DEEP-SEA RENDEZVOUS, A COMPLETE NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

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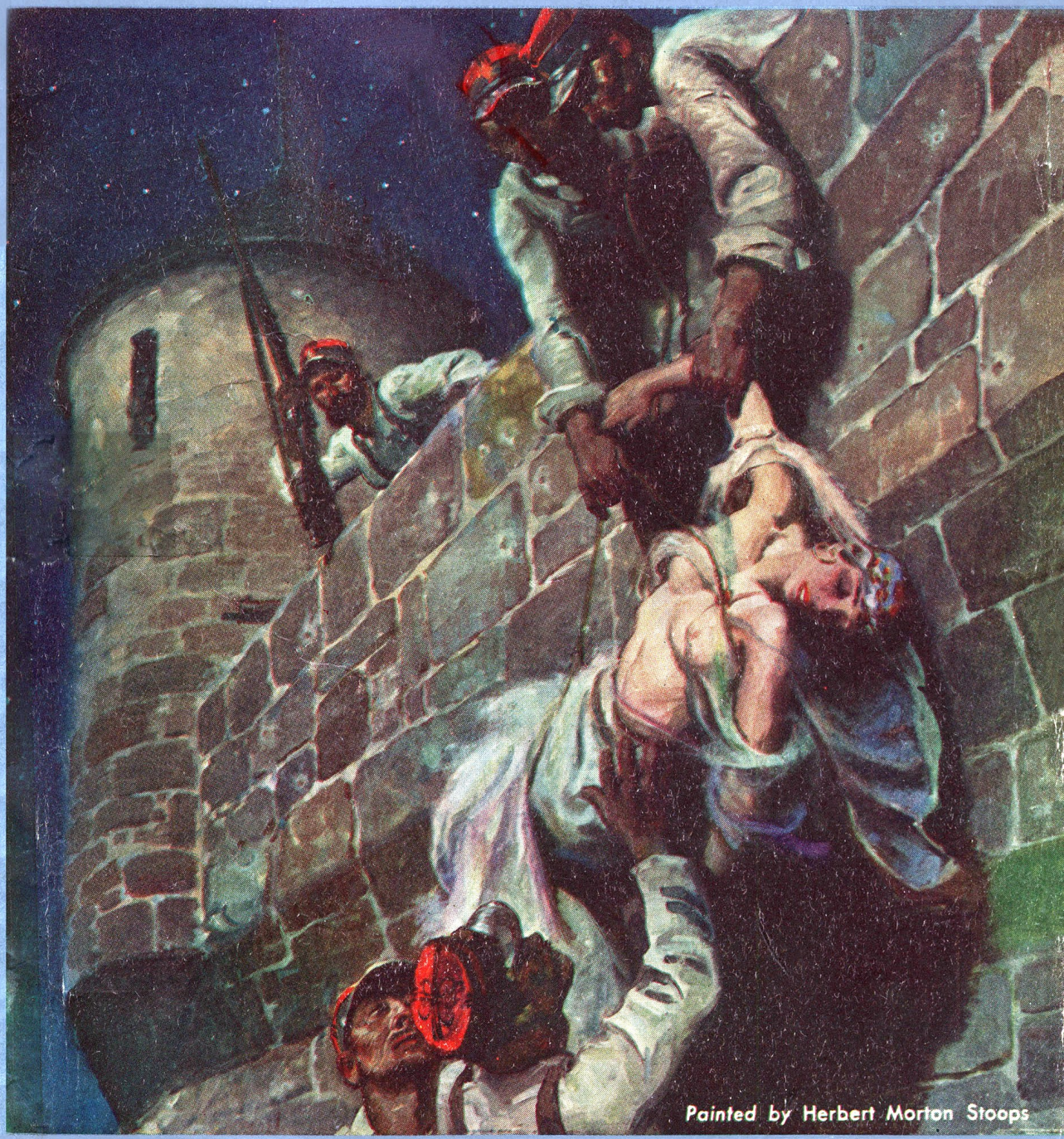

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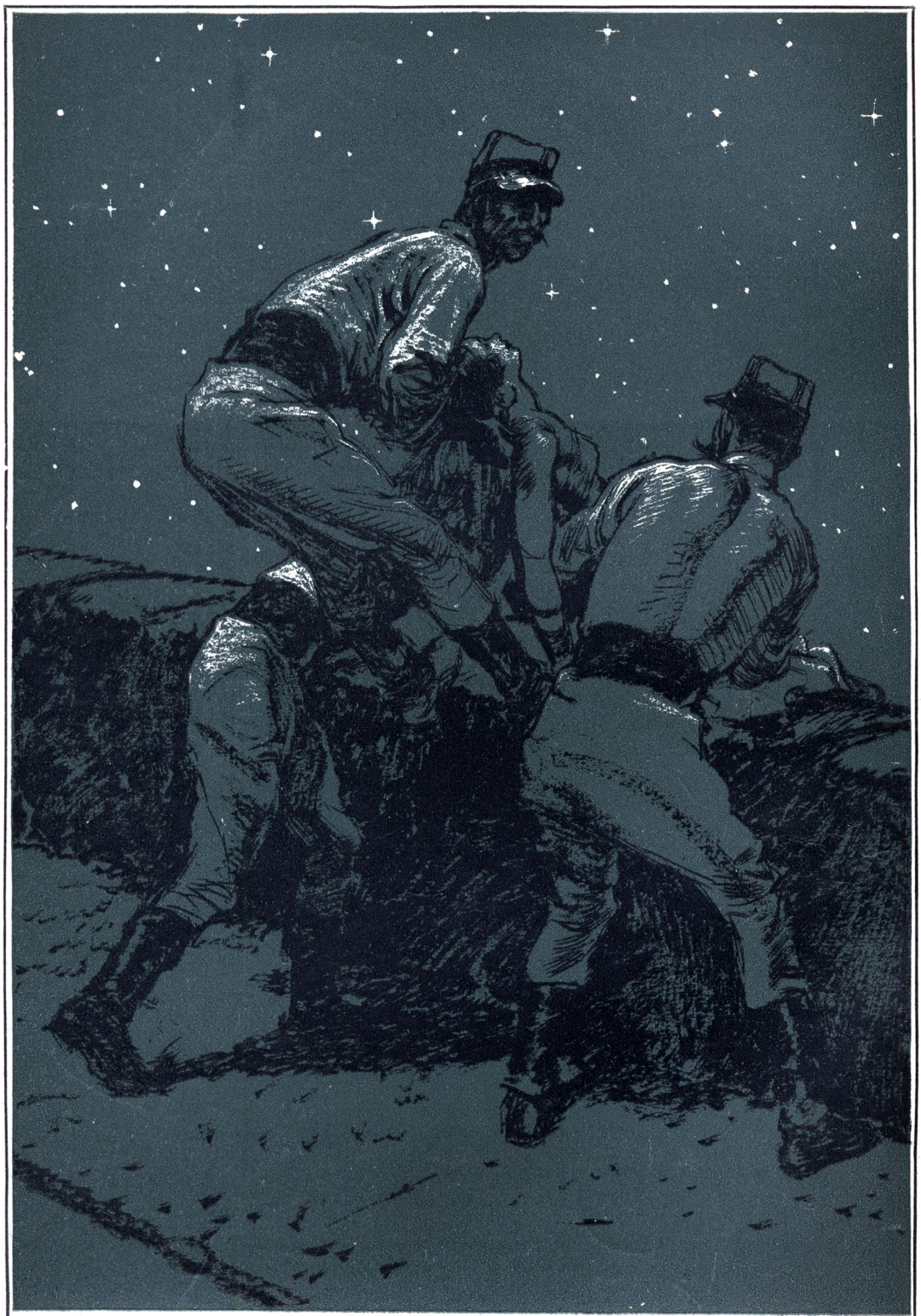
GEORGE WESTON • FULTON GRANT • H. BEDFORD-JONES

A Foreign Legion Novel by GEORGES SURDEZ



The Legionnaires pulled on the rope; a form was heaved over the edge, and caught by ready hands. . . . "Knocks your eye out—eh, Lieutenant?"

(From "Lady of the Legion," beginning on page 16)

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

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Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

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The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

MARCH 1940 VOL. 70, NO. 5

Short Stories

A Novelette

Two Serial Novels

A Complete Novel

A Special Feature

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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 Real Experiences

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.

Death in the Dark

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

CARRICK had pounded the jail doors for three days, before they sent for him. This was in London. He had been arrested without a word of reason and held incommunicado.

Now he found himself facing a Britisher in uniform, and a secretary of the United States Embassy, who regarded him with much less sympathy than did the Britisher. Carrick, who was furious and unshaven, eyed the two men gauntly and then pounced like an eagle. The secretary nodded to his embittered demands.

"You were arrested, Mr. Carrick, at the instance of the State Department."

This was a facer; it silenced Carrick with sheer incredulity. Before he could find tongue, the other continued, with an icy eye and a pleasant Virginia accent:

"The essentials of your case, Mr. Carrick, laying aside all secondary matters which might confuse the issue, are that you, an American citizen, have broken the neutrality laws of your country. You deserted your ship and sought to take part in the conflict here. Do you deny the charge?"

Carrick stared.

"I'm not on trial here," he snapped. "No, I shan't deny it. I can be of service. I demand to communicate with my friends and with a lawyer."

The Britisher leaned forward, a twinkle in his eye.

"I represent your friends, Mr. Carrick. We very much regret this unfortunate affair, believe me. Your friends have exerted every influence on your behalf. They have left London and gone on to their destination. I hardly think you need a lawyer."

"Arrested and clapped into jail—and don't need a lawyer?" said Carrick hotly.

"You're here in England without a passport," said the secretary. "Your actions threaten to embroil your own country. Such men as you are dangerous, and we have demanded your deportation to the United States."

Carrick's gray eyes hardened; his hard-bitten, hawklike features drew taut.

