, this island—and a strange time indeed when great monsters rise out of the sea to destroy humans."

AND right then, as suddenly as disaster had cracked out there, a flash of perception came to me.

"Monster?" I said. "What kind of a monster makes a noise like a cannon? That was no monster, Monsieur l'Abbé. That was a torpedo. Three torpedoes, and then a three-inch gun firing at that ship. That's no monster. I'll tell you what it is, it's war. War, Monsieur l'Abbé. That would be a German submarine sinking a French or British merchant vessel—"

But he stopped me short.

"Hush!" he said. "Do not say it, I beg of you, my son. The news of war has not been brought to the island—not officially. Not for certain. It is true that only a day ago there was a radio message at Ushant where there is a station, bringing the rumor of war. But I did not wish that it become known here—not yet, my son. In the last war, there were twenty-nine of our young men in the French navy—and only five of them came home to Bihannoc'h. It is not good that our women suffer in advance. Do not, I pray you, uselessly give agony to my children here—"

"But that—that submarine. It is—"

"That too, I have suspected, my son," he told me. "No sea-monster, but a submarine. And what can these simple fishermen do against a submarine? Is it not better that, for them, it be a sea-monster? It is not always that one may destroy superstitions without danger. There is little harm in the belief in sea-monsters; yet if it were now a submarine—"

I saw his point, in a way; and yet I knew that sooner or later that pilgrimage to the shrine of Sant Yann and the sacred spring would bring hundreds of these ignorant, simple fishermen to the very

They charged blindly into the shadows. What hellish

edge of the lagoon, where apparently the Germans had established their secret base. I pictured a machine-gun turning loose on them and cutting them down like wheat. I started to say so, too, but I was interrupted.

There was a great shouting down at the shore, as one of the lifeboats came in and the crowd was thronging around to help drag it back on the beach. We both hurried down and mingled with the others.

What I saw first was a gruesome thing. Those lifeboats had not saved any lives. What they brought back was a half-dozen bodies, limp and sickening and mutilated beyond belief. They might, from appearances, have been English seamen, and one seemed to be a mate, or at least some officer, with his visored cap thrust firmly down over sightless eyes, bearing that single word, embroidered in gold: *Ganymede.*

BUT the shouting continued and increased. It seemed to have an angry tone, rather than one of grim sorrow such as you would expect. And then I saw a huge fellow, a veritable giant in tarpaulin, running madly along the wharf, flourishing his arms and shaking his fists into the air. It was, I saw at once, my old rescuer, Ervan Tual, and he was working himself up into a frenzy of rage, his flaming red hair tossing a spray of water about as he roared and shouted.

I caught a single word of it—*"Zaozon—Zaozoned!"*

The crowd picked up that word and shouted it back at him, getting madder and madder.

The Abbé plucked my sleeve.

"God save us now, my son," he whispered. "They know."

"They know—what?"

He told me. It seemed that the boat Tual had been in was attacked by the "monster" and overturned, but that this time, in clear, lucid twilight and in spite of the high wind and bad sea, the fishermen had recognized it—not as a monster but as a submarine.

"Tual was a gunner in the French navy in 1914," said the abbe. "He is telling them. He is cursing the *Zaozoned,*

machine might be waiting for them I didn't dare to guess.

which is the Breton word for Saxons or Germans. He is swearing vengeance. He is stirring them up, my son, to go and destroy them. God help us now!"

Give the Abbé credit, he was all man. He walked calmly into that raging mob and said his say.

"There is war," he shouted at them. "France is at war. Do not stir up these Germans here. Let them be, for the French navy to find and destroy. Let a message be sent to Ushant, where the telephone without wires will send it to Brest. But do not let foolish courage bring the scourge of death to this island, my children. What can we, a few men without arms, accomplish against the German machine-guns?"

And did they listen? They did not.

"*Ni zo bepred Bretoned,*" this big Tual shouted. "*Bretoned tud kaled*—we are Bretons, Bretons, the strongest of men. Shall we suffer the damned Saxons to spawn their death upon Bihannoc'h? Shall we endure that the Blessed Sant Yann be defiled? Is it not the time of the *pardon?* Shall not our saint lead us against these intruders? Who will follow?"

And they all went wild.

It isn't easy to describe the frenzy of a mob, nor to comprehend mob-hysteria when it takes possession of a man. But I saw this happen with my eyes. I saw those leather-faced men, their eyes glittering with a momentary insanity, seizing clubs and scythes and pitchforks and fish-spears and gaffs, crowding around the raging Tual, shouting their hatred of the *Zaozoned,* swearing to avenge an ancient, legendary saint.

"*An tan! An tan!*" they shouted. "To the fire! To the fire! Light the fire of Sant Yann's *tantad,* that he may help us to destroy the *Zaozon!* Sant Yann! Sant Yann!"

I TOLD Gonical to stop them before it was too late, but he might as well have been spitting against a tempest. Not that he didn't try. He went out among them, praying, beseeching, shouting, declaiming, but they were beyond anything a human could do or say.

"Who are ye, my children," he cried at them, "that ye may slay the Saxon soldiers—ye, with bare hands and a few sticks?"

And the terrible Tual shouted back at him:

"*Deuit, va zadik.* Come, little father, and let us be, lest we harm thee. The accursed *Zaozon* shall not desecrate our island nor bring sacrilege to our saint. Stand aside!"

And the rest of them jostled and shoved and pushed the little priest away in a manner that told me plenty.

Then strange things began to happen. Drums were beating. The chant of the pilgrims lifted again. If this was mob madness, it had a religious flavor, too. And just as though it had never been interrupted at all, the pilgrimage to the old saint's shrine and spring formed again as the singing, roaring voices lifted up in deep majesty. It was growing quite dark by now, and knots of resinous wood were lighted as the crowd resumed its procession, sending weird flickering light and shadow to dance across the low-hanging clouds.

I've seen mobs before. I've seen men lynched and pulled to pieces, and strikers practically tearing down stone-and-steel buildings with their bare hands. I was even in Paris during the Stavisky riots when tens of thousands marched against the Chamber of Deputies swinging canes with razor-blades on them, hurling rocks and singing the Marseillaise. As a newspaper man I've seen about every kind of mob there is, but never anything quite like this one. It wasn't blood-mad or sadistic or wanting death. It was different—it was inspired by ancient forces we don't know much about these days. The first Crusaders might have been like that. This Ervin Tual might have been Peter the Hermit.

IT is three miles from Men-Mor to the north tip of Bihannoc'h, but it seemed only a step to me that night. For I was caught up in this crazy emotion, something stronger and more consequential than any measure of distance. I only have a vague recollection of the march, the frantic Abbé tagging behind, still bleating out his prayers against this journey to certain death. It was more of a swaying dance than a march, really, done to the powerful rhythm of their chanting and the constant *tum-tum* of wooden drums, with ancient bagpipes droning and whining and those hundreds of voices bellowing. There were women and girls, too, and some quite young children, all caught up in this insanity, and singing:

Tan! Tan! Dir! Oh, Dir ha tan! Tan!
Dir ha tan!
Tan! Tan! Tir ha tonn! Tonn! Tir ha tonn!

It was no Christian singing. It drew from emotions and deeds and worships far older, even, than the Sant Yann whose miracles they avenged. It was a song of fire and of oak and of steel and of flood. Savage Druids in their primeval forests of old may have howled those words. Wild Celtic warriors going forth to battle. Cæsar's Roman legions may have lifted their voices in that same deadly rhythm. It was elemental, primitive, a song that screamed in the very fibers of my soul as I listened to it. The rocks and the scrub oaks of the island swayed and trembled with its volume.

Tir ha tonn! Tonn! Tir ha tann! Tann!

The fierce music of it had reached through the invisible barrier of centuries and black powers.

Forgotten gods wrought their black magic to the lilt of it. A lonely Christian saint whose very existence may only be in the abstracted superstition of his little people, sat high somewhere in his heavenly citadel and was content.

THERE is a sharp fall of ground as the high plateau which is the larger portion of the island drops to sea-level, and halfway down that incline, in a grove of gorse and shrubbery, is the *Feunteun-ar-Bis,* the miraculous spring of Saint John's stolen finger. When the marching throng of crazed villagers and pilgrims broke through the scrub and could look down upon that little clump of brush, a shout went up that might have come from the Children of Israel in sight of the Promised Land.

I suppose it was all on the books and it had to happen like that, but I can't look back on that night without thinking that old Sant Yann did have a card up his sleeve and that what happened was just a natural phenomenon.

A queer little ceremony began as the crowd arrived at the grove which concealed the sacred spring. They began to fling themselves prostrate, faces to the ground, while all joined in a sort of litany with the women crying out tremulously:

Mar d-eo gan-in stouet ma bek—

And the men responsively chanting:

Mar m'euz keuz, ne ked heb abek. . . .

And both together:

Sant Yann, hou pet truhe d'oh-emb.

It was a simple, pathetically innocent prayer and confession, as the Abbé explained it to me, running to the effect that "If our heads are bowed with sorrow, it is not without reason," and ending with a special supplication to the Saint.

"Soon, my son, is the moment of the miracle," the Abbé was whispering to me.

"Which one?" I whispered back; but he failed to note the irony.

"The miracle of the sacred spring," he said gravely. "As you see it is now quietly flowing. But after the prayers, after the *Tantad* fire is lighted, it will spurt, it will send up its terrible healing stream of boiling spray as it has done these hundreds of years."

"Always at the same time on the same day?" I cracked, still skeptical, but he nodded.

"Always," he said. "On the eve of the second day of September when the seventh hour is gone."

I could only say, "Oh?" I was too mixed up inside.

But they were lighting the sacred fire now. Over on the top of that hill the men had piled up their fagot bundles and a flame was already leaping over their vast mound as the *Tantad's* mystic glow sent eerie shadows to dance in the foliage like mad demons.

"Sant Yann! Sant Yann!" the crowd was shouting now, and the chant of litany had ceased.

"Sant Yann! Hear us, saint of this place. Let the mysterious strength of thy finger bring us thy sign!"

On and on they wailed, but their voices merely echoed and were dulled against the constant moaning of an angry sea beyond the blackness where the lagoon must be.

And nothing happened. There was no movement at the holy spring. Save for the slight vapor which writhed above it in the light of the torches and the fire, there was nothing to distinguish it from any old spring bubbling out of any old rock on the seaside.

SUDDENLY, the lilt and the tempo changed. That mad Tual began it. His tremendous voice lifted up and shouted, not a prayer but a battle-cry:

"Zaozoned! Ankeu ar Zaozoned!" ("Death to the Saxons!")

It was a battle-cry that may have been handed down since the ancient days of warring Celts and Saxons.

"Ankeu ar Zaozoned!"

The fierceness of it shook off the spell of worship and prayer and rekindled in those overwrought breasts a spark that flared and burst into flame. They caught up the cry. They waved their clubs and weapons. And as though driven by some invisible dread force like mere puppets, they hurled themselves in a mad charge through the scrub and thick foliage beyond the spring, prayers and miracles forgotten. Behind that black barrier lay the rock-bound lagoon. . . . and certain death.

"Nunc dimittis—" the Abbé was muttering. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart."

And he was on his feet, running after them, with me at his side.

Then it came.

Chatter-chatter-chatter. . . .

Bullets clipped the trees next to me and I went flat on my face. Women screamed somewhere. Sudden agony rippled across the island. I jerked the priest to his knees and then forced him down beside me.

Chatter-chatter-chatter. . . . .

AND then, like evil spirits rising up out of darkness, I saw them, the Germans—sailors or marines or some such—half a dozen of them, only, with an officer standing, cool and sinister, making a forward gesture with his hand. One of them had an automatic rifle and it was pointed right where the spray of it would dust around the little hollow gully I was groveling in. They had been lying on their bellies and now that they began to see that what was coming at them was no troup of ghouls or werewolves or any outlandish thing that mob must have seemed like from a distance, they were going to mop up and get it over with. They emerged from the low cover of that clump of trees where the *Feunteun-ar-Bis* in its rock-made dish was silently bubbling its miraculous waters. They stood up and the officer gave a whistle and on they came, with that nasty automatic spitting a stream of death that was moving right up my way.

And then the miracle happened: The spring of Sant Yann, which has been spouting its boiling waters for hundreds of years, took a hand in the game. Call it Sant Yann, sticking his Blessed Finger right into the fight.

For a spout of the scalding water suddenly shot heavenward with a swish and a hiss of steam, right out of that spring and into the middle of the Germans. And before anybody could tell just what was happening, before those charging Germans could get back to their boat and out of the way, that spring had become a geyser, shooting and snarling and spitting water which must have been fifty degrees above the boiling-point, by the sound of it.

Now there is nothing in the military regulations, even in Germany, which can make men stand still and let scalding water blow up in their faces. And those men didn't. One of the men—I still think it was the officer—gave a howl of pain as the water blistered his face and back and shoulders, and all the rest of them broke and ran—ran back into the pitch dark toward the lagoon, screaming in their raucous German, and abandoning machine-guns, automatic rifles and anything else which might hinder them from escaping that terrible scalding jet of water.

THE whole set-up changed right then. I gingerly lifted my face out of the grass and mud to see that mad Tual, his face illuminated by his torch and a nasty black smear running down across his mouth which I knew was blood, flinging his great club ahead of him into the shadows and waving his villagers on, shouting:

"Sant Yann! Sant Yann!"

The very devil was in that mob now. They charged blindly after this enormous hulking Tual, straight into the shadows by the shore where even their torches scarcely cast a light. What hellish machine might be waiting for them there I didn't dare to guess. All I know is that I got up on my knees first and then on my feet, dragging the priest with me, clutching his beads and still praying. I must have lost my head, because no man in his right mind would have followed that screaming crowd into whatever might be back there. But I did it, and I guess the "miracle" took me under its wing. Anyhow, here I am, safe.

Where the lagoon shores on the land is a flat stretch of sand, then a sort of rim of broken rocks and boulders. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face because such visibility as the night and the trees left was completely shut off by the pouring out of steam and vapor from that erupting geyser. But out beyond that, I saw a light, and presently there came a scattered sputter of rifle-fire from the lagoon.

I knew what that meant. It meant that there really was a submarine out there in those waters and that the fleeing soldiers (or were they sailors?) had shoved off in a boat and had reached their mother pig-boat and had warned the rest of them that the island was going crazy and maybe going to blow up.

And then, as somebody flung a torch far out into the lagoon, I saw the thing—what was visible of it. No wonder the islanders had at first thought it was a sea-monster. The glint of light along its whale-like back, broken a little by the ripple of water, and the narrow deck and conning-tower, gave it an appearance of something unworldly.

And almost as I stood there staring, there was a terrific crashing explosion as one of the sub's small guns was discharged right in my face.

I sprawled. The breeze of that shell hit me like something solid. I sprawled, because I couldn't help it. And when I stood up again and turned around, there was something gruesome right behind me where a man had been standing, that I'd rather not describe here.

I heard the motor of the sub start throbbing. I heard the grind of metal as the hatch was closed and bolted tight. I saw that gray nebulous shape start to glide away, then to submerge. The air was bedlam with the yelling and screaming of the crazy Bretons. Outside beyond the reef of rocks, the sea was angry and snarling and sent back a sort of accompaniment to the battle symphony which was being played on this orchestra of the gods.

And right then old Sant Yann pulled another miracle.

OF course I didn't know just what it was, then, but something stopped that submarine from submerging. Later I reasoned it out: it would be the seining nets which the fishermen had abandoned when the "monster" had "attacked" the fleet the day before. Let the nets foul in the screws or filter under the valve openings, and the U-boat would be as crippled as though a ten-inch shell had ripped its gear away.

And it was effective. The boat just hung there in the water, a long, glistening monster, not moving. . . .

I lost sight of what was going on for a minute, because I had to get nearer. I

There must have been a dozen men crawling over that submarine, when somebody inside decided to open up the hatch. That was the fatal move.

ran out, myself, on a sort of rocky ledge, to where the U-boat was only a hundred yards or so away. Back on the land, somewhere, somebody had lighted a fire, and the huge flames suddenly converted an inky nightfall into an angry shimmering red-and-yellow hell.

Then I saw what I saw. There must have been a dozen men crawling over that submarine, when somebody inside decided to open up the hatch. That was the fatal move, because no sooner had the face of a human being shown there than hands reached out and grabbed at him. I guess the men inside didn't quite know what was happening and didn't know just how really mad those islanders were, but they found out plenty.

"Iou! Iou! Iou! Iou! Sant Yann! Sant Yann!" somebody was screaming. More swimmers piled up on the half-submerged pig-boat. I heard the muffled sounds of shooting. I heard screams of pain and shouts of rage and all the din and dither of the most fantastic battle you could ever imagine. Men in uniform began to pour out of the sub, shooting as they came, but they never had a

chance. There must have been a hundred or more islanders swarming over that deck by now, and they literally pulled those Germans to pieces.

It didn't last long. No, this didn't last very long, because all of a sudden that submarine began to sink; it sank with the hatches wide open. Even above the roar of the madmen who screamed their devilish murder on her deck and the constant murmur of the sea outside, I could hear a gurgling sound that told me more or less what was happening. The water of the lagoon was filling that sub, and the men inside, such as were left, were being drowned like rats.

And then, suddenly, it was gone. With a swish and a chug and a sucking sound, the "sea-monster" glugged down out of sight, leaving a swarm of struggling, fighting mad bodies milling around on the surface, treading one another in a mad frenzy to keep from being pulled underwater by the suction of the sinking submarine.

And then it was over. That part of it, at least. There was only the singing and chanting on the shore where the *Tantad* fire blazed still. There was only a scattered rabble in the water, trying to make the shore. There was only the flicker of eerie light from the flames of the fire, making the lurking shadows of that hell-spot chase each other like demons.

And the Abbé Gonical was behind me, touching me on the arm, saying:

"Come, my son. Come away from this place, and pray to God for the souls of my children who have died that their miracle might live."

THAT isn't quite the end of my yarn. I'd like to leave it like that, but I can't. I managed to get a boat back to the mainland the next morning and I went straight back to Paris and wrote a story about just what you have read. I told about poor Althès and his assistant. I put down the bare facts of what happened, leaving out the color and the "miracles" because you have to "write down" when you send cables back to America.

And when I had shoved that story through and was thinking about that job in Warsaw, reading the news of what had happened during the two days I was away, I saw that the tanker *Ganymede* was the first commercial vessel of the war to be sunk and that the German U-boats were thought to have a base right where it would hurt British and French shipping worst. So I felt pretty good about that story of mine. Apparently I had uncorked something big. Apparently my guess had been right about that submarine base.

SO I walked in to see the chief with an idea of doing a short from the purely naval angle for the night's cable.

Townsend Maker is a hard-headed citizen any time, and he gave me a look when I came in that made me wonder what was on his mind. There was plenty. Furthermore he wasn't alone. There was a dapper little Frenchman in striped trousers and a cutaway sitting there and they were both looking over the story I had just sent down to the cable desk.

"Fellowes," said the boss, "you've been drunk again."

"The hell I have," I told him.

"This story," he said, "is crazy. Nobody but a drunk would write a story like that. I sent you out to get the dope on Dr. Althès and you come back with a drool about a Breton *pardon* and a lie about fishermen sinking a submarine. You're fired, Fellowes. You can go and get your pay now. Not only that, but I'll see to it you can't get a job on any news-service in Paris while I'm around. Nobody is gonna let me down like that, Fellowes, you hear?"

I stared at him. I couldn't believe it. I just stood there and gaped while the little Frenchman nodded and babbled and pumped hands with Townsend Maker, and then bobbed himself out of the door.

Then the boss grinned at me.

"Sit down, Charley," he said. "That was a gag. You pack your bag and go to Poland in the morning."

"What the—"

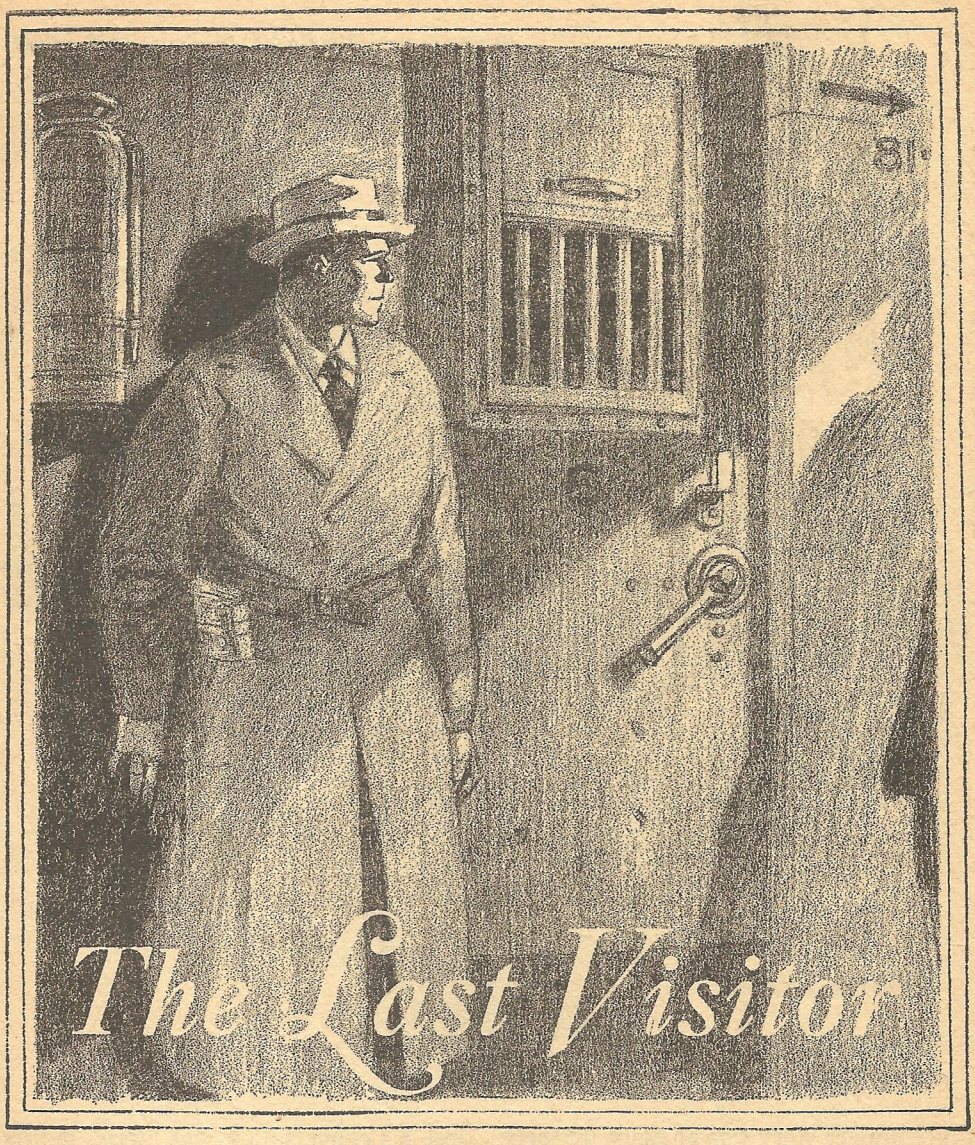
"That Frenchman was M. Ducros, of the War Ministry. He camps out here, as of yesterday. He looks over every bit of copy that leaves here and he cuts most of it down. We can't use that story of yours, Charley."

"Why the hell not? It's true."

"Maybe it is, but would you want to have all France and England know that there was a submarine base right at their front door without their doing anything about it?" He was grinning again.

"Maybe," he added, "some day you can write that into a fiction story, but the Transatlantic wouldn't print any part of it, Charley. Could I interest you in a beer before the cafés close?"

He could.



The Last Visitor

An idea of great hope dominates this strange and moving story.

By MAURICE BEAM

YOU should know at the beginning that there is no explanation of this story at its end. Its threads are not all tied; its enigma is not dexterously exploded; it cannot be fully explained and never has been. The choice is not merely artful. Had I not written these lines another would have, when Steve Blaylock talked; and the end must have remained the same. My possession of the facts was only an accident of the *Courier* copy-desk. I was one of five on the rim of that desk; and to any of the others might have fallen the reading of Blaylock's copy on the Mungler case.

Rockwell has said that the whole thing was accidental, that he did not willingly choose Blaylock for the Mungler assignment, knowing Blaylock's limitations, but that he had no other choice, with Mason sick and Haynes needed at the governor's office. Rockwell still admits Blaylock's ability, so far as it went, but says that the Mungler story was simply too big for a man who was a statistician.

"Explain this, Blaylock!" Rockwell demanded
"What?" Blaylock asked, confused.

The Mungler story was no place for mere accuracy; it needed something more.

Blaylock *was* accurate, to a fault. But his writing was heavy, literal, and as full of banal *clichés* as a legal brief, without the excuse of necessity. He was continually being hurt by jabs of copy-readers' pencils lightening his style, while saving his facts.

Blaylock conformed to no news-room type. He did not dangle cigarettes from his lips. He did not wear his hat askew and exchange cynical banter with his city editor. He took himself seriously and had a certain dignity. He was silent, inward-looking, ashy, of medium build, with gray eyes, a prominent nose and thin lips that drooped slightly at the corners. He talked well, with careful diction and punctilious grammar; but like his writing, his conversation was literal, matter-of-fact and colorless.

Perhaps, with Rockwell's use of the word "accidental," we are really picking at the fringe of the enigma. For was it an accident that Blaylock saw more clearly than others the change that came over Mungler during those last days in the death-cell? Was it an accident that gave the *Courier,* and no other paper, the right to publish Mungler's diary? And finally, was it blind chance that enabled Blaylock to catch that single fleeting glimpse of John Masterson in the corridor of the death-house?

IT began on the afternoon of January 3rd. Blaylock came into the *Courier* city-room, sat down at his desk and pulled out his notes. For a week he had

been covering a series of meetings on taxation. The stuff he was turning in ran to columns on inside pages, and was as civically valuable as it was dry.

The place hummed with the usual unhurried, aimless bustle of all editorial rooms when the next deadline is still comfortably distant. Reporters hammered at machines. A couple of copy-boys wrestled fiercely but silently near the open door of the cubicle housing the teletypes. The slot-man at the copy-desk was marking copy without haste, and tossing pages at us on the rim. Throughout the big room phones tinkled intermittently and voices answered, loudly, softly, smoothly or raucously.

City Editor Wint Clark called to Blaylock, "Hey!" He held a phone in his hand.

Blaylock got up slowly and walked to the city desk.

"Ever watch a guy die?" asked Clark.

Blaylock shook his head.

"Well, there's always a first time. Get sick easy?"

"What is it?" Blaylock asked.

"Mungler, at the State pen. He dies in four days."

"Where's Haynes?" Haynes had been on the Mungler story ever since Mungler had entered the death-cell.

Clark said patiently: "Rockwell sent him to Albany to cover the Governor's office. There's a thousand-to-one-chance of a last-hour reprieve. Mason's sick. Rockwell says you're the best bet for Mungler now. So it's you. You've never seen a burning. It will freshen your style, maybe." Wint Clark was congenitally disrespectful. There was no ridicule in what he said to Blaylock.

"When do I leave?" Blaylock asked stoically.

"Six-ten. Gets you there at eight."

"A story tonight?"

"No. Haynes' advance will do. But from now on, a daily. Get it on the wire by six, starting tomorrow. Your running story. Pick up all the feature stuff you can, and send it when you get it. If it's hot, why, telephone. You get a by-line."

As he talked, Wint wrote. Now he handed Blaylock a cashier's order for two hundred dollars. "See Rockwell before you go."

Blaylock picked up the order. Wint was talking into another phone. Blaylock passed the copy-desk with the corners of his mouth drooping lower than usual. He went into Rockwell's office. Rockwell's long, shiny face, under the mop of the red pompadour, stared up at him. Rockwell was telephoning too.

Blaylock waited uneasily. Rockwell hung up and began his instructions in his rapid, whining voice.

"You're covering Mungler. Go up there. Remember, here's a boy in the death-cell, going to die. Put yourself in his place. Feel what he feels. Think what he thinks. Then write it. Don't rush it. Figure it out. We want accurate reporting, but we want a little more. Here is where you can be a poet —if your poetry doesn't show through. Make people feel it without knowing it."

Blaylock nodded. Rockwell went on:

"Here's a boy from a good family, poor, but honest American. To be electrocuted for murdering a girl also from a good family, and a rich one. All the elements, there, you see. He's intelligent. He can feel. He knows where he is. He can imagine what's coming. He's going through hell. And on top of that, he says he's innocent. Maybe he believes it. But there's one thing you've got to watch out for—"

"What's that?"

"Mungler's ideas on religion. He's an atheist, or something. It's created a lot of feeling all over the country. But don't let it color your stuff one way or the other. Keep opinions to yourself. The *Courier* hasn't got any opinions on the matter. Facts—facts. If Mungler blinks his eyes, we want it. If his hand shakes, we want it. Whatever he expresses, tell about it objectively. Objectively! Here is a boy in the death-cell. People in death-cells are expressive as hell, Blaylock. Nothing can save him, and he probably knows it. There'll be no reprieve. And finally—"

Rockwell stopped and fastened his apparently ingenuous blue eyes on Blaylock. "Finally, get Mungler's diary. Don't miss. Warden Miles is a friend of the *Courier,* and he'll help. We want Mungler's diary, exclusive. It ought to be good. He's been writing ever since he went into the death-house. Miles says nobody knows about the diary but us."

Blaylock understood. Rockwell talked for another five minutes with his hand running back and forth through his pompadour, mostly repeating what he'd said. Then Blaylock went to the morgue and went through the Mungler file from beginning to date.

Theodore Mungler was twenty-eight years old. His father, who had been a garageman, was dead. His mother was poor. He had no brothers or sisters. He had finished two years in a good university, been forced to leave school to take over the small business his father had left. This consisted of a filling-station and a car repair-shop.

Ruth Polliard had been the daughter of a brick manufacturer. The family was moderately wealthy, socially prominent in the suburb where the Munglers and Polliards lived, and Ruth had been Theodore's sweetheart from schooldays. She had been a strikingly beautiful girl.

One night they had gone to a roadhouse with a friend, Chester Gore. All three had entered the place, remained for a time, had two drinks each, and departed. The next known fact was the finding of Ruth and Mungler in the latter's car, a roadster. Mungler's hands were at Ruth's throat when a parking-lot attendant saw them. Ruth was dead.

Mungler's defense was that Gore had choked Ruth to death when she refused to respond to his advances, that he had seen Gore run from the car, that he had leaped to aid Ruth, that Gore was drunk. Gore denied everything. He had gone home, he said, following a short argument between himself and Mungler as they were leaving the night-club. He testified that he had seen Ruth and Mungler enter the car together. This, together with the testimony of the attendant, had convicted Mungler.

These were, and are, the main facts in the case. As to their truth or justice, Blaylock had no opinion whatever. He had followed the story only casually during its first phases.

HE reached the village near the penitentiary that evening. After registering at the local hotel, he called the office of Warden Miles. Miles was at his apartment inside the walls. He informed Blaylock that visiting-hours were over at nine o'clock. "And before that, if Mungler refuses to see you," he added.

"Shall I call you back to find out if he will?" Blaylock asked.

"That won't be necessary tonight. Two reporters have appointments already. I'm sure Mungler won't mind if there's a third. I'll tell you this, Mr. Blaylock: I'll do everything possible to help the *Courier*."

Blaylock thanked him. He knew that the *Courier* had aided Miles in securing his appointment, and that Miles would do everything in his power to secure Mungler's diary for the paper. Blaylock worried about that diary. Rockwell seemed to think it would constitute a tremendous scoop.

Thus it happened that at his first meeting with Mungler, Blaylock was not alone. There was Barnes of the *Advocate* and Conway of the *World News*. Guard Jeremy Scholes escorted all three to the death-cell. During this first interview, Blaylock asked few questions. He spent the time in a careful study of the condemned man.

MUNGLER was a frightened cynic. His belligerent eyes were challenging and wary. He was handsome in a meaningless way, with regular features, dark brown, thick, slightly curly hair, and a stocky, well-proportioned body. In sum-total the impression received was one of nervous aimlessness. Fear had done this to him. It had burned him out and destroyed any color he may have possessed. He wore a clean but rumpled white shirt, open at the throat, a blue sweater and prison trousers of gray.

This was Blaylock's first impression of him, before he spoke. When that happened, a subtle change was apparent. He had better control of himself than seemed possible from an outward appraisal. He had a stubborn courage which was locked in constant battle with his fear.

"What have you fellows heard from the Capitol?" Mungler's eyes jumped from one face to another.

Barnes and Conway shrugged. Blaylock said: "My paper sent Haynes to cover the Governor's office. It may mean there's some chance for a reprieve."

"Who sent him?" Mungler seized on this eagerly.

"Why, the managing editor."

"Oh, just a hunch, then." He shook his head hopelessly. "If it happens, it happens," he said in a low tone. "An editor's hunch don't mean anything to me. I mean about the reprieve." He sat down upon his berth. "Well, what do you want to know?"

Barnes and Conway had evidently conjured up a lead for their story. Blaylock, listening, was not greatly impressed. It was not a new lead. But as he listened to Mungler's reply to Barnes' question, the word *fanatic* suggested itself. The prisoner talked too willingly.

"Get this: I haven't changed my mind. Why should I? I couldn't, anyway.

"What's the difference if I am going to die? . . . . I want no reprieve. There is too much that is wonderful, in what is coming."

When you're dead, you're dead. So much meat, just so many chemical elements and compounds that, finally, will merge with the earth—if you're buried—or with the atmosphere if you're cremated. It all amounts to the same thing."

Blaylock wasn't very much impressed. News stories of the past several days had, if anything, overplayed the fact that the prisoner had refused to accept the spiritual comforts offered by Rev. Simon Britton, family pastor, as well as the ministrations of Chaplain Morehouse of the prison staff. It was one phase of a rather well-defined death-cell philosophy. Men facing death became either fanatical converts, or they became just as fanatically averse to belief in salvation. Mungler had adopted the latter course. Feature stories on this topic had brought about a lessening of public sympathy for him, and paradoxically, had lent him fame as a youth of exceptional intelligence, erratic but brilliant.

"And what does the Reverend Britton say to that?" asked Barnes with a hint of condescension.

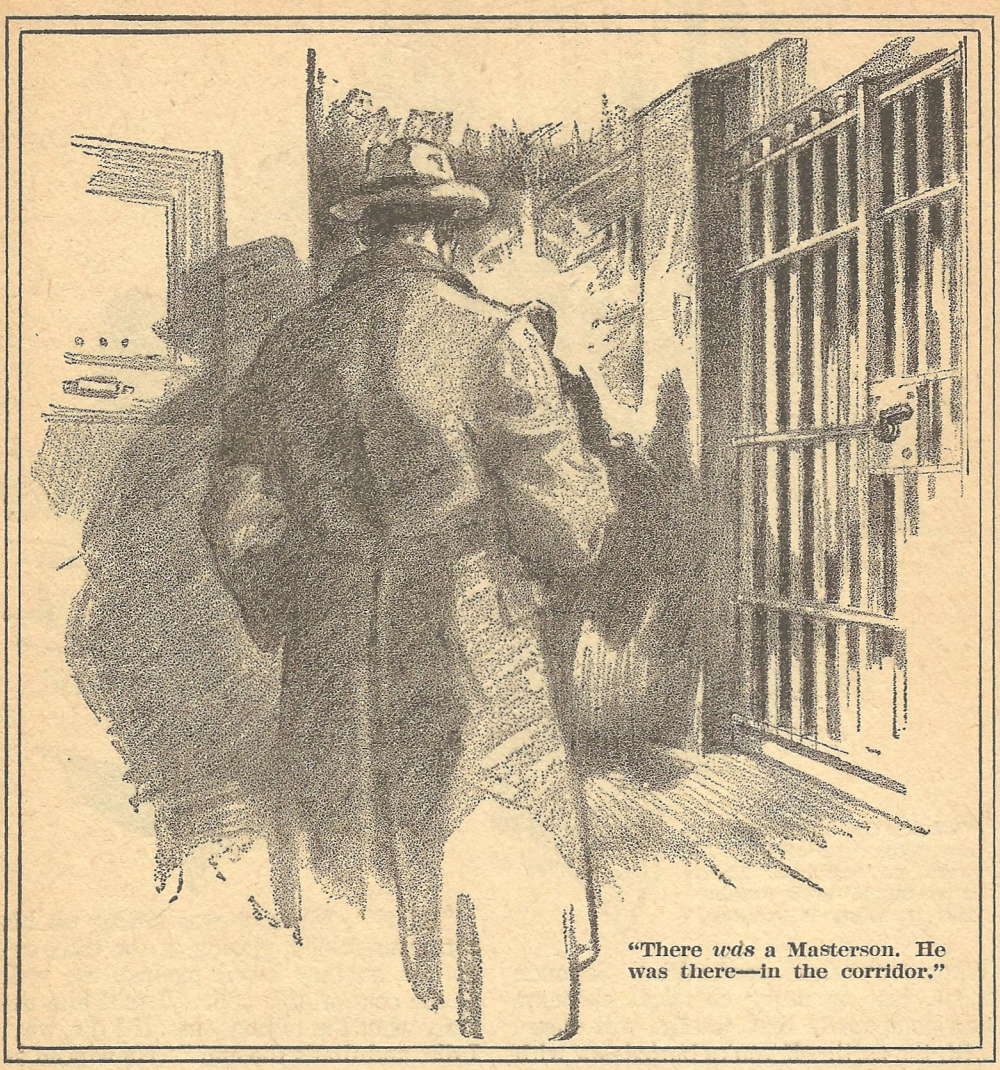
"Him!" Mungler was sitting on his cot, arms folded, glaring at the three reporters as they stood against the wall of the comfortable cell. "I told him exactly what I'm telling you. If I die, why, I die, and that's the end." He winced as he spoke. "I told him that if I say I believe something I can't believe, why, that's the worst kind of hypocrisy. Isn't that the truth? You fellows know it is. Yet what do you put in your papers? You say that I curse God and deny Him, that I laugh at all religion and at everyone who has faith in heaven and hell and redemption—"

"Not my paper," Blaylock interrupted.

"No, not yours. But others—"

AND then it came out, in a rapid burst of eloquence that surprised Blaylock and at the same time recalled Rockwell's warning:

"Why should I believe in God or the power of God?" cried the condemned man. "I am innocent of this crime they've pinned on me! And God would know I am. Yet what does He do? Lets them convict me, lets the jury believe lies, lets the real murderer of Ruth go free and al-



"There *was* a Masterson. He was there—in the corridor."

lows them to lock me in this cell. And now, in four more days, He'll allow them to take me and strap me in a chair and kill me. Kill me! For a crime I did not commit. Is it any wonder that I know there is no God? Who put such ideas into my head, who is responsible for them, if it isn't God Himself? The Reverend Britton! What does that fat, smug man know about justice? What does he know about death? What can he know about the Hereafter, if he's never watched it coming at him, the way I am watching it? What can he tell me that I don't already know? What?"

Barnes and Conway were taking notes. Blaylock did not. He recalled that Haynes, in one of his stories, had covered almost this exact phase of Mungler's philosophy. Besides, Rockwell had asked for facts, objective facts mainly, and here were none. To the fact-loving Blaylock, Mungler's opinions were trite and meaningless.

It was not until he had returned to his room at the hotel that the lead around which to build his first story occurred to him. He sat down and thought it over carefully. It appeared that he had stumbled upon a new slant, one not noticed by any other paper. So his first interview with Mungler was not to be wasted, after all. Out of it had emerged a fact that everyone else had overlooked.

The fact was, Mungler was no atheist at all. On the contrary, he was a profound believer, not in the mere idea of a passive God, but in a personal God, a confidential God who, as a friend, had betrayed him. His very bitterness, the view that Someone had *allowed* him to be brought face to face with death, showed

an intense intimacy with God. It was a positive belief, long established, and not one engendered merely through present fear.

Blaylock, sitting alone in his hotel room, considered all this carefully. Then slowly it dawned upon him that he had stumbled upon yet another fact: Mungler was innocent! He had not killed his sweetheart. No man would blame a living, omniscient God who was as real to him as a person, unless, inwardly, he was certain of injustice to himself. Mungler was certain—in his secret thoughts he treated his own innocence as a fact!