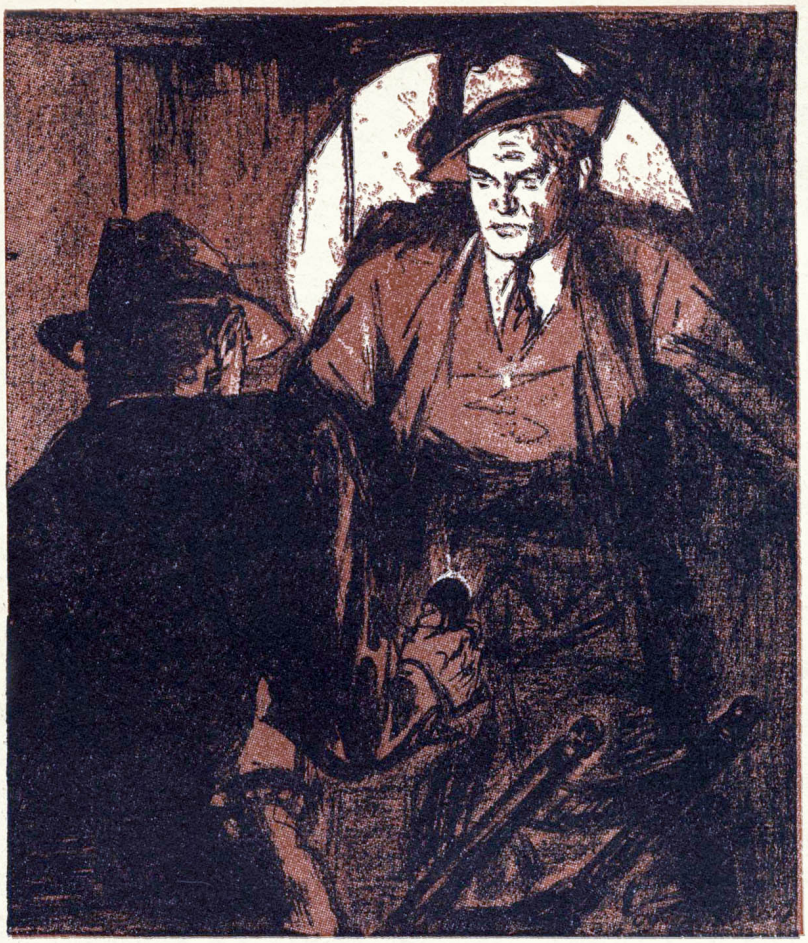
"So I'm treated as a felon!"

"On the contrary, you're to be released here and now," said the Britisher.

"Against my protest," put in the secretary coldly. He extended an envelope. "I've been instructed to give you this temporary passport, to serve on your homeward voyage only. Good day, Mr. Carrick."

Carrick took the envelope, tore it across, and dropped the pieces.

"That for you," he said. "Now what?"



An American undertakes a bit of war service on his own hook, and runs into desperate adventure in the blacked-out British metropolis.

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

"Less impudence, Mr. Carrick, and more sober thought," observed the Britisher gravely. "Until passage home is obtained for you, report here at the jail each day at noon. You may go."

He walked out of jail and into the heart of London, a man half free.

He had little money, a hotel room, nothing more; the afternoon was wearing away. As he made his way to the hotel, a middle-class hostelry behind Charing Cross, he was struck by the singular phases of this interview that had freed him. His friends were gone, yet had worked for him.

Informed that he was to be deported, he was not under surveillance—queer! That embassy secretary had been astonishingly frigid. Surely ambassadors had more important worries than poor devils who broke the neutrality laws in the endeavor to take arms against brute oppression and wholesale murder? Then that Britisher, obviously a friend and helper, but an extraordinarily chilly sort of friend, even from the English standpoint. It was all most puzzling.

When Carrick threw open the door of his hotel room, however, he stopped dead and stared. In the small grate a fire was burning. Sitting before it, feet cocked up on the coal-scuttle, reading a newspaper, was the same Englishman he had left in the jail office. And on the table was set out a bounteous "high tea."

"Oh, hullo!" The Britisher rose, hand outstretched. He was a smallish, deft man with inconspicuous features and brown mustache. "Gower is the name, Carrick; Intelligence, y' know. Glad to meet you under more auspicious circumstances."

Rather dazedly, Carrick shook hands. The other rattled on cheerfully:

"Dev'lish unpleasant and all that, having to comply with your country's regulations. The Embassy has done its duty. We've done ours. Now suppose we gather around a bit of tea and discuss the matter. You can be of immediate service to us here, if so disposed. I know all about you: speak German and so forth."

Carrick dropped into a chair. "My friends?"

"Gone, as stated. You're in my hands," returned Gower cheerfully, attacking a sandwich. "You can be of use to us, and to your own country as well. Things are a bit shaky, you know, over on your side."

Carrick ate and drank and listened, for Gower spared no words. With brute force and cynical lack of any honor or decency swamping the earth, with nations tottering, with the Russian tide threatening to sweep over Finland upon Sweden and Norway, the New World was in jeopardy no less than the old.

"We know some Nazi or Russian agents here," said Gower. "Others we don't know. Last night we jugged a chap who calls himself Ellsworth, who had come from America to make contact with one of these agents here. We propose to give you his papers and let you make the contact. Suit you?"

Carrick sat up. "You're damned right it does! You know the agent, then?"

Gower nodded. "Leaving him footloose—better to know him and all he does, than have to locate some other chap. The hope is that you can pick up something from him about the Soviet or Nazi people in the States. None of those fellows use their real names, of course."

Carrick glowed. The deportation talk was mere bluff. He was, rather, being given a chance to be of inestimable service.

"You see," Gower explained, "you're obviously an American. With 'Ellsworth's' papers, you can fit the part; no Englishman could. He's a messenger, bringing over money and coming for instructions—messages to take back. You need no special knowledge; his papers and the money are sufficient to identify you to Barrett—that's the name the agent here goes by. He's an Englishman, I'm sorry to say. Radical chap, y' know."

Gower talked on. Carrick discovered that time was short. He had to play the Ellsworth rôle that very night.

A LIGHT, slim weapon like a pencil, loaded with a single gas shell, was in his breast pocket that evening, as he walked up Chancery Row to find the lodgings of Mr. "Barrett."

By progressive degrees, however, Carrick's disillusion became complete. The house was a dingy one. He was shown to Barrett's rooms by a dilapidated slavey and obtained admittance without the slightest difficulty; the slogans and passwords of fiction were non-existent; the whole affair was prosaic in the extreme.

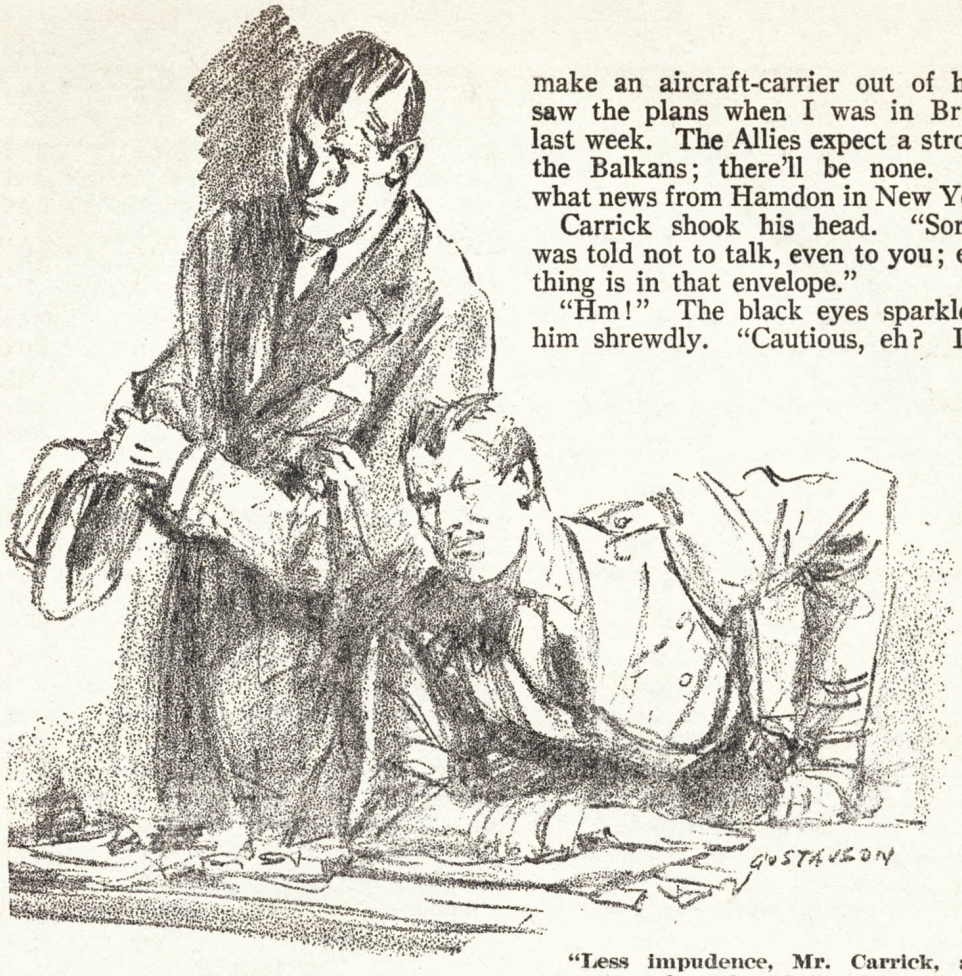
Barrett was an untidy, nervous man with a mop of hair and frantically earnest eyes in a thin face. He shook hands and showed Carrick to a chair.

"So you're Ellsworth!" he said. "Where's the money?"

Carrick handed over the sealed envelope entrusted to him. Barrett ripped at it; his first and chief interest was apparently financial. Satisfaction filled his face. He glanced at the enclosures, took up a pipe and filled it, and nodded solemnly at his visitor.

"Good. You have done good work. You're well spoken of. Any trouble?"

"None," said Carrick laconically. "Expect any?"



"Less impudence, Mr. Carrick, and more sober thought!" observed the Britisher.

"No, no, but one can never tell. Did you meet Bliebman?" He spoke nervously, not awaiting a reply. "Wonderful man. Should be in Los Angeles by this time. I see you brought an order for payments from Charles Hartch. You know him?"

"No," replied Carrick.

The other's eyes glowed.

"You must! He'll stir up America, I can tell you! Best man the Ogpu has there, except possibly Bramnitsch. Now, I'll tell you verbally what isn't put into the instructions that are ready for you. May is the month. The subversive forces operating on the money of those Hollywood fools will strike in May. On this side, the same—Russia in the north, the Reich in the Mediterranean. The British navy is being slowly worn down and crippled, so the stroke at Malta and the Suez Canal will catch them off guard."

Carrick's nerves jumped. "How can the German fleet get out of the Baltic?"

"Bah! They're out now, some of them; their fleet will be augmented at the last moment. The loss of the *Graf Spee* is more than counterbalanced by their recovery of the *Bremen*. They'll make an aircraft-carrier out of her. I saw the plans when I was in Brussels last week. The Allies expect a stroke at the Balkans; there'll be none. Now, what news from Hamdon in New York?"

Carrick shook his head. "Sorry, I was told not to talk, even to you; everything is in that envelope."

"Hm!" The black eyes sparkled on him shrewdly. "Cautious, eh? I suppose it's for the best. Well, here's everything for you."

He produced a bulky envelope; Carrick pocketed it, then signed a receipt, in the name of Allan Ellsworth. He shook hands with Barrett, who insisted on descending to the street door with him, and there paused for a low word.

"Are you going to see Hartswick? He's most anxious to see you."

"I hadn't intended to," said Carrick. "Where is he?"

"The third house down the street. Go see him now, tonight! He wants to send orders to those handling the American Bunds. Those of us in actual service have nothing to do with those Bunds—too dangerous."

Carrick muttered a vague assent; the door shut, and he descended the steps.

There he paused, and drew in a deep breath of air. It was incredible; all of it had happened with no mystery, with no thrill. He had come and gone, and it was over. The third house? No, better take no chances now. This was a sodden, unwholesome neighborhood; best get back

to Gower, who awaited him at the hotel, and make his report—

At this instant, the first sirens began to sound.

IN a moment, the street was hurled into frightful confusion. The houses vomited people rushing for air-raid shelters. The shrouded traffic signals winked out, cars were darkened. There was no panic, but the blackened streets were re-echoing with thousands of terrified voices.

Carrick had been given a gas-mask, which swung at his hip, and a flashlight. He was making for the Strand, and crossing the street, when voices suddenly shrilled. A truck, no doubt an army lorry, came hurtling through the gloom, its driver yelling something; flagrant disregard of orders, but perhaps necessary.

A shriek burst, then a thin moaning sob. A figure was caromed into a group just ahead of Carrick—a man, hit by the passing lorry. Carrick flashed his light. An old man, white of hair, struggling feebly. The group melted and ran on for shelter, as Carrick angrily tried to halt some of them. The sirens were wailing like doomed souls.

Carrick lifted the frail dazed figure. He caught a gasp of words in German.

"Easy," he replied in the same tongue. "I'll help you. Live near here?"

"There, there!" The old man pointed at the obscurity. Carrick supported him.

"All right, step out; I'll help you. German, are you? A refugee?"

"Yes." The voice changed to English, pure and without accent. "They wanted my wealth, they took everything. They said I was a Jew—they lied! I escaped. England is good to me."

The words died away upon a quivering groan of agony.

Steps appeared ahead. Carrick flashed an occasional gleam of light, no more; the old man was staggering along with pitiful groans. They got up the steps. The house door stood wide open. One flight up, said the old man, most of his weight on Carrick as he sagged. He was keeping up with an effort.

On the stairs, he pressed a key into Carrick's hand and gave the room number. Then he pitched forward in a dead faint. The house was deserted; air-raid warnings were still wild in the sky. Carrick opened the door, dragged the old man inside, and flashed his light around.

It was an ordinary lodging-house room, the single window covered over. Carrick lit a gas-jet, lifted the old man to the bed, and made a brief examination. There was no surface hurt, but a terrific blow had hit over the ribs, crushing them, and a trickle of blood over the white beard told of internal hemorrhage. There was nothing Carrick could do.

The man's face was striking—a virile, indomitable, magnificent face, with the beautiful fragility that sometimes comes to old men, lending a hint of almost saintly qualities. As Carrick studied that face, a sense of eerie solemnity, of an unseen presence, grew upon him. He knew death was hovering in this room.

He got up and looked around. The grate was heaped high with papers and the little sticks supplied for kindling in London lodgings. A few books on the mantel; no name in them. No personal belongings of any account. He frisked the old man. Nothing in his pockets but a few coins, and a ten-shilling note.

A half-empty bottle of brandy was on the dresser. Carrick got it, came over to the bed, and poured a little into the old man's lips. A tinge of color came into the waxen cheeks. The eyes opened; blue eyes, keen eyes. Wandering, broken, heart-pumped words came in German.

"Who are you? What has happened?"

"Easy," said Carrick. "You were hit by a truck. You have friends, relatives? Tell me. Any doctor near here? Air raid somewhere—when it's over, I'll get your friends."

The blue eyes rested upon him. They were piercing, intelligent, intensely alert. The lips moved slightly.

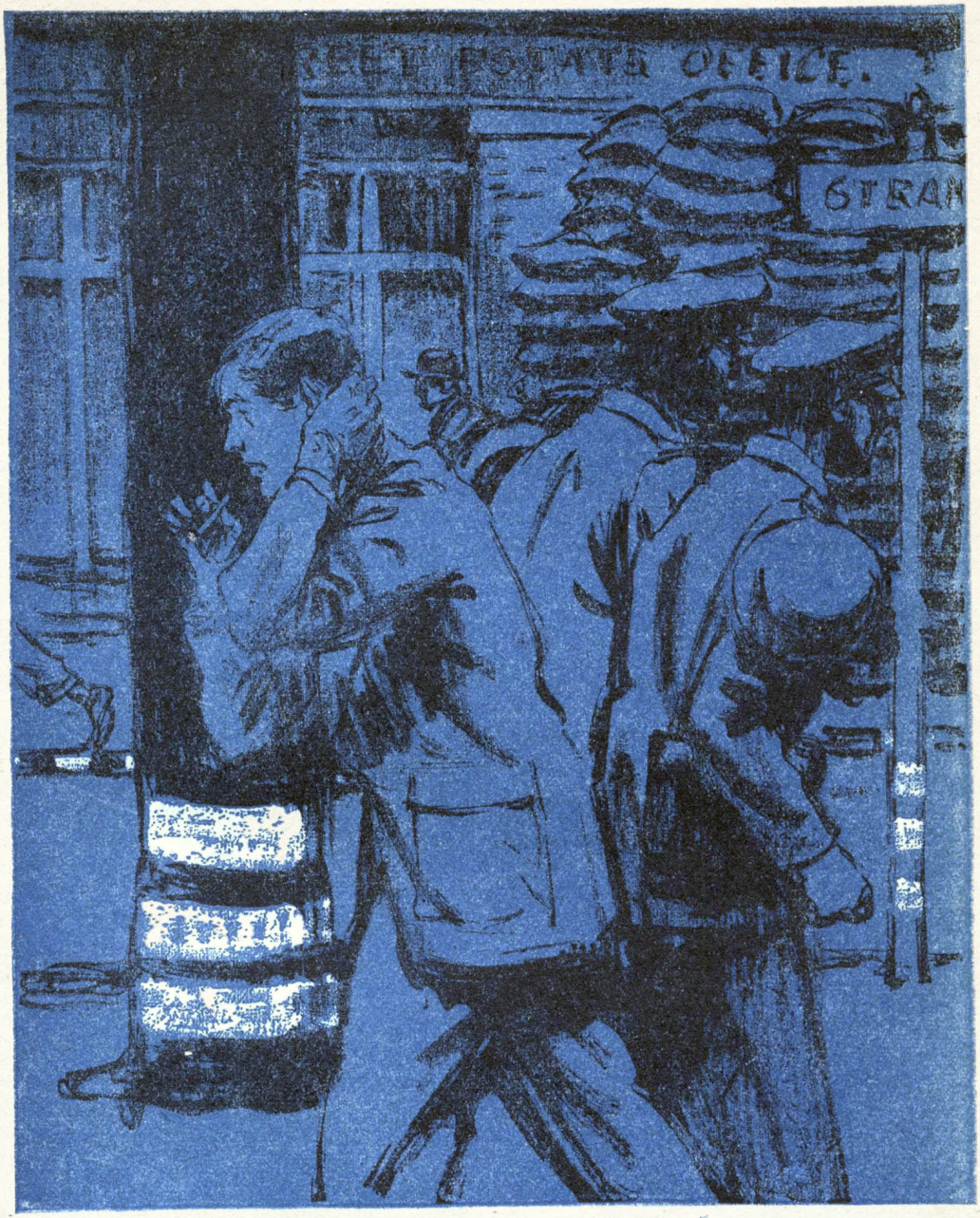
"Light the fire. Quickly!"

With a shrug, Carrick went to the fireplace and struck a match. Might as well humor the old fellow, he reflected. This place was better than being on the streets.

THE contents of the grate blazed up fiercely. Something more there than mere bits of wood and scraps of paper, thought Carrick with momentary wonder. The flames actually lifted with a roar, as though kerosene or some such substance was present. It did not occur to him at the moment that the papers in this grate might have been arranged for swift destruction in emergency. He came back to the bed and looked down into the blue eyes.

"That warms the room a bit, eh? What's your name? You can trust me. Any friends around here I can call?"

"No," came the answer. "Nobody. I'm dying. . . . You speak German—who are you?"



Carrick scarce knew where he was; that crack over the ear still had him reeling.

"An American. Like yourself, an enemy of Nazis and all they stand for. Afraid I can't do much for you. Does it hurt much?"

"Not at all. It is death; I can feel it," the other said calmly. "You are good to me, young man. You would not help the Nazis?"

"Not by a damned sight!" said Carrick emphatically, and the other nodded.

"Good. Hate them—I hate them! There. . . . The sirens have stopped."

So they had, indeed. From the city drifted in that queer, inchoate sound caused by a blend of voices, a multitude of human voices beyond counting, lifted in fear and emotion. A queer sound, to send a chill through the blood.

Carrick felt those blue eyes fairly drill into him as he sat. He could sense power in this old man, an uncanny power as of some unearthly force. Dying, that was it. Carrick had seen death before now; sometimes it wrought strange things.

"Won't you tell me your name?" he asked gently. "I'll get a doctor just as soon as—"

"Nonsense. Let me die in peace! My name? Martin Fenchurch. Get the book from the mantel; the Nostradamus."

Martin Fenchurch! That was no German name, assuredly. Perhaps one the old fellow was using. Best help the dying man by humoring, thought Carrick again; and rising, he went to the mantel. There was the book in question, one of the cheap editions flooding the market. He came back to the bed with it, but old Fenchurch lay with his eyes closed; he had slid away into unconsciousness. Carrick sat down quietly and let him alone, glancing curiously over the cheap little book.

THE name of Michael Nostradamus, famed in his lifetime as the greatest of physicians, had since his death in the sixteenth century been famed as the greatest of astrologers. His prophecies regarding France and Europe, veiled in mystic language, had for generations been given much erudite study, with scanty result. In every crisis of French history his rhymed quatrains were dusted off and studied anew.