Blaylock was convinced; yet Rockwell's warning remained strong within him. Personal opinions would have no place in his stories to the *Courier*. He would stick to facts. And as usual, his facts were unimpeachable, until the very last.

One such fact was the Rev. Simon Britton. Blaylock saw him, heard him, even touched him when they were introduced by Warden Miles. He described him briefly in one of his stories to the *Courier:* He was fat, Blaylock said, a ruddy, round man, and big, with one of those deep, manly, sonorous voices which ring so fulsomely from the pulpits of comfortable debtless churches. He was persuasive and jovial. But he was not smug. On the contrary, he was sincerely worried over what he called his failure with Mungler.

"An essentially honest boy, but misdirected and with a hard mind," he told Blaylock.

This was after the prisoner had asked that all ministers, even Chaplain Morehouse, be kept out of his cell. The chaplain accepted the situation with forgiving sadness. "He may need us when the hour comes," he said quietly. "If so, we are here to lean upon. The poor lad is not one to face death alone."

BUT though he needed solace as his fear grew, Mungler refused to accept it.

Blaylock barely touched upon this. Instead he wrote mainly of outward things; of Mungler's cell, which was new and modern, with its private wash-room and a radio; of the visits of the stricken mother and the few friends who accompanied her; of Mungler's life and ambitions before the night of the murder. There was nothing of the maudlin in what Blaylock said. He was at home with facts, and he seldom strayed into abstractions.

He saw Mungler's fear grow and become an obsession. He knew that a blanket of blackest gloom hung over the mind of the condemned, with his hope of reprieve vanishing, with his death approaching by the hour. It became more and more difficult to talk to the prisoner, to keep his mind on any subject other than death. To Blaylock's inquiries about the diary, Mungler would not reply. His bitterness toward God became a mild mania. . . . Then came the change.

HOW shall it be described, that change? Blaylock cannot describe it. He can only say that he became aware of it. Yet at the time its reaction upon him was to make him more wary about keeping his personal opinions out of his dispatches. This is proved by the *Courier* files of the period. Blaylock's matter-of-fact objectivity increased and became correspondingly dull; his accounts contained no more sentiment or emotion than a report of a city budget. Rockwell was getting what he asked for.

Yet slowly, during those last two days of his life, Mungler was changing. It was a deep, inward transformation that showed little on the surface. A quicker lift of the eye, an ironic appraisal of his plight in a phrase or a word, a trace of humor—all these began to lend a liveliness to Mungler that had been absent. No longer did he appear in monotones of cynical anger. Instead he expressed tolerance, and this gave him new depth. It also served to hide his fear. Later it appeared that he was no longer afraid, or had become reconciled. The hope for a governor's reprieve, seldom out of his talk, was now apparently forgotten. He did not allude to it during the last thirty hours of his existence.

Blaylock says he noticed this latter fact, but did not realize its tremendous import, till later.

The news-stories of that time—there were more than a dozen reporters living in the village as the execution drew near—reflected only the obvious changes in Mungler's manner. The prisoner, they said, was controlling his fear; he had taken a fatalistic view of the inevitable; there was now a possibility of his walking to the chair under his own power, contrary to prediction. . . .

The death-walk had been scheduled for dawn. The evening before, Rockwell again phoned Blaylock about the diary.

"Mungler will make no promises," Blaylock reported.

"He admits he's keeping a diary, doesn't he?" Rockwell asked impatiently.

"Yes. Has been right along, but he won't say who gets it."

"Did you make the offer?"

"Three hundred. Yes sir."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Said he'd think it over."

"You're authorized to go as high as five hundred, then," Rockwell snapped. "But try to get it for less. Bargain with him. It'll be paid to his mother, tell him. She needs it."

"Yes sir."

"And Blaylock—" Rockwell spoke wearily: "Your stuff's okay, but give us a little more feeling, you know—sentiment. He must be worried, awfully worried. And is there any sign of a break on the religion angle? Watch for that, Blaylock. They do break, you know. If Mungler recants, gets religion, it's a streamer—if he says he's sorry for what he's said. Religion's hot, with all these dictators fighting the churches."

There were more of Rockwell's admonitions before Blaylock was permitted to hang up. . . . Immediately thereafter came the tinkle of his phone on a waiting call. It was Scholes, the prison guard. He was excited.

"Mungler's asked that his execution be set ahead six hours. He wants to die at midnight. Tonight! Instead of six in the morning. Warden Miles has granted his request; within his rights—"

"Am I the first you've told this to?" Blaylock asked.

"Yeh. Warden's orders."

"At midnight." And Blaylock thanked Scholes. Then he had the *Courier* office again, and Rockwell. Rockwell switched him to a rewrite. It was a nice scoop for the *Courier*. He congratulated Blaylock, and said they'd beat the rest of them by minutes with an extra.

But the news of Mungler's request was troubling Blaylock. He forgot about the value of the scoop. Here was Mungler asking for death. If it had been fear that made him ask, Blaylock would have understood. A man sufficiently afraid will do anything to end his torture. But Mungler wasn't afraid any longer. Blaylock had studied him carefully. He was positive that Mungler had no fear. Why then was he asking to die? By Blaylock, a fact once accepted by his reason was never questioned. Yet here was one fact seemingly contradicting another.

He rushed out and hired a car. In it, he planned to bring Mungler's diary to the *Courier* in person. That would be quicker and more certain.

The first man he met inside the prison was Warden Miles. He asked if he might see Mungler at once. Miles' reply was not enlightening. "Sure. Any time. He wants open house for the press all evening. He wants 'em all to come. He's happy as a lark."

The warden's tone was light, with undercurrents of relief in it. Blaylock analyzed this correctly. A warden must walk to the chair with a condemned man. This is an ordeal, at best, but far more torturing when fear weakens the victim and he has to be dragged or carried into the death-chamber. Miles had anticipated such an ordeal with Mungler. Now, with Mungler's new-found courage, that unwelcome official chore would be lightened and made at least tolerable.

"How do you account for it, Warden?" Blaylock was impelled to ask.

"Why, religion," answered Miles positively. "What else? Mungler's got religion strong. I've seen it happen before. It makes them over. It's a wonderful thing, religion. I've seen it work."

"But—the ministers—"

Miles shrugged. "There's other kinds of religion. A man in the death-cell finds that out. Preachers are all right, but Mungler's figured this out for himself. He's that sort. I've seen it happen before. He's convinced himself, where nobody else could." Miles smiled, and winked knowingly.

Blaylock didn't argue the point. Nor did he agree with the warden, entirely. Mungler was certainly not crazy. Nor was he superstitious and mystic. Blaylock could understand the condemned man's practical mind, because his was similar. Mungler had something more than abstract faith to buoy him up. His fear had been banished by something far more tangible.

IT was here that the idea of escape first suggested itself to Blaylock. Had Mungler evolved a method? Had he found means of conjuring open these walls of concrete, stone and steel, and the score of locks intervening between the death-cell and freedom? The thought was preposterous. Escape from this modern penitentiary, with its automatic locking-systems, its precise, timed-to-the-minute routine, its tri-daily count of inmates, its machine-gun-garrisoned walls, the mechanized plan of its entire operation, was humanly impossible.

Humanly: In his thoughts Blaylock examined the word. Then it disappeared —to return later with renewed force.

As he moved along the corridor toward the wing which contained the death-house, Blaylock saw a figure in civilian clothes coming toward him. At first he thought this another reporter, since visitors seldom used this entrance. That he did not exactly recognize the other's face was not surprising. Papers were sending new men in to cover tonight's execution, and Blaylock didn't know all of them. Yet there was something faintly familiar in the face, too. As he came opposite the other man, he nodded. Dark eyes smiled into his, and white teeth flashed instantly in a brown, oval face. Then the stranger was past him, walking steadily down the corridor. Blaylock turned slightly, and noted that the figure was tall, slender and that it moved with a remarkable buoyancy and grace. The next instant it had disappeared around an angle of the wall. Blaylock felt a curiously heady sensation, and a feeling of intense optimism settled over him. He had just met John Masterson, he said later, although at the time he did not know it.

Thereafter, seeing Mungler, talking to Mungler and listening to him, drove all else from his mind. For the moment they were alone. Mungler's eyes were amused and quizzical; Blaylock was as light-hearted as a boy. He had lost all sense of tragedy. But he was remembering the diary. He asked Mungler about it.

"Sit down, Steve."

As Mungler spoke, he tuned his radio. He was listening to a light, bright symphony. Blaylock sat down. Mungler bent his head, following intently a bar or two of the radio orchestration, beating time with his finger. Then he said casually: "Don't worry. The *Courier* will get the diary, such as it is. You've been nice to me, and fair. I've read your stories. They should give you a name."

Blaylock thanked him. "My managing editor called—"

Mungler interrupted him. "Get me all you can for it," he said. "It'll go to my mother, you know. How much?"

"Five hundred." Blaylock quoted the top figure without hesitation.

"Okay."

"Where—will I find the—" Blaylock hesitated.

"After my death?" Mungler said it lightly. "Right here, in—no, wait: I'll tell Miles to take it, for safe-keeping. Get it from him. He told me the *Courier* deserved it."

"Could I take a look at it now?" Blaylock asked.

"Not now, if you don't mind. There's parts of it you wouldn't believe. I'd rather it was afterward."

BLAYLOCK at the moment missed this allusion to the unbelievable. He did not insist on seeing the diary. The whole discussion had been casual. It was almost as though there were no prisons and no electric chairs. His watch showed eight-thirty. Mungler was to die at twelve.

"I hope you enjoy it," Mungler said. And he smiled. "The diary, I mean."

A shiver ran over Blaylock. He had been thinking of the coming horror, when this boy was to be shocked to death. He had begun to see Mungler from that viewpoint—as a boy. All the condemned man's sharp gloominess of a few hours previous was gone. He had no hatreds left. He was like a boy in this, as in his spontaneous and genuine gayety which seemed to well from him warmly and gently, with not so much as a hint of adult ridicule. It was the outward manifestation of a deep inward strength. It occurred again to Blaylock that perhaps Mungler did have an original plan of escape. A second thought reminded him that perhaps Mungler had written something about it in his diary. This random guess made him ask:

"What is there in your diary that you think I wouldn't believe?"

"I should have said 'couldn't.'"

"Maybe I could."

"Afterward, yes. But not now. Because the final test is still to come."

"Test?"

"At midnight," Mungler said softly.

So Blaylock's curiosity remained unsatisfied, and he had no chance, then, to pursue the subject. Guard Scholes appeared at the door with the announcement that other news-men were asking a chance to talk with Mungler.

But Blaylock did not forget Mungler's curious remark about "the test." Now he understands what it meant. . . .

The "last mile" has been done on the screen, in play and story, until it exists as a pattern. The drama of those final steps from life to eternity, while stirring, has become acknowledged and therefore conventional—or was, before Mungler.

Mungler's walk was unique; a gay parade, terrible as laughter over a coffin

to those who followed, but to Mungler a joyous march. There was not the slightest doubt of this. He thought it. He knew it. You knew he knew it. What he did and what he said were quietly real and beyond all histrionics.

The guards, one of them Scholes, came to his cell and brought him forth. His head had been shaved for the cathodes, his trouser-leg split for the anode of the chair contacts. He wore a white shirt, freshly laundered, and his washed hair trembled lightly on his head.

It is a fact that Chaplain Morehouse and Reverend Britton waited in the warden's office for a call that never came. But Mungler made another request, once the procession was in the corridor, that was as incomprehensible as his gayety. With the warden just behind and the guards on either side, he asked Scholes, on his right, to free his arm.

"If you don't mind, walk on the other side, will you?" said Mungler.

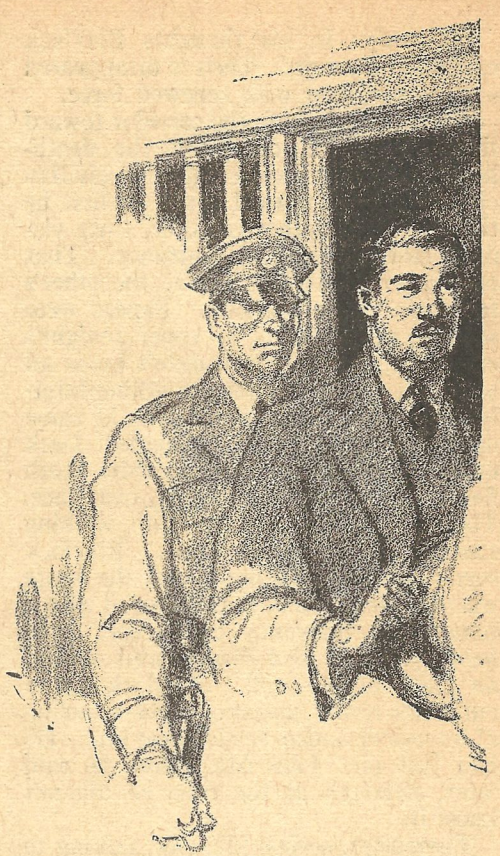
Scholes turned; Warden Miles nodded nervously, and the guard took a position on the other side.

THE dispatches that night agreed that Mungler's step was firm and light, that he did not once falter, that the smile on his lips was natural, and that his mood seemed one of pleasure. This is literally and objectively true. But still, Blaylock says, it misses being complete. The man who was to die was happy in a solemn and certain but not a jaunty way. He did not banter. He made no effort for effect. Had he done so, there might have intervened a note of falsity in all this scene and made of it a mummery, an attempt at bravado that would have fallen flat. There was nothing of the kind.

With the official witnesses, other reporters, the prison physician, Blaylock sat in the designated place inside the death-chamber. Upon leaving the warden's office he had swallowed a drink of whisky. Its effect, even upon an empty stomach, was not noticeable. When Mungler entered, Blaylock's eyes were upon his face. Mungler smiled at him cheerily. That smile was more terrible than what followed.

The prisoner did not hesitate. He walked directly to the chair, sat, settled his body comfortably as possible and placed his arms upon the supports provided for them.

The guards adjusted the straps rapidly. The electrician fixed the cap and leg-contact; a murmur of their heavy breathing and faint sounds of metal mingled in the otherwise silent room.



Warden Miles stepped forward.

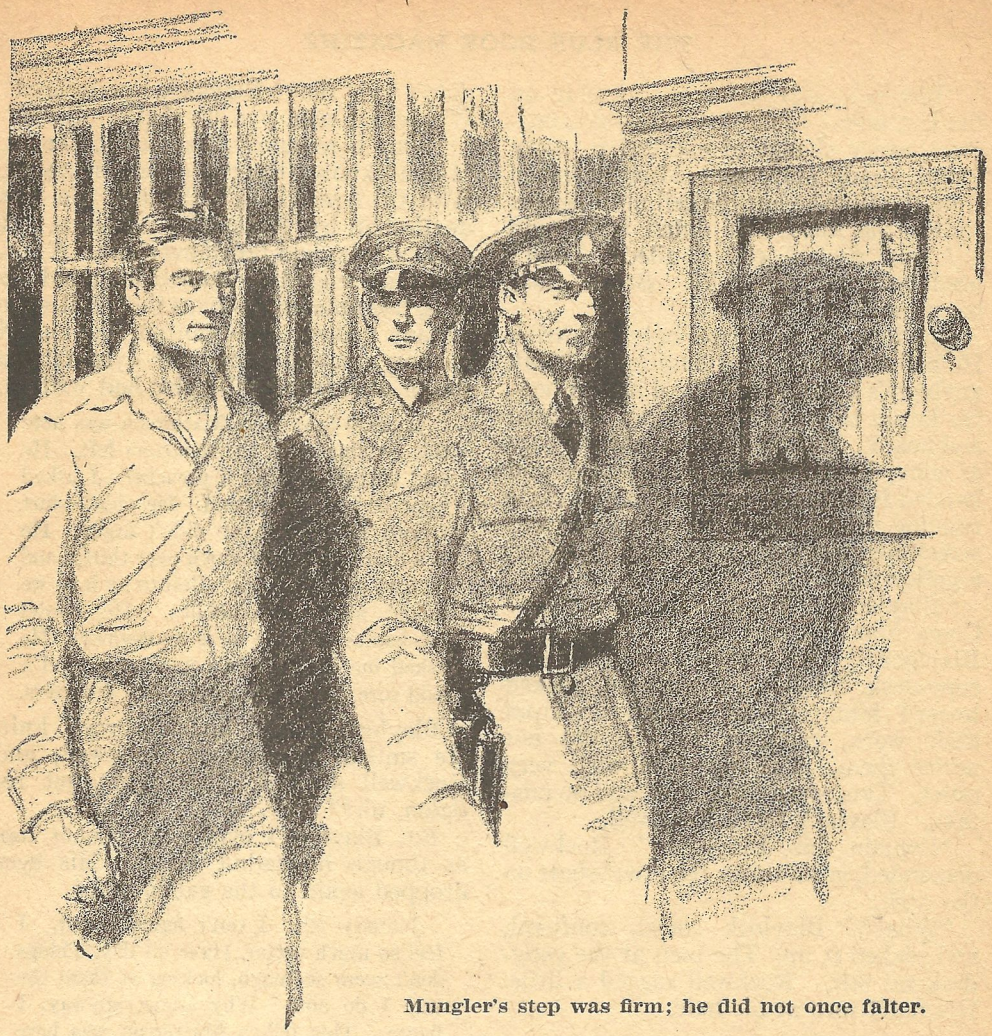
"Is there anything you wish to say?" His voice was trembling.

Mungler's reply was friendly and casual. It sounded impromptu. "Just that I'm innocent," he said slowly. "Not that it matters now; for it doesn't. And don't feel badly about this. You are doing me a greater service than you think." His eyes were not in the least cynical. They were strangely soft. "I thank you, all of you, for your kindnesses to me."

HE stopped talking; Miles stepped forward with the hood. The prisoner shook his head, then moved it slightly and gazed for one brief instant beyond the warden, toward the door.

"All right?" he cried suddenly. "All right?" Each was a question. Blaylock, following his eyes, saw no one. When he looked back to Mungler, a pleased smile had spread over Mungler's face.

The smile was still there a moment later when Miles dropped his hand and the executioner threw the switch. The body stiffened, caught in convulsive reflexes, but still the smile remained. Then came the final forward straining and the



Mungler's step was firm; he did not once falter.

motionless sag as the muscles quivered and set.

The liquor that Blaylock had swallowed came up bitter in his throat. His head spun, but it seemed to him that he could still see Mungler's face and the smile upon it. . . .

Blaylock hurried from the room before the doctor pronounced Mungler dead. He went to the warden's apartment, telephoned the *Courier* and turned in his story. As he finished, Miles entered. Without a word he disappeared, and returned with a manuscript. It was Mungler's diary. On top was a notation stating the address of the dead man's mother. The warden surrendered it with a word about payment, which Blaylock assured him would be met promptly.

He didn't read the diary on the way back to the office. In the first place, he was driving. Secondly, he was shaky from what he had just seen. Thirdly, he was striving to clarify some queer and unexpected thoughts that already were knocking about in his brain. It was as though something he had once known and forgotten was now returning. Beyond glancing at the first few pages and noting that they had not been rewritten, but expressed Mungler's early bitterness, he paid no attention to the manuscript. Speed just now was important. The *Courier* had paid a generous price for the diary, and the essence of its value lay in its quick publication. Mungler's own story, Blaylock supposed, at all events would be but a repetition of what he had already heard from Mungler's own lips or guessed at from observation of him.

AS he entered the city-room, Rockwell met him and snatched the manuscript from his hand. After a hasty glance at it, the managing editor passed it to the shop foreman, who had been waiting with him. That man began tearing it apart into "takes" for the linotype operators, even as he raced for the composing-room. Rockwell cried in excited jubilation:

"Blaylock, give us a column more on the last mile. Make it first person, intimate, every change of expression, every sound, every movement Mungler made from the time he left the cell until he was feeling the juice. He didn't break, did he? He laughed, eh? Smiled? Didn't need any religion, eh? Break their hearts with it."

Blaylock sat down and began to write. He had no notion of attempting to break anybody's heart, even if he'd known how. He began to write about what he'd seen and heard. He had finished nearly a page of copy, jerked it from the machine and handed it to Clark, when Rockwell came running from his private office. He was screaming, waving a long strip of paper, a galley-proof.

"Blaylock! What have you done? Come here! Come here! Good God, Blaylock!" He leaned heavily on the copy-desk. Blaylock, bewildered, walked toward him. Others looked up from their work, grinning, but he did not notice them. The big room went very quiet. This was a carpet-call and no mistake. Blaylock faced Rockwell.

"Explain this, Blaylock!" Rockwell demanded, as he threw the proof-sheet on the desk.

"What?" Blaylock asked, confused, and picked it up. The men at the copy-desk sat stiff. Rockwell sagged a little. His hand tore at his hair.

BLAYLOCK looked down at the portion of Mungler's diary set in type. He seemed oblivious of everything else.

Rockwell exploded:

"I told you, didn't I, that if Mungler changed his mind, got religion, we wanted it, wanted it to spread all over the paper. I told you plain. You said you'd watch for that. Why didn't you, Blaylock? What the devil's the matter? What was the matter, Blaylock?" Rockwell's tone dropped to a whisper. He was so mad he couldn't talk. So he stopped talking and crouched.

"Mungler didn't get religion," Blaylock said.

"The hell he didn't! A preacher named Masterson came to see him, two or three times, maybe more, and when Masterson got through with him, Mungler saw the light. He says so himself, right here in his diary. Didn't you read the diary?"

"I didn't have time," Blaylock blurted.

"Didn't have time! God! With half the papers in the country taking time and spending money on this story—you didn't have time! Blaylock, you're fired! Why did I send you up there? *Why?*"

"Wait a minute," Blaylock broke in. "I don't know what you're talking about. Wait till I read this." Blaylock now was unaffected by Rockwell's violence. A curious calm had fallen over him. A certain knowledge had entered his mind, he says, had entered easily as though it were already known but forgotten, like an old memory reawakened. His eyes fell to the printed words Mungler had written.

> January 6th: John Masterson was here this evening after the reporters left. He said he isn't exactly a preacher—I asked him; he is just a friend. He didn't start talking religion, so we didn't argue. He is a nice fellow, not much over thirty, and he uses good English. Before he left, we talked about automobiles. He knows mechanics. Maybe he is an engineer. He asked me if he could come again, and I said sure. He is no worse than reporters.

Blaylock looked up, his brows knit. He smiled vacantly at Rockwell, and Rockwell snarled: "He didn't get religion, uh?"

But Blaylock's eyes were vacant too, as though he hadn't heard. His eyes dropped again to the galley-proof.

> January 7th. I can't figure it out. I feel so much better. Have all day. Things don't seem so tough, looking at them the way I do now. Why argue, anyway, I figure. This fellow Masterson was here twice today. I tried to pin him down. I know he's some kind of preacher, but it doesn't seem to make any difference. I asked him what sect he belonged to. He said none. The second time he came, I was writing the letter to Mom. He guessed what it was, and told me to go ahead and finish it. I asked him again about being a preacher, and if he had a church. He said no, but he admitted preaching outdoors sometimes. So he must be one of these missionaries like the ones who used to be over on Quincy Street when I was a kid. I asked him if he belonged to any of those organizations, and he said not officially.
>
> Anyway, I have taken a liking to Masterson. His talk lifts you up some way or other, and makes you feel good. He seems to know all about my case, really know about it. Not like a reporter. He seems to know what I know, that I didn't kill Ruth. Gore did. But Masterson said he wouldn't condemn any man. That's why I'm so sure he's a preacher. Why doesn't he have a church?

Blaylock's eyes went to the last paragraph. This began with the date of January 8th—today. Mungler had written:

> I know now. Masterson is a preacher, and a wonder. It is not so much what he says, as how it makes you feel. All day I have been on top of the world. What's the difference if I am going to die? I ask myself if I am crazy, but I know I am not.

That was the end of the galley-proof. But just as Blaylock finished reading it, a copy-boy rushed in with the next one, the last. Blaylock snatched it from the lad's hand.

> I would not have missed this for anything. I want no reprieve. I would refuse one. There is too much that is wonderful in what is coming. I will ask them to hurry it. I want to go tonight. Because I know now who John Masterson is: He is Jesus Christ. I know it. Christ was here once in the form of a man. Now He is here again. He has told me not to be afraid, that He will be with me. He says death is easier than anybody thinks, that imagination is what makes it bad.

ROCKWELL grabbed the proof-sheet from Blaylock, and his voice taunted. "No preacher, eh? Blaylock didn't get religion? You didn't miss the best beat of the whole story?"

He commenced to read hurriedly.

Blaylock wasn't listening. For a moment he stood as if in a trance. Then he seized a telephone and called Warden Miles. When he got the connection, he began abruptly:

"Did you see Masterson, who called on Mungler several times?"

"Who is this?" Miles asked, not recognizing the voice.

Blaylock repeated his own name mechanically, *"Courier,"* he added. He heard Rockwell's laughter, bitter and accusing, yet he did not hear it. Rockwell was picking up the phone-extension.

"Masterson?" Miles was repeating. "Masterson?"

"A preacher—"

"Britton—Morehouse?"

"No," Blaylock said. "Masterson. A slim fellow, dark. He was in Mungler's cell, to see him."

"There was no preacher," the warden asserted. "Mungler asked us to keep them out, and we did. Nobody named Masterson ever visited Mungler's cell."

"Nor the death-chamber?"

"No. You were there. You got all the names."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. You remember what I as good as told you, Mr. Blaylock? Mungler was crazy. Fear drove him crazy. He got a kind of religion along with it—"

Blaylock hung up. Rockwell stood with head atilt. He had caught most of what the warden said. He looked at Blaylock a long time, and his eyes grew thoughtful. He began combing his red hair with his long fingers.

"Go back and finish your story," he said finally. "Nobody was there. Mungler was crazy. We can't blame you for not seeing it. We couldn't print it, anyway. We want facts—how he smiled, how he—"

"He wasn't crazy," Blaylock interrupted.

"—looked on the way to the chair. You're good at facts. Maybe you better—"

Rockwell stopped. For the first time, Blaylock looked around at the rest of us. Then his eyes came back to Rockwell.

"He wasn't near as crazy as we are," he said, talking faster than anyone had ever heard him talk. "There *was* a Masterson. I should have known before, but I didn't. I was too busy looking for facts. But He was there. *I saw Him.*"

"You—saw—this Masterson?" Rockwell's eyes narrowed.

"Yes," said Blaylock softly. "In the corridor. As plain as I see you. And He spoke to me. Why not? There are millions of people who believe He was here once. There are millions more who believe He'll come again. Can all these be wrong? Maybe He comes oftener than we think."

Blaylock turned, and walked with peculiar tensity toward his desk, sat down, then looked up and met Rockwell's gaze.

"You said a column—facts on how he went to the chair—"

Rockwell nodded. After a moment he walked slowly into his office.

FROM that day to this, he has never questioned Blaylock about a matter of reported fact. Nor have we of the copy-desk ever deleted one. Steve Blaylock is uncannily accurate. He writes nothing that cannot be thrice proved.

And this too is a fact as accurate as the numerical one of the five hundred dollars paid to Mrs. Mungler for the diary that never was printed.

The Money

By SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

Illustrated by Lyle Justis

NOBODY remembers the fighter who doesn't quite make the grade. Mention the name of Student Smith nowadays, and only a few sports-writers will place him —which is just as well, I guess. The Student never got quite to the top. Yet I often wonder whether anybody in the world could have licked him. I doubt it. . . .

Condition, Inc., was just about closing the evening when he first showed up. The Late Business Men's Class had strung out into Broadway, still sweating behind the ears. The boss and I were going through some sour accounts when a polite voice with a touch of foreign accent made us look up.

"Is instruction in boxing given here?"

"Right," I said.

The late visitor came forward. He was rangy and thin and ruddy brown—handsome, too, in his evening clothes. I'd have set him down as a feather, not more than eighteen years old. Wrong on both counts.

"I should like to go into training," he said to me.

"For what?" the boss asked.

"The prize-ring," said the lad. "Do you box, yourself?"

That burned me up. "You're talking to Terry McShane, retired, undefeated world's champion, in case you're interested," I told him.

"How do you do, Mr. McShane?" he said. "May I present myself? Sylvester Smith." Manners like an ambassador.

"Syl for short, if you train here," I told him. Condition, Inc., is a class concern, all right, but there's such a thing as too much dog. "This is no fraternity house."

"University man?" he said quickly. His big dark quiet eyes were taking in the Intercollegiate Boxing Trophy that Terry made me keep on the top of my desk.

"Right the first time," I said.

"I should like you to train me."

"That depends. Just what are you aiming at?"

"The championship."

"Nuts!" said Terry, and laughed.

"With special reference to developing a defence," he went on as if he hadn't heard. "I wish to avoid injury as far as possible."

"I see," I said. "You want to be a champion without getting hurt."

"Yes."

"Why don't yuh play chess?" Terry blurted out.

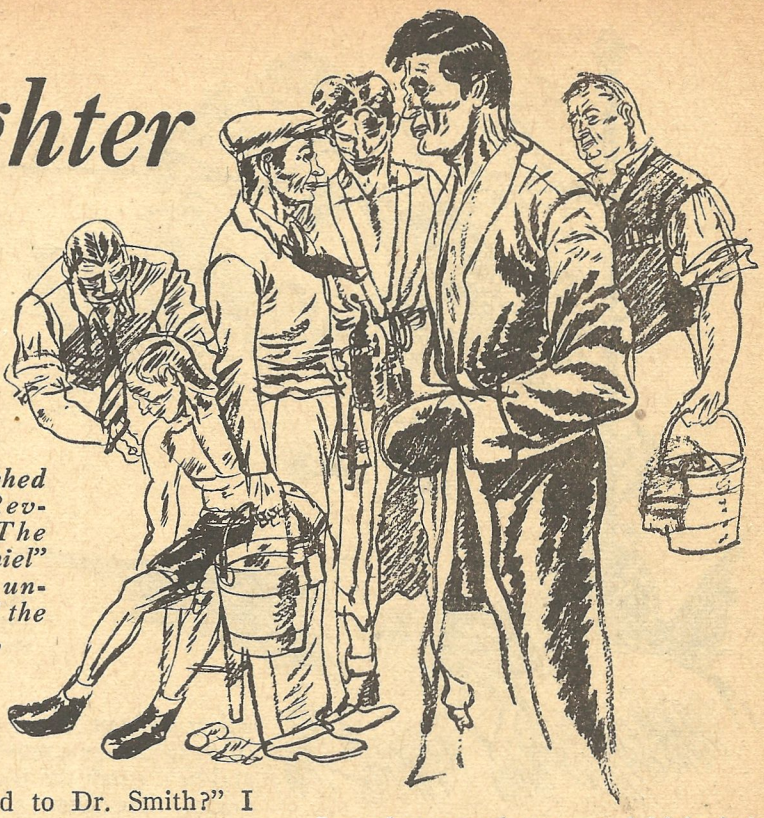
"There is, I understand, no money in it," he answered seriously.

"Oh! It's the cash you're after!" I said.

He seemed faintly surprised. "Certainly. And apropos—" He laid a check on the desk.

When I saw the signature, it was my turn to be surprised—and not faintly, either. The name was Millward Smith. As I was working my way through medical school, I knew plenty about Dr. Millward Smith. Some said he was crazy. Others touted him as one of the great geniuses of his time. Either way, the whole scientific world had both ears cocked for whatever came out of his biological-research foundation down under the Equator.

Fighter



The distinguished author of "Revelry" and "The Godlike Daniel" gives us an unusual story of the prize-ring.

"Are you related to Dr. Smith?" I asked the boy.

"He is my guardian."

"You'll need one!" Terry barked.

The kid's manner rasped him. Yet it didn't strike me as being fresh or snooty. It was natural to him to be serious and polite and formal. I edged the check along for Terry to see. The name didn't impress him, but the figure did. It was five hundred dollars.

"Okay," said Terry. "Take him over, Ken." He went out.

"I am Ken Kessler," I said to the boy.

"So I surmised; I have a letter for you."

IT was from a former classmate of mine who was doing field work in ethnology with the Millward Smith bunch, four weeks deep in the jungle from anywhere. It told me something about the bearer, though I could have stood more. Young Smith (which wasn't his real name) had a vagabond Spanish naturalist for a father, and a mother who belonged to one of those mysterious "white Indian" tribes, still almost unknown, from the unexplored forests south of the Orinoco. Both parents had been swept away in flood. Millward Smith picked up the boy when he was ten years old, educated him in Europe, and practically adopted him. He was specializing in half a dozen sciences, and was pointed to carry on the work after his guardian.

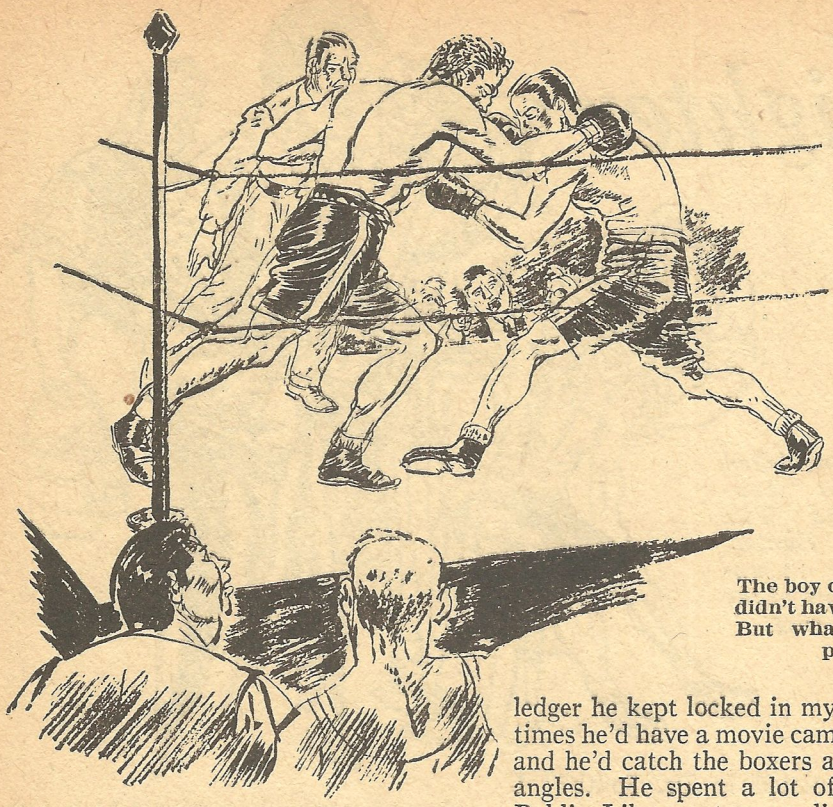
Just what turned a top-notch biologist's thought to the box-fight game as a money proposition, the letter neglected to state; and I never did find out. I doubt whether the boy himself knew. It was enough for him that the old man needed the cash for some particular project; he was there to carry out orders. To him, Millward Smith was a mixture of father and saint; and no wonder. From all I hear, he was a pretty swell old bird, at that. The letter said that there would be resources to finance the experiment, and went on:

The two Smiths have some theories of muscle and nerve technic which they think applicable to boxing. Sylvester will doubtless tell you more of this—if he feels like it.

Theories, eh? That made no hit with me. Theorists in the ring usually last about two rounds of their first and last fight before some tough realist proves up on 'em with a sock to the button. I didn't want to discourage the boy by telling him this, though. I asked him:

"How long are you going to be with us, Syl?"

"As long as is necessary." To win the championship, he meant! "But I must return for several months each year to the Foundation. That is my life work. This, you comprehend, is merely incidental."



The boy couldn't hit; he didn't have the strength. But what a show he put on!

"Some incident, it'll be," I told him.

Syl reported for work on a Monday. When he stepped on the scales, I thought they'd gone haywire. I had checked him for a feather. He wasn't even a lightweight; he was a welter. One hundred and forty pounds of leather-covered steel. He was built so loose he was almost double-jointed. Although he was broader than he had looked in his street clothes, you could see there was plenty of room for growth in that deceptive framework.

HE didn't know the rudiments. That was all right, too; so much less for him to unlearn. After a few work-outs, I turned him loose with a class of earnest toilers from the office district, the kind that're sure they'd be serious contenders if they could spare the time from business. What a lot of fun those merry amateurs had, belting him around! Pretty soon, though, he wasn't so easy to hit. Also he developed a snappy left and a utility right. Nothing to dent a wall with, either of 'em, but good enough to dampen the enthusiasm of the cocky boys.

Everything I told him he did without crabbing, and I gave him plenty to do. Besides that, he had his own methods of training. When I wasn't working him, he'd watch the pros that stabled with us, taking notes and making diagrams in a ledger he kept locked in my desk. Sometimes he'd have a movie camera with him, and he'd catch the boxers at all kinds of angles. He spent a lot of time at the Public Library, too, reading up on famous bouts. Pretty soon he began to get a reputation around the place as a wise one on fight facts and records. Bets were referred to him for settlement. The regulars got to calling him the Student. That's how he got his fighting name, Student Smith.

From the start I got the idea that he wasn't really interested in fighting. It was a grind for him, a means to an end. He was patient as a Swede, eager to learn, and a hog for work. But fighting instinct? Not a gleam. One day, though, he came from the library with something that did wake him up. It was an old newspaper account of the mirror stunt that Young Griffo used to spring in barrooms. He was lightweight champ then, way back in the Nineties, and they say there never was his equal for speed and cleverness.

I read the piece.

"What about it?" I said.

"I believe I could do it."

"No harm in trying."

We went down to the dressing-room where there was a full-length glass for the business men to admire their vanishing tummies. A quick young theatrical agent named Whately was getting into his clothes.

"Would you mind standing here behind me, Mr. Whately?" the Student said in his politest manner.

Whately put down his shoe. "Sure," he says.

"If you will pardon me," says the boy, and put on his iron hat and stood, facing the mirror, with his back to Whately. "Now would you be so kind as to try to knock off my hat?"

"Why not?"

"I doubt whether you can do so."

"For a ten-spot."

"Taken. You have three attempts."

They came fast: a left, a right, another left. The lad hardly moved, but the head with the hat wasn't there when the fists whistled by. Whately rubbed his shoulder and paid over the money. A voice at the door said:

"Hey, Pretty! Want another ten?"

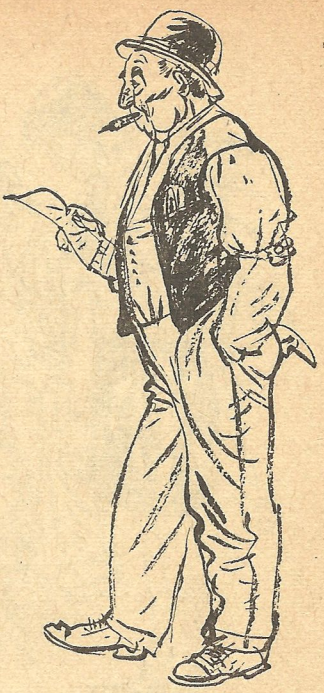
It was Tim Slater, a husky, lunkheaded middleweight fighter, and a mean pup if there ever was one. Syl looked at him for a minute, then took his place before the mirror again.

Tim smashed him over the kidney with a right, and as he was falling, flicked off the hat with a left. Whately and a couple of rubbers pried me off him, but not before I'd spoiled his laugh. In spite of my kick, Syl paid over the money. He said he'd learned something. There was an expression on his face when he said it that I hadn't seen there before.

Everybody around Condition, Inc., was sore about it, and that made Slater extra sore on the Student. I was for throwing Slater out of the gym; and Terry would have done it, I guess, but for the hook-up to Pete Halvey.

Already Pete was figuring as a possible coming champion. He was the worst-looking gorilla that ever scared an opponent into the jitters by glaring at him, cockeyed. He couldn't help the glare. His eyes were not only set at different angles, but they were different in color, and he had a jaw that a sledge would have bounced off. That appearance had no more to do with the real Pete Halvey than if he'd worn ringlets and smirked like Shirley Temple. What a swell guy he was! Straight and square and clean as you'd find in any line, I don't care if it was the church itself. He'd still hold the title, I expect, if he hadn't been killed hauling a cripple out of the collapse of a grandstand at his training-quarters.

WELL, Pete was Tim Slater's half-brother, but you'd never guess it. They couldn't have been more different. Pete never worked at Condition, Inc., but he used to come around once in a while to keep an eye on Tim. Student Smith saw him once and took an instant dislike to him. People often did until they got to know him.



It was time our young hopeful got himself some practical experience, so I took him out on the palooka circuit, working the hick clubs upstate. Four and six rounds—fifty dollars, tops. He lived on milk mainly. Couldn't stand restaurant food. Too much salt. Salt was poison to him. That was his Indian blood. He was a queer bird, all right, but strictly on the level, and a good pal. I came to like him. So did the boys around the gym, all but Tim Slater, and Terry. Terry was on the fence. He couldn't figure the boy at all.

When we got back, he tackled me. "How'd that kid of yours do?"

"All right."

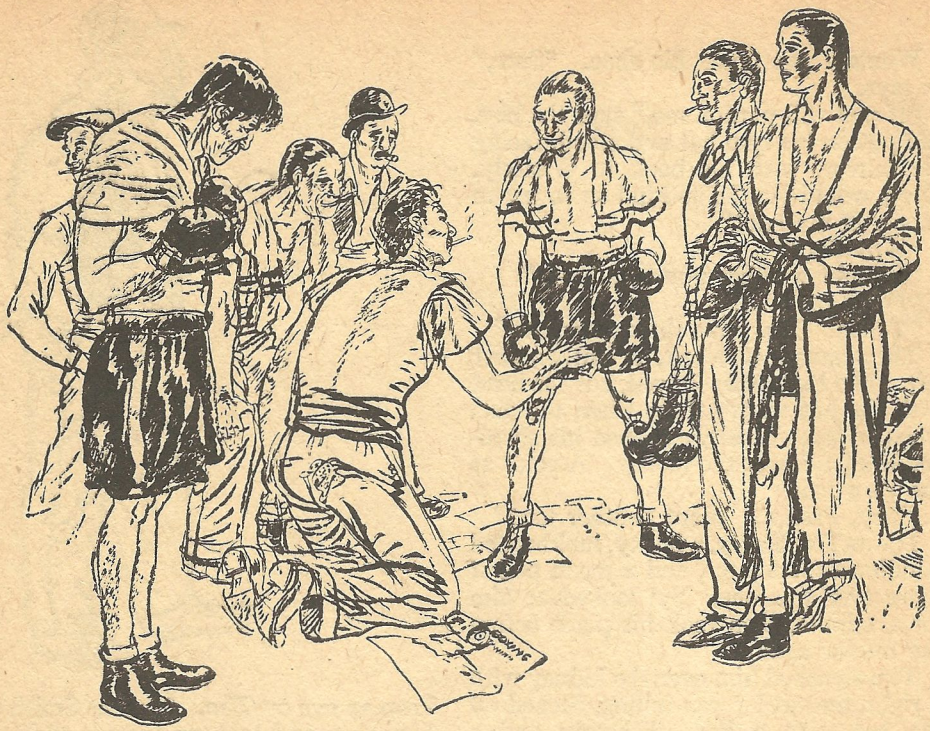
"You gotta show me."

He went through the record I'd kept. It wasn't too hot. A couple of crooked referees had flammed us. The kid had been fouled out once. He'd been back-heeled and rabbit-punched and mustarded. It was rough going in the small-time clubs in those days, and the Student got his share of the dirty work and a little bit more, because he was so gentlemanly and different. But a lot of those bad guys had sprained shoulders from swinging at him when he was six feet away doing a step-dance.

Terry scowled over the list.

"Where's the kayos?"

"We didn't get any."



"Nothing but lousy decisions. Against pushovers, too. No punch, huh? No wallop."

"Give him time."

"Time, huh? Is he good for another five hundred?"

"I wouldn't wonder."

"As long as he pays for the time, he can have it. But what's he getting out of it? Is he stuck on the game?"

"He hates it. He thinks all fighters are crooks. Except you and me," I ended up, getting Terry's expression.

"Then what's he sticking for?"

"Don't faint when I tell you: A hundred grand."

"Oh, yeah? Aint that nice! What's he going to do with it when he gets it?"

NO use in telling him that Syl was going to turn in what he made to an old scientist whose name wouldn't mean a thing, to build a research laboratory a thousand miles away from anywhere. I handed out some dope about a land-development project.

"Uh-huh," says he. "What's he want to do next?"

"Fight Tim Slater."

Terry let out a blat. "And spot him twenty pounds? You're crazy. Tim would beat him in a punch."

"How are you going to beat a man you can't hit, boss?"

"Any man can be hit. I don't care how fast he is."

"Listen, Terry: The Student isn't fast like a man. He's fast like an animal. There's a difference."

Terry took no stock in it. Whatever he thought of Syl as a fighter, the boy was ready money, and he didn't want him ruined. Nix on the Slater match. Then something happened that changed his slant.

Somewhere Tim Slater had picked up a Spanish crack that meant knives and blood where it came from. He was saving it for Syl. Terry and I were in the office the morning he found Syl waiting for a game in No. 2 handball court, and sprung the fighting word on him. I heard his mean cackle, and then Syl's voice with a kind of hiss in it, and I knew something was up. Terry and I lammed out of there quick. Before we got to the door of the court, there was the quick shuffle of feet and a grunt. Something hit the side wall so hard that I swear it bulged out toward us.

"There goes your boy," said Terry—and beat me getting in.

The next thing I saw, he was hauling Tim Slater to his feet. Tim looked dazed. He had his hands pressed over his short ribs. The Student stood near, pretty white. Terry propped Tim in a corner. He turned to the boy.

"So that's what you been keeping in the mothballs, huh?"

Syl didn't say a word. Terry went over to Tim.

"You got what you ast for, didn't yuh?"

"He fouled me!" Tim said. It was just what you'd expect from his sort. "I'll take him on any time."

"Okay, Student?" says Terry.

"Yes."

"I'll get you put on somewhere." He gave Tim a shove. "Now scram!"

IN the six weeks of readying for the bout, the Student trained fast. When they weighed in, he wasn't giving Tim more than seven pounds.

It was a bad fight. Pete Halvey was in his half-brother's corner. I was in Student Smith's.

Tim started in to fight with his elbows in. He hadn't forgotten that body blow. It was easy for our boy to cut patterns in his face with a fast-shooting left, and get away untouched. Tim's punches began to get suspiciously low. About that time they'd changed the local rules so that a fight couldn't be forfeited on a foul, which was right up Tim's alley. Between the fifth and sixth rounds, with points piled up against him, Tim, looking worried and savage, was getting an earful from Halvey. In view of what happened next, it looked bad, for Tim started in the sixth by working close and pumping in both hands 'way low.

Foul? Of course. What could the referee do, though? Warn him? Sure. What of it? There was that lousy rule. Syl was groaning, almost out—only the bell saved him. In his corner he whispered to me between gasps:

"Halvey put him up to that."

I didn't believe it, but it was no time to argue. Afterward I found out that Halvey had been roasting Tim for his low punches in the round before, and threatening to drag him out by the slack of his pants if he didn't lay off it.

Phenomenal footwork carried the Student through the seventh, that and his condition. By the middle of the eighth, he was getting his strength back. Coming up for the ninth, he was all right.

Slater was getting rattled and reckless. Syl kept feinting him higher and higher to protect his slashed-up face. When he had him right, the body-punch shot in, and it was twilight and evening bell and after that the dark, as the poet says. . . . Sure, I took Lit in college.

In the dressing-room my boy said: "I want to fight Halvey."

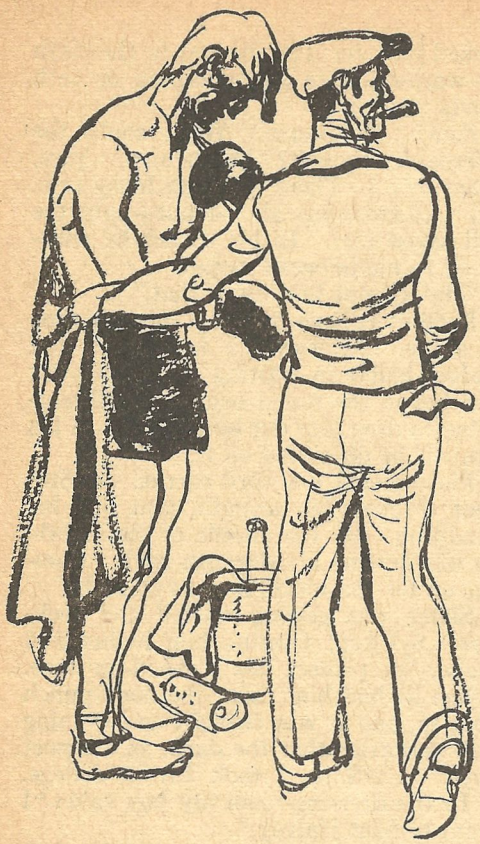
At first I thought it was lightheadedness from the punishment he'd taken. It wasn't. It was hate. For him, Pete and Tim were two of a kind. They represented everything that was dirtiest in the fight game, and you couldn't persuade him that there was anything to choose between them. There was an Indian streak of vengeance and obstinacy in Student Smith. But for him, at one fifty-six, to fly his kite at the most promising heavy in the business, was a laugh. Only you couldn't make him see it that way.

"Wait," he said. "I'll grow."

"You've got a lot of middleweights in front of you," I suggested. "It might be a good idea to clean them up."

He did, too. All but the title-holder. It was all by decisions, though; no kayos. By this time I had got wise to the fact that he wouldn't use his final punch if he could win without it. He was saving it, not taking any chances of giving away his pay-off secret. I'm sure he could have taken the champ in that division. Instead, he packs his trunk, says good-by, and beats it for South America.

WHEN he got back, he was a light heavyweight. It seemed like he could grow to order. I had a hunch that he, or maybe Dr. Millward Smith, knew some



secret of development—diet, or glands, or something.

Now we had it to do all over again in the new class. The competition wasn't too hot, but matches were slower and harder to get. It took us the better part of a year to work up close to the top. Then, when we were all set to match up with the Number 1 man, you know what happened. Sure! Old Man Smith sends for him, and he lams it for the jungle. This time he took back a wad of dough —twelve or fifteen grand—and I heard they'd started the building operations.

WHEN I shook hands with him again five months later, I pretty well knew the answer to my first question.

"One eighty," he said. "I am ready for the Halvey match."

Well as I knew him, it was hard to believe. He was the most deceptive build I've ever seen. Big as he was, he was so rangy that he looked frail, and the way he had with him added to the impression, so modest and polite and sort of shy. It made him seem still like a kid. He was always that to me, and he treated me as if I were his older brother.

Fast? He was faster than ever. Some fighters slow down as they take on weight. Not the Student. And his defensive ability was a sort of genius. In the ring he seemed to know what was coming before it started. It was mind-reading. Or maybe only muscle-reading.

"You're in the army now, kid," I told him. "The heavies are coming big and strong and good this season. You'll have some jobs on your hands before you get to Halvey."

He didn't want to. He wanted Halvey and no one else. But the fact is, we didn't rate Pete yet. He was already established as the probable coming champ; he had the class and the record. He didn't have to fight us until we had more to show.

Not that he was afraid, you understand. He wasn't afraid of anything in the world. He didn't have to be. His ringside weight was now one ninety-five, and he had everything, simply everything. Murder in each mitt, intelligence, unlimited stamina, all the cleverness in the world, and the fighting spirit if ever anyone had it. Terry McShane privately didn't give our boy any chance against him; I wasn't any too confident, myself. But the Student was. For the first time he was impatient under training.

We fought our way to Pete by cleaning up three of the lighter men in the division. Decisions each time. The Student never had to use his killer against any of them. When the Halvey papers were finally signed, we were giving away nearly fifteen pounds, and the odds were two to one against us.

For some time a scaly crimp calling himself Doctor Mestern had been hanging around Condition, Inc., watching Student Smith work, whenever he got a chance. One day he came to my desk.

"I got the Indian sign on your Indian," he said in a husky, whisky voice.

"Yeah?" I said.

"Yeah. I got his number. I got a line on that body-poke of his."

"That's pretty smart," I said. At that, I wasn't sure but what it was smart.

"Is it worth a hundred a week to help him train?"

"Not a hope."

"It might be, to Halvey."

"Take it to him, then, and move quick. We're not buying any blackmail."

No matter how straight a fighter is, he can't keep the crooks off him. A bunch of Philadelphia gangsters were down on Pete Halvey for a lot of money. They were sure-thing bettors, up to any trick from referee-fixing to quiet murder. Not long before, they'd had a stooge feeling

us out for a fix. No dice. But it ought to have made me more leery.

Doc Mestern didn't go to Halvey personally. He knew he'd be liable to get his face pushed in. He went to Gerbinger, the big-shot of the Philadelphia mob. What the consideration was, I naturally wouldn't know; but he sold his duck, all right.

The Student was living in a house up on Morningside Heights that Millward Smith kept for his work when he was in New York. He had a couple of Smith's servants to look after him; and Mestern must have got to one of them with some of that Philadelphia money.

THE day of the match I had dinner at the house. The Student said something about his milk not tasting fresh, but I didn't think anything of it. He was always fussy about his food. On the way over to the arena his stomach turned inside out. One of Gerbinger's men was waiting to get a squint at the boy. He must have been satisfied. The odds jumped before we reached the dressing-room.

What could we do? Syl wouldn't listen to forfeiting. A slug of brandy set him up a little. But he looked like anything but a good proposition when he climbed through the ropes. Pete Halvey was close after us. He came right over to our corner.

"How's everything, kid?" he asked. That gorilla face of his, with its wild, uneven eyes, looked worse when he smiled.

"Fine, thank you," said the Student. Always polite, but he didn't even see the big fellow's outstretched hand.

Pete's expression changed. He had just turned away, when the retching set in again. He whirled around, glaring and doubtful. I wondered whether he hadn't a suspicion.

"What's this?"

"You ought to know," the kid told him.

"Dope," I said in his ear. "That Philadelphia crowd."

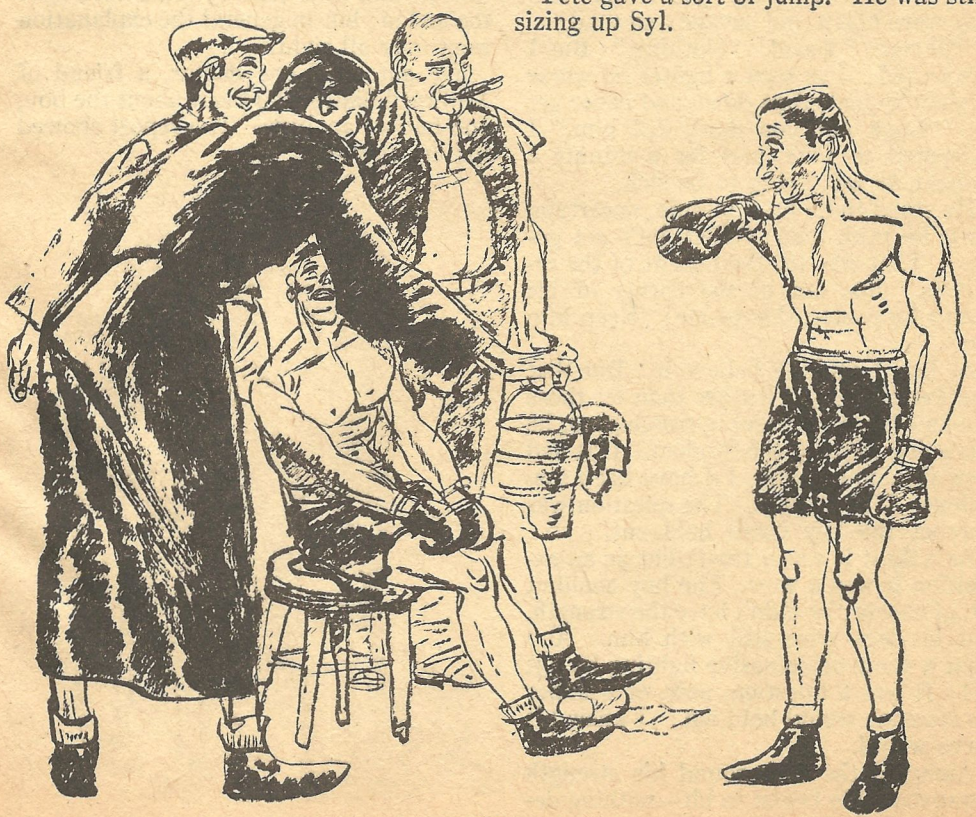
Pete cursed. "You don't believe I had any hand in it, do you?" There was a sort of appeal in the way he said it. He was looking at Syl.

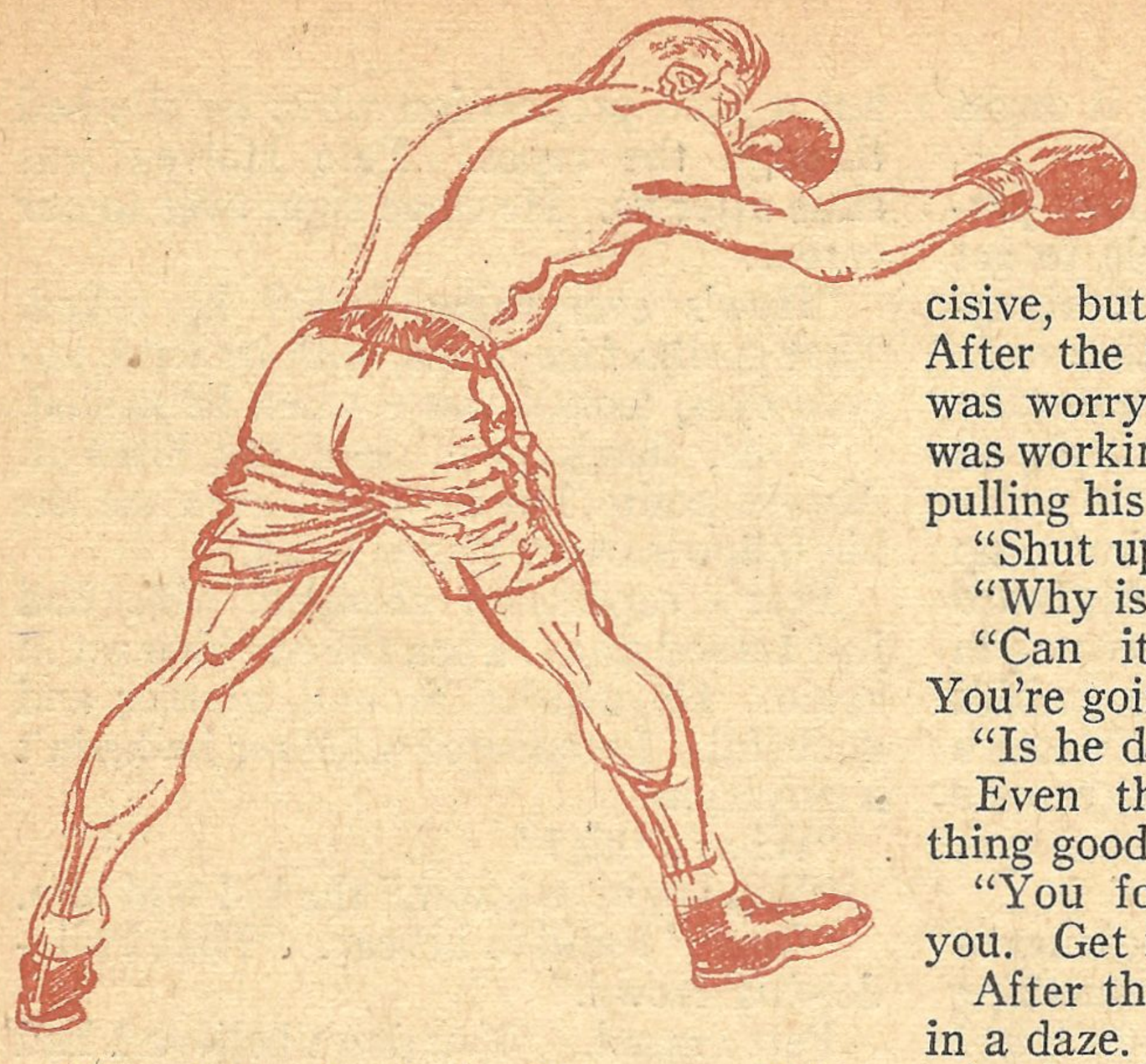
"*I* don't," I said. But the kid never gave Pete a glance.

The crowd was getting edgy. They didn't understand this palaver. The newspaper boys were beginning to rubber. A slick voice below called out:

"A thousand even, Student don't last five rounds."

Pete gave a sort of jump. He was still sizing up Syl.





"You aint going to let him go on?" he muttered to me.

"They'll tear the house down."

The referee came over. Pete jerked his head toward the corner.

"Look at him," he snapped.

"What's wrong?" Delavan asked. He was plenty worried.

Syl put on a grin that would have made a monkey sorry.

"Nothing," he asserted. "I am quite ready." He turned his eyes on me, and they were black and savage and mad.

"All right," I said. "Nothing." But I was scared. I've seen a fighter no worse off than he looked go down and never get up. "Look out you don't kill him," I whispered to Pete, and for a minute I thought *he* was going to be sick.

He stood there for a minute, uncertain. Then he said, loud: "Well, let's get going." That was for the benefit of the reporters. But out of the corner of his mouth he passed this to me: "Keep him away."

At first I couldn't believe it. But that was Pete Halvey. Rather than let those crooks cash in on double-crossing us, he was going to carry the Student. If it had been anyone but him, I'd have been suspicious. Not of Pete. The question was whether the boy could hold out.

As a fight it was a frost; but as an exhibition it was a wow. The boy couldn't hit, of course; he didn't have the strength. But his legs were still with him. And what a show of defensive fighting he put on! It was a question, now, of whether his stomach would hold out: I knew his nerve would.

Along in the fifth round his strength improved. He began to hit—nothing decisive, but he put some marks on Pete. After the round, though, I could see he was worrying over something. While I was working on him, he whispered: "He's pulling his punches."

"Shut up."

"Why is he doing it?"

"Can it. Keep up that footwork. You're going good."

"Is he double-crossing his backers?"

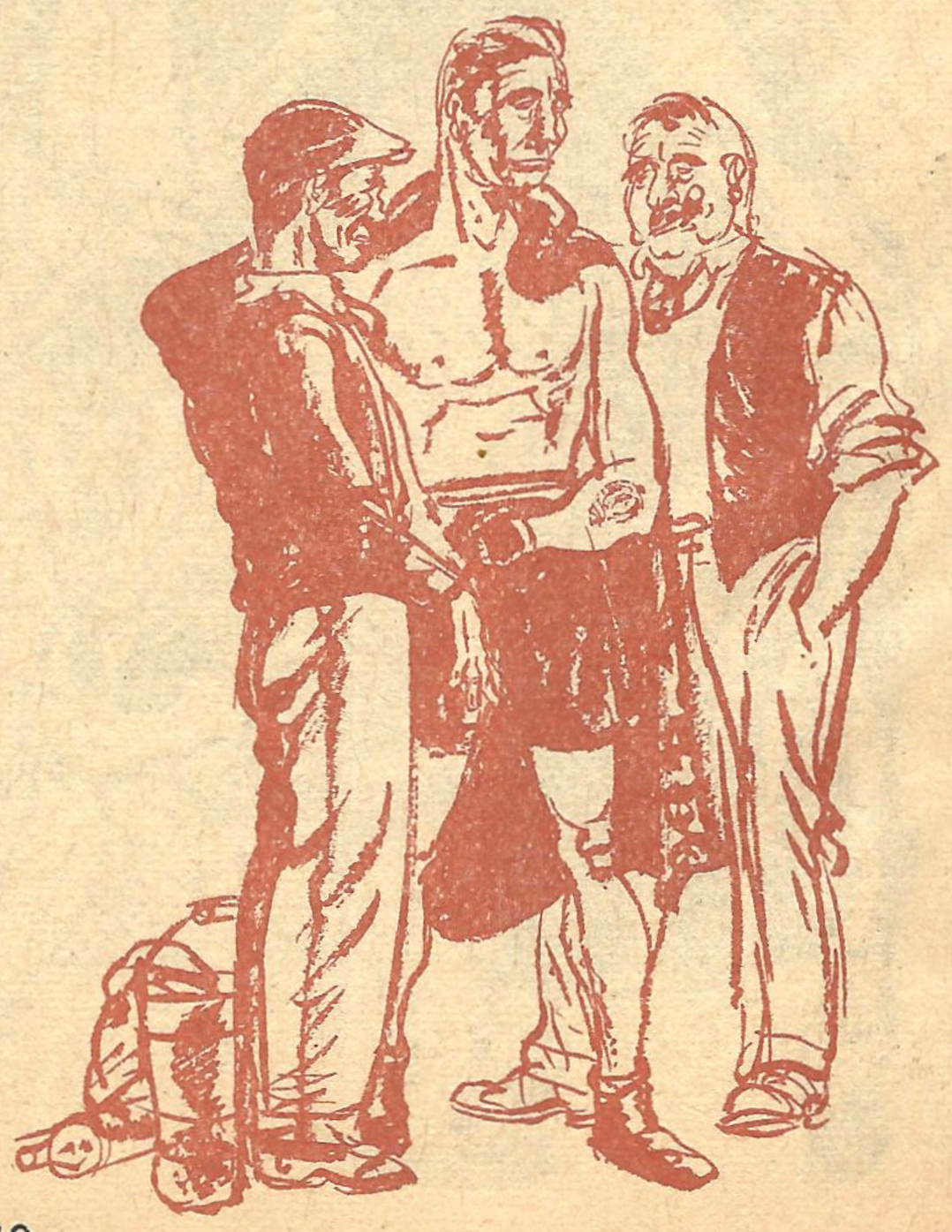
Even then he couldn't believe anything good of Pete. But I was sore.

"You fool!" I said. "He's carrying you. Get in there and make a showing."

After that, he was like a man fighting in a daze. But his cleverness was so instinctive that he got away with it.

IT was a draw. What else could it be? How that mob did squawk! That was all right, though. Halvey's reputation was good enough to cover the thing. No sports-writer would be brash enough to try and pin anything on him. We gave out that the Student had eaten some spoiled cantaloupe for dinner that evening. One fresh columnist commented that he and Pete Halvey must have split the melon; but in general the explanation went over all right.

We got an A-one doctor, a friend of Millward Smith who knew about the boy, and had an analysis. The report showed sodium amytol.



"What's that?" Terry McShane asked. "Knockout drops?"

"Not precisely," the expert said. "The dose was designed to act upon the subject after he entered the ring and retard his reactions. Stupefy him, in fact."

"Why didn't it?"

"I believe there is some racial allergy to salts. It set up an acute poisoning, and his stomach rejected it."

So the luck was with us that far. To be on the safe side, we had shipped the boy off to the hospital. One of the first people to see him was Pete Halvey. I met him as he was coming out.

"That's a pretty swell boy of yours, Ken," he said.

So then I wanted Syl's angle. "What do you think of Halvey now?"

"I'll never fight him," he said.

"Sure, you'll fight him. That's business."

But all I could get out of him was the same; he'd never fight Pete. The Student never said anything he didn't mean, and after he'd said it, he stuck to it. . . .

As soon as he was strong enough, he sailed for the Orinoco. The bluff was that it was for his health. But I knew it was to duck the return match. All the newspapers were plugging for it. So was Pete. Syl wrote that he'd take it up when he got back. . . . Well, he had to do something. He was still far short of that hundred grand. He had to fight somebody to make it up. If it wasn't Halvey, who would it be?

Here was the set-up in the heavyweight division when the Student checked in again at Condition, Inc. Red Hearn, the titleholder, was an accident. He'd got there by a fluke, and he was staying there by a stall. It was a cinch that any one of three or four contenders could take him if they could get him into the ring. So his manager kept yelling for an elimination series. Let the challengers take one another on, and Red would fight the final winner.

The pick of the field were Halvey and a beefy bruiser named Croker Odlum. He could hit, and was a glutton for punishment. When Pete was almost unknown, he had fought a ten-round draw with Odlum. Now he was fifteen pounds heavier; and Odlum, who was nobody's fool, wasn't picking any more of that if he could find something easier. Student Smith looked a lot easier. At one eighty-five, he'd be giving Odlum twenty-five pounds. The match had been put up to the Student by radio, and he'd grabbed at it. It was an out for him, so that he wouldn't have to answer Pete's challenge if it came.

Who should turn up again after our boy's return but "Doctor" Mestern. I didn't let on that we were leery of him.

"Do you think the Student can take Croker Odlum?" was his opening.

"Surest thing you know."

He pulled down his fish-mouth. "He wasn't so hot against Halvey."

"You can't expect a boy to fight on rotten melon. The Student's got a sensitive stomach."

"He needs a medical man to look after him."

"Maybe you're right," I agreed. "Are you tied up?"

I knew he was. I knew he was tied up tight with that crooked push.

"No," he said. "No; I aint tied up. Not for this fight."

So we made a dicker. Mestern was to be in charge of diet and general condition. Pretty soon after that, the betting odds took a jump. A lot of Odlum money was showing. By that I knew that the Doc was set to double-cross us.

FOR every double-cross there's a double-double. Nobody was to know about ours but Terry, Syl and myself. But the boy insisted on passing the word to Pete, so he could get a piece of the money. He did, too, at sweet odds. At dinner before the bout, when the Student's pitcher of milk came in, I poured it over Mestern's head, and we threw him and the butler into an upstairs room with a guard at the door, and were on our way.

Well as I thought I knew the Student, I'd never have believed that he could put on a show like what followed. When he crawled through the ropes, his eyes were queer and stary. He gawped at the referee while he was giving instructions.

"I beg your pardon. I'm not sure that I understand," he said. It was so well done that I was almost scared, myself.

Some front-row freshy yelled: "What! *Again?*" Then the bell rang.

Whether Odlum was in on the Mestern trick I wouldn't know. It doesn't matter, anyway. He had his instructions. In he came, swinging hard and loose and plenty. Good enough dope against a sick man. But all of a sudden the Student had stopped looking sick. He slipped the big fellow a couple of times so slick that only the ropes stopped him. Over in his corner they were getting on now. There came a yip from them:

"Watch yourself, Croker!"

It was no good. That freight-car was set for a certain pace, and he was too dumb to change. He made another avalanche rush. His body was spread wide as the Student ducked and brought both hands in hard—and there was two hundred and ten pounds of Odlum asleep on the floor. The crowd was pretty near as stunned as he was.

BY any kind of logic, Halvey was next. The newspapers were yelling for the match. Red Hearn was sitting pretty in Hollywood, waiting to be put out by the survivor. Would the Student listen? Not with a tin ear. He'd fight Hearn. He'd fight Odlum again. He'd fight Gundle or Schwartz or Sadowski or Sailor Mackey or Gargantua the Great, or John L. Sullivan's ghost. . . . But he wouldn't fight Pete Halvey.

Of course it was all cockeyed for Pete to come and see him personally. Heavyweight contenders are supposed to stay apart and snarl at each other. But Pete was no Emily Post. He made his own rules. So there he was, after dinner one evening, thanking our boy for making him a nice winning on the Odlum bout.

"You and me next," he said. "When'll it be?"

Syl put on his politest expression. "Sorry," he said.

"What d'yuh mean, sorry? Don't be a sap. We're a natural. We'll draw a quarter of a million gate."

"Sorry. I'm not going to fight you."

"Have a heart, kid," growled Terry; but Syl only shook his head.

I trotted out the best argument I could think of. "You're still nearly thirty grand shy, Syl." All it got me was another pig-headed, "Sorry."

Pete scratched his head. "What's the answer, kid? Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"Kid, you're a cockeyed liar."

Syl grinned back at him. "All right, I am a liar."

"Come clean. Do you think you can beat me?"

"I will ask you another: Do you think I can hit you?"

"Sure. You're clever. I've been hit before."

"I can knock out anyone I can hit."

"You got to prove it to me."

The boy studied for a minute. "Would you come into the next room?" he said.

THE four of us went to the place that Millward Smith used for a private laboratory when he was at home. There was apparatus, and diagrams on the wall, and in a corner a manikin with a body made of different kinds of rubber, representing the muscles. Underneath were scarlet lines and coils, nerve traceries. Syl drew the figure out on the floor.

"Do you know anything of the solar-plexus blow, so-called?" he asked.

"Didn't Fitzsimmons knock out Corbett with that one?" I said.

"Yes. It was more or less accidental. A chance blow. Fitzsimmons had the luck to land it when Corbett's abdominal muscles were flexed in a certain way. Have you heard of any other match being won by that particular blow?"

"Corbett-McCoy," said Terry. "But there was something queer about that one."

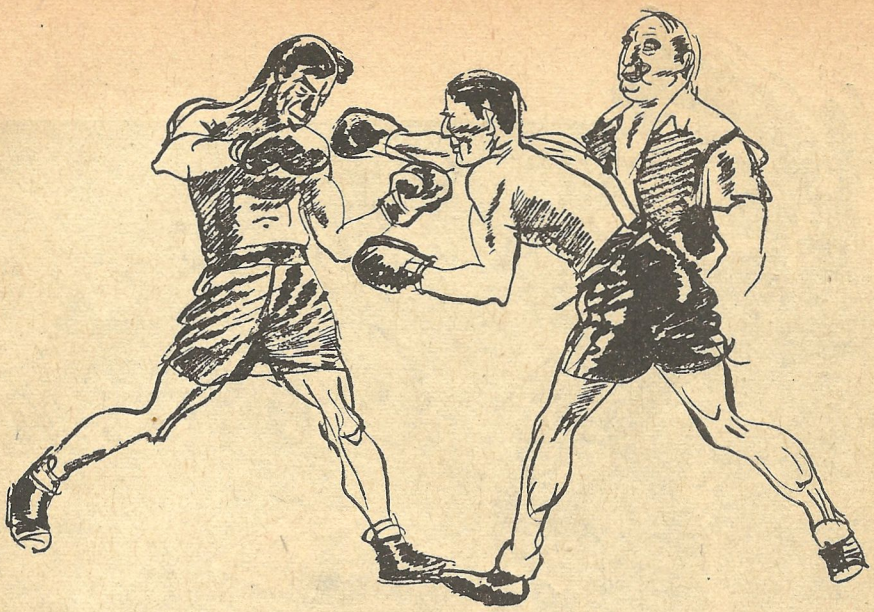
"Exactly. And no other example on the records. Why?"

"You're the professor," I told him. "Why, yourself?"

"Because normally the muscles give safe protection to that nerve ganglion." He put his finger on a network of red lines. "I have analyzed five postures in which the protection is inadequate, even against the impact of so moderate a blow as my body-jab. Sooner or later I can maneuver an opponent into the proper position. It is only a question of my preserving an impregnable defence until the opening is offered."

Pete's jaw dropped. "You're putting me wise to this?"

"Why not? You could easily have beaten me in our former fight."



"Sure. When you were poisoned. I don't fight that way."

"I should have as great an advantage over you if we were matched again."

Pete looked stumped. "You're throwing away a world's championship, kid."

"The championship, *per se,* means nothing to me. My interest is purely financial."

At that I had a flash. "Listen, you two: Red Hearn is holding out for the elimination."

"Yes."

"He's got to come through and take on whichever of you two wins."

"Right."

"And it's a pipe that either of you can flatten him."

"Yes." That was unanimous, too.

"Okay. Pete, you want that title."

"I can use it in my business."

"And Syl, you want the cash."

"Twenty-eight thousand, five hundred dollars." He had it pat.

"Right, okay, and Q. E. D. We'll have the elimination here and now, and painlessly. Heads or tails decides which of you forfeits to the other. The survivor licks Red Hearn and splits the purse. If Syl lands the title, he retires and leaves it to Pete. If it's Pete, he carries on. How about it?"

IT was airtight. Terry elected himself, as former champ, to toss the dime. It came down tails for Pete. I've always thought it was a laugh that a world's championship should have been decided in a scientist's laboratory. . . .

The Student helped train Pete; and Red didn't last ten rounds against him. No; he didn't use the Student Smith jab. He didn't need it.

Student Smith went back to his jungle and never came out again. Not under that moniker. He took his winnings with him, and the laboratory was finished. It isn't doing so badly. Every now and then an announcement comes from it. I suppose it's reckoned the most important outpost of the scientific world.

And the Student? The last time I saw him was at Pete Halvey's funeral. It was one of the biggest and, I guess, about the saddest funeral New York has ever seen. At the grave somebody jogged my elbow. It was Minton Masters, the columnist.

"See that bird on the other side of the grave? The big, stringy man with the beard? Know who he is?"

"Who?" I asked, just to be obliging.

"That's Roberto Carrenos, the authority on tropical biology. I had a tip he was flying to New York in a special plane. You've heard of him?"

"Yes," I said.

"He must have known Pete. That would be funny, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

"What's got him? He's crying!"

"What the hell of it?" I said.

He stared at me. Then he whistled.

"And they say that fighters are as hard-boiled as gossip columnists!" he said.

So I expect he was on. But he never printed it in his column.

A CORRECTION

Through a most regrettable error, the authorship of "The Brumby," on page 190 was wrongly credited. Dr. Donald Thomson is the distinguished anthropologist who consented to give us that vivid account of a scientist's adventure in a remote Australian desert.

A young newspaper man finds a murder-mystery and an exciting night aboard a yacht off Florida.

THE evening sun was hot, the fishing very bad; and the little waves on the inland waterway gave the anchored rowboat a lulling motion. But Sam Robbins, drooping on the 'midship thwart, couldn't get off to sleep. It wasn't because his sagging chin kept hitting the unfriendly metal of the deputy sheriff's shield pinned inside his shirt. It was because Innis Barr, his Northern friend, kept talking.

"Name one reporter who has ever risen to be owner and publisher of a newspaper," Innis Barr said. "Name one! Just *one!* You can't do it! Why? Because there isn't any. It can't be done!"

Sam Robbins opened his eyes slightly. "Well, if it cain't be done, what're you-all so wrought up about? You-all are a reporter, and maybe the Colusa County *News* is a newspaper—sort of. . . . Does your hook need another strip o' mullet on it, maybe?"

Innis Barr reeled in violently, had a look at his bait and cast his line over into the shadow of the little mangroves along the bank. But he kept on talking.

"Five hundred dollars. Five hundred! Where would a real newspaper man get five hundred dollars?"