Since the present war had begun, Nostradamus had become the rage on the continent. Editions of his prophecies had swept France. His alleged predictions were being expounded on all sides, with more or less plausibility. Carrick smiled in pitying incredulity as he glanced over the senseless bits of verse.

Then he found the old man looking at him again, and speaking faintly.

"Yes, I am Martin Fenchurch. You are a good friend. You have done well. Look in the prophecy—the first verse of the sixth book. Two words are changed in pencil. Read it to me, and I shall tell you the meaning."

Carrick skimmed over the pages until he found the verse in question. He read it aloud, mouthing the antique French words awkwardly, then reading the English version:

Autour des Monts Pyrenees grand Amas
De gent, neuf Arriens secourir roy nouveau
Pres de Garonne, du grand temple du Mas;
Un Romain chef le craindra dedans l'eau.

About the Pyrenees shall be a great gathering
Of nations, nine Arriens to succour a new king,
Near the Garonne and the great temple of Mas;
A Roman leader shall be in dread of the water.

Carrick smiled. "Well, Mr. Fenchurch, does that make any sense to you?"

"It means everything!" exclaimed the old man with an access of strength. "Why should Nostradamus, four hundred years ago, have used the unknown word 'Arriens?' But wait. Promise me you will write down what I say and send it to the *Times!* Send this verse, and its meaning. I want it published, to encourage and hearten the people of England, who have given me shelter and refuge! Promise me!"

"Very well. I'll write it down here and now," said Carrick. "And I'll send it by messenger to the *Times* from my hotel. It's early; they'll have it in time to use tomorrow, if they wish." He took out pencil, caught at a sheet of paper lying on the desk nearby, and copied off the verse. "Now for the meaning."

"It means that nine Aryan nations shall gather about the Alps to install a new king—*Pyrenees* means the *Alps. Garonne* means the *Danube.* A new king of Austro-Hungary!"

Carrick's brows lifted slightly as he wrote. "And I suppose you can make sense from that absurd phrase, the Temple of Mas? There's no such god or deity."

"Of course not. That is formed from the initials of the Latin words *Mores—Ars—Scientiæ*—Austro-Hungary is the temple of ethics, arts and sciences! And a Roman leader; that's Mussolini. His fleet will be defeated by the Nazi fleet. Write it down, write it! And swear to me that you'll deliver it as you said!"

"Word of honor," said Carrick. The coincidence suddenly struck him—Italy's fleet destroyed! What had Gower said about the Nazi fleet striking at Malta?

Well, no matter. He bent over the open, empty desk and scribbled down the message. A promise to a dying man was a sacred thing, even if it were a bit of sheer folly.

All nonsense, of course. Carrick took absolutely no stock in the supernatural, or in this absurd prophecy. But he had promised, and that was enough.

"Sign my name to it," said the old man very faintly. "Envelopes—there—"

"Right," replied Carrick, and went on with the epistle.

HE finished it, signed the name of Martin Fenchurch, reached for one of the several loose envelopes in sight, and addressed it. The letter folded, the flap sealed, he pocketed it and then turned to

Martin Fenchurch, with a cheery word; but the word was stilled on his lips.

The old man was smiling; he had lapsed from unconsciousness into death.

Carrick verified the fact, then rose and glanced around. Nothing to keep him here now; best be gone and out of it while the house was empty. On impulse, he reached out to the cheap little copy of Nostradamus, and slipped it into his jacket pocket. He had noted numerous penciled markings in the book, and the thought struck him that it would prove interesting to peruse at leisure. A memento of a strange experience, with its hint of the uncanny!

He turned out the gas-jet. Flashlight in hand, he stepped out to the stairs, saw the way ahead, extinguished his light, and felt his way down to the open front door. He came to it and paused, staring out at the blackness of the street.

SILENT now, this street. Not a light showing anywhere. Until the "all clear" sounded, Londoners would remain huddled in their shelters; it was a ghostly city of the living dead, and Carrick repressed a shiver. The sirens had ceased, there were no explosions. Another false alarm, of course; as yet, the threatened bombs had never fallen here in London. He patted his pocket, where the thick envelope given him by Barrett bulged at his chest. What a night, what a moment was this for crime or vengeance or sneak-theft! All London in cellars or bomb-proof shelters, doors unguarded—

"The fool!" The voice came from the sidewalk just below. Carrick, startled, realized it as somehow familiar. "Of course he wasn't Ellsworth. I gave him a dummy package and he was satisfied. This means, of course, they've pinched Ellsworth. We'd better get this stuff in the pillar-box at the corner—safest place is in the mails—"

"Then find Hartswick at once," said another voice, lessening in the darkness. "He'll know what to do. . . . Time to duck for it—"

The voice trailed away, with thudding of rubber-shod feet.

Carrick stood in swiftly shocked surmise. So Barrett had not been tricked after all! These papers in his pockets were dummies. Barrett and a confederate were dumping their most precious effects into the mail—yes, that was the safest place for such things. They were out and gone on this errand. No pillar-box for letters closer than the Strand. Then they would go to look up the Nazi agent, Hartswick. There was time, there was time! This was the hour and the moment when all things were possible.

Even with the thought, Carrick was moving, descending the steps to the sidewalk, and striding swiftly. He would have to venture the flashlight. To find Barrett's house now, with all lights doused, was impossible for a stranger.

He made a guess at it, mounted steps to a doorway, and with his hand over the light sent a ray between his fingers. It picked up the number. Wrong; Barrett's house was the next one beyond. Back to the sidewalk, on to the next steps.

Here was the right one; he remembered it, even in the darkness, now that he stood at the door. The door was closed, but it was not locked. It opened to his push, and he stepped in. A deathly silence here, and a welcome one.

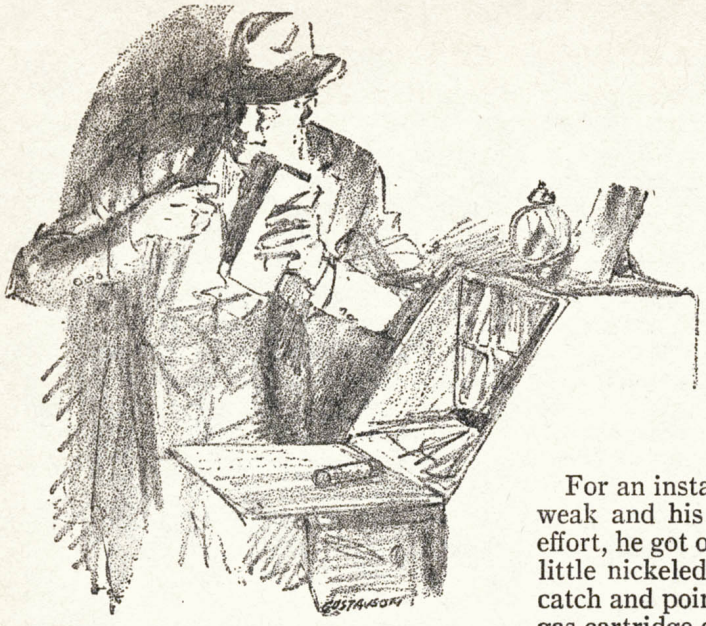
With gleams of the muffled flashlight to aid, he found his way upstairs and to the room of Barrett. The door was locked. Without hesitation, Carrick threw his weight against it, and the weary old wood gave way with a crash.

Even in the brief time he had been gone, the room showed evidence of hasty work. The windows had been blanketed. Everything was in confusion. A bag, half packed, stood on a chair. Carrick went straight to a desk in the corner, from which Barrett had brought the envelope for him. Here were notebooks, neatly stacked for packing, and bundles of letters and papers. His light played upon them, and the name of Ellsworth leaped up at him. It was written across the corner of a fat envelope.

NEXT instant, the envelope was in his pocket. His light touched upon something else, and a laugh broke on his lips. Nostradamus! A copy, identical with the one in his pocket. His hand went out to it.

"Another souvenir!" he muttered ironically, as he took the cheap little volume. "I'm becoming a book collector; why not?"

This, too, he pouched, and hesitated. It seemed a pity to leave all this plunder; however, that was Gower's business, and he had what he had come for. He took out the dummy envelope, tore it open, found it stuffed with blank sheets of paper, and left it on the desk to get rid of it and serve as a mute indication to Barrett that the American visitor was not altogether a fool.



"Another souvenir!" he muttered ironically. "I'm becoming a book collector; why not?"

Chuckling over this thought, he turned to the door. He was well satisfied. His coat pockets bulged with the Nostradamus volumes, and in the breast pocket reposed the real communication for Ellsworth. He had accomplished—

IN the doorway, he halted abruptly. A creak came from the stairs. Another. Before he could move, a pencil of light stabbed the blackness. It touched him, held on him. A startled oath sounded. At the same instant a heavy body struck him and knocked him off his feet, sending him backward into the room. Caught!

He fell over a chair, with a crash. The flashlight was knocked from his hand, and he sprawled, half dazed by the shock. A jet of red fire, a heavy report, and he felt the hot breath of a bullet that actually seared his cheek. He flung himself sideways, rolled, and came to one knee.

Two men, by their voices, cursing as they struck against the furniture. Again the ray of light flashed out. It touched Carrick. He leaped from the floor, straight at it, struck a man heavily, sent the light away and out as it fell, and his impact must have knocked the man over. He himself was free. Another shot roared in the room. Something touched him, a hand gripped his arm, and he struck hard and fast. His blows went home; he broke clear, but received a terrific slam above the ear that sent him reeling and dizzy, off balance. He came up against the door—against the edge, striking his cheek and mouth upon it, before he clutched it and stayed himself.

For an instant he clung there, sick and weak and his brain spinning. With an effort, he got out his one weapon, the slim little nickeled gas-gun; he threw off the catch and pointed it at the room, and the gas cartridge exploded with a sharp burst of rushing flame.

Carrick pulled the door shut and stumbled away. He heard wild voices from the room—voices of pain and raging dismay. Somehow he found the stairs and clattered down and was out in the night air again. Rain was falling now, a gusty drive of it. The "all clear" signal was thrilling in the air.

As by magic, life and sound erupted from all quarters, lights flashed, the world came awake and alive. Carrick, for a little, scarce knew where he was. His hat was gone, and the wet touch of the drizzling rain was grateful to his bruised face. Crowds were swarming in the street, voices buzzing high with excitement. Carrick paused, lit a cigarette, and stood quiet until his shaking limbs came back to full duty again. That crack over the ear still had him reeling.