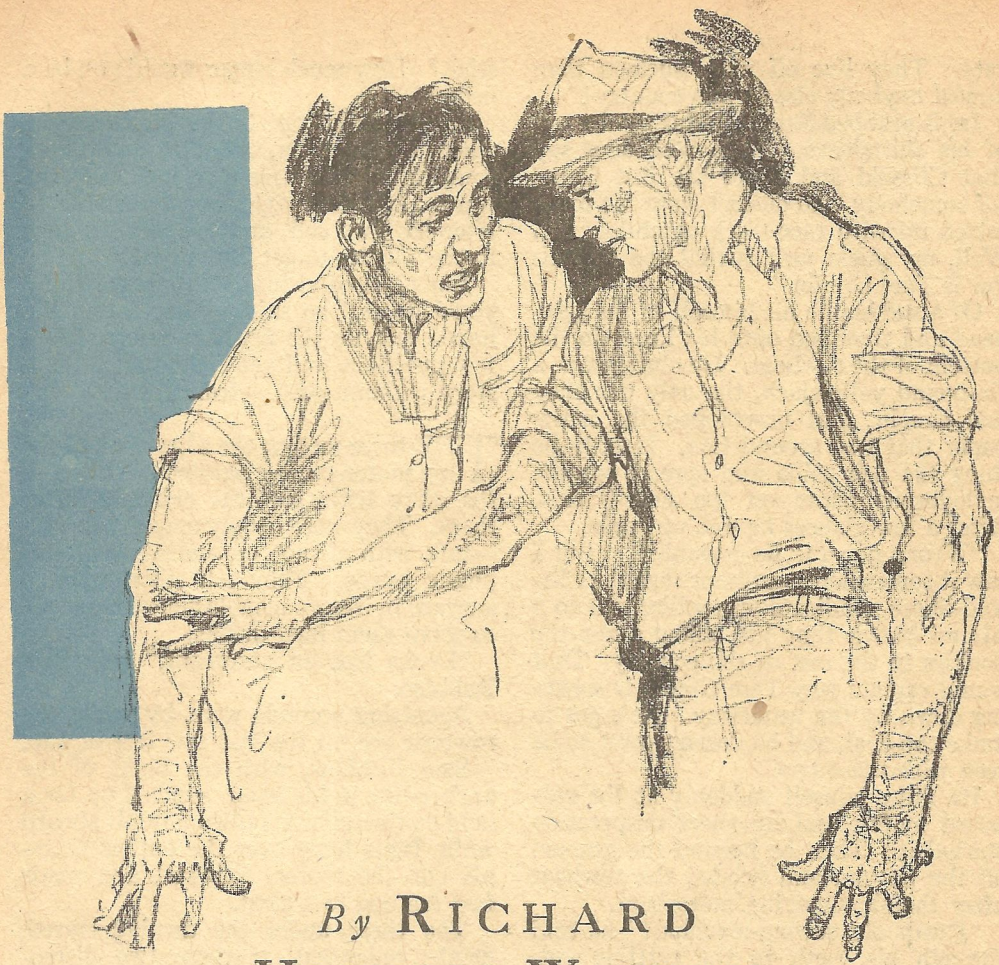
"Don't know," muttered Sam. He eyed an approaching motor-cruiser with sleepy indifference.

"Yet for a measly five hundred dollars —besides the debts and bills, of course— I could take ownership of that little sheet and make it hum."

"Only thing that hums in Florida is insects," Sam Robbins said. "That's why I come down here from up north in Geo'gia."

"Instead of being a respected publisher in Florida, Sam, I've got to head north right now, in February, and get a job covering police—just for the lack of five hundred lousy, unimportant dollars!"

"That sounds right disrespectful to me," Sam said. "Five hundred's mo' dollars than I ever saw piled up in one place, an' there's others like me—a powerful plenty of 'em. Besides, the Colusa County *News* is run down into a knothole. Me an' the sheriff drag it off some pore fellow's neck for the bank eve'y so often."



By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

He sagged again.

"Better reel in," said Innis, looking over his shoulder. "That big motorboat's crowding this side. They're afraid of running aground by that bank."

The big white cruiser, almost top-heavy enough to be called a houseboat, was crawling over almost on top of the rowboat. Her name, for some reason, was the *Ariel's Wing,* Innis Barr noted. At the wheel a fat man in uniform, complete with four broad gold stripes, was gazing suspiciously at the caved-in bank.

Another man, with a blunt nose and the powerful jaw of a barracuda, walked to the bow to speak to them:

"How much water—past that wash-out?"

Innis Barr looked up at him with dawning recognition.

"Channel's been dredged," Innis told him. "Take it easy."

The boat came on.

"Know who that is?" Innis said to Sam Robbins. "That's Tam Greffin, one of the biggest restaurant men in New York."

"Down this way, eatin'-place owners don't have yachts," Sam said.

"I'd say Tam Greffin could afford a yacht that would use that boat as a tender. Maybe if I were a restaurateur instead of a newspaper man I would have five hundred dollars to buy the *News.*"

Innis Barr expressed his sorrow for himself with a pathetic sigh as the *Ariel's Wing* slid past. Before he had finished the sigh his utterance changed abruptly to a strangled grunt.

"Look! Look!" he whispered. "Look at who's with Greffin! On the after-deck under the awning! Ike Clissold, who worked his way up from a street-corner bookie, and Vic Shore, who worked his way down from quite a good family."

"I'm shore I never heard o' either of 'em," said Sam Robbins. "Who—"

"Almost every bet on a horse-race made with the bookies in twelve states goes through the Clissold-Shore syndi-

cate. They live off more suckers than almost anybody else in this country!"

Innis grabbed Sam Robbins by the roll of his shirtsleeve. "The wise ones say that Clissold and Shore are just fronts for somebody who doesn't want his name mixed up with race-track gambling. . . . Well, my guess now is that the big fellow is Tam Greffin."

Of a sudden he hit himself in the forehead and thumped onto his knees in the bottom of the rowboat. He clutched at a six-pound yellowjack, the only fish they had caught, and unwrapped the newspaper that was around him. Hastily he flung the fish aside and spread out the malodorous paper on the floor-boards. After a few glances he was up again.

"Wrong paper!" he grumbled. "But I saw it somewhere—a rumor that the Clissold-Shore syndicate was selling out to a Miami bunch that just about owns the bookies in the rest of the country. That would explain why Tam Greffin is sneaking down by the waterway. He's got to make the deal, and he doesn't want to be seen with those two."

He flung himself suddenly at the outboard motor, and by sheer desperation started it. Then he hoisted the grapnel off the bottom and headed the rowboat after the slow-moving motorboat.

"Rusty old sewing-machine!" he said through his teeth to the rattling outboard. The boat gained speed.

SAM ROBBINS had taken no part in all this chaos. Resignedly he reeled in his line and Innis Barr's.

"It's impossible that they'll talk!" Innis said. "They never talk. . . . We're gaining! If I could just confirm Greffin's hook-up with the syndicate!"

Sam Robbins shook his head. "You No'therners!" he said. "If a thing's impossible, why mess with it? 'Taint restful."

"They won't talk!" Innis moaned, nursing the outboard. The motorboat was still crawling cautiously.

Sam leaned aft. "See heah, now!" he said against the outboard's clamor. "I haven't got my gun with me, it bein' right hot weather to tote a gun. But I'm still a deputy sheriff without it, and—" He opened his shirt and displayed his shield. "Say the word, and I'll run in the lot of 'em. Maybe they'll talk to you then."

Innis laughed. "What would your dear brother-in-law, the sheriff, do to you if you threw those three big boys into his lock-up without a charge that would stick? How much longer would you be a deputy?"

Sam Robbins got huffy. "In Geo'gia, where I come from, suh, that would be a small thing to do for a friend. Say the word. It's downright uncomfortable in Number Two cell, and the sheriff's gone to the 'Glades to get him a deer."

Innis looked at him. "At that, I think you'd do it," he said. "No, Sam. We board 'em, tie the rowboat astern, fire a few questions and get kicked off. It's a story without words—from them."

THE three men on the after-deck of the big motor-cruiser paid no attention to the dirty little rowboat chugging after them. They were deeply engaged in talk—talk with abrupt movements and emphatic words. They fell silent when a steward in irreproachable whites came aft to serve them long drinks.

"Looks like an argument," said Sam Robbins.

Agonizing seconds went by while the rowboat ate up the last few feet of gap.

Sam Robbins, with the bight of the anchor-line in his hand, reached up for a hold on the rail and pulled himself aboard while Innis hung over the outboard. Innis cut the motor, followed and made fast the line to a cleat.

The three under the awning stared, drinks unheeded, at these two disreputable-appearing fishermen. Innis Barr stepped toward them with unobtrusive haste. Sam Robbins trailed.

Innis nodded politely. "Press," he said. Not being employed at the moment, he could not be more definite. "Bound to Miami for a little sun, Mr. Greffin?"

The blunt-nosed Tam Greffin set down his long drink. Ike Clissold smiled, a meaningless and mirthless grimace. The wicker chair creaked under his rounded weight, although he did not seem to move. Vic Shore, youngest of the three, was sprawling unconcernedly in his seat, and he continued to sprawl.

"No statement," said Tam Greffin. His voice was a low rumble, almost a growl. "That's all. No statement."

"It was a dumb question," Innis Barr said. "As a matter of—"

"No statement," Tam Greffin cut in. "Get back in your boat."

Innis Barr appeared affronted. Ike Clissold was still smiling, as if to remove the sting of Greffin's brusqueness, but he was not happy. Vic Shore was watching Tam Greffin narrowly.

"Do you leave, or swim?" Tam Greffin demanded.

"Of course I should have asked Mr. Shore or Mr. Clissold," Innis Barr said. "I know they do your talking on this side-line of yours." He turned toward the other two. "We've heard that you three are going to Miami to sell out your —ah—horse-racing enterprise to a Southern group that operates in States that the Clissold-Shore syndicate doesn't cover. How about it?"

There was a sudden silence on the after-deck of the *Ariel's Wing* as Innis Barr calmly exploded this bomb. Tam Greffin's name had never been connected with any enterprise less substantial than the restaurant business. Only Sam Robbins shuffled a foot.

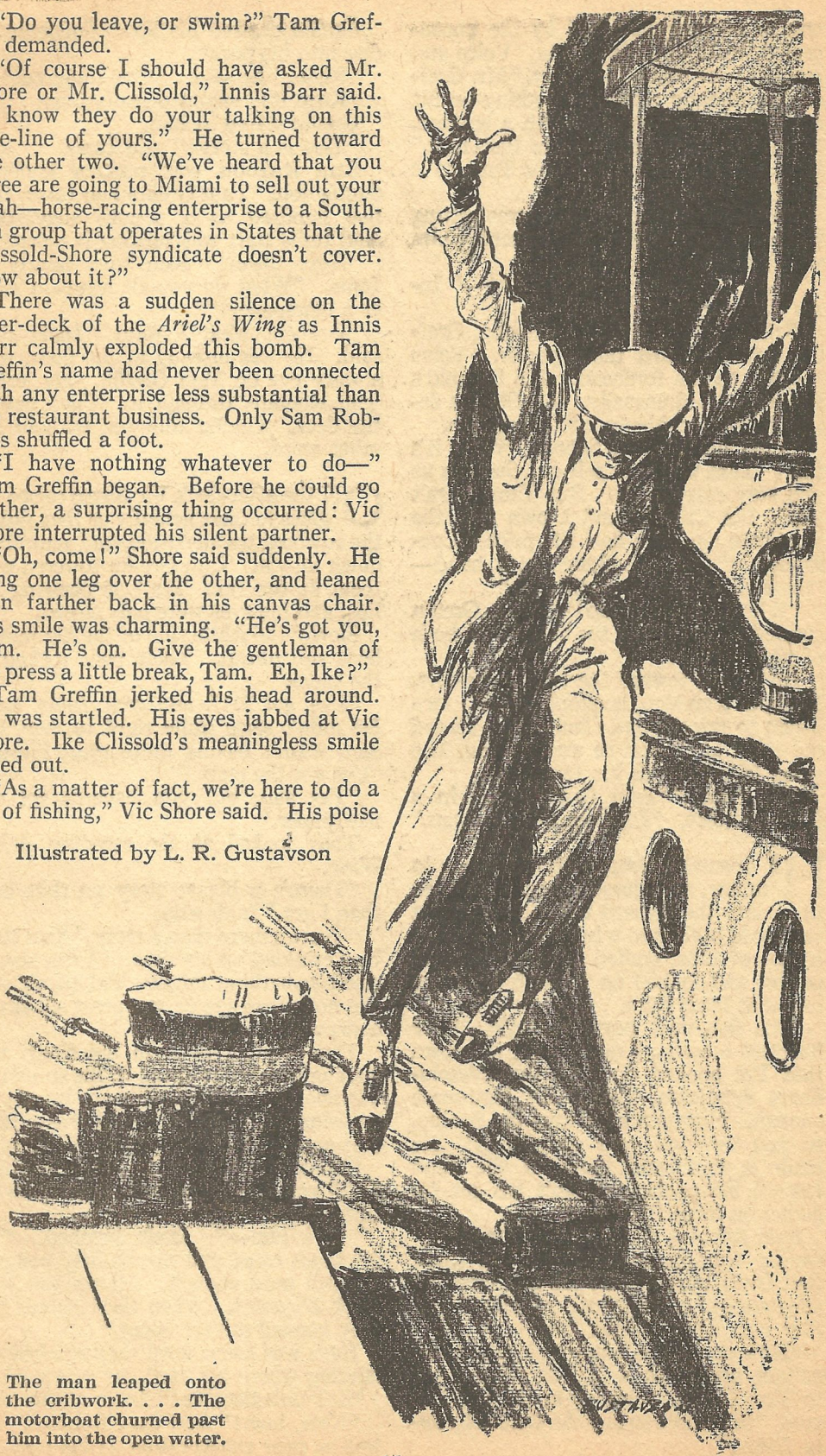
"I have nothing whatever to do—" Tam Greffin began. Before he could go further, a surprising thing occurred: Vic Shore interrupted his silent partner.

"Oh, come!" Shore said suddenly. He flung one leg over the other, and leaned even farther back in his canvas chair. His smile was charming. "He's got you, Tam. He's on. Give the gentleman of the press a little break, Tam. Eh, Ike?"

Tam Greffin jerked his head around. He was startled. His eyes jabbed at Vic Shore. Ike Clissold's meaningless smile faded out.

"As a matter of fact, we're here to do a bit of fishing," Vic Shore said. His poise

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



The man leaped onto the cribwork. . . . The motorboat churned past him into the open water.

was in no way disturbed by the unconcealed wrath of Tam Greffin. Voice and manner were casually correct. "Mr. Greffin has already caught something—a bit of Mr. Clissold's scalp—with a spinner. We had to cut the hook out of Ike's hair." He laughed. "First blood for Tam, as it were."

Tam Griffin, black of brow, was getting to his feet. Vic Shore was watching him with polite derision in his face.

"How about this deal with the—" Innis was talking fast.

Bristling like an old police-dog, Greffin thrust toward the reporter. Veins showed on his forehead. Ike Clissold's fingers twisted uneasily. Vic Shore's defiance flared suddenly into expression.

"That deal?" said Shore. "Well, it's this: Tam wants to sell out through us and stay respectable. But Tam doesn't think Ike Clissold and I own half the syndicate and rate half the price. Consequently"—and he flung out a hand—"there's a difference of opinion."

"Will you shut up!" Tam Greffin snarled at him. "Off the boat, you—both of you! *Off!*"

He lunged toward the two trespassers. Then, of a sudden, he stopped. His face began to smooth out. Innis Barr sensed the effort at control he was making. The veins faded out in his forehead.

"This way," Tam Greffin said, in a friendly voice. "I have a word for you."

HE opened a door, motioned them to follow, and closed it again. He led them into the owner's cabin, unlocked a steel safe built into a bulkhead, took out a wad of bills, stuffed the wad into his pocket and looked up through his furry brows at Innis Barr.

"It's this way, boys," he said. "For business reasons, I don't want it known that I'm hooked up with the Clissold-Shore syndicate, though it's legitimate enough. Now you boys were out fishing, so you were on your own time." He made a significant move of the hand toward his pocket. "Can't we get together on forgetting this?"

Sam Robbins made a noise like gas escaping from a soda-bottle. He knew that Innis Barr had no job and owed no allegiance to any newspaper. His Miami *Star* post hadn't lasted long.

"How about five hundred lousy, unimpo'tant dollars fo' him," Sam suggested to Tam Greffin, grinning at his own humor. "He wants to buy the Colusa County *News*."

Greffin chewed his lips. Suddenly he dug into his pocket.

"Right," he said. "Five hundred."

"Keep it!" snapped Innis Barr.

Greffin stared at him.

"This is a story!" said Innis.

Sam Robbins was rocking under a double jolt. Tam Greffin had taken that five hundred as a serious suggestion. And Innis Barr was turning it down!

"Hey, theah!" Sam said faintly to Innis. "What do you-all want—a story or a newspaper?"

"I've got what I want," Innis Barr said. He was already at the door, with a wary eye on Tam Greffin. He jerked Sam Robbins through it. They gained the deck. Greffin followed without another word.

ON the after-deck Vic Shore raised his glass to them genially as they pulled the rowboat up alongside, and scrambled down into it. Tam Greffin towered over them at the rail. He was chewing his lips, and his eyes were half closed.

Slowly the white side of the big motorboat slid ahead. Their boat rocked in the wake.

"I've got it!" muttered Innis Barr. He didn't seem quite right to Sam, but Sam wasn't feeling quite right himself. "I've got the story!"

"Yes suh, but you haven't got the newspaper."

They looked at the receding *Ariel's Wing*.

"There's a bigger story on that boat than I got," Innis said.

"There's more than a story," Sam Robbins crinkled up his nose. "I can sort of smell something mighty bad theah, and I'm no hound-dog or any great shucks of a deputy, either."

Tam Greffin, back in his chair, was leaning forward to speak to the sprawling Vic Shore. Vic was smiling at him in his superior way. Ike Clissold was sitting bolt upright, an unhappy-looking man.

"Look heah!" said Sam Robbins. "Will you-all get five hundred dollars for this story?"

"Five hun—" Innis laughed. "I'll get space rates, and maybe fifty bonus if I chisel hard enough. I'll try the New York *Dispatch*. When they canned me, they canned me for cause."

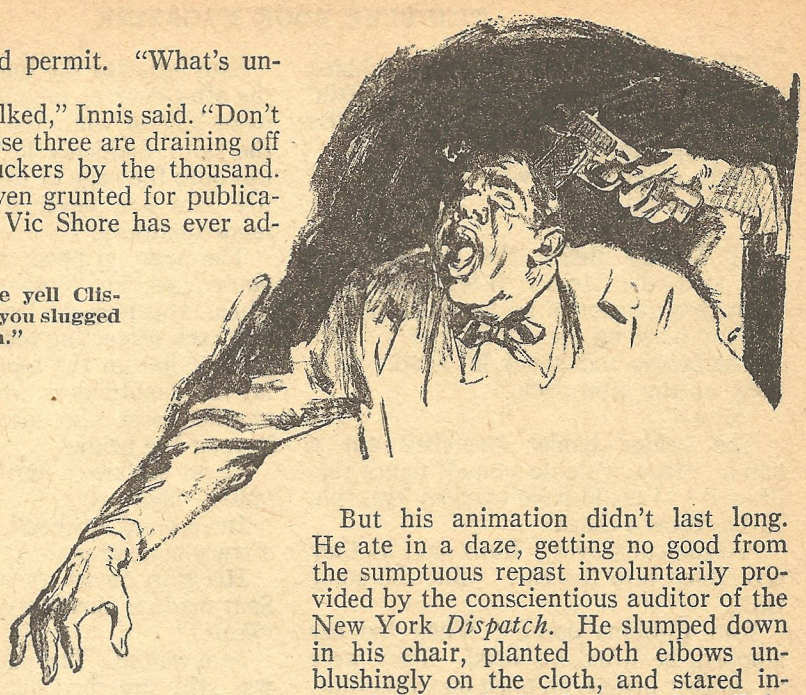
Innis was silent until they reached the landing where his 1935 car was parked.

"It's unbelievable!" Innis muttered.

"Now, look!" said Sam Robbins. He was as near exasperation as his easy-go-

ing nature would permit. "What's unbelievable?"

"One of 'em talked," Innis said. "Don't you get it? Those three are draining off the money of suckers by the thousand. They've never even grunted for publication. Not even Vic Shore has ever admitted knowing that horses run. Yet Shore talked. Not about the weather—about the syndicate. Don't you get it?"



"I heard the yell Clissold gave as you slugged him."

Without waiting for Sam's answer, he rammed the car into gear and rambled toward West Palm Beach. He lugged his typewriter from the car into the telegraph office, and queried the *Dispatch* on the story.

WHILE Sam rested, Innis batted out three pages, triple-spaced. As he finished, the *Dispatch* replied, agreeing to pay expenses and ordering eight hundred words. But the managing editor wanted to see the stuff before talking bonus.

"The story's not worth a by-line, but it's something," Innis said. "I shouldn't have got it. If I went North, the *Dispatch* would hire me. But if I could just get that bank to give me a shot at the Colusa County *News!*"

Sam shook his head. "Not fo' fifty dollars," he said.

"They'd rather let the press rust," Innis agreed.

"Do we eat now—on the *Dispatch?*" Sam asked. It was past eight o'clock.

Innis looked at him with respect.

"I think you've got the makings of a newspaper man," he said. "Never give an auditor a break! We eat."

At a quietly good Palm Beach place, Innis grinned at the menu.

"Good old swindle-sheet!" he said. "Tuck in, Sam."

But his animation didn't last long. He ate in a daze, getting no good from the sumptuous repast involuntarily provided by the conscientious auditor of the New York *Dispatch*. He slumped down in his chair, planted both elbows unblushingly on the cloth, and stared intensely through the front of Sam Robbins' shirt.

Suddenly he stood up. Sam hastily gulped down his beer. He had been expecting something.

"Come on!" said Innis. "There's some news on that boat I didn't get. Didn't you sense something underneath? Neither Greffin nor Shore added up right to me. Especially Shore. No matter how much Vic Shore and Greffin hated each other about the split, Shore shouldn't have talked. It's too close to squealing. I can't leave a story for the boys in Miami to snap up. We'll find her. Most of these motorboats lay up nights."

"More rushin'!" said Sam.

Innis paid, and they left. On the trip down the coast road to Delray Beach, Innis uncorked the old sedan. With headlights slashing the warm black night, they sped southward.

"You figure if you hit these curves hard enough, you'll straighten 'em plumb out?" Sam inquired as the tires screeched shrilly.

A little farther on, Innis began to talk to himself. He repeated word for word what Vic Shore had said to him, including the remark about the hook that Tam Greffin had caught in Ike Clissold's hair.

"It's all out of line," he said to his companion.

Sam Robbins aired his tonsils in a mighty yawn. "You've got me worn down to a nub."

"Job or no job, I'm a newspaper man," Innis said.

"Maybe it's a crime," Sam Robbins said with sleepy sarcasm. "I'm sittin' on my handcuffs right this minute. Who do I snap 'em on?"

Innis glanced sidewise at him. "It could be a crime."

AT Delray Beach the bridge-tender said the *Ariel's Wing* had gone through a quarter of an hour before.

"Any noise on the after-deck?"

The bridge man shook his head. "Nobody on the after-deck."

"Sure?"

The bridge-tender stretched out a hand. "How wide do you-all figure this draw is? I could have touched 'em, suh, if they'd been theah."

"Argument's over," Innis said as they scrambled into the car. "But the story isn't."

Sam Robbins dozed. When the car stopped, he lifted his head. They were at another bridge, an open one, this time. To northward a great yellow eye was sweeping the low, bushy banks of the waterway.

"The *Ariel's Wing* is back of that searchlight," Innis said. "I just missed her at the bridge to northward."

"What do we do?" Sam Robbins asked between yawns.

"We follow till she lays up somewhere," Innis Barr said. "I want to be thrown off again."

They waited. Innis switched off the lights. On the open draw, the bridge-tenders, pipes lit, leaned on the capstan-bars.

The motorboat, huge in the darkness, came sidling cautiously up to the opening. Her width gave her only a couple of feet of clearance on either side.

Innis sat still, brooding over her as he had brooded over Sam Robbins' shirt in the restaurant. Except for her running-lights and the powerful searchlight, she was in darkness. Not even a glimmer showed through any of her portholes.

"All gone to bed," Innis muttered. "Well, I'll wake 'em up. I want to hear Vic Shore talk some more."

As the boat's pilothouse came abreast, Innis switched on his headlights. Their brilliance lit up the man at her wheel. It was Ike Clissold. He threw up a hand to shield his eyes. Innis snapped off his lights. The boat slid on a few feet.

"Eve'ything peaceful," said Sam.

Innis' hand suddenly seized Sam's arm in a command for silence. His head was thrust forward to aid his eyesight.

Sam followed the line of his eyes. On the after-deck of the motorboat a man, a mere blur of whiteness, was standing at the rail. Suddenly he stepped over the rail onto the edge of the deck. In all his life Sam had never seen anyone move more stealthily.

The man gripped a stanchion. He paused, peering forward along the deck. Then, crouching, he leaped over onto the cribwork protecting the bridge. He flung himself flat on the topmost timber. He lay there motionless, while the motorboat churned past him into the open water beyond the bridge.

"I do declare!" muttered Sam. "Did you-all figure this?"

Innis shook his head. "No, but there's a story coming up."

His grip on Sam's hand tightened as Sam made a move to get out of the car. "Wait!"

Sam waited. The man on the cribwork was still stretched out flat and motionless. When the boat was a hundred yards down the waterway and the bridge-tenders were closing the draw, he stood up. He moved along the timberwork to the bridge approach, and climbed to the level of the road. He brushed off his jacket with some care and walked briskly toward Innis' car, the only one waiting.

BY the light above the bridge they saw that this man was Vic Shore. His manner was as unruffled as ever.

"Could I trouble you to give me a lift to—" he began; and then, peering more closely at Innis Barr, he made a new start:

"Why, it's the reporter! This is lucky!"

To Sam Robbins, he sounded pleased.

"Glad to give you a lift," Innis Barr replied. He opened the door. His eyes were very intent on Vic Shore.

"Got fed to the teeth with that boat," Vic Shore said. He slid into the back seat. "I thought I'd hop ashore quietly for a spot of night life and pick up the boat farther down. Look here, I hate to drink alone. How about joining me? I know a place near here."

Innis' elbow in Sam's ribs shut Sam's mouth with a click.

"Right!" said Innis. "We'll go, but we'll keep on asking questions."

"Fair enough," Vic Shore said. "The place I had in mind is Dave Begg's Motor Court and Trailer Inn. What time is it?"

"Eleven-forty."

"Eleven-forty," Vic Shore repeated. "Eleven-forty. Not midnight yet. He'll be open."

"We're on our way," Innis turned down the coast road and drove along through the increasingly silver light of a rising moon. Sam knew that Dave Begg's Inn was always open. But it was no place to attract one hungering for Florida night-life.

Innis asked a few questions about the motorboat.

"Nothing but an eight-knot houseboat," Vic Shore said. "We've had to keep ditch-crawling till midnight every day to hold our schedule. Ike Clissold and I relieve the captain at the wheel. Ike's got her now."

Innis nodded. "I saw he was at the wheel," he said.

"You did? You saw Ike?" Vic Shore laughed. He did not explain why. He was still in great good humor when they reached Dave Begg's place. He sent the waiter scurrying for hard liquor, solid food and such local delicacies as heart-of-palm salad and beach-plum jelly.

When Shore went over to feed nickels to the automatic phonograph, Sam Robbins leaned across the table to speak softly to Innis.

"That fellow's up to something right crooked around here," he said. "He snook ashore like he was set on murder."

Moodily Innis shook his head. "You've got that wrong, Sam. He didn't mind us or the bridge-tenders seeing him leave that boat. He walked right up to us."

Sam grunted.

"What he was trying hard—mighty hard—was to prevent anybody on the boat from seeing him get off," Innis said. "Wrap your skull around that one."

"That's so," Sam admitted. "It was like that. He didn't try to hide from us. But that could be a bluff when he seen he was seen."

"It could," Innis admitted. "We've got to watch this lad, Sam. He's a Page One, Column Eight story, somehow."

VIC SHORE came back. Sadly Sam Robbins saw the table laden with a better spread than the auditor of the *Dispatch* had provided. He did his best, but his mouth opened wider for yawns than for food. What he drank made him even sleepier. And when he tried to concentrate on the Vic Shore mystery, his brain went dead.

Innis Barr was too thoughtful to make a good guest for such a lavish host. Sam could fairly see Innis' mind grinding away. Occasionally Innis interrupted Shore's trivialities to ask a question.

"That Southern syndicate deal is this way," Vic Shore said. "Tam Greffin is a tough lad with two yens. He wants respectability, and he wants cash. But any time cash and respectability clash, the dibbs win. He's ready to show himself in the open to do me and Ike Clissold out of our cut on the sale of the syndicate. That's Tam Greffin all over."

He took a drink. "And maybe he needs it all, at that," he added. "I hear he's been losing it in the Street faster than the suckers can drop it to him on overpriced food and slow horses. We're all suckers for something."

"I wouldn't say he was so tight with his money," Innis said.

Vic Shore was amused. "Tried to bribe you, didn't he?" he guessed.

THE party went on. Vic Shore was relishing a secret. His eyes had a gleam in them as if he saw most amusing scenes. A smile kept creeping onto his lips. It wasn't a nice smile.

Shore had Innis and Sam Robbins licked on that mystery. Sam was ready to give up.

Shore enjoyed their company. He didn't try to make them drunk so he could slip away. He didn't get lit or pretend to get lit. He prevented Begg's place from closing down, both by his spending and by his pleading. As well as Sam's sleepy brain could make out, Vic Shore was there to spend time as well as money. He often looked at his watch, but emphatically vetoed ending the party.

Innis Barr played along and continued to give his brain a cruel work-out. Innis let it leak out casually that Sam was a deputy sheriff. This pleased Shore immensely. He patted Sam on the back.

"Stick to me, kid, and you'll wear diamonds in your teeth."

"Or it might be I'll have my teeth knocked out," Sam said.

"No." Vic Shore shook his head. "No. There's nothing crude about our little enterprise. It isn't a racket. No, indeed. And my partners are such gentlemanly gentlemen."

He laughed, and raised his highball. "Here's to my partners tonight, gentlemen—both of them!"

Innis stared at the grinning mouth and the eyes looking afar at something secret. He gave vent to a queer sound, as if the

wind had suddenly been knocked out of him. With a quick movement he got to his feet. "How about another tune?" he asked their host, with a nod toward the phonograph.

"Pardon, pardon!" murmured Vic Shore. He groped for nickels, and started toward the machine.

Innis gripped Sam Robbins' shoulder. "Ten to one, my hunch is late," he said. "Get to a telephone. Call Sheriff Dunn. Find out if anything has happened in Colusa County tonight. . . . Anything! . . . Quick!"

"If the sheriff's back from his deer-hunting, he'll skin me bare!" Sam muttered, aghast. "It's past one o'clock."

"Quick! I'll make Shore tell me where the boat is laying up tonight. I'll have the car at the door. Move!"

Sam Robbins moved. A minute later, with sleep shocked out of his enlarging eyes, he hurried out of a telephone-booth. Innis Barr was coming in the front door. The lights of his car cut shafts through the darkness behind him.

"The sheriff's not back from the 'Glades," Sam blurted. "But Belle, my sister, says somebody called up to get him not a quarter-hour ago. There's been a killin'—murder—on the *Ariel's Wing!*"

Innis Barr nodded. His lips were tight together. "It's an alibi that Shore's been working us for," he said. "But I know the exact time he sneaked off that boat."

"Belle's been tryin' to get a deputy," Sam said. "I'm no great shucks at murders—but I'm a deputy, aint I?"

"You are," said Innis. "You'll handle it right. Only, let me handle Vic Shore."

"He's yours!" Sam Robbins nodded, relieved. "We got to be gittin'! She told me where the boat is."

Vic Shore was looking for them. He grinned when he saw them. "Don't run out on me," he said. "I like company tonight."

"The deputy, here"—Innis touched Sam's arm—"has just had an urgent call. There's trouble on the *Ariel's Wing*—and they want him, and you too, right away."

"Trouble?" Vic Shore looked swiftly from one to the other. His eyes were wary, not surprised. "Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

Innis ignored the question. "You're wanted at once," he asserted. He flung a hand toward the car. "Come on."

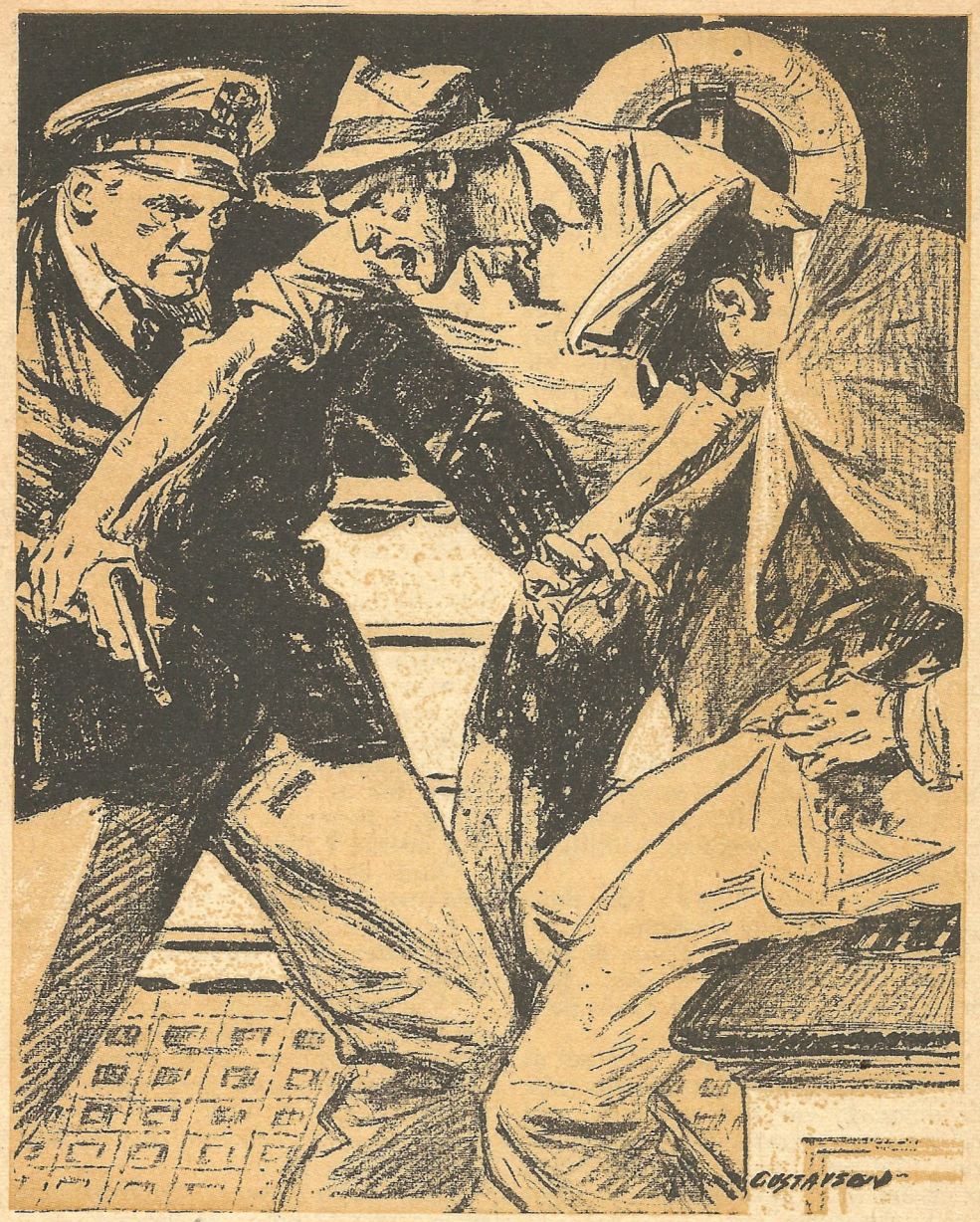
Vic Shore shook his head. "Not me," he said. "Not if there's trouble. I keep out of trouble. There was no trouble on the boat when I left her at eleven-forty. The others were asleep in their rooms, I think. What kind of trouble?"

"Come on—with those handcuffs!"

Sam Robbins took Innis' cue without hesitation.

"'Trouble' is all," he said. "I reckon, Shore, you won't be dodgin' any by refusin' to come with me. I'd take it right unkindly."

Backed by Innis' rigid face, he pulled out of his crumpled linen suit a pair of handcuffs. He spun them on a stiff forefinger. His eyes, not so mild, surveyed the gentlemanly Vic Shore with a certain intensity. "How about it, Mistuh?"



Innis gasped. "Right heah!" cried Sam Robbins.

Vic Shore stared at the handcuffs. His face was as blank as a gambler calculating odds.

"I'll stay with you," he said after a long fifteen seconds. "Maybe later I'll call you and your handcuffs, deputy; but right now I'll stay with you. Let's go, boys."

Innis kicked the car through the gears. He didn't say anything. He drove fast. The moon was higher. The silver road turned golden under the blaze of the car lights, and whirled under the wheels.

Under Sam's guidance Innis ran south eight miles, then turned. As the gaunt ironwork of a drawbridge showed ahead, he latched up his handbrake.

They piled out. The white bulk of the *Ariel's Wing* loomed alongside the piling south of the draw. Deck and cabins alike were lighted now. The fat captain met them and motioned them aboard. His arm shook. His eyes popped suddenly at the sight of Vic Shore, then took in the shield that Sam Robbins flashed.

"Aft," he said. His voice was hoarse. He led them past the white-faced steward and a young fellow in dungaree trousers.

Under the awning in the stern, the blunt-nosed Tam Greffin was waiting for

them with a cigarette glowing between his fingers.

Greffin's gaze was fixed on Vic Shore. "You didn't get far, did you?" Greffin said softly to his younger partner.

NEAR the rail, fallen forward on his face, lay Ike Clissold. He was dead. His skull had been caved in.

"Murdered," said Tam Greffin. He swung a hand toward the port quarter, to indicate a heavy automatic pistol that lay close to the side. "The gun—Vic Shore's gun—would have gone overboard if it hadn't hit the rail. You can see the scarred varnish. There are a few hairs on the gun-butt where it cracked in poor Ike's head."

He turned to Sam Robbins, whose shield was visible. "How did you come to round him up so fast?" he asked.

Sam moved uneasily. "I—I just run across him," he said.

In the car, Vic Shore had been silent, with a guard on his face. Now he was smiling, smiling that covert and unpleasant smile of his.

"If it wasn't that Ike Clissold was an old friend of mine, I'd be sorry for you, you high-grade rat," Tam Greffin said to Shore. "You got caught up with quick enough."

"Meaning what, Tam?" Vic Shore asked softly. He lit a cigarette.

Innis, with a warning glance at Sam Robbins, dropped back a step. Sam stayed quiet as a decoy duck as the partners faced each other.

"You're right not to talk, Vic; but at that, you're licked," Tam Greffin said. His voice, so low that afternoon, was higher now, with a sort of metallic vibration. "I'd bet a wad, your fingerprints are on that gun. A tough break it didn't land in the water."

"My memory's bad," Shore said. Smoke curled from his nostrils. "I don't remember killing Ike."

"I remember it plenty!" the fat captain burst out. "I heard the yell Clissold gave as you slugged him. I cut her down and ran aft. It aint going to help you that you sneaked ashore unseen when we drifted into this bridge here. That gun'll have your prints, all right."

Vic Shore looked at the ash on his cigarette. "I don't remember killing Ike," he repeated. "But Tam, I do remember your buying a gun like mine in Jacksonville, on the quiet. I remember your borrowing my gun this morning, Tam, and handing it back in such a way I'd have to put my prints on the barrel. I remember that happened about an hour after you tangled up a fishhook in Ike's hair, and had to cut off a bit of hair to clear it. Is that the hair you stuck on the gun-butt?"

"What is this?" Greffin demanded. He looked at Sam Robbins. "He's accusing me, Sheriff! Listen to him!"

Vic Shore laughed. "The sheriff is listening. And now he'll hear something. I see the whole set-up now." He spoke to Sam Robbins: "Let me reconstruct this for you, will you, Robbins? Ike and I have been in Tam Greffin's black books because we wanted our half the price of the business, and could get it, too. Tam wanted it all—claimed we were entitled only to a daily cut in the take."

Shore pointed to the rail, then went on:

"I saw Tam slipping up behind Ike Clissold last night up on the Indian River. Of course I thought he was just trying to throw a scare into Ike. He quit in a hurry when he spotted me. Then this morning he borrowed my gun for a while. I began to get uneasy.

"Tonight I was jittery. When Ike relieved me at the wheel about eleven-thirty, I pretended to go to my cabin. But instead I slid ashore."

"Keep on listening, Sheriff," Greffin said contemptuously. "He loves to talk."

Vic Shore flung his cigarette into the black water. It hissed out in the silence. He smiled into Greffin's face.

"You offered to bribe a reporter to forget you so nobody would figure you knew right then that you'd be on Page One in the morning, anyhow," Shore said. "The subtle touch, eh? Well, Tam, it won't be simply as an important witness that you break into print."

Tam Greffin yawned. "How about a little action, Sheriff?" he suggested.