He reached the Strand at last, slowly making headway through the foaming crowds, careless of the soaking rain. When he gained Charing Cross and got to his modest hotel, the man behind the desk stared at him.

"I say, sir, you look—one minute, sir! We've had telephone calls for you; this must be another." The clerk answered, and beckoned Carrick. "He just now came in, sir. Here he is."

Carrick took the phone and heard Gower's voice.

"This is Gower, Carrick. I had to run out on an important bit of work. How did the thing go off?"

"All right," said Carrick. "I've got the stuff. Barrett is skipping out. You'd better collar him at once. I had to use the gas shell."

"Right! I'll see to it. Sorry I'm on something that will keep me, but I'll see that he's attended to. I'll be along in the morning. Congratulations!"

CARRICK hung up, remembered the envelope in his pocket, and got it out.

"Send this by messenger to the *Times*. At once, please. And send me up a hot drink of some kind, will you? I'm soaked through."

"At once, sir."

In his own room at last, Carrick took off the soaking coat and draped it on a chair-back, then sank into another chair, head in hands. His skull ached consumedly; a swollen bump over the ear spoke for itself. A tap at the door, and an elderly ultra-respectable servant came in with a tray. He was startled at sight of Carrick.

"Beg pardon, sir, but is there anything I can do?" he ventured. "You're not hurt, I hope? That air-raid was a sudden thing—"

"I'm not hurt, but I feel like hell," said Carrick, seizing on the drink and gulping it. "Thanks; this is all I need. I'll tumble into bed and be all right in the morning. Have me called at eight."

"Very good, sir."

Carrick stripped and tumbled into bed. He was completely done up, and was asleep the moment he hit the pillow. . . .

He wakened to the echoes of a peremptory rapping at his door. Vaguely remembering that he had left a call, he answered it sleepily.

"All right, all right! I'm awake. Much obliged."

The knocking was repeated. Carrick sat up.

"Who the devil is it? What d'you want?"

"Open," came the curt response. "In the King's name!"

Astonished, Carrick tumbled out, went to the door, and unlocked it. Two men walked in, two strangers, who glanced about the room and then fastened hard eyes on him. One spoke.

"Mr. Carrick? I'm Captain Milne of the Intelligence."

"Oh!" said Carrick blankly. "Well, sit down. I'll get some clothes on—"

"One moment," broke in Milne. He extended a folded newspaper, a copy of the morning *Times*. "May I ask whether you recognize this?"

Carrick glanced at the section indicated. It was the letter column; and a laugh broke from him as he recognized the Nostradamus verse and the note he had penciled, signed with the name of Martin Fenchurch.

"So they used it, did they? Too bad the old boy doesn't know."

"Do you admit sending it?" demanded Milne.

Carrick looked at him in surprise. "Admit? Why, of course I sent it! Just what are you driving at, anyhow?"

The two exchanged a glance; then Milne nodded and took a chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Carrick; let me warn you that anything you may say will be used against you. For some time past, we've been aware of enemy wireless messages on a very high frequency being sent out from London. A low-powered portable transmitter, using Nazi submarines as relay stations to Berlin. An hour ago, this station sent out a certain message dealing with Nostradamus."

He paused. Carrick thrilled suddenly to the name.

"So it means something to you!" went on Milne. "The message sent out was this letter in the *Times*, word for word. We've traced the letter to you as sender. The verses of Nostradamus are obviously being used as a code. We want that code, Mr. Carrick."

Carrick was absolutely thunderstruck, as the truth rushed upon him. Old Fenchurch had lied like a Trojan. Instead of being a refugee, he was a Nazi agent! The peculiar way those papers had blazed up—arranged for destruction, of course! Struck down in the street, Fenchurch had even in death made use of his rescuer to get the message sent; a verse in which he had changed certain words.

THE British Intelligence had worked fast, too. It was barely seven-thirty now, yet they had found him as the sender of the letter. Carrick smiled, reached for a cigarette, and shook his head.

"Gentlemen, you're fast workers! Yes, I sent the letter; in fact, I wrote it. Here's the way of it." He told of picking up the old man, and of all that had followed in regard to Fenchurch. To his surprise, however, he read only an icy, skeptic comment in the eyes of his visitors.

"Martin Fenchurch?" Milne repeated. "Hm! Drake, run downstairs and telephone; learn if any such death has been reported. Mr. Carrick, I don't believe a word of your story."

The second man left the room. Carrick looked at Milne, and knew that to save himself he must now give the entire story.

"I suppose," he said, "you'll let Mr. Gower, of your service, reassure you? He'll be here before long. In fact, I was on an errand for him last night when this happened."

Milne heard him with lips compressed, and shook his head slightly.

"I'm aware of your story, Mr. Carrick, and that Gower was assigned to your case yesterday. Unfortunately," he added, "at an early hour this morning Mr. Gower was killed while on duty."

Carrick stiffened. "Killed! But—good Lord, man! Who's in charge of my case now?"

"I am," said Milne. "Gower sent you last night to contact a man named Barrett. Later in the night, Barrett was arrested by orders of Gower. What about your errand there?"

"Oh!" Bewildered, Carrick plunged into the story of what had happened.

WHEN he finished, Milne lighted a cigarette, reflected upon it, and shook his head.

"I see. If you have the papers to prove this story, Mr. Carrick, well and good. It all sounds rather fantastic, I must say, but we'll be glad to find it true."

"I've got everything," snapped Carrick. "The stuff for Ellsworth is in an envelope. And also, the two copies of Nostradamus. Here, they're in my coat—"

He dived for his coat. It was not on the chair. It was not in the closet. It was not in the room at all—there simply was no coat. All his other clothes were undisturbed.

"The devil!" he exclaimed blankly. "I ut it on this chair last night, because it was wet—"

His voice trailed away before the upraised brows and incredulous smile of Milne.

At this moment the other Intelligence man returned, with the brief report:

"Correct about the Fenchurch chap. Found dead in his bed. Cause not yet assigned. Not a refugee at all. Has been living there two years and more; supposed to be from Northumberland somewhere. Landlady denies indignantly that he might have been a German."

Carrick looked at the two men. Gower dead! That knocked things in the head. They eyed him curiously. He pulled himself together.

"Milne, that door was locked when you came? Then somebody has been here and walked off with my coat."

"Likely story; stick to it," said Milne laconically. "Suppose you get into something, and we'll take a little trip together. Go down and get a cab, Drake."

"You mean that I'm under arrest?" blurted Carrick angrily.

"My dear chap, what d'you think?" Milne replied, as the other man departed again. "I'd like to believe your story, 'pon my word. You were well thought of; Gower had expected you to be valuable to us. Instead, you give us a song-and-dance. You saw Barrett last night, and immediately he tried to run out on us. You say that you informed Gower by telephone; there's no evidence of it. If you knew Gower was dead, you've cleverly made use of his name. Suppose you warned Barrett. Then you stuck this letter into the paper—rather clumsily, I must say; no doubt you depended on your story being believed. We're no' so saft, my lad, as they say in the north country. This Nostradamus thing is away over my head, over all our heads; but we know it's a code. So you just come along."

Carrick, in a whirl, began to get into his clothes. His coat, with its precious contents, was gone—that was the one amazing thing—and the terrible thing—which damned him.

"My face—that proves my story!" he exclaimed. "Look at this cut—feel my head!"

"No go, my son," said Milne. "I'm sorry. We'll see what Barrett has to say about all this."

CARRICK grunted. He could imagine with what vicious glee the nervous little Barrett would welcome his plight—no doubt the man would lie himself black in the face to get Carrick into the soup. But the coat, the coat! That envelope for Ellsworth would prove—

"Damn it all, Milne," he burst forth, knotting his tie, "you've got to believe me! There were two of those Nostradamus books in my coat. One I took from Fenchurch's room, the other I picked up in Barrett's place as a souvenir. And the Ellsworth stuff—"

"Produce 'em," said Milne, "and see my face change!"

"But the names that Barrett mentioned to me!" exclaimed Carrick desperately. "They must have been real names of agents in America! That must

be why he suspected me—Ellsworth no doubt had some verbal messages from those people!"

"Will you dress?" said Milne patiently. "It's eight o'clock, and—"

A rap at the door, and it opened, to show the elderly, ultra-respectable hotel servant. He came in deferentially.

"Eight o'clock, Mr. Carrick. And, sir, I took the liberty last night—you were asleep, but it grieved me to see your clothes in such a state—beg pardon, sir, but I took your coat and had it pressed a bit. These were in the pockets, sir—"

With a whoop, Carrick fell upon him. The two books—the bulky envelope—the coat itself, neatly pressed! The astonished servant stared, as Carrick seized the envelope and thrust it at Milne.

"Here you are! Here's what you want—the stuff for Ellsworth! Now everything's explained—here are the books, too. Now let's see your damned face change, will you?"

MILNE said absolutely nothing. He tore open the envelope, glanced at the contents, and then seized upon the two small books. An exclamation broke from him. Before he could speak, the officer Drake came back into the room.

"A telephone call from headquarters, sir!" he said to Milne. "I took the message. That Fenchurch chap—turned out to be a little bit of all right after all, it did! They said to tell you he's been identified. Not Fenchurch at all. He's the chap we've never been able to nail—the Nazi agent in chief, Hartswick!"

HARTSWICK! Carrick's pulse was leaping. Three doors down the street, Barrett had said. Hartswick!

"Lord!" exclaimed Milne suddenly. "Know what this book is, Carrick?"

"Eh?" Carrick spoke almost stupidly, at sight of the volume Milne was holding up. "Of course—Nostradamus. That's the one I took from Barrett's room."

"With the complete code penciled in," said Milne softly.

"Then you don't want the cab?" asked Drake.

"Want it?" A laugh broke from Milne. He put out his hand and gripped that of Carrick. "I should say we do! Carrick, get into that coat. Come along to headquarters. It's the greatest haul of the year—and it's all yours. Come along!"

Carrick, slowly comprehending, gave him a thin smile.

"Well, you were a truer prophet than old Nostradamus, Milne—your face has changed, and I'm glad of it!"

"If I'm any prophet at all, you'll be still gladder of it when we reach headquarters. Come along, my lad! Off we go! *Exeunt omnes,* as the stage directions used to say—*exeunt omnes,* with alarums and excursions!"

And Carrick obeyed, with a warm heart and gratitude to the gods.

About "Lady of the Legion"

(which begins on the next page)

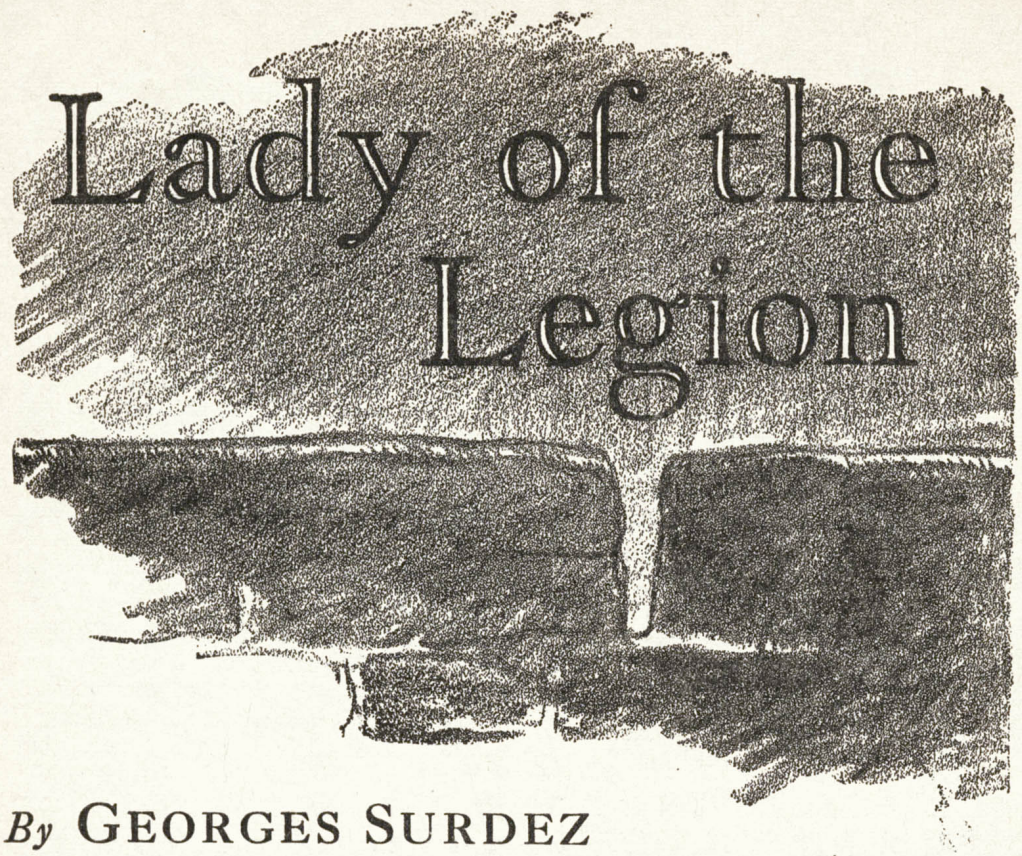
THERE is nothing at all fantastic in a Saharan war being fought over a girl. While it may seem farfetched to have a young officer jeopardize his career and his life, risk the death of his men, anyone familiar with conditions out there knows similar cases. The French lost Tafilelt for fifteen years because a captain had an affair with the daughter of a Kaid. From first to last, that situation must have cost several thousand lives. As to the episodes of the siege, they are based on actual attacks, some in the Sahara, others in the Atlas, in the Rif. As for Torval's determination to blow up the dump, if that is not credible, Lieutenant Lapeyre and a half-dozen others were kidding when they did that exact thing.

The aviation stuff is based on what pilots in North Africa told me, both in the Sahara and in Morocco. Even against villages, daylight raids were not profitable, as the natives would go out into the open and watch the show with some enjoyment. Night raids are exceptional, I'll grant. But there have been one or two, in emergencies. The information about marriage, etc., is accurate—any curious reader can pick up the manuals and codes and check up to his satisfaction.

Torval could have been an American, without going into the realm of romance. Captain Hamilton, the only American officer in the Legion, commanded Bou-Bernous, about the loneliest blockhouse in the Sahara, when he was a lieutenant. I know Hamilton, of course, and like him, but I believe that he considers me like something that creeps under moist stones, because I write about the Legion. He has a phobia against Legion writers, which even established accuracy (I am a Member of Honor of Legion veterans, New York, Oran, etc., and honorary sergeant Saharan Company of the Draa, etc.) doesn't melt.

—GEORGES SURDEZ

Lady of the Legion



By GEORGES SURDEZ

THE wind hurtled out of the night across the naked plateau, bringing for a moment the chill of the remote mountains, filling the darkness with tumult. The barbed-wire enclosure of Military Post Mozibo throbbed and hummed with the gusts; the stays of the wireless-mast sobbed long metallic notes. Then the air became silent and motionless, and the stone, the sand, the adobe of the walls, breathed out oppressive heat. Against the velvet black of the sky, the stars glowed like points of white fire. Dawn was near; within an hour the Saharan sun would slide over the eastern ridge and turn the world to a furnace.

Torval emerged into the narrow courtyard from the cement cell in which he lived. There was nothing abnormal, no sign of a disturbance. The sentries were on the wall; he could hear their regular footfalls, discern the faint glitter when the bayonet spun at the end of a beat. From the foot of the wall, he hailed the nearest man in a low voice.

"Legionnaire—"

The steps halted. Head and shoulders appeared, outlined against the sky.

"Mon lieutenant?"

"Did you hear a shot, awhile ago? Very far away?"

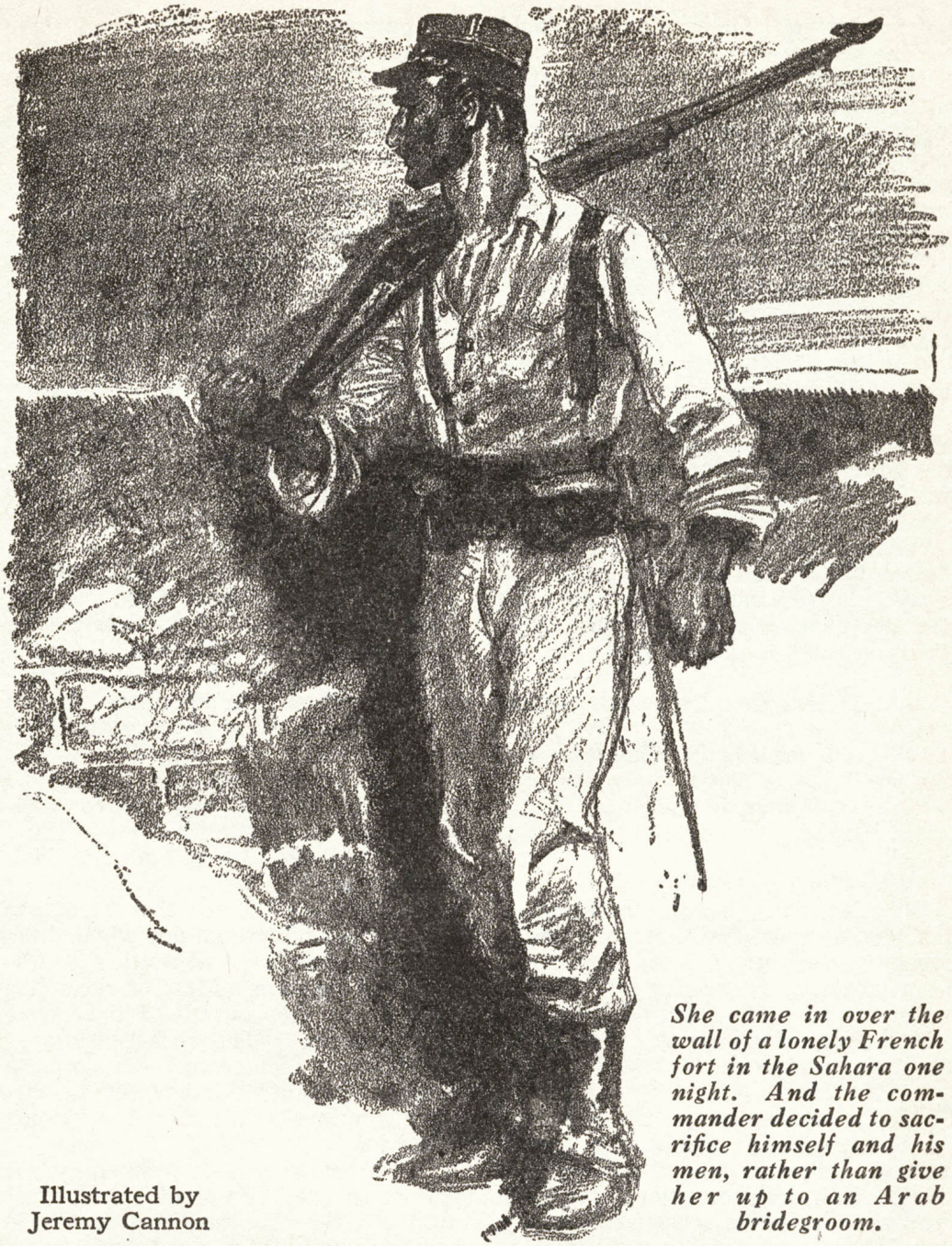
"I heard a pop, Lieutenant. But as I saw no flash, I didn't want to wake up everybody." The soldier hesitated, then resumed in a patient tone: "You know, Lieutenant, sometimes a rock cools off fast and splits. That makes a pretty loud crack."

"That's right, old man."

The sentry waited a respectful second, then resumed his pacing.

Torval envied his calm. There was a lucky fellow, without too much imagination. To him, a crack was a crack, not a detonation. But he was not responsible for Post Moziba, a few square yards of sand surrounded by ineffective walls, and occupied by twenty-eight Legionnaires. And he did not know what Torval knew, that they were here as the result of an administrative error.

The outpost was hung in space at the side of an unfinished automobile road made useless by the lack of bridges over deep gullies. It was tempting fate to place racks lined with repeating-rifles and sheds crammed with ammunition, so close to a hostile zone swarming with tribesmen to whom guns and cartridges were more precious than gold. The establishment was due to people working from afar, unfamiliar with the Sahara, who had decided by the map.



Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

She came in over the wall of a lonely French fort in the Sahara one night. And the commander decided to sacrifice himself and his men, rather than give her up to an Arab bridegroom.

It was a very old story, soldiers paying with flesh and blood for paper mistakes. But that was small consolation for Torval. He was twenty-five, and fond of life. He did not like to feel his head so insecure upon his shoulders. For it was granted that a surprise attack by a resolute, numerous band might well leave the spot gutted and strewn with the bodies of its defenders.