SLOWLY Sam Robbins pulled out his handcuffs. He fiddled with them uncomfortably after a side-glance at Innis Barr's intent face.

"With Ike dead and me waiting for the chair, you'd be getting one hundred per cent, wouldn't you, Tam?" Shore said with slow relish. "My memory's still bad. Where and when did I kill Ike?"

"You know well enough!" the captain said. He jerked an arm up the black canal. "You timed it right to get away. You killed Clissold a hundred yards north of this bridge not an hour ago."

Vic Shore didn't lift his eyes from his older partner's face. But with a flick of

his fingers he indicated Innis Barr and Sam Robbins.

"Vic Shore hasn't been out of our sight ashore for two hours," Innis Barr said.

Sam Robbins nodded agreement.

VIC SHORE laughed. "Well, Tam?" Tam Greffin's eyes half closed.

"But—but it couldn't be!" the captain protested. "I know the steward an' the engineer were caulkin' off in their bunks. I was at the wheel. That left only—"

He stopped, and his eyes joined the eyes of Vic Shore, set rigidly on Tam Greffin's blotched face.

"Only one other man was aboard," the captain said hoarsely.

"Well, Tam?" Vic asked again. "If my prints are on this gun,"—he swung a foot to indicate the automatic by the rail,—"it isn't the one that killed Ike an hour ago, because I was ashore with a couple of witnesses, and couldn't make the prints. It won't be hard to dredge up the gun you got at Jax." Then he shook his head at the older man, and his eyes showed glittering hate. "You aren't quite bright enough to fix both your partners and hog it all, Tam."

Innis spoke: "Shore sneaked off the boat after he made sure you intended to kill Ike Clissold and frame him for the murder, Greffin. He could have warned Ike, but he preferred to have Ike killed, and you trap yourself for the murder. It looks as if he'd got away with it, too."

"I deny knowing Greffin meant to kill Ike Clissold," Vic Shore said with perfunctory emphasis. "Nobody can prove I did know it. But who's sole boss of the syndicate now, Tam?"

"My hunch came too late to save Clissold from you," Innis said to Greffin. "I'll show up Vic Shore, but he wins your racket in a dirty fight."

Tam Greffin did not answer. His thick body bent double. His right hand darted toward the automatic beside the rail.

Vic Shore kicked at it, but he wasn't quick enough. Tam Greffin scooped it up and jammed it against Shore's chest.

Innis Barr moved fast. His hand hammered at the muzzle of the gun. The pistol roared. The recoil and the wrench of Tam Greffin's wrist pulled the gun away from Innis. He grabbed for it, twisting aside the barrel. Tam Greffin wrenched again and again.

"Come on—with those handcuffs!" Innis gasped.

"Right heah!" cried Sam Robbins. He was already shooting a punch with the steel bracelets, after the manner of brass knucks, with his right fist backing them up. They landed on Tam Greffin's jaw with a crack that made their legitimate use on his wrists a second later quite unnecessary.

Innis picked up the fallen gun. "You should have seen—this play of Greffin's coming too," he panted, looking up at the motionless Vic Shore. "You're so good—at spotting murder before it's done."

"That man's hit—hurt bad," the captain said, peering at Shore's face.

And before they could grab Shore, he sagged to the deck, clutching his side.

Tam Greffin came out of his daze. He put his linked hands to his head, struggled, saw Vic Shore down, and stopped fighting. He laughed.

"O.K., boys," he said. "They ought to give me a break on Ike, because I got that rat too."

Sam Robbins shook his head. "Not in Florida," he said. "That's a mortal hurt, I reckon, but we'd better get him to a doctor. There's one down the road. Go git him, Captain. Jailhouse up the road. The sheriff will be proud of you, Mister. . . . Hey, where you going?"

Innis Barr, with his watch in his hand, was heading toward his sedan.

"Didn't you ever hear of a deadline?" he said over his shoulder. "Story coming up!"

IT took Sam Robbins some time to understand it.

"They broke Page One wide open, ripped it up and made it over for me in the last edition," Innis Barr explained. "Nobody else had a line. The whole shop was crazy, and we beat the town."

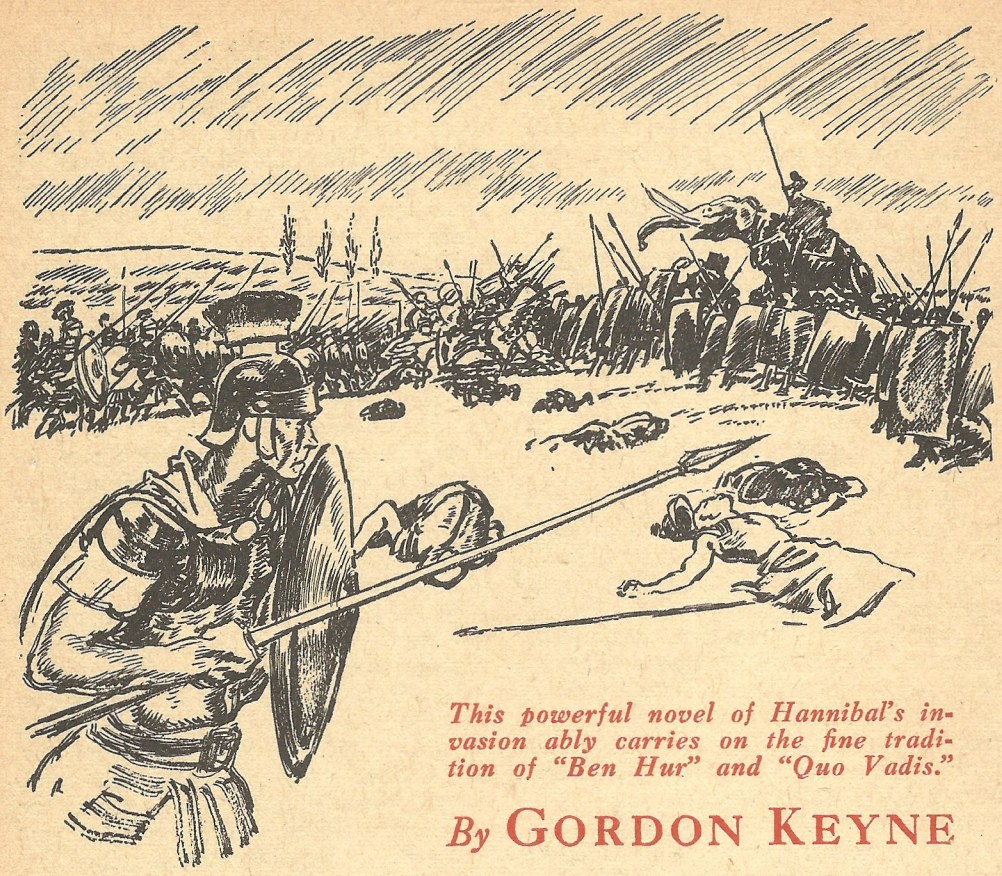
"Sounds like a good bit of work to me, right in the middle of the night, too," Sam said. "They liked for you to disturb their newspaper like that?"

"You've seen the check, haven't you? Five hundred bonus, with love, kisses and an offer of a job from the publisher. But what do I want with a job? I'm a publisher myself—of the Colusa County *News*. What's the matter?"

Sam closed one eye to aid his brain.

"I'm tryin' to remember what that Vic Shore said. Somethin' about, 'We're all suckers for somethin',' it was. Me, I'd pay out five hundred, always assumin', just *not* to be publisher o' the *News*."

"Tumblebug," a motor-racing story by Richard Howells Watkins, will appear in an early issue.



This powerful novel of Hannibal's invasion ably carries on the fine tradition of "Ben Hur" and "Quo Vadis."

By GORDON KEYNE

THEY LIVED

The Story Thus Far:

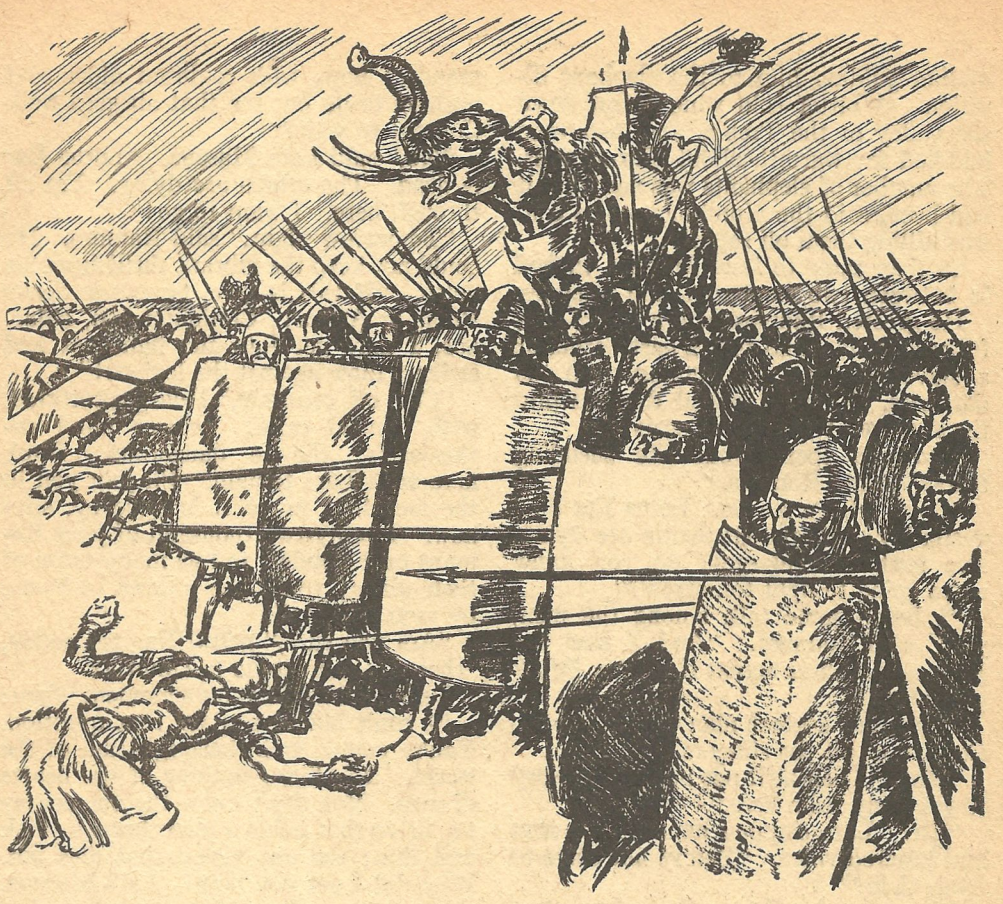
THREE men sat at a wineshop table in an Alpine village.

"War and war and war!" said the village mayor gloomily. "Now the African hordes move up the Rhone to bring us fire and sword! Why should this be?"

The exiled Roman Mancinus shrugged. "Why, you ask, this unwanted war? Because the earth is too full of people. Perhaps the gods seek to thin out the race of men. A nation becomes drunk with dreams of glory and loot. They're led to it by the magnetic character of some great leader. Hannibal is such a man, from all accounts."

He soon had opportunity to learn for himself. But first came his momentous encounter with the professional soldier Pelargos, a gigantic slinger who had served under the father of Mancinus, who had been commander of the Fourteenth Legion. Caught in a trap during the last Punic War, Marcus Mancinus had given parole in order to save the lives of his men, of whom Pelargos had been one. But as punishment he had been sentenced to exile; and in consequence his embittered son was living as a farmer in this little Alpine valley.

Mancinus struck up a friendship with Pelargos; and when the Lady Drusilla, daughter of the former consul Quintus Veturis, passed through the town under the escort of Scipio, Pelargos told a strange story. "I was with Veturis when he died," said Pelargos, "and at the last he spilled a few secrets.... Close to the Veturis estates in Umbria is the grotto of Lamnia the Sybil. Some of the treasures of Rome were hidden there, just before the Gauls sacked the city; and those who knew the secret died.



BY THE SWORD

"Veturis, when out hunting, discovered a hillside opening and made his way into long caverns; he saw the treasure, but because of superstition about the Sybil, he never went back. But he told of it in delirium, when he was dying. Well, I know the secret. I know how to find this cave entrance; no one else does."

Pelargos proposed that Mancinus join him in a raid on the cave. The exile hesitated; and then—Hannibal and his army and his great war elephants came rolling up the valley. A day later Mancinus, changing his name to Ramnes, had enlisted in the service of Hannibal as guide; soon thereafter, with Pelargos, he shared Hannibal's desperate battles against the mountain tribes of the Alpine passes.

Wounded and worn out, Ramnes (as he was called among the Carthaginians) was left to recover in a village while Pelargos and the other survivors fought their way on. Finally came a letter from Pelargos telling Ramnes that his exiled father's estates—his own rightful inheritance—had been usurped by his cousin Mancinus. More, this Mancinus was an evil fellow who possessed a dagger poisoned by some subtle drug so that even the smallest wound from it deprived the victim of all will power. And this Mancinus sought to win the Lady Drusilla and join her estates to his. . . . Ramnes sent Croton, a slave, with a letter seeking to warn Drusilla. *(The story continues in detail:)*

LARS MASENA the elephant-trainer was weeping again.

Ramnes had timed his arrival in the two-mile-long camp; it was evening when he was passed through the lines, a Nu-

midian guiding him to the elephant division. A bitter cold wind swept down the valley of the Trebia, and men were huddled for warmth about blazing fires. The number of elephants was not what it had been, said the Numidian. The cold was killing them off rapidly.

So they came to Lars Masena, tucked in between two elephants, and weeping.

He greeted Ramnes with a cry of joyful recognition, and spat a hasty order at a slave who set off, running, into the darkness. Then he pulled Ramnes into the shadow of the giant beasts.

"Do you spend your life shedding tears?" asked Ramnes.

"Lord, I have reason. Lotus Ear died yesterday. All the elephants are dying. I've sent for Pelargos; do you know we're going to fight tomorrow?"

"I heard some talk among the men, yes," said Ramnes. "And I saw the Roman campfires across the river. Pelargos is well?"

"Aye, and a great man now, my lord. Captain of all the slingers."

"Hm! Then he'll not be in any hurry to get away from here."

"Eh?" Lars clapped hand on his arm and lowered voice. "You've not come to fight, then?"

"No. I'm for the south, and no time to lose about it. Umbria."

"I'm going with you, I'm going with you!" murmured the elephant-trainer excitedly. He had abandoned tears now. "I wept, because I thought the gods had forgotten me! But you're here. Pelargos will go. We'll all go. After thirty years, I'll see Asculum again!"

A HASTY step, a towering figure in gleaming mail and furred cloak, and Ramnes struck hands with Pelargos in the obscurity. The Stork folded up his long legs and sat with them, cursing the smell of elephants.

"I came into camp after dark," said Ramnes, "hoping to avoid Hannibal's eye. I've no mind to figure in any battle. There's work ahead."

"Then the man Croton found you," Pelargos said with his croaking laugh. "Good. This time tomorrow night, all three of us will be on our way. You'll see something tomorrow, comrade! I've just come from Hannibal. By Hercules, what a wonder he is! I'm winning the fight for him tomorrow—you'll see. We have to fight quickly, before all the elephants are dead. No front-line work for me, either; I'm one of your bloody commanders now, with a dozen aides and nothing to do but see that all goes well. Content to wait?"

"No," said Lars Masena. "Lotus Ear is dead. The others are dying. I'm all through here. I want to go!"

"Tomorrow night," said Ramnes. He could not keep the vibrant thrill from his voice. "If this is true, tomorrow spells Rome or Africa! Confound you, Pelargos, I may get into the fight yet and strike a blow against the legions!"

"Cool off, comrade," Pelargos retorted, with cynical calm. "Never mind enthusiasms; they're dangerous. Bunk here with Lars tonight. I'll join you in the morning; my post is close by, anyhow. Twenty-two thousand of your Romans over yonder, and as many more of their allies; you'll see widows in Rome by next sunset!"

"Are you sure," asked Ramnes softly, "that you want to go to Umbria?"

Pelargos was silent for a moment; then:

"I can't blame you for that question. You're young, ambitious, ignorant of the world. You know nothing of the hearts of men. You don't know the one enduring drive that holds a man through thick and thin; the one vision that dies not. Why did I get you here? Lars Masena, there, knows. For thirty years Lars has had a vision, and now he sees the reality approaching. Eh, Lars?"

"Yes, yes!" sniffled the elephant-trainer. "I've lost all that I had; nothing now remains except the dream."

"Dreams are the only realities, comrades," said Pelargos, and his voice sounded mournful. "With your help, mine comes true. With my help, you attain your own. Ramnes, here's your answer: I have three of the best horses in the army ready. Tomorrow pause a little while, to watch something that will echo down the world. Then we mount and ride, we three. Content?"

"Content," said Ramnes gravely. "If Rome's beaten tomorrow, you'll lose a lot by going to Umbria. Fame, position, rank—"

"Be damned to all that!" broke in the other. "What awaits me, beyond Umbria, is greater than all else. Don't you think it's hard to be patient? Good night."

He rose abruptly and stalked away, his abnormally tall figure glinting upon the next firelight. When he was gone, Lars Masena spoke gently.

"He told me, one night in the Alps. His wife and two sons—somewhere."

"Yes; he told me also."

"Are you comfortable here? Might as well bed down on this straw between the beasts. I have some food ready for you, and wine." As he spoke, Lars produced a bowl and a leather bottle; apparently he was not critical in the matter of food. Neither was Ramnes, at the moment. Having cared for his horse, nothing else mattered. He relaxed, ate, drank, pulled up the blankets, loosened his garments.

"Any danger of these beasts rolling on us, Lars?"

"No." The trainer chuckled. "They're careful, my lord—"

"Don't 'my lord' me," grunted Ramnes. "My name's Ramnes. We're comrades. Tell me where you're bound for in Umbria—the town of Asculum, isn't it?"

"Aye. Just beyond Reate, for which you're bound; between Reate and the coast. Eryx is on the coast."

"Eryx!" That was the city Croton the horse-doctor had talked so much about, the Greek city. It was the dagger of Eryx which Mancinus now had.

"Aye," said Lars Masena. "Eryx. That's where Pelargos hopes to find his wife and two sons. You for Reate, I for Asculum, Pelargos for Eryx."

RAMNES whistled softly. Here was news. A shrewd and canny man, this Pelargos, and could keep a close tongue. A man not to be doubted, yet endlessly serving his own purposes.

"You haven't told me, Lars, why you seek Asculum. Homesick, after these years?"

A pause in the darkness. Then the older man's voice, reflective, evasive:

"Only when we've drunk unmixed wine, when the tongue is loosened—then I'll tell you the truth. Otherwise, a man lies to avoid thought of his own heart-burnings."

"Yours have had thirty years or so to burn out," said Ramnes, somewhat irritated. "Do you spend your life between tears and elephants?"

"The elephants are dead or dying; the tears are spent: my life now lies in the future," replied the other, with a touch of restrained dignity. "Don't disdain me, friend Ramnes. In the Latin cities to the southward, in the whole of Italy where the power of Rome reaches, you and Pelargos will walk in hourly peril, but I'll go in security."

Ramnes was puzzled by the man. He knew Pelargos had picked Lars as a companion, not blindly but for some deep reason; what it could be, eluded him.

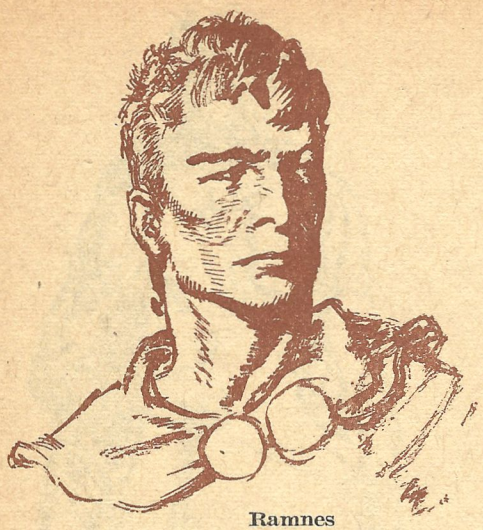
"I'm going with you! After thirty years, I'll see Asculum again!"

"Peril for us? How so?" he asked.

"Somebody has talked; perhaps Hannibal, who knows? You no doubt remember that Roman prisoner, Alimentus, who was with us in the Alps. He was exchanged and has gone, but learned too much before he left. He more than suspects that you're a Roman and that Pelargos is a deserter from Rome; and, since we're going into territory that's subject to Rome, look out! The Latin cities hold safety and aid for me, even were I blind and starving, but without me they'd hold scant security for you."

"Why are you so sure of yourself?"

The elephant-trainer chuckled softly. "Wait and see! I'm not sure enough to boast of it, except when I'm drunk; the first Latin city we reach, will tell whether I'm right or wrong. Time enough then to boast. Here, feel this."



Ramnes

Ramnes found a rope-end thrust into his hand.

"Feel it, pull it apart. How many strands are there?"

"Three, of course. All rope has three strands."

"Good rope," corrected the other, and chuckled again. "I learned this from Pelargos. A strong man can break one of those strands; but not three. You or he or I, alone, might be helpless; together, the three of us can attain what we will."

RAMNES lay quiet long after the other had fallen asleep, and his brain flittered with uneasy conjecture. Disturbing news, that about Alimentus; despite war and ruin, Rome would not be too busy to stir a relentless pursuit of deserters or traitors. A pity that Alimentus had been exchanged and let free, to tell what he knew!

The mystery about Lars Masena had deepened, but the little parable of the threefold cord was to the point, significant. Ramnes comprehended that upon these two, as upon the thousands all around, weighed an ever-increasing suspense. He caught the contagion of it, could sense it on every side. The feeling had taken hold upon him, also. Here along this river on the morrow would be settled the destiny of nations; but what was more vitally important to every man there, the fate of personal ambitions and desires and hopes, the life or death of selves and comrades.

With morning, Ramnes slept late; the whole army slept late, snug against the chill searching wind and the driving gusts of rain. Ramnes wakened to movement and confusion on all sides; here was Lars Masena with a huge flask of wine and a huge bowl of hot stew, and fresh-made bread. Crouching, the bowl between them, Lars vented his news.

"*Brr!* Snow today, if I'm any judge. Three more elephants dead, the rest barely able to stagger. Listen!" A blare of trumpets, thin and distant, pierced athwart the rain. "The signal; that means they're coming. Maharbal's Numidians have been riding around the Roman camp to tempt them—the legions are coming! They'll have to ford the river. No hurry. The orders are to eat and drink hearty. Thank the gods I'll not be in the fighting line! Such a day for battle I never saw in my life. The wind's like a knife."

They ate. The elephants were being led out and caparisoned with mighty armor of steel and leather; many of the poor brutes were so far gone with cold that they could scarcely stand and their trumpetings were pitiful.

Time wore on. Presently only the hulks of the dead beasts remained. The rain was coming down harder, mingled with occasional bursts of sleet. The leaden, sullen skies boded snow. A courier, pelting along in the mud, paused to fling excited words.

"They're crossing the river! Crossing, and forming up!"

"Come along," said Lars, wrapping himself in a long skin robe. "I know where to find Pelargos. What a day, what a day!"

Close by, on a little rising ground, Pelargos was stationed, giving final instructions to a crowd of officers. A new Pelargos, brusque with authority, wasting no words. He nodded greetings and went on with his orders. Ramnes eyed the slingers with surprise; each was wound about the head and about the body with two slings, and carried a third.

"Why the extra slings?" he asked Lars.

"Some notion Pelargos has—to be used at varying distances. Ha! *Look!*"

The line of battle was marked by the elephants, placed in pairs in the van, each pair a hundred yards apart. Behind these, the ranks of heavy infantry; behind these, again, the crowded masses of slingers. Between gusts of rain, cavalry appeared in the distance. And opposite, coming up from the river-line, the legions of Rome, slowly advancing, increasing, swelling in number as more crossed at the ford, spreading out to right and left.

The crowded officers about Pelargos burst into a yell, turned, and scattered

at a run. A few aides and couriers alone remained. Pelargos came to Ramnes, his eyes glittering eagerly, and exchanged quick handclasps with the two.

"All's set," said he. "Hannibal's off to the right with the headquarters staff —won't bother us. Look!" He pointed to a line of trees lessening in the distance. "Mago and a division of light Numidians are hidden there, to take the Romans in flank. Ha! Look at our Spanish infantry, and those heavy Numidian regiments! Then look at the Roman legions—comprehend the difference, Ramnes?"

Ramnes nodded. The legions were open and uncrowded, with a man's width between every two men; but the African heavy infantry was like a human wall, with shields locked, the men in close formation. Ramnes felt the blood pound in his temples as the shouts rippled along the line, as the advancing lines of the legions gave birth to some thousands of skirmishers who came forward at a run toward the elephants. Lars squatted on his heels and squinted across the rain.

Pelargos gave his croaking laugh.

"There we go! Watch, now—watch! Lead bullets for distant work; stones for closer business; and for hand-to-hand work with the infantry, big stones as large as eggs. That's the program. . . . Ha! We're at it—we're at it!"

The slingers went out at a run, past the heavy infantry, past the elephants. They came to an abrupt halt. The Roman skirmishers were leaping forward—only to melt suddenly, to fall in windrows, to break and stagger back. Unseen death smote them from afar, as the leaden bullets of the slingers sang, and the ranks were lost.

MORE men rushed from the ranks of legions—light infantry of the Latin allies; a wave of them, thousands of them. From somewhere on the wings, to right and left, came the din of battle, the flutes and horns, the thin yells of men; but Ramnes could not take his eyes from the scene before him. The Roman infantry survived the lead bullets, but each slinger now took his second sling, and a perfect hail of stones stormed upon the mailed ranks; and as they came still closer, the largest sling of all came into use, hurling great lumps of stone that battered armor and smashed skulls and men together.

Pelargos kept his staff busy—now ordering up fresh supplies of ammunition, now sending messages to division commanders. Yells of exultation rippled up from the African lines as the Romans, unable to endure that frightful rain of missiles, broke and drew away, and hastily reformed their stricken lines, while the legions swung forward to take the brunt of battle. Whistles shrilled. The cloud of slingers melted, fell back; the Spanish and African lines moved forward between the elephants. The elephants moved. The whole line of weight was in motion, hurtling forward at the famed legions of Rome.

THEY met, with a crash of conflict. Snow swept down in a whirl of flakes, rain and sleet coming in gusts. To see much of anything was impossible. A horseman came up at a gallop and drew rein before Pelargos.

"Orders!" he yelped excitedly. "The Roman cavalry has broken, and Maharbal is killing them like flies! The general says to have the hot stones ready and not fail; and can you spare any slingers for the center?"

"I'm sending him a company at once," said Pelargos, and dispatched one of his own aides. He beckoned another, as the courier went off at a hammering gallop. "Move up the furnaces and the hot stones; let 'em have it at once."

He turned, chuckling, to Ramnes. "Red-hot stones, comrade! Another little trick of mine. Selected men can handle 'em in link-mesh slings. Comrade, you're seeing something! I never saw such a battle as this—do you realize that hardly an arrow has been shot? This rain has ruined the bowstrings. Ha! Listen! That means Mago has fallen on their flanks!"

A tremendous rolling blast of trumpets broke upon the storm, but to see what was happening at any distance was impossible.

Under the impact of the African wall, the legions reeled; and the elephants rolled in upon them at the same time. For one moment, Ramnes thought the whole Roman line was swept away. But it reformed, the legions drew into ranks again, the elephants were halted.

Lars Masena shook his head sadly.

"I said they'd be no use!" he croaked. "They can't fight; they can hardly stand! And the snow will kill them all."

Those stubborn Roman ranks were unyielding now. Their array was taken in flank by Mago and his hidden troops. Maharbal's cavalry, sweeping around,

came in upon the flanks also; their retreat was cut off by the river—but they did not retreat. Back and forth surged the massed ranks of men. To the eye of Ramnes, it was a wild turmoil, a furious mob conflict, but the trained gaze of Pelargos knew better.

"Well, comrade, it's all over," he said. "You've seen your first battle, eh?"

Ramnes gave him a glance. "What do you mean, over? Those legions aren't yielding!"

"No," said Pelargos calmly. "They're dying. Our Numidian cavalry is in on 'em from the flanks, and that settles it. They can't get back across the river to their camp. The whole scheme of battle was absolute perfection. I didn't believe the Romans would be foolish enough to attack, but there they are! And they won't surrender. Romans don't."

"No," said Ramnes in a low voice.

PELARGOS eyed the rain-lashed, snow-whirling scene, then glanced curiously at Ramnes.

"After the first thrill, nothing exciting about it, eh?"

"Not in this weather," said Ramnes frankly. "A lot of poor devils fighting and dying in rain and mud—for what? I'm glad I'm out of it."

Pelargos broke out laughing.

"Comrade, I salute your honesty, and say the same for myself! You'll see the difference soon enough. Take orders, fight, live or die—for what? An abstract cause. That's one thing, and to hell with it! Another thing entirely to fight for your own cause, to get to grips yourself. . . . Lars! Come along."

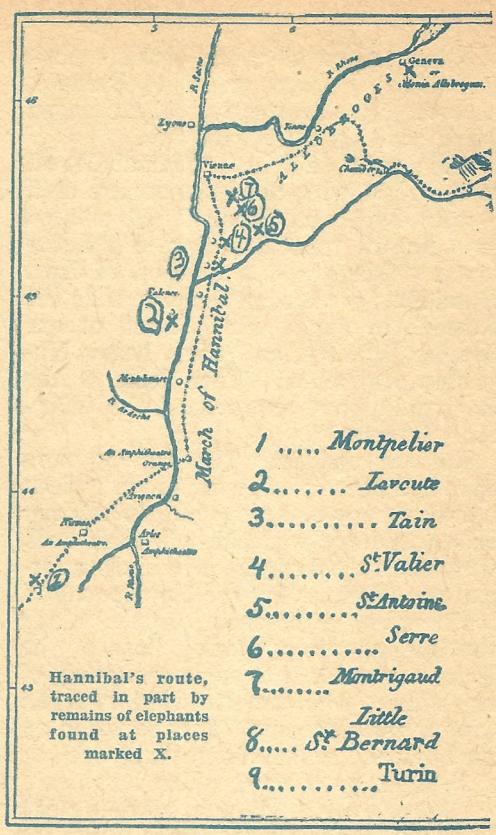
"Eh?" Lars scrambled up. "Whither?"

"To Umbria and destiny! On to the camp, comrade. The horses are waiting there."

Ramnes swung into step. "But you, Pelargos? Your absence—"

"Bah!" Pelargos snapped his fingers. "In the moment of victory, who knows or cares? They'll think I lost my head, got into the fight, and was killed; will they search thirty thousand corpses for me? Not much. There goes Rome, on the whirlwind! And here go we—to our hearts' desire."

In the deserted, empty camp, they came upon a slave waiting with three horses. Pelargos gave him a coin. The three men mounted, walked the horses out of camp, and headed south, while behind along the Trebia died the senators and knights and common men of Rome.



CHAPTER VI

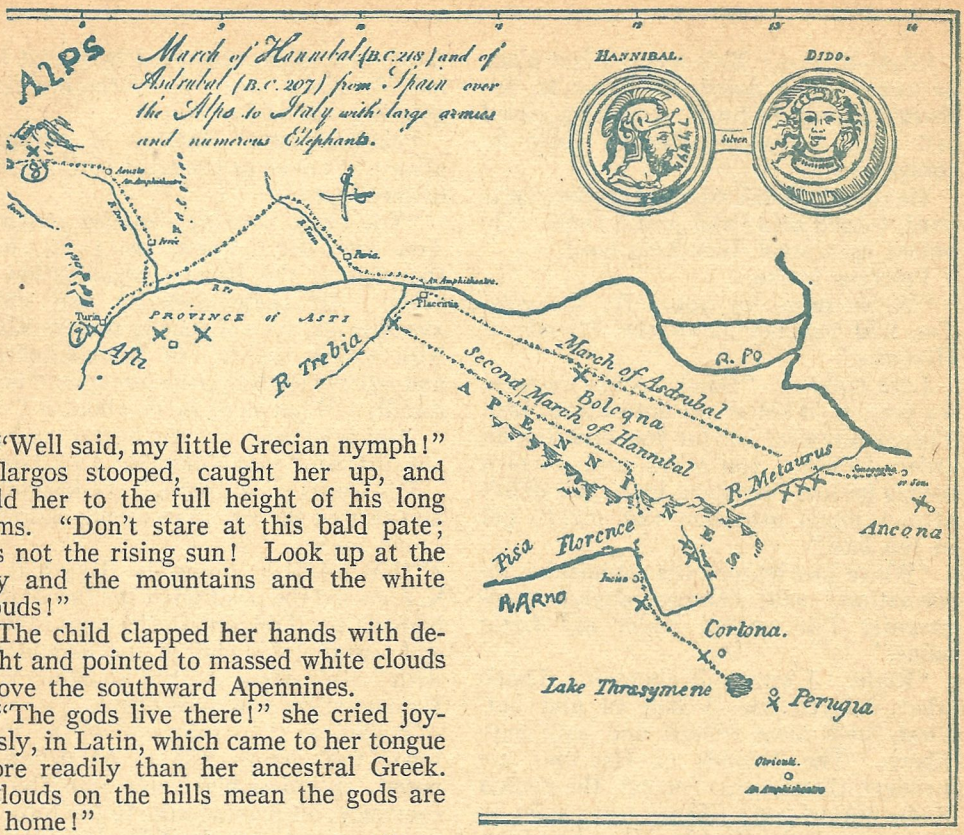
TWO days of hard riding east and south, along the road to Bononia; war and snow and cold had vanished and they were upon sunny skies and vine-clad towns. Their third night on the road found them in a little sprawling village, with Bononia twenty miles away; there, according to plan, they would turn south to Florentia, through the Apennines, and via Tuscany come to their destination.

With sunrise, Ramnes came into the courtyard of the tavern, realized that he had seen nothing of Lars Masena since their arrival late in the night, and saw Pelargos near the tavern fountain, playing with a child.

"Where's Lars?" demanded Ramnes, ducking his head in the fountain spray.

"Gone upon an errand of mystery; skipped out last night and hasn't shown up yet." Pelargos beckoned the child, who was gawking at him. "Hither, little Ganymede, and I'll toss you up to the bright sky! Isn't she a pretty little trick, Ramnes? Speaks Greek, too—pure Greek type, if you ask me. Here, little love!"

"Ganymede's not my name," she said, approaching him diffidently. "That's a boy's name. I'm not a boy."



"Well said, my little Grecian nymph!" Pelargos stooped, caught her up, and held her to the full height of his long arms. "Don't stare at this bald pate; it's not the rising sun! Look up at the sky and the mountains and the white clouds!"

The child clapped her hands with delight and pointed to massed white clouds above the southward Apennines.

"The gods live there!" she cried joyously, in Latin, which came to her tongue more readily than her ancestral Greek. "Clouds on the hills mean the gods are at home!"

"No more, my sweet, no more!" declared Pelargos. "The gods are scattered, chased away, gone forever. I, Pelargos, affirm it!"

"Oh!" She stared into his face, round-eyed. "Gone? All the nice gods?"

"All of 'em, every one!"

"Did you chase them away, Pelargos? Or was it the bad Africans?"

He burst into a laugh, tossed her up, caught her and set her down safely.

"Pelargos — that means *stork!*" she said, proud of her Greek knowledge. "You're not the Stork that Roman officer was talking about?"

RAMNES, listening, started slightly. He caught a lightning-sharp glance from Pelargos; the laughter died out of that long-nosed face.

"What Roman officer, little nymph?"

"Oh, the fine soldier who was here two days ago! He was talking to the elders of the town about someone called the Stork, a bad man; anyone who kills him will get a lot of money. That's all I know about it."

"And more than enough," said Pelargos soberly. He was fumbling in his pouch for money. "Hercules be praised! Like you, I changed names among the Alps," he said to Ramnes, "taking the Greek instead of the Latin. Old Scipio must have missed his Ciconus badly. Ah, here we are!" He brought out a coin and pressed it into the child's palm. "Here, nymph, take this and get a dress for that poor little naked doll—"

He came erect and stared hard at Ramnes.

"By Hercules! What magic is this? A Roman ahead of us—laying traps? It's impossible!"

"Nothing's impossible," Ramnes said bluntly. "What's the mystery about Lars? Why didn't he share the room with us last night? I'm getting tired of this nonsense."

"I'll tell you over our bread and wine. Come on."

They tramped into the serving-room, settled at a table, and ordered breakfast. Alone, Pelargos leaned forward.

"He'll not mind my telling you; said he meant to do it himself. As a young man, before being dragged off as a slave by some accursed Roman, he joined the Friends of Hercules. That's the Greek for it; there's some Etruscan name that'd break your jaw. A secret society—one of the mysteries. It extends all over central Italy. Once a member, always a member; but Lars wasn't sure that it still existed."

"Why not?"

"Anti-Roman. This was the first place he could learn definitely about it, for there's a lodge in town. He disappeared last night. And— Hello! Here he comes now."

He called. Lars, who was in the courtyard, turned aside and joined them. He pulled up a stool, breathing hard.

Pelargos spoke.

"We've news for you. By the way, I've told Ramnes about the Friends of Hercules."

Lars nodded. "Good. And I've news for you; we'd better get out of town fast. There's a reward out for you, and Roman orders to catch you at all costs—which means us too. By good luck, you didn't attract much attention last night; got in too late."

"We've just learned the astonishing information," said Pelargos dryly. "Apparently I'm wanted under my Latin name."

"Right. I know all about it. That's what delayed me—I had to find out. First, we'll have friends and help anywhere. The Friends of Hercules are stronger than ever. Second, the reason Rome wants you: There were spies in the camp at the Trebia. One had been with Scipio in Gaul, and recognized you. A deserter, now a great man among the Africans!"

"But how," put in Ramnes, bewildered, "could it be known Pelargos headed south?"

"Never mind that," said Pelargos hastily, with a confused air. "It's of no great—"

"Wait!" struck in Lars Masena, an imperative ring in his voice. "Remember the night after Lotus Ear died, in camp? And you insisted on cheering me up, and refused to mix the wine as usual, and we had several drops too much?"

Pelargos uttered a subdued groan.

"Oh, I suppose I must admit it," he said, with a grimace. "I did have a vague memory of having done a lot of talking."

"Too much," Lars said severely. "In brief, you were drunk and you bragged. About taking the road to Umbria, about golden treasures and other things."

"Damn it, I'm sorry!" Pelargos exclaimed contritely. "Actually, I was trying to get you out of the dumps. I didn't think any of those Numidians knew what I was saying."

"That spy did." Lars leaned back and spread his hands with an expressive gesture. "And here we are, with the word out ahead of us. Didn't you say something, that night, about catching that fellow Mancinus down in Umbria, and flogging him out of his skin?"

Pelargos gave Ramnes a sheepish glance. "Looks as though I had been indiscreet, yes."

"You can't possibly disguise yourself. You two don't know, as I do, how thorough is the Roman organization in Italy. All these districts and cities ahead of us, even if they're merely allied with Rome, are full of Roman officers and representatives; couriers spread news rapidly. What shall we do about it?"

"Get breakfast, get the horses, and get out of town," said Ramnes. "Talk later."

His words clove through the hesitation and cleared the air. The others nodded.

CURIOUSLY, these few days had reversed the position of the three: they had left the Trebia with Pelargos radiant and assured, his sun in the ascendant; with Lars a mere cloaked shadow; with Ramnes silent and unassertive.

Today, as they rode out of the little town, the change was to be definitely noted. Ramnes had come into the ascendancy, his driving urge to the fore, his eagerness to reach the Villa Veturis lifting his Roman spirit into gradual command. Lars Masena had become talkative, gravely wise, a shrewdly alert man. Pelargos, who had been drinking hard, had relapsed into the old careless, gay, sprightly fellow Ramnes had first known. Now, as they came clear of town and headed stirrup to stirrup along the country road, Pelargos swore a great oath.

"Comrades, I've had my lesson for the last time. Ever in my life, wine has ruined me again and again. Now, and I swear it, Bacchus shall go the way of all the other gods! I'll not taste a drop of wine until we reach Reate and the Grotto of the Sybil. I swear it!"

"By what god?" demanded Ramnes dryly. "On what altar?"

"On my sling!" Pelargos exclaimed.

"It's high time," put in Lars Masena. "We're no longer three good friends riding to destiny. We're hunted men, or one of us is; and he's too well marked to be mistaken. Before noon we'll be in Bononia, and there we'll find Romans and trouble. What to do?"

"Halt," said Ramnes, and drew rein. He reached for the buckles of his gorgeous breastplate, removed it, and thrust the armor at Lars. "Ride ahead of us, and ride fast; no couriers have passed us, no one knows the news yet. Proclaim a

great Roman victory over the Africans, show this as part of your spoil, and trade it off for Roman armor of any kind at all. Then ride back a little way and have it ready for me, before we enter Bononia. Eh?"

"Understood." Lars squinted at him alertly. "To what end?"

"If we're stopped, I'm a Roman soldier taking Pelargos as my prisoner."

"Ha! Excellent!" cried Pelargos lustily, and smote his long thigh in delight.

"Wait; we're not finished." Ramnes eyed Lars thoughtfully. "From Bononia our way lies due south through the Apennines to Florentia and on through Tuscany. Right?"

"That's the most direct, certainly. Only, as things now stand—"

"Precisely! Rome wants to nip the Stork, knows he's heading for Umbria, and is ahead of us. What's another way to our destination?"

Lars brightened. "Ah! Cross the Apennines at the end of the journey instead of now! Go straight on through Bononia to Ariminium on the Hadriatic; that's ninety miles. Then along the coast to Fanum Fortunæ, another thirty; there we'll pick up the great Roman road, the Via Flaminia, and will have something like a hundred and fifty miles to Reate."

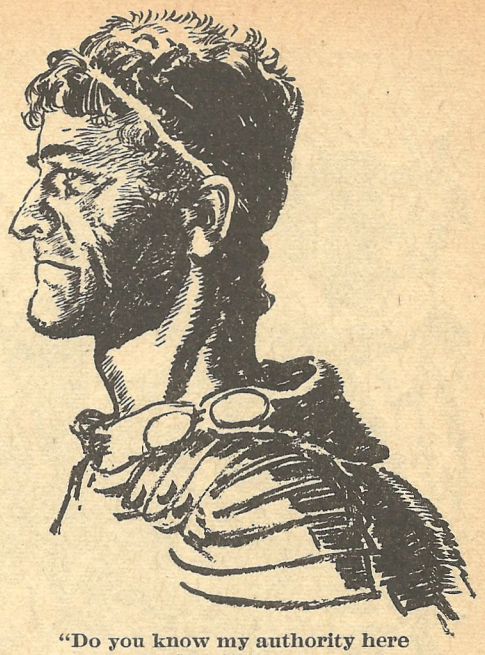
"That's our road. And, once past Bononia, we'll probably have no trouble —they'll be looking for Pelargos along the other route."

"They'll be looking everywhere," struck in Pelargos gloomily. "Remember, I was known to be the friend of old Veturis! That damned Scipio is a thorough fellow."

"All right. Off with you, Lars! We'll follow at leisure."

Lars pricked in his spurs and vanished among the olive-groves ahead.

THE other two rode on slowly for a little, and silently. Ramnes was mentally weighing the possibilities of this mischance. They were not, after all, very alarming; once past Bononia, there should be no immediate peril. Ahead in Umbria, it would be different, but even there danger would be nicely balanced. It was only fifty years since Rome had conquered the Sabine tribes of Umbria. There as elsewhere she was well hated. It was significant that the Friends of Hercules were more powerful than ever. This secret brotherhood, working everywhere to nullify Roman rule, began to bulk large in the mind of Ramnes.



"Do you know my authority here is absolute?" he rasped.

"Well, comrade, you're in command," said Pelargos suddenly. "I know the voice of authority when I hear it; you're the captain of our destiny."

"As far as Eryx, you mean."

"Oh!" The other looked disconcerted. "Who told you that?"

Ramnes laughed. "The Lamnian Sybil, perhaps; a revelation from the gods, perhaps! You big rascal, why didn't you tell me everything about yourself, that your family was at Eryx? You're glib enough in spilling your secrets to the world when in liquor!"

"I know it, comrade; no need of rubbing things in every minute like a damned nagging fishwife!" complained Pelargos. "For that matter, I have other hopes that won't bear telling, at least till we reach Eryx itself. You to Reate, Lars to Asculum, I to Eryx—eh?"

"Right. He wouldn't tell me why he's so devilish set on Asculum."

Pelargos began to laugh. "No. And if I were to tell you, I'm afraid you'd regard the whole thing as childish nonsense. Wait till we get Lars in his cups, and you may believe him. Didn't I tell you he'd be valuable? With his pull at this secret society to aid us, he's better than a legion! Do you expect trouble at Bononia?"

"Of course. It's the chief city of the district, isn't it?"

"Then had I best get rid of my arms?"

"No; leave them. In case of trouble, I'll take your sword. Do you know Hannibal's plans—will he march on Rome?"

The legions reeled; for one moment, the whole Roman line was swept away.

"Not in the dead of winter, not across the Apennines! He'll winter where he is, build up his army, make the north of Italy secure. With spring, Rome will have new armies ready to pounce on him; he must be ready for them."

"Then we're marching slap into Roman territory."

"Pulling out a golden hoard and a lovely woman from under the very nose of Rome!"

"Don't be so glib about it; no telling what's happened in the south. That fellow Croton, that horse-doctor, can't be so far ahead of us—not more than a couple of days at most. I made good time from the north. Do you know what legions were at the Trebia?"

"No. The third was one of them."

"Good enough. Let's get on."

Noon saw the walls of Bononia ahead, through a grayish mist of olive trees. A quarter-mile from the gates, Lars came riding toward them, a bundle across his saddle. He greeted them with a grin.

"The city's in an uproar of joy over my news! And here's your Roman armor, Ramnes."

"Good. Now get along back and we'll meet on the other side of town."

Lars pricked away at speed. Ramnes donned the Roman armor, took the sword of Pelargos, left his steel cap swinging beside the saddle, and rode on with the tall man at his side. The usual crowd of country folk was about the gates, with a squad of Roman soldiers, but apparently no attention was given the two; they passed on and in without question.

TRUMPETS were blowing, voices were ringing exultantly; the news of victory brought by Lars was spreading rapidly through the city. Ramnes began to think they would get through the place without trouble, until he rode into the central market-place. Here was a crowd of all sorts, many a Roman among them, and a squad of soldiers clustered about a whipping-post, where a figure was triced up for flogging.

"Halt, there!" rang out a voice. A decurion, or corporal, leaped into the path of the two, with other Romans behind him. "Halt! By the gods, comrades, if this isn't the very fellow we were warned to get! Look at the lean length of him, look at the stork's beak! Look—"

"Suppose you look at me for a change," snapped Ramnes angrily. "You damned rascal, don't you know senatorial rank when you see it?"

The decurion fell back under the lash of those words.

"Pardon, lord. This man—"

"Is my prisoner. Taken in the battle at the Trebia, sent to Rome with me by order of the consul."

"The battle! Is it true, this report of victory?"

"The whole Punic army destroyed," said Ramnes, and a howl of delight arose. By his armor and face and tongue, he was so obviously a Roman of rank, that the soldiers fell back. All but the decurion, who hung irresolute.

"Lord, if this be true—"

"If?" barked Ramnes. *"If?* The gods help you when I reach Rome! You'll regret your impertinence to Quintus Curtius—I'll get you transferred into the third legion and make life hell for you! Out of the way."

That settled it; cold Roman pride was absolute. Before Ramnes could pass on, however, a cry from the flogging-post reached him. A hoarse cry in Greek:

"Pelargos! Ramnes! Help me!"

Jerking his horse around, Ramnes eyed that triced-up figure amazedly, and recognized the wizened, blear-eyed features. He beckoned the decurion, and questioned curtly:

"What are you doing to this man?"

"Lord, he's obviously an escaped slave, from his collar; further, he had a passport written in Punic. He can give no good account of himself—"

"Well, I can," broke in Ramnes. "He belongs to Lucius Mancinus, was captured at the Ticinus fight, and no doubt Mancinus has purchased his freedom from the Africans."

"Do you vouch for him, lord?"

"Absolutely and entirely! Let him go free." And Ramnes held up a hand. "You, Croton! You heard my words. Get south to Reate and report to your master at once. Do you hear me?"

"At once, lord, at once," cried Croton, as they loosed his bonds.

"Have you need of money?"

"Not if my property is returned to me." Croton glanced at the soldiery.

"See that it's done," said Ramnes to the decurion, and rode on.

They left the marketplace and forum behind, heading on through the wide streets.

Pelargos pushed up close.

"Why didn't you bring him with us?"

"Too risky. A Roman would not have done so."

"Right. You played the part; I'd have sworn you were a knight at least! Well done."

They hastened on, passed the eastern gate without question, and fronted the open road once more. Ramnes, startled by this meeting with Croton, was suddenly anxious at thought of Drusilla, of Lucius Mancinus, of what might be happening down there in Umbria. The way was so long, so long! But Croton, going direct, would get there ahead of him, and would bear word. How would she receive that word? Had she forgot the bearded young ruffian beyond the Alps?

"Ha! There's Lars. All's well!" The voice of Pelargos scattered his musings and brought him back to the present. "Now we can make time—a hundred miles to the sea, or less!"

LARS was waiting. Reunited, the three pushed the horses hard and dropped the long miles steadily behind.

"You might have waited," said Lars, on hearing what had passed, "to make sure Croton was freed."

Ramnes smiled thinly. "No Roman would admit the least doubt of his orders

being obeyed, my friend. It would have been a false step."

"Right! Ha! You should have seen his cold and imperious Roman mien!" exclaimed Pelargos lustily. "A patrician to the very life! No fear; Croton's on his way south."

TWO days; three days. The bright valleys of the Po fell behind them as they coasted the rugged southeast line of the mountains, crossing countless little rivers and streams. Danger seemed well put behind, but they took no chances. When they sighted parties of foot or horse, the keen vision of Pelargos scented peril afar and they took to the woods until it was past; this eyesight of his, indeed, was something most remarkable.

"It'll be of use when the time comes," he said, to the comment of Ramnes. "When we reach Umbria, I'm like to be in perilous places; but one gets nothing by risking nothing."

The glint of the far Hadriatic upon an afternoon of sun; with its last light, the white buildings of Ariminium squatted beside the sea, the long walls and bridges, the high towers. A Roman garrison here, the northern tip of Roman rule along the Hadriatic.

The Roman armor and tongue of Ramnes, and an assumed Roman name, passed them into the city unquestioned. There Lars disappeared on his own errands. The horse of Pelargos was lame, a fresh beast was needed; they arranged to spend next morning in the city, meet at noon, and be off along the coast to Fanum Fortunæ.

Mid-morning: Ramnes, with a groom, was inspecting the horses when Pelargos appeared, accompanied by a horse-dealer and an enormous gaunt gray mare, for which the lame beast was exchanged. As the deal was concluded, a swarthy, bearded man came walking into the inn yard, asking for Pelargos. The latter flung a swift word at Ramnes.

"Quick, comrade—turn away! We're strangers. I've got this rascally priest of Hercules on a golden hook—"

He hurried off, greeted the swarthy fellow, and the two began to walk up and down, chattering Greek at a great rate. Ramnes stretched out in the sun by the fountain, amusedly wondering what Pelargos was up to now. The priest seemed a shrewd, capable fellow, and not too scrupulous, to judge by his looks; he stowed away a purse Pelargos gave him, and as the two paced within earshot, Ramnes caught his words:

"Well, I'll go to Eryx, I'll tell your vision, but I'll take no responsibility. By all the gods, it's a ticklish business! Either you're a madman or you're up to something."

Pelargos grinned. "Gold, my friend, is eloquent!"

They drifted out of hearing and presently separated. When the priest had gone, Pelargos came over to the fountain, and met the inquiring gaze of Ramnes.

"Comrade, that rascal takes a message to Eryx."

"Oh! To your family?"

Pelargos rubbed his long nose. "Not exactly. Look! Trust me a little while. I'm gambling largely on destiny; if all schemes fall through, no harm's done."

"Right." Ramnes shrugged. "Do you know what's worrying me?"

"No. What?"

"Suppose we find the treasure you talk about. How much of it do you think three men can transport anywhere?"

Pelargos met his whimsical glance, and the birdlike eyes twinkled.

"Ha! Practical fellow, aren't you? Well, I've an answer for everything—but that, too, depends somewhat on destiny. Now I'll tell you something, give you a mere clue. Do you know that thirty years ago Metellus gave the Africans a bad drubbing in Sicily?"

"So I've heard," Ramnes said drily.

"Right. He captured over a hundred elephants. He built a mammoth raft and ferried those elephants across the straits into Italy."

"Yes? What became of them?"

"That," said Pelargos, "is precisely the question. If rumor, gossip, army talk, should be correct, the dice will turn up a double six for us. Content to trust me?"

"Yes. If we— Hello! There's Lars, and in a hurry. Something's up."

LARS MASENA appeared, walking fast, his face gripped by excitement. He came up to them with eyes ablaze.

"You've a room here? Come along, come along! Take me to it. News! Wine first. I'm dry as the dust of hell!"

He snapped an order at a serving-man, received a flagon of wine, and gulped it.

"No pause to mix it, d'ye notice?" said Pelargos admiringly. "Ha! A fury's on the man! Here's the real Lars emerging, comrade—"

"Stop your mockery and take me to your room," broke in Lars.

He was, indeed, a different person; the last vestige of the disconsolate elephant-

Maharbal's cavalry, sweeping around, came in upon the flanks—but they did not retreat.

trainer had vanished. Now there was a light in his eye, a firmed vigor in his face, a brusque energy in his voice; he had suddenly come all alive.

When they were in the room with the door closed, he faced the other two.

"There was a man from Asculum—he knew her, he'd seen her!" he burst out.

"Who?" demanded Ramnes.

"Rhea! She's not in Asculum at all. We'll not have to go there!"

"May I ask who the devil is Rhea?"

Lars looked blank. Pelargos took up the word, looking cynically amused.

"Right. You've never told him, Lars. Comrade, the dream and heart's desire of our honest Lars, is to find a woman named Rhea. They were in love thirty years ago; he's never been able to return and claim her. Oh, it's no use giving him any practical advice! I've told him she's probably dead, or married and surrounded by brats—a grandmother, in fact! He won't listen to me—"

"And I was right, right!" blared out Lars exultantly. "I told you we had taken oaths to Minerva and Aphrodite the Cyprian, that she'd sworn to wait for me,

that I'd sworn to come back some day! I told you! And I met this man from Asculum who knew all about her. She's never married. The family has left the old town, in fact. I tell you, Rhea believes in me, knows I'll find her again!"

"Oh!" said Pelargos, looking blank in his turn. "And you want to take horse and leave us and find her—is that it?"

Lars drew himself up. "Have I not sworn oaths to you, Pelargos? We go in company—first your errands, or those of Ramnes, then mine," he said with a stern dignity.

Ramnes struck in, smiling:

"Come, old friend—this is the secret you never told me? I'm glad, for your sake. Why, you look twenty years younger! Congratulations."

"I—I didn't have the heart to talk of it," stammered Lars, flushing. "I hoped against hope, prayed to the gods; all these years, in Sicily and Africa and Spain and Gaul! Besides, Pelargos hurt me cruelly with his talk about what might have happened."

"Confound it, man, I only spoke the truth!" exclaimed Pelargos. He took the hand of Lars and pressed it warmly. "Yet I was wrong; and I've never been so glad to be proven wrong. Where is she now, this Rhea of yours?"

"They've got a farm," said Lars Masena, giving him a strange look. "Where, you ask? You may well ask, you who sneer at the gods! It's just outside Eryx."

Pelargos took a step back. "Eryx!" he repeated, and swallowed hard. "Eryx!"

SILENCE fell on them. Ramnes, looking from one to the other, felt a thrill, a prescience of strange unseen forces—the workings of fate, or the doings of the gods? Why was this unknown town of Eryx apparently tangled in the destiny of them all?

Pelargos rallied. He sighed, stirred, shook himself like a dog, as though to be rid of some superstitious chill.

"For you, at least, the dice turn double six!" said he. "Let's saddle up and get out of here. We can reach the Via Flaminia by night and be on the last leg of the journey."

"And you'll no longer doubt the gods?" cried Lars Masena joyously.

Pelargos gave him one cynical look, and tapped his breast.

"My friend, here are the gods—if we could only visualize them," he said, and strode out, lifting his voice at the grooms and hostlers.

CHAPTER VII

FANUM FORTUNÆ and the sea lay behind; southward, now, on the Flaminian Road, the wide highway partly finished, partly still under construction, by which the hand of Rome lay upon Umbria and the Gallic tribes to the north.

Road-workers, parties of soldiers, sutlers' wagon-trains with supplies, levies of men and horses, recruiting officers tempting the hill-folk to take the Roman penny—here, abruptly, the three found themselves riding amid farflung echoes of war. Of actual Roman troops, there were very few, all detachments having long since been called in, but the occasional colonies provided veterans or reservists who had taken over all administrative functions for the republic, and the Latin allies provided masses of recruits.

Another night found them at the Metaurus river, in a tiny hill town, with the chasm that pierced the shaggy Apennines ahead. Pelargos, only too conscious of possible danger, had discarded his armor and donned Greek dress, shortening his stirrups so that his great height did not readily appear except when he was afoot.

They had turned aside, now, from the road to Eryx, which lay somewhere down the seacoast. South lay their way into the heart of Umbria; then, if all went well, eastward to the sea again, to Eryx.

On, now; a Roman citizen riding with his two freedmen to join in the war, a likely story.

"About the time we get there," said Pelargos, "they'll have the news from the Trebia. So far, we're ahead of it."

They rode hard, pushed fast, plunged along the fertile Umbrian valleys, then up into the heights once more. Twice they ran into trouble, meeting agents of Lucius Mancinus who tried to impress their horses for the service of the state, for hereabouts horses such as these three were hard to come at. The cold caustic Roman tongue of Ramnes sped them on each time, but as Lars muttered, the portents were bad.

"Look for trouble at Spoletium," said he darkly. "A Roman colony was established there twenty years ago. Once past, all's well; thirty miles farther to Interamna, then we leave the Via Flaminia and cut across the same distance to Reate. The mileage is approximate, but the peril at Spoletium is not. At a pinch, we could get there by midnight."

"No pinch," said Ramnes. "Make it tomorrow morning and get it behind us."

Pelargos, that night, oiled his sling and rearranged the contents of his two pouches. He had halted, at every mountain torrent, to seek out a few pebbles to his liking; now he had a goodly lot of them, smooth and round, and also a stock of his jagged iron missiles.

"I did a lot of forge-work while we waited at the Trebia," said he. "Now my fingers are itching for the sling; there's killing ahead."

"Why not three slings?" asked Ramnes, remembering the battle.

"Bah! For an expert, one's enough." Pelargos cast an envious glance at the flagon of wine before Ramnes. "My throat's parched for a drop of that juice of the grape! I'll be a glad man when we reach Reate and my vow's ended. Suppose we get blocked in Spoletium?"

"I was thinking of that." Ramnes turned to Lars Masena, who by this time was aware of their whole errand. "In case of trouble—"

"The Friends of Hercules are strong," broke in Lars.

Ramnes shook his head.

"I don't mean that. Ride ahead and reach the Lady Drusilla at the Villa Veturis, somewhere near Reate. We'll meet there, if separated. Tell her you're from me."

Pelargos chuckled. "You're taking a lot for granted, comrade! Remember her pride."

"And her warm eyes," said Ramnes.

The Stork gave him a curious glance and said no more.

Lars shrugged and assented.

ON with morning, until the warming sun found them looking up toward the high pass where Spoletium sprawled all up and down its rocky hillside, and on farther where the road left the fertile valleys and wound snakewise toward the summits. It was close to noon when they rode in at the eastern gate, unchallenged and unnoted. As they headed across the narrow streets of the hill town, they laughed together at their fears.

"Laugh not," said Pelargos, sobering. "It's never the expected that crops up to hit one behind the ear!" A sudden torrent of low oaths broke from him, as he stared at the gate ahead.

Ramnes eyed him, startled.

"What is it?"

"A man I knew in Sicily, a damned Cretan archer—ride on, ride on! He may not remember me. Of all the tricks of malignant fate—"

He drew his wide-brimmed Latin hat down over his eyes. Ramnes made a gesture to Lars Masena, who rode on well ahead of them. A cluster of soldiers were about the gates; a Roman centurion and several auxiliary officers were standing in talk. Lars saluted, spoke in the Sabine dialect, and without being halted, passed on outside. Ramnes followed; the men eyed him curiously but asked no questions. Behind, he heard a shout, a commotion. He flung Lars Masena a curt word.

"Ride!"

TURNING his horse, he saw Pelargos on the gray mare, in the gateway. An officer, a Cretan by his broad accent, had halted him; two of the soldiers had lowered spears to block his exit.

"By Jupiter, it is! The same long-nosed rascal!" cried the Cretan, who carried slung at his shoulder a powerful horn bow. "The champion of all slingers—well met, Stork, well met! You've not forgotten me?"

"The lion never forgets the jackal, Cretan," growled Pelargos. "What are you doing here?"

"Detached duty. Why aren't you with the army, you loud-mouthed son of iniquity?"

"On my way to Rome, to join up, now," snapped Pelargos. "Give passage, there!"

"Not so fast; I owe you a few scores, my honest Stork," began the Cretan. "You and your blasted bragging about a slinger being worth three bowmen—"

"Here, what's all this?" The Roman centurion broke in upon the scene with brusque authority. "Stork, did you say? By the gods, you're right! The fellow's a good seven feet long—ha! The very man who's wanted—the Stork, sure enough! Off that horse, you; take him in charge, men—"

Pelargos loosed reins and drove in spurs. The gaunt gray mare reared up, screamed with mad pain, and knocked the soldiers right and left in the wild forward leap. Next instant Pelargos was roaring at Ramnes to ride on.

Instead, Ramnes joined him; stirrup to stirrup, the two horses went along the road at a gallop, scattering country-folk, and reaching at last an open space.

"Ride ahead, leave me!" Pelargos looked back, and cursed hotly. "Horses. They're after us. I'll stop them. You go on."

"Lars has gone on; I stay," said Ramnes, seeing that Lars Masena was indeed out of sight.

"Those legions aren't yielding," said Ramnes. "No," said Pelargos; "they're dying."

Pelargos flung a furious oath at him.

"I can stop them, I tell you! This means fight. It's my affair."

"Don't waste breath."

The northern valley lay behind them now; ahead, the road twisted and wound along hill flanks above a brawling torrent. Lars must have gone on full speed, for they saw no sign of him.

Twisting from time to time in the saddle, Pelargos vented a grunt.

"Not so bad. That damned Cretan, the centurion, and five others. They're gaining on us. Faster!"

"No," said Ramnes coolly. "Slower. Let 'em gain. Pick your spot, and save our own horses. We've a day's hard riding ahead of us, and more."

"As you say. Five bowmen, and the Cretan; he used to be a great hand with the bow. I'll take them. The centurion to you. The road mounts—excellent! There's our place, a half-mile farther on; it was made for us."

The road was mounting toward the crest of the pass, twisting and winding as it rose. All was clear ahead, with the emptiness of high noon. Pelargos quickened his pace, pushing on well into the lead, Ramnes refusing to hurry.

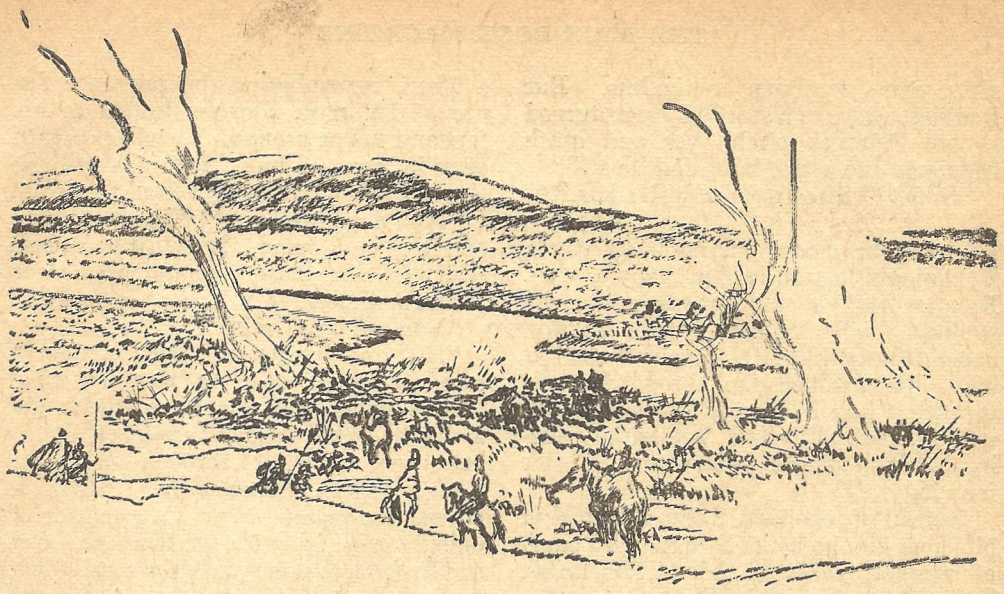
Here the road circled deeply about a hillside spring, mounted beyond in a sharp twist, mounted still farther till it was directly above the spring and the circle. Here Pelargos had dismounted and stood smoothing out his sling.

"No hurry," said he. "Best tether the horses."

Ramnes obeyed, tying the horses among the trees. He rejoined Pelargos, who was taking his iron bullets from the pouch, filling his mouth with them.

"Sword out," mumbled Pelargos; "here they come. Best try a pebble for distance—hard to judge angle fire like this."

He slipped a pebble into the sling, whirled it, loosed it at the road below, and nodded with a satisfied air. He had



picked a spot free of trees, giving clear view.

Swiftly, with a rush and a clatter of hooves, a stream of figures pulsed into sight below—the Cretan in the lead, five bowmen strung out behind, the centurion last of all, a light javelin in his hand.

The sling whirled. Pelargos set another missile in place; one of the bowmen pitched forward in the saddle. The sling whirled again. The iron pellet, unseen, drove home just as a startled yell rang up. A second man threw out his arms; Ramnes could see the blood springing on his face as he fell over. A burst of yells, of wild voices. Pelargos swung around. The horsemen were pressing up the steeply pitched curve, their backs to him, unable to stop their horses or realize where he was.

The sling whirled again, and a shout of delight pealed up from the slinger.

"Take that, Cretan! Take that from the Stork! Fair as you please, slap in the temple—ha! *Back*, comrade! Across the road and among the trees! They're afoot and scattering to get at us!"

Under the urge of hand and voice, Ramnes comprehended. So quickly had the affair transpired,—with such incredible precision and rapidity had Pelargos loosed his flitting death,—that Ramnes had scarce freed his sword from scabbard.

He ran back across the road toward the horses and the thick trees, Pelargos at his side, chortling with glee.

"The Cretan and two of his men paid out—that leaves three, and the centurion. We needn't worry about that blasted Roman—he can't get at us. The others can. 'Ware arrows, now! Watch those trees ahead, at the curve. They're coming up to nip us. Show yourself, comrade! Let 'em have a glimpse of you, stir the brush a bit!"

Pelargos darted a dozen feet away and stood immobile, watching, eyes fastened on the greenery back across the road. Should Ramnes show himself—tempt a shaft from those horn bows that could pierce the best armor at a hundred paces? Trust the keen eyes of Pelargos? Three archers there, stealing through the green trees, shafts notched and ready.

Why not? Ramnes reached out, agitated the brush beside him, showed himself, ducked quickly behind a tree. Well that he did. A bowstring twanged, an arrow came slanting down the sunlight—another—a third. The deadly shafts searched out where he had been an instant before.

Then lifted a scream. Pelargos had whirled the sling, loosed it; the scream replied—a piercing, reiterated scream, a man there gasping out his life, unseen. The gut twanged and twanged again; arrows flitted vengefully. The preternaturally tall shape of Pelargos doubled, unfolded, doubled again. The death he wielded was silent, terrible, unseen.

A piercing cry, an incoherent, yelping moan, and Ramnes stared in horror as a flopping thing broke cover—a man, twisting over and over, clutching at his neck, rising, falling again. Pelargos grunted, and the sling whirled. The man fell limp and sprawling to the merciful cast.

"Two!" cried Pelargos. "Now for the other. . . . I have him, I have him!"

The sling was loosed; the vibrant note of a bowstring hummed at the same instant. One low, gasping cry from the trees opposite. A man fell forward into

view, arms outflung, motionless. But Ramnes, aware of a startled grunt, turned to see Pelargos pitch over and crash headlong into a tree bole, and lie still.

"Habet!" lifted a voice. "He has it!"

IT was the centurion, breaking cover, coming at a run, javelin ready to cast. Ramnes took a step forward, into the sunlight. The staring, furious countenance fronted him; the javelin leaped at him. He avoided the throw, and the centurion had his sword out as he followed—steel glittering, hot oaths panting, himself hurtling forward in utter ferocity.

Instead of recoiling, Ramnes leaped at him, met him breast to breast with a crash of corselet against corselet. His father had taught him this shattering body-blow. The other blade slithered on his armor. His own steel hewed at the neck, bare and sweated, and blood leaped to the stroke.

The centurion, recoiling from that crash of bodies, slashed terribly by the sword-edge, rocked on his heels. Against that solid, massive body-bulk, his own lesser weight had failed utterly. The blade fell from his groping fingers; he stared at Ramnes with fright, horror, agony fleeting across his face as the blood spurted over his armor. Ramnes, set for a second slash, checked it. Death was in this man's eyes.

"Trick—damned trick!" gulped out the centurion. "Marcus Mancinus taught us that—the Fourteenth Legion—you devil! May the gods drag you down to hell!"

He sighed and bowed forward, and fell. Ramnes, with sudden pity, sprang to him and turned his face to the sky. The eyes of the dying man rolled; his voice came faintly, wildly:

"She was right. She cursed me—the Lady Drusilla cursed me by the gods—when we burned the villa—cursed me—within the week—"

The faint voice died away; the head lolled; the centurion was dead.

Ramnes knelt, staring down at the pale face, surmise and conjecture hammering at his brain, all else forgotten. This man had been in the Fourteenth, had served under his father, who had taught all his men that trick of meeting the lighter enemy with the body. Odd! But the curse! Drusilla had cursed him—a week ago the Villa Veturis had been burned! By Roman hands? By Lucius Mancinus of the wild boar's heart?

Then, remembering the prostrate figure of Pelargos, Ramnes leaped to his feet and swung around. A sudden breath of relief escaped him. Pelargos was sitting up, waving a hand at him, speaking.

"Well done, well done! Now come here and give me a hand. Lucky it was close quarters—the blasted shaft went clear through, almost. Can't reach it myself."

"You're hurt? Hit?"

"Hit, and banged my head against a tree," Pelargos said, as Ramnes came on the jump. He bared his thigh; the arrow had gone nearly through and was hanging. "Pull it through—jerk it! That's right. Hercules be praised, it missed the bone! Now it's a matter of doing a good job with the bandage. Get a shirt from that rascal in the road. That was sweet work, with the centurion! Do you know you're a very Hercules? Well, hurry up with the shirt—"

Ramnes was back quickly, the archer's blouse torn in strips. Pelargos investigated his own wound with deft appraising fingers, wiped away the welling blood, grunted.

"No black blood; that means no particular danger. Tighter with that bandage! We must get out of here quickly, before any others come. Luckily, that centurion wasted no time in talking to others—he mounted and came, and died. So the Stork's safe, for the present."

"He talked as he died," said Ramnes. "Less than a week ago, Drusilla cursed him."

Pelargos heard, and whistled softly.

"Didn't I say that young woman was intimate with the gods?" he observed. "Something's happened, there at the Villa Veturis; no telling what. Mancinus, depend upon it! We'll find out at Reate, or you will. This damned hurt is going to cripple me for riding, once the wound gets stiff. Clap on that last strip of cloth. . . . Good! Now, your hand."

He came to his feet, grimaced, and waited while Ramnes brought the two horses. Once in the saddle, he shook his head and surveyed Ramnes gravely.

"Not so good; I'll stick while I can, but I'll have to keep at a walk. And you're on fire to get ahead, after what that centurion said."

"Never mind; come along. We'll have to walk the horses anyway, up this road to the summit."

ON fire? That expressed it. Ramnes, with an effort, fought the savage anxiety, the burning desire to strike in

spurs and ride on like mad. With a spare horse, he could keep going day and night, could reach Reate by tomorrow noon. But he had no spare horse, and he had a wounded comrade. He choked down impatience. A week ago or less! Croton would hardly have reached Drusilla.

"I can't quite credit it," said Pelargos thoughtfully. "That Mancinus should lift a hand against a Roman lady of rank—it's rather preposterous. That soldiers should use any force against the daughter of a veteran officer of consular rank—no, no! Well, we'll find out in due time. Ah! This cursed hip hurts."

THEY rode on. As far as they could make out, there was no further pursuit, no body of men on the road from Spoletium. It was doubtless thought that seven were plenty to catch two men.

"Now you perceive the beauty of my bullets," said Pelargos, with an air of satisfaction. "Take a stone: it may or may not do the work. But when that jagged lump of iron hits and cuts home—it does the job once and for all. True, it needed two to finish off that man who floundered out like a dying fish, but that was because I didn't get a good crack at him the first time. Probably would have finished him eventually, but to see him flopping in the road irritated me."

"Oh!" said Ramnes dryly. "I thought your second shot was an act of mercy."

"There's no such word, comrade; I believe in efficiency, and that excludes mercy," said the other coolly. "This was a rather sloppy performance, and I'm ashamed of it. On such an errand as ours, with play for high stakes,—and higher, by Hercules, than you're aware at present,—the most vital thing is efficiency. You showed it when you met that Roman. Give the other fellow the help of all the gods on Olympus, and give me efficiency, and I'll make a fool of him. Better luck next time."

"Perhaps," Ramnes suggested, "you'd better take occasion to explain your various hints and ambitions. Higher stakes than I'm aware? Then what?"

Pelargos grimaced. "Not yet, comrade. I'll have information at Interamna; Lars will get it there or elsewhere. If rumor hasn't lied, if I find things as I hope, then I'll lay all bare to you. No use stirring up false hopes or planning on what may not come true. Hello—here's trouble!"

They had gained the summit. Ahead, the road ran straight between high forested walls. And in the road, coming toward them, were two horsemen and four men afoot, with a glint of steel. Pelargos shaded his eyes and squinted afar.

"Four men on foot are rustics, countrymen, but all armed," he declared, though Ramnes could distinguish nothing of the figures. "The riders are soldiers. Not Roman armor, though; looks like Sabine cavalry equipment, from the long swords and flared helmets. They've got a damnably businesslike air about 'em."

"We'll have no trouble," said Ramnes.

"Hm! We can't afford to have any. I couldn't bear trot or gallop for two minutes. In fact, I can't bear even a walk much longer—must soon get out of the saddle altogether," Pelargos rejoined. "Confound it! I tell you they do mean trouble! They're pointing at us and coming on faster, as though they recognized us. But that's impossible."

He drew rein, and drew a breath of relief as the horse halted. His face was twisted and gray with pain. Ramnes waited beside him.

The approaching group were, indeed, coming forward with intent and hurrying air. As they drew closer, Ramnes was amazed at the exactitude of the slinger's description; every detail was as Pelargos had said. One of the two horsemen trotted on ahead and flung up his hand in greeting, as he drew rein, eying them.

"Hail, friends! We were expecting you."

"Indeed?" said Ramnes grimly. "And who may you be?"

"My comrade and I are from a detachment of guards, these others from workers; road-work on ahead. We were sent back to help you—the description was exact. Your comrade, Lars Masena—"

"Ha!" ejaculated Pelargos lustily. "Friends of Hercules, comrades! Lars sent 'em back!"

"Precisely." The leader smiled. "I'm glad you've had no trouble with the accursed Romans—"

"No trouble?" said Ramnes. "A dead centurion, six Cretan archers dead, back there. And my friend here got an arrow through his hip; he can't sit the saddle."

MEN crowded around. They were earnest, rude, uncouth Sabines, and they hated the Romans with all their hearts. Tongues clacked rapidly. Two of the men set off at a run to despoil the dead. The leader, getting an understand-

ing of the situation, turned to Ramnes. It appeared that Lars had met them, had found himself among friends of his secret order, and had gone pelting on for the Villa Veturis.

"Now," said the Sabine leader, "suppose your tall friend dismounts and waits here; we'll bring a wagon, and can send him on to Interamna tonight. There, we'll turn him over to others of the society. He'll be safe, I promise you."

"Good, good!" blared out Pelargos eagerly. "Comrade, it fits in! Take my horse and your own, and gallop your heart out! I'll be along in a day or two. Meet you at the Villa Veturis. Agreed?"

CHAPTER VIII

RIDING at full gallop, shifting from horse to horse each half-hour, Ramnes was certain of overtaking Lars Masena before reaching Interamna. Here he underestimated the time he had consumed in the pass above Spoletium. It was late afternoon when he rode into the city above the pleasant valley of the Nera, and he had seen nothing of Lars.

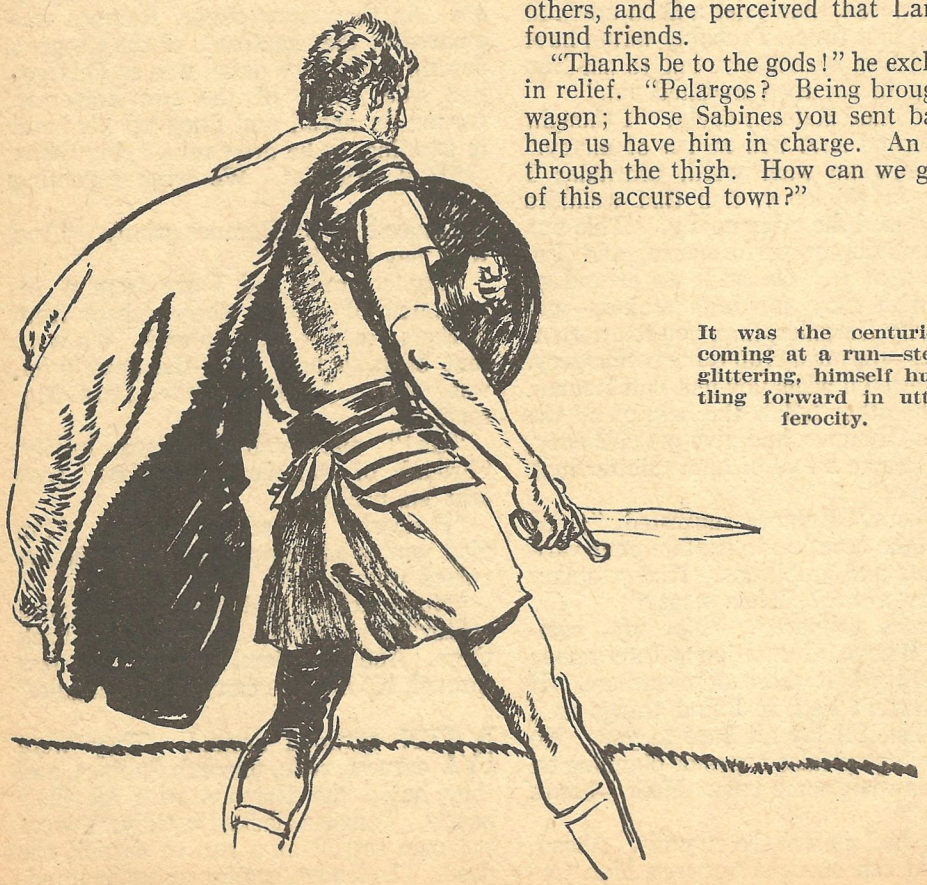
Far from offering any peril, Interamna ignored him completely. The city was in a boil, a yeasty ferment of wild excitement. Five thousand cavalry, from the great training-camp near Reate under Mancinus, were jammed in the streets; they were leaving at once for Rome. News of the Trebia had arrived at last. Ramnes, listening to the talk as he walked his two horses through town, heard that the entire Roman army had been wiped out, except for a few thousand men. He was not surprised, but Umbria was delirious. The anti-Roman feeling was by no means concealed. Those of the Roman party were stern, silent, downcast.