He had lived with that thought for nearly a year. His nerves were busy. He would wake up as he had tonight—worried, hearing suspicious sounds—and prowl about for hours. He felt that the men had noticed this. They accepted their lot with their usual fatalism. Here today, gone tomorrow. And they could not comprehend that he risked more; for even if he saved his life, he would compromise his career.

He went back into his hot room, lighted a cigarette. There was an hour to dawn; then activities would resume, parties would march out for water, for wood, for patrols. Physical fatigue, endless mo-

notony; but in the light, when you could see the horizon.—

He started: there was no mistake this time; it *was* a shot! He reached for his pistol-belt, buckled it on. Another shot, very near, instantly followed by the report of a Lébel carbine: one of the sentries had fired. And now the man was howling at the top of his lungs.

"Aux armes! Alerte! Aux armes!"

Torval ran across the yard, leaped up the narrow stairway leading to the machine-gun platform at the angle of the defensive wall. Quickly as he had come, four or five men had preceded him, and were riddling the darkness aimlessly, shouting. The din was bewildering; yet the officer could see no sign of activity outside. The wind had resumed its giant's sighing.

"Cease firing!" Torval grasped the man nearest him by the shoulder, pulled him away from the parapet. "What does this mean? What are you shooting at? Who gave you orders to shoot? Who's on duty here?"

"I am, Lieutenant: Legionnaire Brousson."

"Why did you shoot? What made you call out?"

"I heard a shot, Lieutenant. Then I heard somebody fooling about inside our wire."

"Why didn't you challenge?"

"Didn't get the chance, Lieutenant. I intended to report that shot, according to regulations. Then I heard that noise, leaned over, and a gun went off right under my nose. So I fired and yelled."

"All right. Let it go this time. Shut up—quiet, everybody!"

THE wind died down; the night was silent, save for the beating feet of belated soldiers running across the yard to take their defense stations. The men crouched close to the parapet, rifles ready, forming scattered bundles of white along the wall. Torval leaned far out, peering into the darkness.

"Achkoun temma?"

Legionnaire Brousson pulled at his arm: "Not so far, Lieutenant. You can be seen from below, against the sky."

They waited; there was no answer, no shot.

The Legionnaires started to talk, arguing, speculating. They were sheepish now, because they had run to the wall and started to fire away at random, wasting powder like recruits. From the quarters of the native runners, *goumiers* kept at the outpost to carry dispatches, there came the shrill yelping of a woman—Ben Brazi's old wife was urging him to keep his nose out of the shooting. Made uneasy by the shots and the shouting, the animals started to vocalize.

"ANYTHING wrong, Lieutenant?" Torval turned and identified the silhouette of Charanov, his senior sergeant. A fine soldier, thirty-five or -six, tall and wiry. His one weakness was no trouble at Moziba: the nearest café was close to two hundred kilometers northward.

"Don't know yet." And Torval explained the situation: "We know there's somebody out there. Don't want to send anybody out until I know how many. This might be to lure a few guys in the open, kill them off and swipe their guns and ammunition."

"Maybe, Lieutenant." And Charanov walked a few feet away from the rest. Then, before Torval could interfere, he leaped to the crest of the wall, lighted a cigarette with a lighter. He let the flame burn for three seconds, then hopped down, laughing: "Not very aggressive fellows, anyway."

Torval grunted vaguely, because he was annoyed. That was Charanov, always eager to parade his nerve. Many men without his luck had admired him, imitated him—to their grief.

"Someone go and tell that woman to shut up," he said. He considered the situation; these men were all waiting for him to give a decision. Most of them had more experience, and all of them were severe critics. "The rocket-pistol!"

"At once, Lieutenant." A corporal opened the ammunition-box near the machine-gun, handed his chief the weapon asked for. "It's loaded."

"I'll shoot off a rocket. Stand by. If you see anyone," he warned, "don't shoot until they do. The guys outside may be lost and bewildered, harmless enough. —Machine-gunners!"

"Ready, Lieutenant." They had stripped the heavy canvas off the long weapon, which seemed to crouch on its tripod.

"Same instructions."

He lifted the heavy pistol above his head, pressed the trigger.

There was a dull detonation; then a long streak of red light unreeled waveringly across the sky. After a second of darkness, the flare bloomed out, swayed and bobbed at the end of its silken parachute, and an immense circle of livid,

bluish radiance spread. Far down the slope, the leaves of palm trees stood out, glittering black, as if varnished.

The panorama so familiar in daylight seemed somehow distorted in the artificial glare, fantastic, menacing.

"There's one—"

Torval spied several figures running a short distance outside the wire. A spot of fire blinked; the crack of a rifle followed. Then another shot, a few yards farther. The Legionnaires opened fire, and the strangers scuttled down the incline, vanished in the dry bed of the arroyo, with the machine-gun spitting jets of sand about their feet. Naturally, the men shouted as they fired, called out directions to one another. After weeks of monotony, this was a welcome recreation.

Then the light went out brusquely, brutally. The night rushed back, pressed like thick felt over their dazzled eyes.

"Charanov!"

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"How many did you spot?"

"Not many, Lieutenant. Four, maybe five."

"Same here," Legionnaire Brousson put in.

Only five; that was reassuring, but became puzzling on second thought: Why should a handful of people creep toward an army post in the dead of night, foolishly reveal their presence by needless shooting, and invite machine-gun bursts? Where had they come from? Who were they? Had they come on foot, on horses, on camels?

"WHAT'S the idea?" Charanov voiced the general thought.

"I don't get it," Torval said.

"I could find out something in a couple of minutes, Lieutenant," said a voice.

"You, Rochas? How?"

"Well," Corporal Rochas said, "I spotted one of them that fell in the wire."

"Sure," several voices insisted: "a small guy—saw him too."

"I can go get him, see," Rochas resumed. "Even if he's dead, one of the *goumiers* can probably tell something from his clothing, his amulets. You get it?"

Torval shook his head.

"That's out. The gate stays shut until morning. The whole idea may be to get us to open it. I don't want to shoot another rocket, either. We can't be lucky all the time; they might hit some one up here."

LOUISE SAUVAIN

"How about letting me down with a rope, Lieutenant?"

"All right," Torval agreed, after thinking it over. "But take somebody with you."

"Buhrer, Lieutenant?"

"Anyone. But be careful."

The two men left their guns behind, stripped off their belts and pouches. Rochas slid down without hesitation; Buhrer followed, with some remark about sending them all postal cards. Soundlessly as they went, those lurking outside must have suspected something, for flashes crackled again, and detonations thudded. At Torval's order, the machine-gun fired in short bursts, beyond the edge of the barbed wire.

A minute passed, another—three, four. Unconsciously, all on the wall spoke in whispers. Then the wind raced out of the night again, and it was impossible to detect any unusual sound. After a breathless wait, the man holding the rope spoke aloud.

"They're back."

"Find him?" Torval leaned out and called down.

Corporal Rochas' voice rose from below, tense, excited:

"Yes, Lieutenant, but there's something funny—"

"Shut up—talk when you're up here. Tie him so we can haul him."

"We're doing that. Wounded—careful!"

"All right. You fellows, slow and easy."

"Slow and easy, Lieutenant."

The Legionnaires pulled on the rope. In the growing light, for the haze of dawn was now forming over the plateau, a form was heaved over the edge, and caught by ready hands. Torval did not turn at once: He had two men out, who must be got back safely. As was proper for a chief, the corporal was hauled in last.

"Knocks your eye out, eh, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"Let's see—"

Torval turned. The body had been laid in the lee of the jutting parapet.

CHARANOV had produced a pocket-torch, and in the beam of light, the officer stared at the mysterious being that they had fished out of the barbed wire. He started, and Rochas laughed behind him.

"Some good-looker, Lieutenant?"

A circle of heads bent over the prisoner—crouching Legionnaires, mouths gaping, eyes staring and shoulders touching, speechless with astonishment. A woman rested on the platform, a girl certainly not much more than seventeen. She was almost completely nude, her garments torn off, shredded by the wire, disarranged by the handling. Rochas was not exaggerating; she was beautiful.

Torval noted the fine sweep of the brows, the small, full mouth, the perfection of her throat, of her torso, very slender, yet fully formed. He noted at once that she showed no tribal tattooing, and saw something familiar yet undefinable in the features.

"Say, I almost passed out when I got hold of her," Rochas was relating. "When you expect to grab one of those bony, leathery apes, and you get your paws on anything that soft—"

"Badly scratched," Torval announced.

"Maybe more than a scratch here—" Charanov indicated a bleeding welt on the left side, below the breast. "Too damn' bad if it's deep. You don't often see such a swell number out here—or anywhere."

Chivalry and sentimentality do not flourish in the Sahara. Life is fast and hard, death always present. The Legionnaires crowded about the wounded girl, with curiosity, interest, but little pity. Charanov probably had expressed the feeling of the majority: it would be too bad if she were fatally injured, because she was so desirable.

"Been running a long way," someone said. "Look at her feet."

"In pretty bad shape," Torval admitted. He looked around; the whole detachment was massed in this spot. "Sentries on watch! You can see her later. Go on! Anybody got a flask?"

A hand offered a small metal bottle. The officer pressed the opening to her mouth, parted the lips, the teeth. Charanov, who was holding up her head, said: "Blood in her hair, too. She's a proper mess."

"Sherb!" Torval coaxed her gently: "Drink."

The brandy was spilling out of her mouth, dripping down her small rounded chin. She swallowed and started to cough. Her head moved from side to side in protest.

"Canst thou hear me? What is thy tribe? Where art thou from?" Torval fired the questions swiftly. The girl appeared very weak; it might be best to have answers soon. "Dost thou hear?"

"Saha, saha, Mouihya," she whispered. "Thanks, thanks. A little water."

"Water!"

Several canteens were pushed toward the officer. But when he offered her one, she did not drink. She seemed to have fainted again. And the bloodstains on the grayish cement were widening.

Torval straightened, with a gesture of discouragement.

"No use. We'll have to wait. Pick her up and take her to the ambulance-room. Might as well get one of the *goumiers'* women to help. Rochas, you're in charge. No kidding, eh? Call me as soon as she can talk."

He had spoken loudly. And as he looked at the girl again, her eyes were open. They confirmed something he had dimly sensed from the start: The eyes were blue; they were European eyes and changed the whole expression of the face. Her lips moved, and he leaned very near to listen.