To get through the packed forum was impossible. Cursing the crowd, Ramnes sought information on the road to Reate and from a roadside merchant bought wine and cheese. As he was asking his questions, he became aware of men closing in on either side of him, then caught a voice at his ear.

"A great day, friend, for those who do not love Rome! Where's Pelargos?"

Ramnes turned, to see Lars Masena grinning beside him. A glance at the others, and he perceived that Lars had found friends.

"Thanks be to the gods!" he exclaimed in relief. "Pelargos? Being brought by wagon; those Sabines you sent back to help us have him in charge. An arrow through the thigh. How can we get out of this accursed town?"



It was the centurion coming at a run—steel glittering, himself hurtling forward in utter ferocity.

"I can't, but you can," said Lars. "I just got here; the fact that I saw the Trebia battle stops me. They all must hear about it at first hand. It means something, let me tell you, to these men under Rome's yoke! Is Pelargos badly hurt?"

"No; a flesh-wound. He can't ride at present."

"Come along with us. Here, let one of my friends take your horses. We're having a look at the proprætor, your friend Mancinus—"

"Wait! You don't know what's happened at the Villa Veturis!" struck in Ramnes.

"I do; more than you, perhaps. But we can't talk here. Come! We'll be on our way again in an hour; the horses will meet us outside the gates. Ha! There's the speech now."

Ramnes let himself be swept along. To talk in this crowd was impossible. Trumpets were ringing a clarion call from the forum. A bedlam of shouts were going up: "Hail, Mancinus! Hail, proprætor!" Curiosity seized Ramnes to see this man. Besides, Lars evidently knew more than he about the Villa Veturis happenings.

The crowds yielded passage to the group. They came into the forum not far from the high stand with its curule chair and six lictors and surrounding guards. A slim, powerful figure stood there—not in the purple-edged toga of his office, but in dusty armor. A long, aggressive, lean face with undershot jaw, a voice curt, incisive, challenging. So this was his cousin—unknown, accursed!

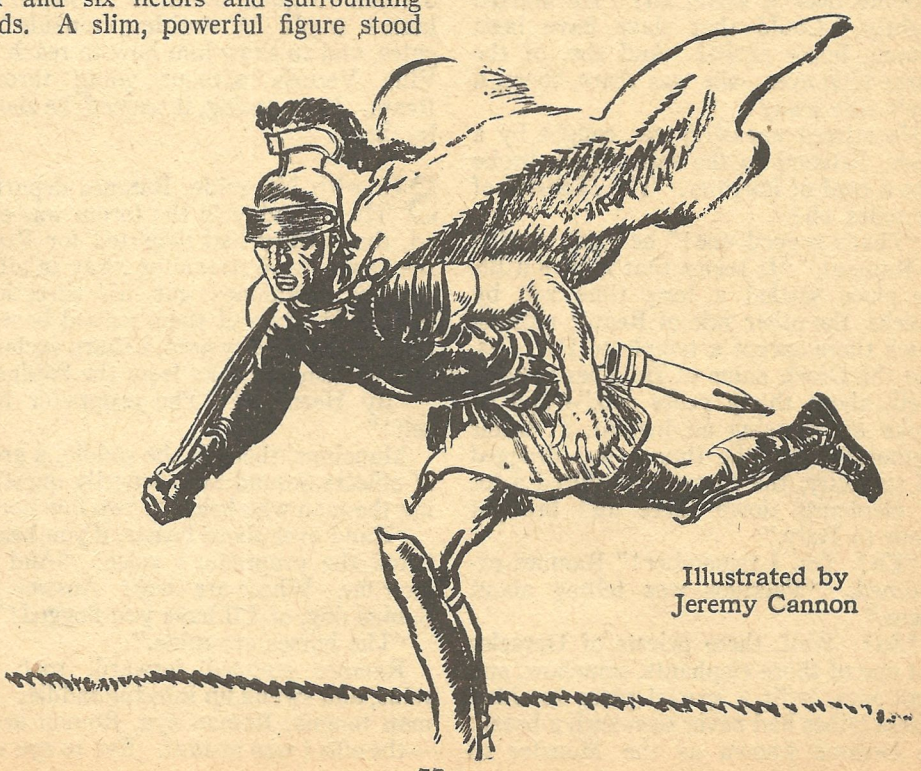
"For the love of the gods, wipe that look off your face!" grunted Lars, tugging at the sleeve of Ramnes. "Come; we've heard enough. Ranting about the glories of Rome. Come!"

THINKING of his dead father, of how the man before him had mounted upon injustice to wealth and power, Ramnes felt savage, hackled fury rise within him at sight of this Mancinus. His pulses were throbbing as he tore his gaze away and went along with Lars and the others, dodging into a courtway close at hand and then into a house, and so into a large and empty room. A slave brought wine, cups, food; then the doors were locked.

"We're safe here; speak freely!" said one of the group.

Lars introduced himself and Ramnes, who told of Pelargos and the killing on the highway. The Trebia? Aye, he had seen that also; it was Pelargos who was largely responsible for the Punic victory. One of the local men laughed harshly.

"We know all about your Pelargos—under his Latin name. Reward notices



Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

are posted in the forum. Umbria is being searched for him. A deserter, eh? One who became a captain under the Africans? They'll never forgive that in Rome! Well, trust us. Your Pelargos will get safely to Reate."

THE Villa Veturis? This was hearsay, but reliable. Four days ago, the proprætor had been there with some officers. Trouble arose over a slave, it was said; the household slaves attacked the officers, there was killing, the villa was set afire and burned. Mancinus and his party had departed hastily at full gallop.

The Lady Drusilla? Oh, she had been away at the time. She was but recently home from Farther Gaul. She was not concerned in the tumult. It was no secret, however, that she had no sympathy with Roman oppression and misrule. Probably Mancinus would not dare molest her, thanks to her rank and her father's name. Still, who could tell? He was a hard man, bitter hard, and loved cruelty. He had flayed two men alive at the gate of Reate a fortnight since. But what of the great battle? The Africans? The elephants? Were they like the Monster of Heracles?

Lars told about the happenings on the Trebia, and Ramnes sat lost in thought. So there was no crisis, no need of haste. Trouble over a slave, eh? He started slightly. Could that slave have been Croton, home again? And she, of the warm blue eyes—she was there, there, a day's ride away!

He stirred uneasily, was caught by a name, listened to the talk. Lars broke into a peal of laughter. The Monster of Heracles, eh?

"That's a good one!" he said, turning to Ramnes. "It seems that there's a little place settled a long time ago by Greeks, the other side of Reate; nothing much there except a temple to Hercules, and the Greek name of Heracles is kept. Well, about thirty years ago,"—and he broke off, pausing an instant, at bitter memories,—"at the time I was dragged off to Sicily, the Romans captured a lot of elephants down there and brought them to Italy."

"Eh? Oh, I remember!" Ramnes exclaimed. "Pelargos was telling about them."

"So? Well, these priests of Heracles got one of those elephants, somehow, and kept him, built a special place for him. These tribes had never seen such a beast; he became known as the Monster of Heracles. He's still there; probably getting on in years, too. People come from everywhere to see him, and the priests make a fat thing off it. Where did Pelargos hear about those elephants? Well, no matter. Here, try some of this Venafrum—the real wine of the gods, liquid gold!"

Ramnes ate and drank, but frowningly, lost in conjecture. Ah! That priest of Hercules, who was worshiped as a god everywhere in these parts, back at Fanum Fortunæ! The priest whom Pelargos had dispatched with some mysterious message to Eryx! It was just afterward that the Stork had spoken about those elephants. And this Monster of Heracles was kept by the priests of Hercules! Well, there was plainly some connection. No wonder Lars Masena was so uproariously amused by the name of this poor ancient beast, and the veneration paid him by the hill folk. Elephants would soon be no marvel in Italy, unless those of Hannibal were all dead by now.

"I'm off." Ramnes came abruptly to his feet and made his farewells to their hosts. "Lars, why not stay here, await Pelargos, and bring him along in a day or two? Apparently there's no hurry on your account. I can go ahead alone."

Lars assented. One of the Sabines undertook to guide Ramnes to where the horses would be waiting, outside the gates, and to show him how to reach the Villa Veturis without going through Reate. By morning, it seemed, he should be there.

SO, with his guide, Ramnes departed. The assembly in the forum was ended, the cavalry had departed for Rome, the people were streaming away in all directions. Ramnes got his directions. But, as the two of them passed beneath the arch of the city gate, a sharp exclamation of dismay broke from the Sabine:

"By Hercules! The proprætor himself!"

Mancinus, there in the saddle, a group of officers around him—angrily questioning the man who held the two fine horses.

"Hand over those beasts, d'you hear?" lifted the proprætor's voice. "And answer me. Whose are they? Answer, you Sabine dog, or I'll have you flogged!"

"The horses are mine."

Ramnes stepped forward, took the reins, and swung up into the saddle. Roman tongue, Roman eye, Roman armor—the effect was instant. Eye to eye with

Mancinus, now, he was more fully aware of the hot sneering cruelty in that lean face and ugly undershot jaw, and the dominating, unscrupulous character behind the cruelty.

"Who are you?" rapped out Mancinus, startled. "Are you one of my men?"

"The gods forbid!"

The hot eyes narrowed. "Your name?"

"A better one than yours."

A RIPPLE of delight shook the listening crowd. Roman against Roman—ha! Something rarely seen! With an effort, Mancinus reined in his anger.

"Are you aware," he asked coldly, "that I am proprætor here, that I've confiscated those horses to the use of the republic?"

"Try to get them," said Ramnes laconically.

Despite his blazing eyes of fury, Mancinus took warning. An enemy, no doubt of it; a Roman, no doubt of it; if a Roman of rank, have a care! But the open appreciation of the country-folk rubbed him on the raw.

"Do you know my authority here is absolute?" he said raspingly.

"No." Ramnes was icily impassive, to all seeming. "A proprætor has military rank only; you assume civil power and the lictors of a prætor, but you say you're only a proprætor. Perhaps you are a consul or even a dictator in disguise. One would think so, from the reputation you have in these parts, Lucius Mancinus."

The deliberate words bit deep, planted alarm of the unknown.

"I lack your name," snapped Mancinus.

"Continue in the lack. I'm a Roman citizen, which is all you need to know."

Impassive, indifferent, Ramnes turned his horse with total unconcern and rode off, leading the big gray mare. He had played the part of patrician to a nicety. The laconic insolence, the incredibly cold hauteur, left Mancinus biting his lip with fury, yet baffled. That he had exceeded the powers of his purely military rank, was all too true. If this were some emissary from the Senate, it might mean trouble for him.

Once well away, Ramnes struck into a swift pace, livid with emotion; that effort of repression had taken all his willpower. More than anything in the world—almost—he wanted to come to grips with this man who had mounted upon the ruin of his father, and he hated to dissemble. Well, at least they knew one another—would know each other better when they met with the mask off!

He sent the horses on at full gallop. The sun was already down behind the western peaks, there was no particular need of haste, but he wanted to get away from Mancinus, who was apparently going back to the camp at Reate. With darkness his pace must slow, for these were country roads.

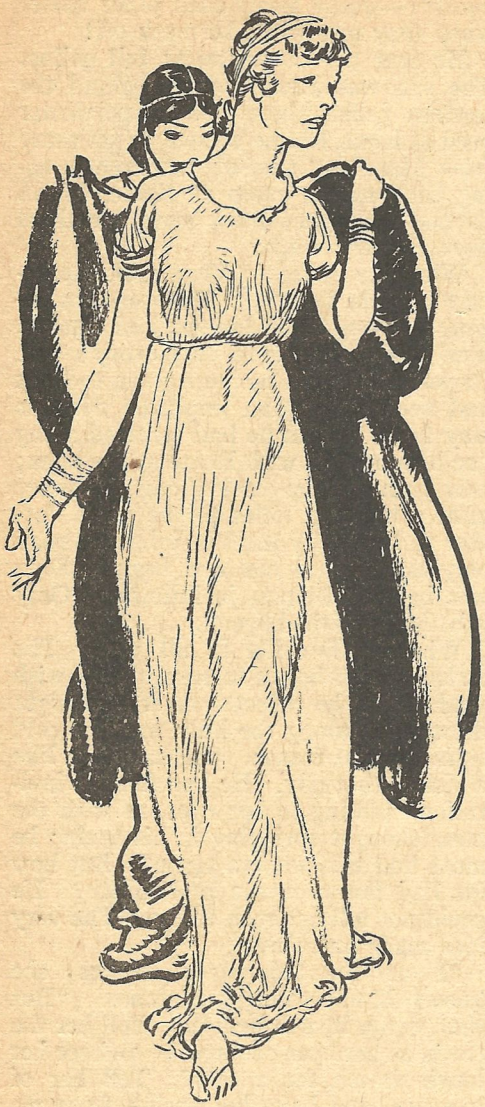
What lay ahead? What could he expect at Villa Veturis? This question began to loom more largely and darkly, now that he was close to journey's end. Or was he? That he must go on to Eryx had been more than implied. All this way from the sea he had traveled along one arm of a V, with Reate at the apex; now turn and go back along the other arm, a hundred miles to the coast, farther to Eryx—by the Via Salaria, a road only partly laid out and begun; Eryx was beyond Roman jurisdiction. Only a little, but still beyond.

What of Drusilla in all this? His errand to her began to seem tinged with madness, as he reflected on it, and night drew down along the hills, and the cold stars brought reason. She had been like a vision, that day. He had fancied invitation kindling in her eyes, as with the same thought springing in his brain; he must find this woman again! But how far had fancy outrun probability? He could not tell her such things. The very idea made him shiver.

"I can use Pelargos as excuse; she knows him," thought Ramnes. "But that, damn it, will be a lie. Tell her the truth, as her eyes command—and see her laugh at me for a fool? Tell her of treasure, and have her shrink from me as one accursed? Damned if I know what to do, what to say!"

He rode on into the night, tormented. Another man would have halted at the first wayside shrine, sacrificed to the gods, and prayed for direction. Ramnes had seen his father act thus too many times, without result.

IT was an hour past midnight, when he came to the forks in the road. By his information, the right-hand road went to Reate; that to the left, would take him to the villa, in its long valley. He turned, and dogs at some near-by farm gave savage tongue as though to greet him. A little farther on, he tethered the horses among trees and rolled up in his cloak for an hour or two of sleep. No use getting there at untimely hours.



He was, in fact, beginning to shrink in alarm from getting there at all.

With the first streaks of dawn, he was riding on, having finished his cheese and wine. His road was well defined, much traveled. It led into the long, rising valley described to him. Those gullies coming down from the high hills all along the right—some one of those must hold the secret of the sybil's grotto. The villa was somewhere ahead, by a stream that issued from the hills. Vine-stalks dotted the slopes, clumps of trees here and there were gilded at their tips by the rising sun.

Conscious that his heart was beating fast with expectation, Ramnes broke into a laugh and slowed the horses. Here was a stream, he had a razor—why not? He passed a hand over his chin and decided for it.

With this he was off, dousing his head in the icy water. He fell to work briskly, and if the job was not neatly or painlessly done, at least he was cleaner for it. Laughing again at his own conceit, he paused to unsling his steel cap and jam it over his hair, which a barber at Fanum Fortunæ had clipped short. What with shaven jowl and armor, he flattered himself that he made a very different figure from the uncouth barbaric Mancinus of the Alps.

He turned to the horses, and put out his hand to the saddle.

Whack!

Something missed his ear and smacked into the horse. The beast reared, gave a squeal of pain, and went away with a leap and a run. The other horse plunged, whirled, and dashed away. Ramnes swung around, bewildered.

Crash! Something hit his corselet with such force as to knock him backward. He lost balance and fell, then came to one knee. A blow struck his steel cap—a ringing, blinding concussion that dazed him. Almost at once, another. A stone glanced from his corselet. Stones! Slingers!

He wavered there, unable to rise, all but sprawled senseless by those shocks. Hoarse voices came to him; his eyes cleared; he saw men running forward from the nearest trees. Shaggy, skin-clad men, shepherds, slings discarded now for clubs. Four in all, plunging in to finish him. They thought him down for good. Sabine shepherds, men of the hills, their speech meaningless to him.

He slumped a little in a swirl of dizzy pain, head hanging. In the nick of time, his brain cleared; muscles and nerves responded to his frantic thrust of will. The foremost man was rushing at him, swinging the massive club, bearded face and wild eyes alight with exultant ferocity.

BARELY in time, Ramnes moved, sprang, propelled himself up and forward, ducking the club and ramming the shaggy figure headlong, steel cap to belly. If the crash sent him all asprawl, it did worse to the other. The man dropped his club and doubled up in a nerveless, helpless mass, kicking spasmodically with one foot.

Desperately, Ramnes scrambled aside as the others rushed in. The fallen club touched him; he caught at it, gained his feet, swung the knotted stick and felt it smash home. A leap, and he was in the clear. One man kicking, one down with

A woman's voice said: "It is good you didn't kill him! Mancinus would bring fire and sword here!"

bloodied face, two coming for him and snarling like dogs as they struck.

Vaguely, he was aware they must have taken him to be a Roman. No stopping to think, however. Here the work was fast and furious—blows coming in from either side, the massive club swinging in his hands, answering his output of strength. It met those blows with shattering force, slapped into one bearded face and sent the owner staggering. Ramnes whirled upon the second man, knocked the club aside, swept in a low stroke for the legs, felt it go home, saw the man lose balance and go down.

Clear? Not yet. Bloody-face was up and shambling in with long club aswing. These weapons did brutal damage, but killed not. Ramnes loosed his voice at the fellow in hot haste, crying that he was no Roman, and mouthing the name of Drusilla; but the shaggy man heard nothing, understood nothing. He hurtled forward, lashing in a blow. One of the others was up and plunging. Desperate, Ramnes flung himself at them in an effort to knock them aside and win clear.

He comprehended only dimly that his tremendous and unexpected strength was beating down all four of them, that they were in wonder and frantic awe and fear of him.

He ducked a terrific swing from one club, sidestepped to avoid the other—and the first man down, who was still down, caught his ankle in one swooping hand. He dragged himself clear, but the effort lost balance for him. He went staggering, arms outflung, weapon useless. The two were upon him like wolves.

A glancing crack knocked away his steel cap and sent him down. He saw the finishing blow coming, tried to ward it off with his arm—and his last memory was a shower of blinding sparks.

He struggled back to consciousness through queer zones of fancy.

An orator was speaking—Lucius Mancinus, it seemed, in that dry rasping voice which stirred him so disagreeably.

"You fools, who else could it be but Hercules come to life? Look at this steel cap, look at this armor—battered, crushed, dented! No ordinary man could have withstood such blows. No ordinary man could have beaten you four giants. A god, I tell you! Hercules himself, by his looks, or some other god."

DULL, confused voices in the strange clacking Sabine tongue. Then nothing for a while. Then a cool, serene voice that wakened echoes in the memory—a woman's voice—said:

"It is good that you didn't kill him! Kill a Roman, and Mancinus would bring fire and sword here! Wash the blood from his face, Caius. You say there's no great harm done him? Very well. Put a wet cloth over his head. Apparently he did more damage to our four heroes than they did to him. Catch his two horses, you four, and bring them here, then get back to your flocks and don't lift hand against any other Roman, or I'll have you punished."

Drifting, again; grateful coolness and wetness on his head. Presently his eyes flickered open. He was sitting propped against a tree. His gaze focused on the only thing in front of him—the valley, a group of fire-blasted trees close at hand, among them the blackened ruins of what must have been a great house. Memory returned. The villa, of course! It was her voice he had heard!

He twisted his head. The effort hurt, sent stabs of pain through head and back. But he saw her standing there in the sunlight, directing a group of slaves and freedmen. Starting the day's work, no doubt, in the fashion of Roman matrons. Seeing to everything about the place, even if the house was gone. A cottage close by—no doubt it was some freedman's house that she was now occupying. Croton! Where was Croton?

His eyes strained upon her. Now her red-brown hair was coiled about her head, and she wore a white gown caught in at the girdle. A slim and slender woman, very proud and poised, filled with youth and loveliness like the morning sunrise about her.

Ramnes put up a hand and shoved the wet cloth from his head. He tried to speak, but blood was in his throat. He spat it out, and she turned, and saw he was awake. Catching a cup of wine that a slave held, she came swiftly toward him and sank down at his side, her anxious eyes upon him. The same eyes, blue, lively, filled with glinting lights.

"Drink this," she said gently, and put the cup to his lips.

"I'm sorry, dreadfully sorry," she went on. "They would have killed you, had not my freedman Caius seen them and rescued you. They're poor, wild fellows—"

"Oh!" said Ramnes. "Don't apologize. It's the other way around; I got what I deserved, perhaps. That makes us even. You see, I've owed you apologies for a long time."

"You?" Her blue eyes searched him. "Impossible. I've never seen you before."

"We exchanged words. You were tender and kind; I answered like a boor."

"I don't remember it at all," she rejoined slowly. "I'd certainly know if we'd met before today. You're not a person to be forgotten."

"Nor are you," he said, and laughed shakily. "No man who has ever looked into your eyes—who looked into your face as I did, that morning—could forget it through all his life."

A touch of color came into her cheeks.

"Where was this? Who are you?"

"Is Croton here? Did he come?"

"Croton!" The word was jerked out of her. "Croton was killed some days ago. Yes, he came. How did you—Ah!"

The blue eyes widened. She put one hand to her mouth in a gesture of alarm, of wild surmise. "No, *no!*" she broke out sharply. "You—it's impossible!"

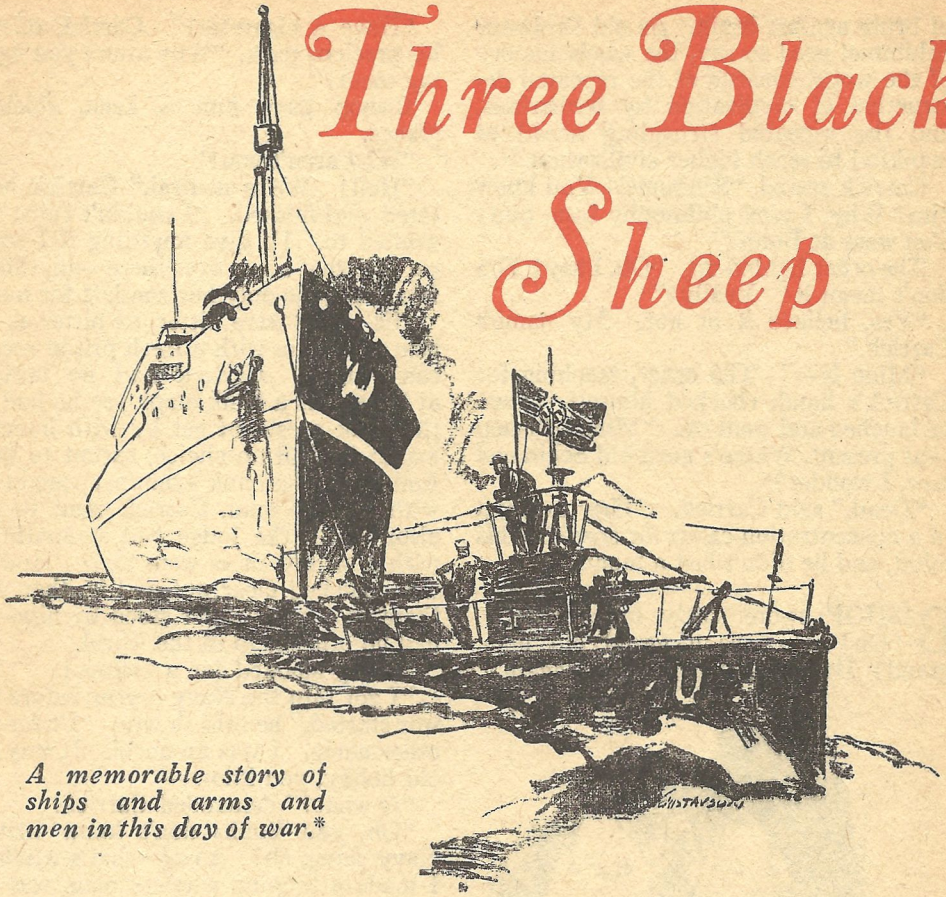
"I must find that woman again!" said Ramnes in a low voice. "That was the message I read in your eyes, if you want the truth of it. I can't lie to you, Drusilla, or utter pretty phrases. I obeyed what the look in your face commanded me. I could not help it. Yes, I'm the same person. You remember now!"

"Yes, I remember now," she breathed, staring at him. "That morning with Scipio. And Croton told me of you, gave me the message—oh, it's like a dream, an impossible dream! Why on earth are you here?"

RAMNES laughed, struggled to rise, and a groan escaped him as the movement brought a swirling eddy of fire across his brain. He dropped back again and lay unconscious.

The third of the four installments into which we have divided this novel will appear in our forthcoming February issue.

Three Black Sheep



*A memorable story of ships and arms and men in this day of war.**

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

CARRICK slouched up to the park bench. It was already occupied at either end; he sank down wearily in the center. The man on his right was unshaven and seedy; he stared blankly out ahead, and seemed oblivious to the world. The man on his left, even more shabby, had his hat pulled over his eyes and was apparently asleep.

Carrick sighed and lit a cigarette; he was husbanding his last package. He was gaunt, and his eyes were hungry, but his clothes were still presentable. He had searched all morning for a job, and had found none.

Beside him, on his left, lay a newspaper. He picked it up and grunted. German! He began to read it, idly—the ability to read and speak German fluently was about the only good his scholarship had brought him. An exchange scholarship, two years at Bonn and Heidelberg. And since then, six months in Sing Sing—only six, thanks to exemplary behavior.

A laugh of surprise escaped him.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered.

"Undoubtedly," observed the man on his right. A cultivated voice, pleasantly accented and obviously English. "We'll all be damned, old chap. But why?"

Carrick looked up, thinly challenging. His face changed and softened; his eyes warmed. The seedy, unshaven man was smiling at him, and something in the quizzical smile, in the friendly but cynical gaze, was attractive.

"This paper." Carrick tapped it. "Published here in New York—and it's all for the Allies! Dead against Hitler and the Nazis! It preaches that all Germans over here must unite to help France and England, and set Germany free!"

"Why not? There are good Germans." The Englishman shrugged a bit wearily. "When it comes down to basic facts, this is a war of barbarism against civilization,

*Because of this story's timeliness, the historical series by Mr. Bedford-Jones announced for this issue has been postponed.

of brute against brain. As old Professor Schimmel used to say, the whole history of the world consists of the repeated destruction of civilization by barbarians, and the repeated struggling ahead of mankind to reach higher civilization."

Carrick stared. "Schimmel! You knew him? Why, I took philosophy from him! You were at Bonn?"

The other lighted up. "Oh, I say! You don't mean it! Really?"

"Yes, believe it or not. My name's Carrick."

"Mine is—" The other, reaching for Carrick's hand, checked himself. Then he laughed and went on. "Mine's Bishop—at present. Where's good old Schimmel now, I wonder?"

"Dead," said Carrick. "They put him in a concentration-camp for speaking his mind, and he didn't last a month."

BISHOP swore softly but earnestly. "Oh! He was a grand old man, grand! Damn the Nazis all over again!"

"Have a cigarette?" Carrick offered his precious pack. "Why aren't you fighting them?"

Bishop gave him a keen, sidelong glance.

"Why aren't you?"

"Hell! We're neutral." Carrick hesitated, and flushed. "I couldn't enlist if I wanted to. I'd give anything if I could get into that scrap over there—anything! It's about the only horizon left for me."

His words were bitter, as bitter as his heart. A man with a fresh prison record can't enlist. Carrick had no horizon of hope. As a bank employee he had let the bank president get by with insecure loans; he had no choice, except to quit. And when the bank examiner caught up with the old man, Carrick went to jail also. Even the judge had sympathized with him, but facts were facts. And he was knocked clear out of life, then and there. Only his sister stood by him—he had no other help in the world.

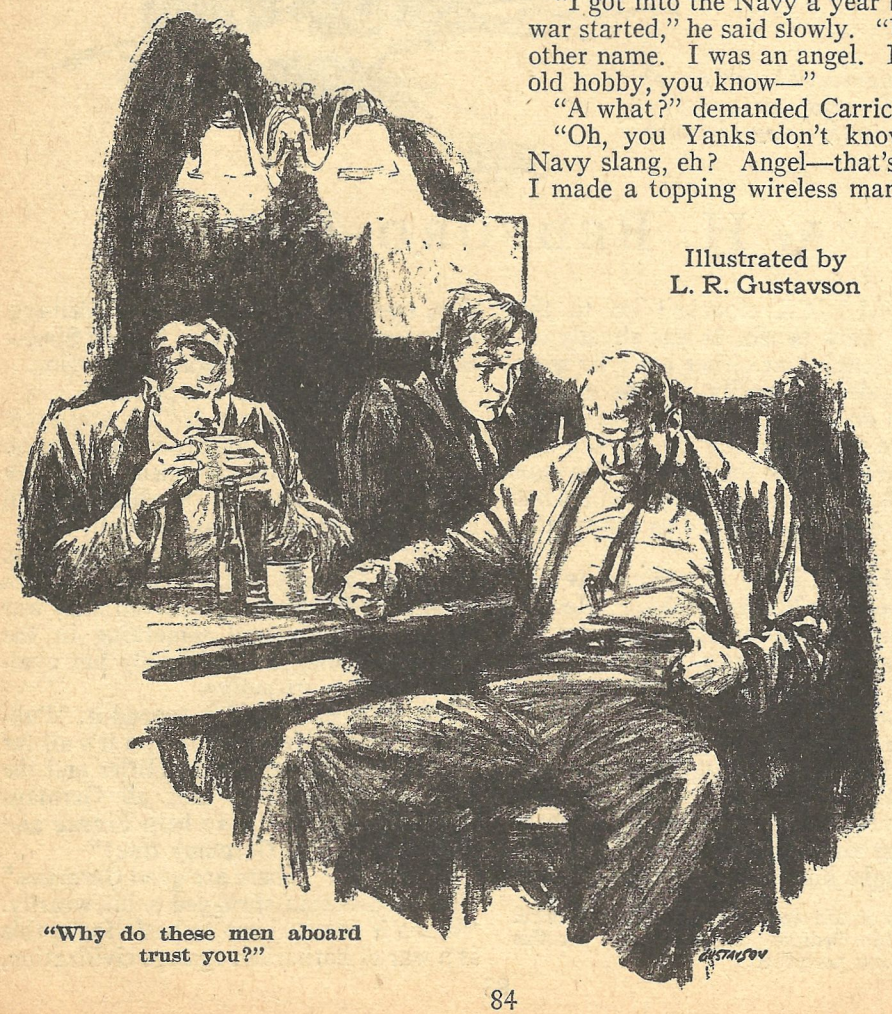
Bishop smoked for a moment.

"I got into the Navy a year before the war started," he said slowly. "Under another name. I was an angel. It was my old hobby, you know—"

"A what?" demanded Carrick.

"Oh, you Yanks don't know British Navy slang, eh? Angel—that's wireless. I made a topping wireless man, was as-

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



"Why do these men aboard trust you?"

signed to the *Courageous*—the aircraft carrier that was torpedoed, you know. Knocked a hole in my ribs. I was invalided out of service, and came over here when I got out of hospital, with a merchant ship. Lost my job. Drink, once more; drink, drink, drink!" he added with a growl. "Drank myself out of the family, out of decent society, out of everything. Did a term in clink, too, if you must know."

Clink—that meant prison. The confidence was savagely challenging.

"Same here," said Carrick quietly. "I thought it wouldn't get me down; but it has."

"You don't look it," commented the other. "Even the refuge of enlistment is now past me. I'm done for. You look fit."

"Fit enough if any job offered," said Carrick. "There's none. I'd take to drink myself if I had the money. Life in a flop-house—hell! There's no future."

"Right," assented Bishop cheerfully. "There's no future, only a quick ending some dark night. It's the kindest thing that offers."

"Except for the family," assented Carrick. "My sister—I have to live up to her faith in me, blast it!"

"Too bad. My family chucked me long ago," Bishop observed. "The pater's in the Navy, too; so is a brother. Jolly well rid of me."

"If you want to die in good company," said a voice, "I'll give you the chance."

Carrick swung around in surprise. The third man on the bench had stirred, had shoved back his hat, and was looking at them. He had long fair hair, blue eyes, a broken nose and scarred face; but it was a strong face, alive with deep hatreds. His English was fluent, with a certain accent not easy to define.

"Thought you were asleep," barked Carrick. "Who asked you to put in your oar?"

THE third man grinned. "Well, you were reading my newspaper. I just bought it this morning—in fact, I only arrived in New York yesterday."

"So you're a German, eh?" Bishop stated. The other grinned anew.

"Because I'm reading a German paper? Bosh. My name is Ole Hanfell, and I'm a Norwegian, and second officer aboard an oil tanker. And I've got the papers to prove it." As he said this, he winked. "Now, by your own admissions, you're bound for hell. So am I. Do you want to come along? If so, we'll get out of this park and find somewhere to eat. It's my buy."

Carrick appraised the man swiftly. Cultured speech, a hard face, fine hard eyes that fairly bit into one. A man of forty or so.

Bishop chuckled. "Ole, you've surprised the secrets of our lives! It's not fair. I know a German accent when I hear it. Tell us who you were originally—and I'll say yes to your invitation."

"Fair enough," added Carrick. "Same goes for me. Speak up!"

The other looked at them hard for a moment, then spoke in a toneless voice.

"FIVE years ago I was commander of a submarine in the German navy—a *Junker* in the Nazi ranks, if you know what that word means today—one of the men higher up. I was Karl von Ritsch in those days. Then came the blood purge. I spent a year in a concentration-camp, because I disapproved of cruelty and brutality to Jews and others. I escaped, got to Norway, and went back to sea under the name of Ole Hanfell. Now you know the truth. Is it yes or no? I'll take you to hell with me, if you say the word."

Carrick put out his hand.

"Suits me. At least, to the extent of hearing where the road lies."

Bishop got up, came over to Ole Hanfell, and solemnly shook hands likewise.

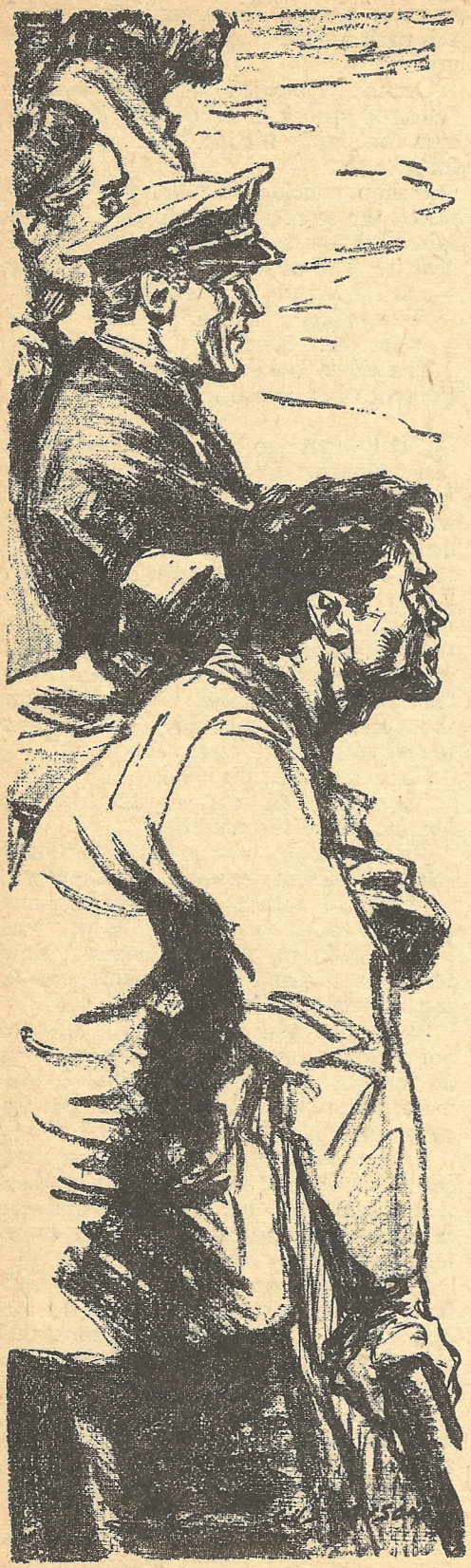
"I've had nothing but a gramophone record to eat for two days," said he. "Or, if you dislike my slang, a bloater. Now for a march past, and I'm with you—a square meal, in other words."

"Lead on," said Ole Hanfell. He was not a smiling sort. He could grin, with an impish, mirthless expression—a grimace, more than anything else. But he never smiled.

Fifteen minutes later, the three men sat about a table, gave their orders, then looked at one another. Ole spoke gravely, in a calm and dispassionate voice more terrible than any wild words.

"For what I am about to offer you," he said, "and for my hatred toward the Nazis, there is a reason which I must tell you. Not what they did to me; that does not matter. But after my escape, I have learned that my wife was put into a concentration-camp, where she was the only woman among thousands of poor men. And my daughter, who was nearly twenty, has quite disappeared. That is all."

All! Bishop swore softly, under his breath. Carrick could find no words.



But the old thought, so eternally true, came suddenly to him: Be your evils what they may, you would never exchange them for your neighbor's burden, did you know what it was.

THEIR meal came. Ole ate slowly, the other two ravenously. A few words were exchanged—comments on the war, a question or two about the oil tanker. She was from Vera Cruz with crude oil, said Ole, between bites. Her engines had been crippled in the big November blow, and her captain had died in the night, and she had put in to New York on a change of orders from the owners. She was picking up a new captain here. Ole had seen him this same morning. A Captain Husgrim. The new orders were to take her oil to London, in order to avoid possible seizure by British ships.

"Also, the wireless man is sick and is going to hospital here," Ole concluded. "I was sent this morning to pick up a good wireless man and one or two others. One will be plenty, I think."

"Good. I'll still be an angel!" said Bishop. "Under the name of Brown or Smith, say."

"Wait. You know nothing yet," said Ole Hanfell. "First, there is a man aboard; he is the mate, Asbiorn. He is the one who killed the captain—poisoned him, I think. He is a Nazi agent, and there are others aboard. Also, the new captain was not named Husgrim when I saw him several years ago at Kiel; then he was in command of a Nazi destroyer, but I do not remember his name. You see how carefully everything has been worked out."

Bishop's eyes glittered behind his blurry beard.

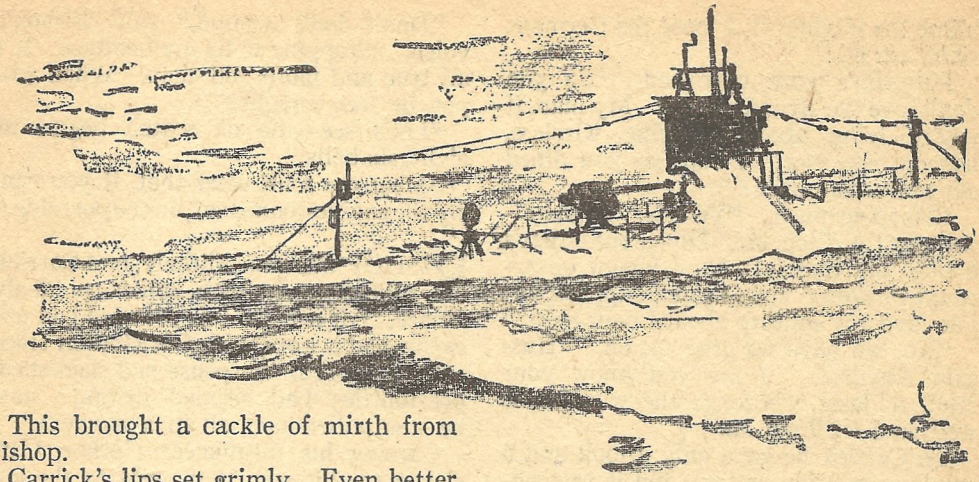
"Why?" crackled his voice. "Worked out? Why?"

"To refuel, at sea, a submarine or two, a raider or two, possibly the *Von Scheer* or another pocket battleship."

Carrick and Bishop stared at him for a moment.

"I don't get your idea," said Carrick. "If you want to hurt the Nazis, just report the matter here, and—"

"Report!" exploded Ole with abrupt violence. "No! I have three incendiary grenades in my luggage aboard the ship. When the moment comes, when the raider or the submarine is alongside—then I strike. Three will be more certain than one, so I'd like to take you with me. Besides," he added mildly, "there is no proof to convince the authorities here."



Shouts of dismay, of panic, of welcome, rang through the ship.

This brought a cackle of mirth from Bishop.

Carrick's lips set grimly. Even better than Ole Hanfell, he could see what this plot meant. The Nazis would not go to so great care and trouble merely to refuel one submarine. Rather, for several subs, for a raider or so, and without doubt one of the pocket battleships which were evading the Allied fleets and striking like thunderbolts up and down the Seven Seas.

"Why," he asked slowly, "do these men aboard trust you?"

"They don't," replied Ole. "They don't suspect me for what I am. My mother was Norwegian; I play the part perfectly; my papers are in order. How should they know? If you say the word, come. I take you downtown now; you will be shipped at once. I think we leave by tomorrow night."

"Done with you, my lad," Bishop said promptly. "Have you any idea where this refuel job might be attempted? Not at sea, surely?"

"I think along the Iceland coast," Ole replied. "From there, it is a quick stroke at English shipping. And no one would know. There are many desolate little bays, with no one to interrupt. That is only a guess. Well, Carrick? What do you say?"

Carrick nodded. "I'll scrawl a letter to my sister, here and now. Then I'm with you."

SO, the die was cast! He did not regret it. He saw the thing with eyes open, and it meant death.

He did not care. He was beaten. That prison sentence had ended his life, anyway. Here was a chance to go out doing something, and he welcomed it. He was aware, also, of a queer comradely feeling among the three of them: Bishop, the drunken wreck; Ole, who had lost everything in life and was yet unbeaten; and he himself, the failure and jailbird.

This did not show in his letter. He wrote, on the restaurant table while the other two chatted:

I'm off at once on a big thing; apparently to England first. No, I've not enlisted as a soldier, my dear. Nothing so desperate as that. You'll be glad to know that I've won out—have conquered fear and defeat. I'm really going to do something worth-while. At least I have the chance; and shall do my best to justify all your faith and love. If I don't return, you'll know I went down trying. And if I win, then you'll hear from me. A hasty kiss from eager lips, my dear!

Yours for the future,
Bert.

He got an envelope, addressed it, and dropped the letter into the box on the corner. Then they were off downtown, the three of them—three black sheep, as Bishop laughingly phrased it.

Far downtown, in a stuffy old shipping office almost beneath Brooklyn Bridge, they met Captain Husgrim and were duly signed on. The Captain, like Ole, was fair; he had a mustache and clipped beard of reddish yellow. There was no hint to show he was German.

"You have no papers? You do not speak Norwegian? Well, English will do." He surveyed Bishop with some contempt. "A wireless man? You're a derelict. Where did you learn wireless?"

"British Navy, sir." Bishop touched his forelock. "Two 'itches of it, before they got tired of 'avin' me around. Gawd

blime the blighters! I 'opes the Germans sinks 'em all!"

Husgrim's gaze narrowed. "So you don't love the British Navy! My man, if you're lying about knowing wireless, heaven help you! I suppose you dined out more than once?"

Bishop grinned. "Yes sir. I was always in the ditch, sir. Dined out—that's a rare 'un, that is! Punishment on account of liquor, sir. I don't suppose, sir, you 'ave any mutiny aboard your ship?"

"No, we have no grog ration." Husgrim laughed. "I see you know your stuff, at least. Manage the wireless as well, and we'll get on."

To Carrick he gave only a look and a careless question or two, and it was settled. The two received their advance money and instructions to meet a boat in an hour's time. Upon which they separated, Carrick having his personal effects to seek.

When, later, he met the boat, Bishop turned up also, half seas over. Ole was with the boat, and took Carrick beside him in the stern.

"Be careful," he muttered as the men rowed out. "You're in my watch, luckily. No talking together unless I give the word. Smith,"—and he glanced at Bishop, who had signed on under that name, —"eats in the officers' mess. You don't."

Carrick cared little.

IN the days that followed, he cared less. The tanker got off next day; now it was work from morning to night, with the winter gales sweeping the north Atlantic. Asbiorn, the first officer, was not the brute Carrick had anticipated, being a rather small man, but with a deadly vicious manner behind his smooth voice.

He saw Bishop only at a distance. That the Englishman was bucking up, was evident. Shaved and decently dressed, he was far from the derelict of the park bench. The crew was a nondescript lot, but several among them were Germans—and this was the only possible evidence Carrick could find to corroborate the story told by Ole Hanfell. Unless one counted the course, which was far northward with the Gulf Stream, according to the stars and to gossip forward.

Four days out, Carrick was shining up brasswork and cursing the impulse that had brought him here. It was cold, the food was vile, and he had been abominably seasick, for the old tanker rolled like a kettle. He was polishing away when a quick, brisk step sounded behind him.

"Don't look around," said Bishop's voice. "Stopping to fix my bootlace. It's all true and more, old chap. When will you be free tonight?"

"Let's see—the off watch begins at eight, six bells."

"Meet me a bit after that, if you can. By the engine-room door, on the port side."

BISHOP was gone blithely, and Carrick rubbed away with spirits suddenly ablaze. All true, and more! He had not exchanged a word with Ole Hanfell since coming aboard. Suspense had slackened, possibilities had seemed distant; now he was pulled taut all in a moment.

Cursing his insufficient clothes, Carrick made his way that night to the engine-room entry; the air was filled with a fine, sleety rain that stung. Inside, at the top of the gratings, the warmth was grateful.

Bishop showed up in a few moments, offered cigarettes, and lit one himself.

"Here's the idea," he said, wasting no time: "They've been sending out code messages. Today came two replies; I took 'em to the Cap'n, and he was hard at work with the mate over charts. I got a dekko at the chart uppermost. It was Iceland, and a certain spot was marked. What's more, they used the old German code in vogue at the beginning of the war. We had it aboard the *Courageous*. Do you get the idea?"

"Apparently you got the sense of the messages," said Carrick dryly.

"Right. We have five days. Then somebody meets us; a code number I don't know, but it must be a sub. The same night, or next day, the *Eisenau* gets there. She's one of their new, fast little battleships—a pocket ship. She can do thirty knots. That means she's at liberty and looking for a refuel, my son."

"D'you mean to say they trusted all this on the air?" Carrick asked in open incredulity.

"Not much. The spot was secret, but I saw the charts. And I'm not supposed to know a word of German, let alone German codes." Bishop laughed softly. "Listen! Can you trust any of the men forward?"

"Of course not. There are a couple of Danes, though; they hate the Nazis."

"Good. When the time comes, keep it in mind to sing out at 'em. I have three or four spotted—the steward's a good man. Norwegian. Lost his brother in a ship the Nazis torpedoed last month. And take this; Ole gave it me for you."

Coming close, Bishop handed over a heavy automatic. Carrick thrust it under his belt.

"What d'you mean by all this about men?" he demanded. "We don't need any help to set off three grenades somewhere below."

"No," said Bishop softly. "But suppose we go farther and do more? Don't ask me what. I don't know. I'm just playing with possibilities. If we're in some cove on the Iceland shore, something may turn up. Be ready for anything. You notice we're putting on full speed? Five days, my son—we're doing nearly three hundred miles per day. Hide the gun!"

Carrick did so. Possibilities? What sort of possibilities? No telling. . . .

The days wore on, with never a sign of life on the lonely gray sea. On the third day of the five, word came for Carrick to belay aft to the galley. The steward had cut his hand and Carrick was to act as helper. A fine upstanding fellow, this steward, named Kraken; he spoke English, and had a vaguely military air. Carrick did not wonder that Bishop had picked him as assistant in case of need.

"Take this tray to the bridge," he said. "And mind your step."

Carrick obeyed, and made the bridge in safety. Entering the pilot-house, he found the captain there, also Ole Hanfell and a quartermaster. Hanfell turned to him, scowling.

"Here, put the tray on the locker seat."

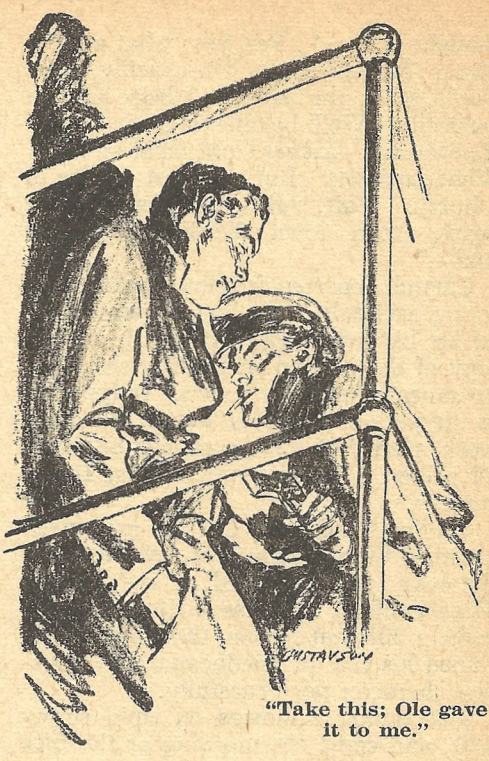
Carrick complied; as he did so, the second officer deliberately knocked over the coffee pannikin, and flew into a storm of oaths.

"You blasted fool! Report to my cabin at the end of the watch—I'll teach you a thing or two! Now get some more coffee. Move, damn you!"

He emphasized his words with a kick, and Carrick scuttled off.

THAT Ole had made the opportunity for a private word, was evident. So it proved, when Carrick reported to the second officer's cabin, beneath the superstructure.

"I have talked with Bishop," said Ole, running his fingers through his long fair hair. "We are now certain of the destination; one of the Heimsey islets, off the south tip of Iceland, deserted at this season. A better spot could not be found. Bishop thinks that aside from destroying



"Take this; Ole gave it to me."

this ship, we might also try for the submarine."

"So much the better," said Carrick, with a shrug. "But would a grenade do that?"

"No. I have commanded a submarine; I know them like a book. If I could get aboard her,—and she will have to lie alongside us for fueling,—then I could open the valves and perhaps accomplish it. We shall see. The point is, will you be ready for anything—quick orders when the pinch comes?"

"Yes," said Carrick.

"Good. All depends on what may come up. Your job will be to shoot Asbiorn. I'll take the Captain."

"Wait! Wait!" exclaimed Carrick. A heart-pulse shot through him. "Listen, Ole! Why do senseless murder?"

"You understand why I hate these Nazis," said the other calmly.

"Yes. Better still, knock 'em over the head, tie 'em up, anything! Get rid of them at the last moment. Then you're in command here. Then replace them with yourself, in dealing with the submarine people. Those Nazis will think you're the agent they're dealing with. Then you can do what you please with the sub—"

"Lieber Gott!" Ole fell upon him with a bearlike hug, and stared into his face with blue eyes of fire. "I never

thought of that! Yes, yes; what a great idea! Magnificent! Go quickly, now. You'll serve the mess and help Kraken generally. We'll be able to get in a word if necessary. *Lieber Gott,* what an idea! What an idea! But we must not be in a hurry. Wait, wait—hold the hurrying heart, crush down the hatred in the soul—"

Carrick departed, leaving Hanfell muttering excitedly. He himself was excited by his own idea. After all, a mere orgy of destruction was rather senseless, upon nearer and closer view. It appealed to desperate, hopeless men; but hard work, plenty of food, a change of scene, all helped to bring common sense to the surface.

Serving mess now, Carrick exchanged no word with Bishop, but saw plenty of the man, and marveled at the change. That cynical, hopeless Briton had become a different person, though he maintained his role of uneducated and Cockney character very carefully.

The tanker wallowed on amid empty seas, and came the morning of the fifth day.

Carrick was serving breakfast. The captain and Mr. Asbiorn finished and went out. Presently Ole Hanfell, fresh from the deck, came in. A moment later Bishop showed up. The three were alone for one precious moment.

"Today's the day," said Bishop quickly. "Just got a message to the Cap'n, Ole. I couldn't decipher it, but it seemed to please him a good deal. Do we sight land today?"

The mate nodded. "By noon, I think. The sky's clear, the weather's good. I make the course direct for the Heimsey islands." He gave Carrick a glance. "Bishop says your great idea is fine."

"Splendid," approved Bishop heartily. "I'm for it. Ole, you give the word. Better wait and see whether a sub meets us or is waiting there for us."

Ole nodded. Eager hatred was blazing in him; but before he could speak, Kraken showed up and the moment was ended, the chief engineer shuffling in with the steward.

TOWARD noon, Carrick went below, got the automatic from beneath his straw donkey, and slipped it under his shirt, buttoning his jacket closely. He got back to the galley, helping with the heavy work, for Kraken's left hand was still in poor shape; but his nerves were taut now, every sense at high tension.

Noon came and passed, sights were taken and compared; then word spread of land in sight. Carrick saw it himself, a murky cloud against the north horizon. A little later, signals were hoisted, speed was slowed—and then she came out of the depths.

Shouts of dismay, of panic, of welcome, rang through the ship. Like a giant fish she came surging up into sight, off the port bow, a sleek dripping shape. The whole crew lined the rail, the Germans jubilant, others scowling. The two Danes cursed heartily. A gun barked from the sub, and the tanker's engines were stopped. Captain Husgrim came to the break of the bridge and addressed the men below.

"CAREFUL, men; we have to do as we're told. We're helpless to resist. They want us to send a boat. Mr. Asbiorn will go."

A man on the sub's deck was, indeed, signaling. As the tanker wallowed, a boat was got off. The six German seamen, Carrick noted, went into her with Asbiorn. As he stood watching, Bishop came up behind him with swift words.

"Ole says to wait, be patient. Tonight will be the time. Speak a word to your Danes. Don't say too much."

He was gone again, and Carrick returned to watching the comedy. Husgrim was evidently pretending to be forced into what was ahead, for the benefit of the crew and possible investigation in the future. The sub forged in close, after meeting with the boat, and Asbiorn's voice drove at the ship, first in Norwegian, then in English.

"Cap'n Husgrim! We're being detained. She says to follow her, or she'll sink us."

Husgrim assented. Ole Hanfell came dashing from the bridge on some errand. He sighted Carrick and made for him, blue eyes afire.

"Now, now!" he spat out. "Kill the Cap'n, put on full speed and ram her! I'll be in command—"

"Not sure enough," intervened Carrick. "Besides, why ram her?" He laughed suddenly, as his pulses leaped again. "Why sink her—when we might capture her? You can run her. Think of that, and wait! Let her get her oil aboard, and then grab her and run!"

He had not stopped to think, to argue possibilities. He was speaking a wild impulse, no more. Yet, the instant he blurted it out, he knew there might be

sense to it. So did Ole Hanfell, who stared at him for one instant, then exploded in oaths of amazed delight, and went rushing away, roaring at a quartermaster to get in the dangling boatfalls.

The sub, towing the boat and running on the surface, headed toward the distant land. The tanker followed. All work at a standstill, the crew clumped at the rail to watch. The two Danes were together. Carrick went up to them.

"Well, mates, there's a Nazi sub, right enough. I suppose you're friendly with Nazis?"

The two gave him a black look. One replied, in broken English.

"Friendly? Do any Danish man lof dose damned Cherman brutes?"

"Oh!" said Carrick, and looked from one to the other. "In that case, keep your ears open tonight. You're not the only ones aboard who don't love the Nazis. But keep your mouths shut. Our captain is a German naval officer."

With that he turned and left them, staring and jabbering excitedly after him.

On second thought, Carrick was not so sure he had done well in voicing his impulse to the mate. He could see, now, how easy it might have been to take care of Captain Husgrim, jam on full speed, and send the tanker crashing into that long submarine ahead. And it might be quite impossible to capture her; even if they got her, what the devil would they do with her?

It was a sobering query, to which there was no immediate answer.

AHEAD, tiny dots of islands grew out of the darkly distant line of coast. For these the submarine was making. No smoke broke the horizon, no sign of life showed on the islands. Listening to the men talk, Carrick learned that the island steamers which made trips clear around Iceland, did not run in winter. Truly, no more desolate or deserted spot could have been picked for the Nazi purposes than this!

A quartermaster returned from the bridge with word that the glass was falling. Heavy clouds were massing in the west, and gray scud shut out the sunlight. There was snow in the air, and when the islets, mere crusted masses of icy rock, came close with later afternoon, their shelter promised to be welcome.

By the time the short daylight had faded, the tanker's cable rattled and clanked out of the hawse-hole, in between two of the islets and close to the westward one, where gannet and other seafowl were the only occupants. The coast of Iceland itself was only a loom against the north. The submarine was moored stem and stern to the tanker, lying close alongside. Her men, on her deck, laughed and joked with the crew of the tanker, and Asbiorn came back aboard, summoning all hands on the forward deck.

"MEN, this submarine demands that we give her oil, and we can't refuse very well," he announced. "But you shan't be losers. They're sending aboard a case of whisky for you, and offer you a bonus in cash, all around, for willing work."

"What in, Nazi marks?" said somebody with a curse.

"No. In English money, five pounds per man," the mate rejoined in his soft way. "And if anyone doesn't want it, let him step out now."

No one complied. Captain Husgrim announced that the work would begin by searchlight as soon as lines were connected with the tanks, and then went aboard the submarine.

The whisky duly arrived, and produced the effect intended. All hands became cheerful, and if there were any damning of the Nazis, it was kept under breath. The first snowflakes began to fall. The crew of the sub crowded her deck, their eager voices ringing. Carrick listened to the talk, and smiled grimly as he listened. She had been at sea for three weeks, had only one torpedo left, and was nearly out of fuel—but more torpedoes were coming on the morrow. Also, her captain had promised the entire crew a run ashore on the islets in the morning, and the men were looking forward to it like children.

"My Lord, man, what a chance! What a chance!" Bishop, coming to the galley for a swig of coffee, found the cook gone for the moment and burst out eagerly at Carrick. "All of them skylarking ashore! D'ye see what it means? You told Ole we could take her and go. So we can, by heaven! Be ready, the moment they go ashore. I'll have Ole ready. He says that with nine men he can take that sub to hell or Halifax!"

The cook came in, Bishop departed, and Carrick went about his duties with hammering pulses. It was possible, after all! Do it, and to hell with consequences later! If they could get that sub and clear out, before the battleship arrived—glory be, that was something to live for!

The darkness was split by searchlights. Lines were connected, the pumps went to

This frightful instant of delay nearly lost the whole game.

work, and long before midnight the not too capacious tanks of the submarine were filled. The work was done; except for an anchor watch, the two craft became silent with sleep, while soft snow filtered down from the skies. When Carrick turned in, one of the Danes came to him with a mutter.

"What did you mean by it?"

"Wait," said Carrick. "Wait for daylight. Be ready."

He himself found sleep hard to win, but it came at last. It came, upon thoughts of that letter to his sister, the only soul who cared. "I'm really going to do something worth-while . . . if I win, then you'll hear from me." Win—what? He was not concerned about this. Something worth-while? A true prophecy, perhaps. Strange, how things turned out!

"All hands! All hands to clear snow!"

Out in the dawn-darkness, all of them. Lights were glimmering from the submarine. The snow had ceased, but was inches deep on deck. They fell to work with laughter and snowballing, and settled down to the job under the smooth acid tongue of Asbiorn. Never could Carrick forget how this man had killed the original captain of the tanker with poison; he believed everything, now.

Reporting to the galley, he went about his own work, while a winch rattled away aft. Cabin stores were being put aboard the sub. The slow daylight grew. Carrick brought their morning meal to the

But Carrick was already jumping desperately for the deck below.

captain and to Asbiorn and the chief engineer. He was unloading a tray when Bishop came in and gave the captain a message. Husgrim looked at it, barked a word at Asbiorn, and they went out together.

Bishop chuckled, and sat down.

"We'll have the day clear," he said to Carrick, regardless of the chief. "The pocket won't be along till night."

The slow-witted chief, one of the few real Norwegians aboard, gaped at them, shook his head, and departed. Carrick leaned over the table.

"The pocket? You mean the battleship?"

"Precisely. What's more, take a look at the submarine's deck—"

He broke off sharply. The captain and Asbiorn re-entered and sat down again to their interrupted meal. Carrick went to the galley.

The winch had ceased to rattle; the desired stores were aboard the submarine. Her crew had closed the loading hatches. Now they were piling into the tanker's boat, which still trailed alongside. They were laughing, talking boisterously, eager for the run ashore; but the boat would not hold them all.

"Two of us will row back for the rest!" came the cheery words, and it shoved off. The islet was blanketed with new snow. The hearty German voices rang gayly across the water. But Carrick, looking at the sub's deck, saw what Bishop had

meant. Not all the men were leaving. Two men, with belted pistols, were remaining as guards.

Kraken, the steward, was in the galley, talking with the cook. He gave Carrick a hard, straight, questioning look; Carrick comprehended that Bishop must have said something to the man. When his tray was loaded, he gave Kraken a nod and a word.

"Almost ready. Stand by."

Back in the mess-cabin, Husgrim and Asbiorn were about to depart, hurriedly. Ole Hanfell had just come in; they were speaking with him.

"We may be aboard the submarine some time," Husgrim said. "We'll leave you in charge here. Keep the men at work. I don't like the attitude some of them display."

As the two left, the assistant engineer showed up for his breakfast. He was a Scot named Fingal, an old grizzled man with beetling eyebrows. Carrick set down his tray. The three of them were alone with Fingal. They disregarded him. The tension broke suddenly. Ole Hanfell was in a fury of suppressed excitement, as Carrick spoke.

"Two guards, on her deck. Armed."

Bishop came to his feet, and his face was like an icy mask. He plucked out his pistol.

"Can't be helped. Now's the time, once that boat has taken off the others," he said coolly. "The Cap'n and Asbiorn are aboard the sub; three officers there. That makes five down below, two on her deck. We can handle it. Ole, are you giving orders, or am I?"

CARRICK freed his automatic. Ole Hanfell stood up, his own weapon in hand.

"I'll give them," he said, "if you don't mind." His voice was whistling, his blue eyes were ablaze. "We'll all three go down to her deck. I'll go straight below. Bishop, you follow me as soon as you and Carrick attend to the two guards. Carrick, you stay topside and cast off the lines. No more than two of us must go down, first—there's no room down there for a crowd."

"We're all set to go, I think," said Bishop, throwing off the safety catch of his pistol. "By the way, I've wrecked the wireless up above. Nobody aboard here will do any communicating. Carrick, keep any men who want to join us, till we've finished below. Kraken is all set—"

Old Fingal had been staring at them, jaw fallen, eyes bulging.

"You—are you all mad?" he cried, shoving back his chair. "What's the meaning of this? What is it, I say?"

Bishop swung toward him. "We're taking that sub and clearing out," he said quietly. "That's our job, Fingal. You stick to yours—"

"You fool!" The Scot caught his breath, then hammered his fist on the table. "You fools! So that's the game, is it? Damn you all, why didn't you take me in on it? I'm not too old to strike a blow against the blasted Nazis!"

THERE was an instant of silence. Then Carrick laughed harshly.

"If you're bound for hell with us, get busy! Look up Kraken and the men for'ard—those two Danes will join us. Perhaps others."

"Come on," said Hanfell, and strode out. "Let me go first, you two. The guards won't think anything of it till you come down."

They gained the deck together. The time was just right. The boat had come back to the sub, taking aboard the rest of her men, and was now nearly at the island shore.

Hanfell went over the side and down the Jacob's ladder. The two guards, below, were talking together. As Hanfell came to the sub's deck, one of them said something; Hanfell spat out a reply in German and started for the conning-tower hatch.

And, at this moment, Asbiorn came up through that hatch, laughing, leaping out into the daylight, joking with one of the Nazi officers who followed him. They came face to face with Ole Hanfell.

Hanfell jerked up his pistol—and nothing happened. He had forgotten to throw off the safety.

This frightful instant of delay nearly lost the whole game. The two guards broke into a run. Asbiorn whipped out an automatic. But Carrick was already in the air, over the rail and jumping for the deck below, desperately.

He came down on top of the Nazi officer. At the rail above, Bishop's pistol exploded, and Asbiorn whirled around. Hanfell, cursing furiously, flung himself at the open hatchway. Carrick was staggered by the impact of his leap, saw the Nazi officer come to one knee with leveled pistol, and his own weapon blasted the man back. The two guards were firing. Bullets shrilled around his head. Bishop

fired again. He fired. The guards pitched sideways, both of them, and one lay still while the other splashed overboard.

"Mind the lines, Carrick!"

The sharp cry broke from Bishop. He was down, now, and diving for the hatch. Carrick started forward, when the prostrate guard came to one knee and fired pointblank. Carrick felt the wind of that bullet past his cheek. To his answering shot, the guard screamed and fell backward, and slid into the water. Asbiorn lay sprawled, dead, face to the sky.

Reaching the forward line, Carrick cast it off and started aft. From below came a shot, a roar of voices, then silence. He ran aft at top speed, reached the after line, and cast it off; then, holding the line, he waited.

From the rail above, now lined with heads, came a storm of words. Old Fingal was on the ladder, gray hair blowing, bawling something. Carrick looked up.

"Those who want to join in, come aboard!" he shouted. "Kraken!"

Voices made excited reply. Fingal clumped down on the sub's deck, darted at Asbiorn, and picked up the fallen automatic. From below, lifted the voice of Bishop.

"Ahoy, Carrick! All clear. Send down a couple of men!"

"Go ahead," said Carrick, and the old Scot plunged at the hatchway.

ONE of the Danes was on the ladder. The other straddled the tanker's rail and dropped, landing neatly. Kraken was at the ladder head, and called down to Carrick.

"Four more coming!"

"Come ahead," said Carrick, and motioned the Danes. "One of you go below. The others wait here with me."

Shouts, questions, an excited babble—he ignored it all. A panting cry from the hatchway drew two of the men. The body of Captain Husgrim was handed up, shapeless with the horror that clothes the human frame in death. A growl broke from the men, who slid the body overboard, then turned to Asbiorn and sent him after the skipper. The two guards had gone down without further trace. The Nazi officer, who died as they picked him up, went after his men.

Bishop came out of the hatchway with a jump.

"All safe! Two officers tied up below." He glanced around. "You men—below, if you're going with us! Smart about it, lads!"

"Hey!" One of the men at the tanker's rail above, let out a shout. "The boat's puttin' off!"

Bishop was eying the men as they filed down out of sight. Four others had joined the Danes. Now he came to Carrick, who still held the line.

"Cast off!" he exclaimed. "Ten of us and Ole—enough, he says! Cast off!"

The submarine was shivering under their feet; the engines were going. Carrick let go the line. The long, slim thing moved through the water. Ole Hanfell's voice came from the conning-tower, bawling something. She backed and backed. Once away from the tanker, they saw the boat crammed with men, halfway out from the island.

Carrick threw up the pistol, fired over the boat, and she came to a halt.

The sub slowly turned, picked up speed, and headed out to sea. Then, stumbling up on deck, Ole Hanfell appeared. He seemed gasping; tears sparkled on his cheeks. He came to the other two and clutched at them.

"What's up? Hurt?" asked Bishop.

"No, no." Hanfell caught his breath. "Listen, listen—I can't believe it! *Lieber Gott*, but it is true!"

"What?" demanded Carrick. The other hugged him suddenly.

"This commander, below—I know him, he knows me! He tells me that my wife is out of Germany, she is safe in Denmark, and maybe my daughter too. *Ach, lieber Gott, lieber Gott—*"

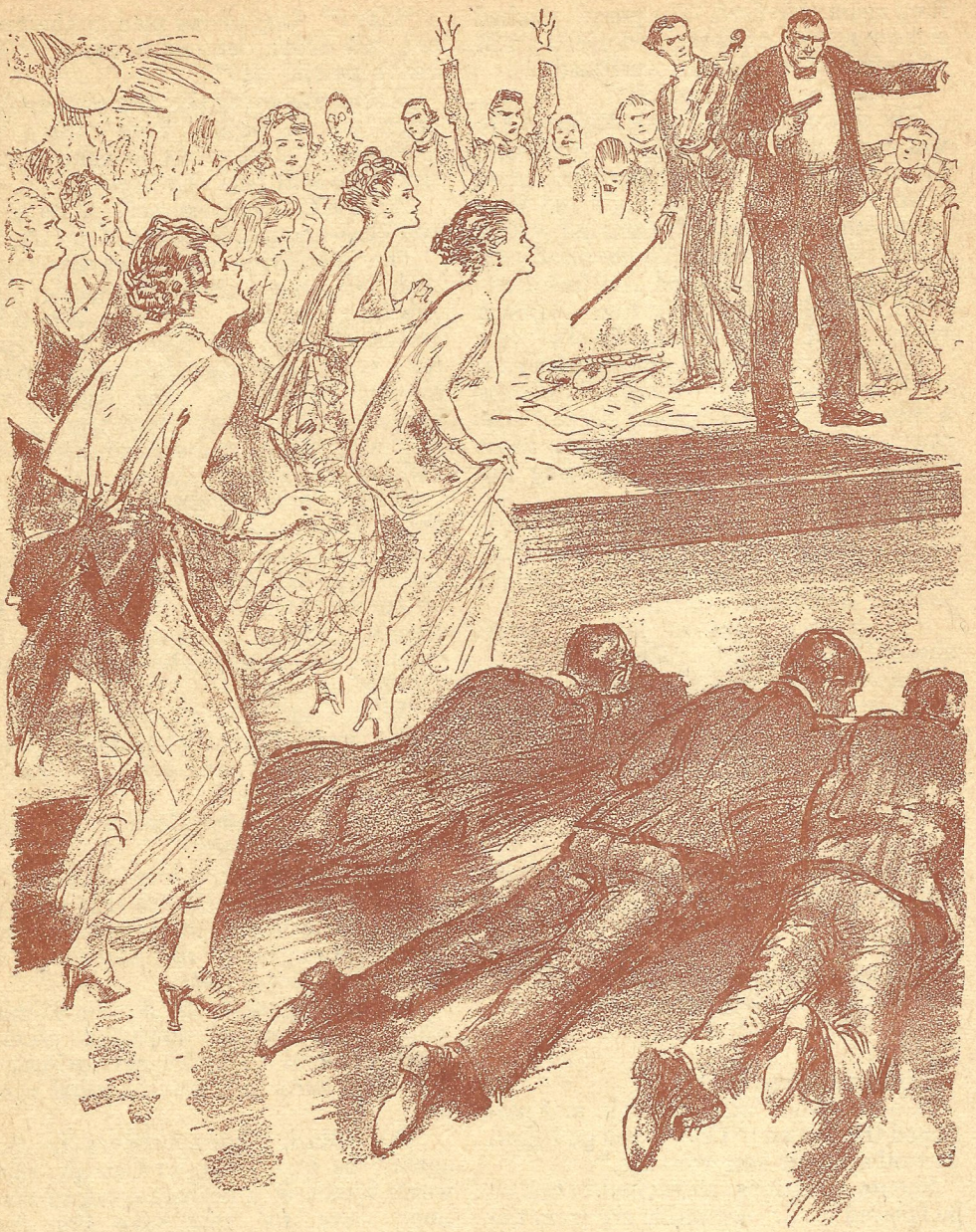
And looking up to the sky, he babbled while tears coursed down his cheeks. Bishop caught Carrick's eye, grimaced, and tried hard to affect his usual cynic air.

"One Black Sheep believes in God again," he said. Yet, to Carrick, these words hinted at a desperate tug of emotion. "Ole, for your sake I'm glad, damned glad! Well, now we've got her, where are we going with her?"

Carrick looked again at the rapt, unseeing face of Ole Hanfell. Then he turned, took Bishop by the arm, and swung him around.

"WHAT the hell does it matter?" he said gently, and lifting his arm, pointed. "There! We're on our way; and one of us, at least, believes in God again, as you say."

Following his hand, they looked out ahead, over the wide unbroken sea, where a glory of sunlight was streaming down through the clouds.



THE DANCE OF DEATH

By THOMAS W. DUNCAN

Illustrated by his fellow-Iowan Orson Lowell

WITH his round face flushed and smiling, Judge Ernest Gowan spied Detective Shep Millen and called heartily: "Well, Shep, how'd you like it?"

"Fine," Millen lied.

"Glad you bought a ticket?"

"Sure."

The slice of orange in Judge Gowan's glass bumped his sweat-beaded upper lip. After fifty years of eating and drinking delicious concoctions, the Judge was as round and plump as a red apple.

"I knew you'd enjoy yourself," he boomed above the racket of the orchestra. "Not to mention helping the Chinese. . . . Want to join me at the dice-table?"

Shep Millen shook his head.

Finishing his drink, the Judge chuckled: "Here's where I lose a few bucks."

And he made his way toward the dice-table, waddling among the men in white dinner-jackets and the gorgeously-gowned women of Reyford's caviar set.

Millen dismissed a humorous impulse to kick Judge Gowan. The Judge it was who had sold him a ticket to this Saturday-night charity party to raise money for Chinese refugees. Because his sympathies were with China, Millen had bought the ticket; and because a strain of Scotch blood ran with the abundant Irish in his veins, he had decided to attend: he hated to toss away money. But attending had been a mistake—he felt as out of place as a bullhead among goldfish.

With a sigh, Millen paced to the veranda door which overlooked the municipal golf-links. Because it was cheap, the arrangements committee had rented this smallish clubhouse for the party, rather than one of the large country-clubs. . . .

In his thirties, Shep Millen, head of the Homicide Bureau, was a spare man with

"Down!" Millen warned. "Keep down, you fools!"

In this swift-paced novelette a hold-up and murder at a country-club dance give an able detective a dangerous job.

a thin and rather saturnine face. His smooth pompadour was a shade darker than beach sand, and his blue eyes were bright and shrewd. Some people thought them hard eyes. Lawless people, especially, thought so.

Wearily and disapprovingly those hard eyes now scanned the gay party. They swept the polished floor, where pretty ankles were flashing to a swing version of "In the Good Old Summer Time," moved past the bar, and halted at the far end of the room, where people were crushed three deep around the chuck-a-luck and dice-tables.

Millen didn't like that. He knew that this gambling was for charity (the committee received a dime on every bet), and he further knew that the police commissioner had sanctioned the committee's plans for raising money in this fashion. Nevertheless, the laws of this State prohibited gambling, and so long as a law remained on the books, Millen believed in enforcing it.

There was, of course, nothing he could do about it, except feel uneasy.

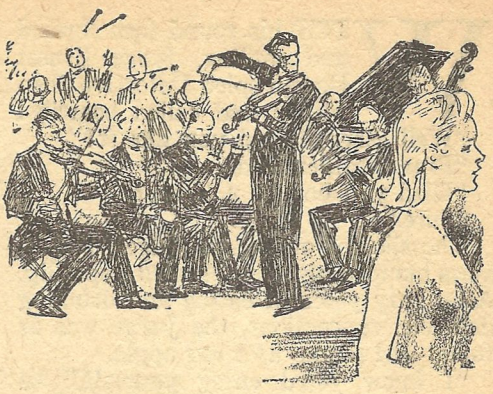
Uneasiness—perhaps that accounted for the bleak dejection that had brushed him as soon as he arrived. He kept experiencing misgivings about this swank party; and he couldn't understand why.

Skirting the dancing-floor, he paced toward the gaming tables. In charge of the big chuck-a-luck dice was Cuthbert Dwyer, one of the city's richest tycoons. That was very well; if gambling must be part of the entertainment, let amateurs conduct it in a frolicsome spirit. But Millen scowled when he noted who had charge of the baize-covered dice-table.

It was Leo Sennley, the smoothest conversationalist and most opulent dresser who had ever dealt himself a card from the bottom of the deck. Big and heavily handsome, he had marcelled-looking black hair and a mouthful of gleaming teeth.

"ALL right, gentlemen and ladies, too," his voice rippled, "into the leather cup they go. Place your bets, gentlemen, and remember China."

Shep Millen wanted to snort. The rôle of protector of the weak was a new one indeed for Leo Sennley. Pitchman, alley-entrance grafter, bogus-stock salesman, card-sharper—all of those occupations he had followed; and now he owned a roadhouse where one might pay five dollars for thirty cents' worth of chicken, and lose money on the wheels.



The dice rolled—rolled again. Sennley's honey-smooth chatter rippled on. The bills that rustled to the table were of uncommonly large denominations; plenty of money had come to this party.

Into Shep Millen's thoughts a voice broke; Sennley had recognized him.

"Place your bets, gentlemen—and have no fear of double-dealing. For we have with us tonight a guardian of law and order, none other than Shep Millen, detective extraordinary."

Millen felt the blood working into his ears.

"Remember China, gentlemen—and if you'll cast your eyes on the man with muddy blond hair, you'll see old Sherlock Snoop himself—the finest detective who ever arrested a tramp for stealing a look through a bakery window."

A woman giggled; people were twisting their heads to stare. To his mouth Millen forced a mirthless smile. This guying was apparently so good-natured that he couldn't openly resent it without showing himself up for a grouch; but beneath the surface of Sennley's persiflage rippled a deep current of resentment. As a harness bull, Millen had once arrested Sennley for selling dubious fountain pens on the street without a license. That was a decade ago, before Sennley had grown so great, but he had never forgotten.

The dice kept rolling. As soon as he could leave the table without appearing to run away from Sennley's banter, Millen edged through the crowd and stopped at the bar. He ordered a planter's punch: that frosty child of tropical thirst seemed eminently suited to this hot summer night. Jack Spaulding, a newspaper reporter who was prominent on the committee which had planned this party, stood behind the bar wearing a white apron.

"Why," Millen asked, "did you get Sennley to run the dice-table?"

"Place your bets, gentlemen, and remember China."

"He knows the lingo, doesn't he?"

Millen admitted that.

"Besides," the reporter grinned, "these debs and their mammas get a rise out of seeing a real live character from the underworld."

"They could spend a night in jail and see a lot of characters."

Spaulding laughed. "And these fat tycoons like it, too. They get so bored with each other's company at most parties that a guy like Sennley is a relief. He adds spice. And Sennley loves it—I think he's got social ambitions."

Millen almost choked on his drink.

"Cheer up, Shep," the reporter grinned. "Remember, it's all for a good cause."

Carrying his glass, Millen wandered toward the veranda. Yes, a good cause—and he was a fool to wear a long face on such a gay occasion. . . . Or was he? Again he experienced that feeling of uneasiness.

Then suddenly Millen grinned. He thought he understood. Since he was off-duty, and going out socially, he had not worn his shoulder-holster and gun. He had left them parked with his sedan. Being unarmed at a party where Leo Sennley was in charge of dicing had made him feel naked.

He emerged to the veranda and stood at the railing, gazing out over the dark sweep of the golf-course. Finishing his drink, he decided to chuck the rest of the evening and go home to bed.

But just then a pleasant feminine voice behind him said:

"Hello, Shep Millen."

The voice's owner proved to be a girl of eighteen, blonde and graceful; and although Millen had the vague feeling that he had seen her before, he couldn't recall where.

"Don't you remember me?" she smiled. And she added: "Maybe my figure is familiar, even if you can't remember my name."

Her banter both irritated and embarrassed him.

"I'm Edith Gowan."

Edith Gowan—Judge Gowan's daughter. The last time he had seen her, several years ago at the Judge's home, she had been a gangling little girl.

"You've grown up," he said.

"Oh, yes," she chirped. "Time marches on."

She introduced her escort, a nice-looking kid named John Somebody-or-Other, who seemed impressed at shaking hands with a plain-clothes man.