"Thank God, I'm safe," she was murmuring, in French.

OVER her head Torval and Charanov, who had heard also, exchanged startled glances: even in those few words, they heard that she spoke French without the lisping of the native women.

Their first reaction to the revelation was ludierous. Torval turned and started to push away the Legionnaires, and both

he and the sergeant ranted: "Get going, to your places! Will you get the hell away from here?" And as the bewildered soldiers scattered reluctantly, they saw nothing humorous in their wrath.

They had felt small sympathy, small pity, as long as they had believed her a native Saharan, because Saharan women lived roughly and often died violent deaths. But if she were European, French, it was another question. For instance, she could not be submitted to the curious stares of a lot of rough soldiers. The very thought was indecent. Torval removed his tunic and draped it over her body.

"Don't worry, mademoiselle. You are safe."

He lifted her in his arms, bore her down the stairs, across the yard, into his own quarters. Dawn was breaking as he eased her upon his thin, hard mattress. Nevertheless he lighted a lantern. Old Kheira, the head *goumier's* wife, reputed to have skill in healing, waddled in within a few seconds.

Torval opened up the medicine-chest, brought out iodine and bandages, broke disinfecting tablets in a basin of water. The old woman set to work, as if he had not been present. As her wounds were touched, the girl stirred and moaned deeply.

And the officer, who had performed operations on some of his wounded men, had set a smashed finger, extracted bullets from mangled flesh, grew weak at the sound. It evoked something too long forgotten, the women of his own race. He had been away a long time—three, almost four years. And when this girl cried, she cried not like a native woman, but with such sounds as he had heard his own sister utter, when she had broken her ankle, skating.

HE went out into the yard, his head bared to the new sun. He answered questions asked by his men, but his mind was back there, in the room. Where had that girl come from? How? Who was she? She had been in the desert a long time; that was certain. Her feet were calloused; her face, her slim arms, her tapering legs to mid-thigh, were deeply tanned.

But with the numerous secret agents kept by the French Intelligence among dissident tribes, how had her presence remained unknown, unreported? Many native women had blue eyes, but not that clear, almost violet color. Why, her—

"Sidi Lieutenant—" Kheira had come to his side. She handed him something small yet heavy, with her wrinkled fingers. "It was resting against the ribs. Struck a stone first. The gash in her head is not deep, probably a fall. The scratches? They are nothing. Few of them will leave so much as a thin mark. But she is very tired, spent. She has walked very far, been very frightened in the darkness. I gave her a hot drink to guard against the fever, and now she is asleep."

"Look here," Torval said: "I'll give you a hundred francs if she gets well."

For an old native woman, the sum was enormous. But Kheira was not overwhelmed.

"That will be cheap enough for such a maid," she declared. "Young, beautiful and unwed!"

CHAPTER II

THE rising sun revealed the horizon empty.

As soon as there was sufficient light, Torval led a patrol out, piloted by the tracker, Ben Brazi. The Saharan picked up the tracks of the prowlers with ease. He announced that one of them had been wounded, indicated dark, flaky spots on stones and sand. His comrades had come to his assistance and helped him get away. The tracks led them down the long incline to the palm-grove, followed the dividing wall outside, gained the open again.

Cartridges were picked up. It was not difficult to spot bright, metallic objects against the neutral tints of the soil. Some were for an American carbine, others for a military Mauser. Four miles from the post, Ben Brazi called a halt: They had reached the spot where the strangers had camped.

"Six horses, two pack-camels. All big, strong animals in fine condition."

Torval long since had lost all wonder at the ability of Saharans to read facts on the ground. In this case, he could have done as well: Tracks and manure, the manner in which the few runted tufts of bush scattered about had been gnawed, told the whole story. Hungry animals, weary animals, do not pick and chose their food.

"Ait-bu-Khetras, they were," Ben Brazi soon announced. He showed Torval a length of leather, partly braided. "This is their work."

"I almost passed out when I got hold of her," Rochas was relating. "When you expect to grab one of those bony, leathery apes—"

"Might have been bought from them, or stolen?"

"No, Sidi Lieutenant. This is freshly done, unfinished. When they left here to pursue the woman, for you have guessed they pursued her, they left one behind to guard the beasts. To while away the time, he played with this. And when the others returned, with a wounded man, he forgot about it, dropped it."

At ten o'clock, when the heat increased, Torval gave the order to go back. And as always, as he plodded toward the post, he experienced some satisfaction: that quadrangle of walls, like a growth sprouted on the surface of the plateau, surmounted by the small, vivid tricolor, was his. He was master there, and it was worth the weight of responsibility to think that.

IT was almost noon when he entered the gate. After a light lunch, he sent for Kheira.

"Can she speak?"

"Yes. She chatters well."

"Tell her I am coming in ten minutes."

In Government reports, he checked up on the Ait-bu-Khetras. A rather unimportant tribe, few in numbers. Normal pasturing ground north of the extreme tip of the Iguidi Dunes—that is to say, some ten days' camel journey southward.

Then, for the first time in weeks, he looked at himself in the mirror. When he was decently turned out, he felt that he was not unhandsome. But like many youthful officers on Saharan duty, he had allowed his beard to grow, native-fashion. As his head was shaven for cleanliness and comfort, the white skin, where the képi covered the skull, surmounted his deeply tanned face—and the general effect was unsatisfactory: A ball, half-mahogany, half-ivory, resting on a pillow of coarse dark hair.

He thought of shaving. But although no one would voice amusement in his presence, he knew this would arouse humorous comments among his men.

When he entered her room, his room, he was furious for a moment. Everything was in disorder. There was a strong reek of perfume in the small cell, and he spotted a precious bottle of perfume left uncorked. On the small low table there was a profusion of provisions filched from his private stock; sardines, jam, biscuits, candy. The two women had made free with his personal belongings without consulting him, had ransacked trunks and opened drawers.

The girl was resting on the low couch, draped in a flowing robe of snowy white wool, the huge sleeves turned up: his best and finest burnous. Around her black hair was a flame-colored scarf, a beloved souvenir of a remote sentimental attachment, kept in tissue paper, in a pasteboard box fastened with string, locked in a trunk!

His was the legitimate rage of the bachelor against feminine intrusion, combined with the resentment of a man accustomed to respect and command.

His face must have reflected something of this, for she grew frightened, stared up at him, her full lips parted over the small, even, white teeth. She was very beautiful, and that scarf did belong on her: It brought out charmingly an unexpected tinge in her deep tan. His anger melted, and he smiled.

"Lieutenant Jean Torval," he introduced himself with a bow.

"I am—" She halted, speechless, in a startled gasp. He crossed the room, offered his hand. To his astonishment, she did not take it, but touched her palm lightly against his, like a native. She made an effort to speak: "I am—Louise —Louise Sauvain."

Then she stared at him, and he drew up a stool, sat down. He looked at the cigarettes, and she handed him one, not offering the box as is usual among Europeans, but holding it between her fingertips. This puzzled him. Skin, coloring, features, speech, eyes, she was a French-

woman. But her behavior was that of a timid native girl.

"I hope you are feeling better, mademoiselle."

"Yes, yes," she nodded with conviction.

Again leaden, awkward silence settled between them. Torval was embarrassed: how should one go about this? He could not start firing question after question at a young woman who had been through such an adventure. Yet she must understand that an explanation was in order. He cleared his throat.

"Have you been in the desert long, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, monsieur."

AND that was that. Suddenly he realized the truth: Louise Sauvain was behaving like a native woman before the man who holds her fate in his hands. He was the master; she was waiting for him to talk, thought it proper to tell him only what he expressed a wish to know!

"I am very happy that you are better, mademoiselle. Your nurse informs me that your wounds are light. The fever must have left you, for you have eaten." Eaten two weeks' desserts at one meal, came the uninvited thought. "Do you feel strong enough to chat for a few minutes? You see, while I am in charge here, I must report your presence to my superior officers by wireless as soon as possible. There must be a special permission to have a European lady in a military outpost in this zone."

"Yes."

"For instance," he resumed casually: "Where you came from, and where you wish to go."

"I come from Bir-Rebbi. I wish to go to France."

"Where is Bir-Rebbi?"

"That way—" She indicated the south with a finger.

These flat, direct answers amused Torval somewhat, but if he made such progress, he would be hours obtaining data for his report.

"Mademoiselle Sauvain,—that is your name?—could you tell me how you came to be with Saharan tribesmen? It is not wholly curiosity, you understand." As she glanced at the cigarettes, he gave her one, held a match out: "Allow me."

"Yes." She puffed expertly, frowned, as if concentrating. Then she started to speak slowly, and although she pronounced the French words perfectly, she appeared to have trouble arranging them for speech: "I am Louise Sauvain. I was born in Oran. I lived there until I was seven years old. Then my father, who had been employed on the railroad, lost his job. We moved to Morocco, my father, my mother and me. My father became a trader among the soldiers. We had two carts, each one with two mules. The Chleuhs surprised us, killed my father, stole the merchandise. My mother and I were taken as slaves.

"The fighting there stopped—peace came. But the people who held us fled south, because they would not kill the black bull."

Torval nodded understanding: when Moroccan mountain tribes make a peace pact, they sacrifice a black bull as a symbol of good faith.

"We were not badly treated. My mother knew how to cut cloth and sew on a hand-machine. She made dresses. But they would not let her tell the French where we were. After a while she did not want to go away herself. She had become the wife of an important man. But she wanted to send me back, to be French. She begged and begged, but they would not let her write. Then one day—she died."

Torval allowed a second of silence: "How old are you, mademoiselle?"

"Eighteen, I believe, monsieur."

"And you were about eight when you last lived among French people?"

"Yes."

"GO on, please." Torval smiled encouragingly. The mystery was not a mystery at all. The stilted French, the native mannerisms, were logical. Ten years is a very long time for a person under twenty.

"My mother's master said I was his property. He set my dowry at six hundred silver douros. When it was offered, I would not marry. One of the elders in the council was a wise man and took my part, saying that it was wrong to bend anyone not of their race to their customs. Then he died. And a dowry of eight hundred douros was offered. That was much money for a woman.

"I had seen the man. I said he was too old to wed. He is an *agha*, you know, a chief among chiefs. But he walks bent like a broken stick, and he has a white beard, so long, and his mouth has no teeth."

Louise brought both hands level with her slender middle to indicate the length of the beard, grimaced at the thought of

the toothless mouth. Her pantomime was effective, amusing. Torval nodded and said seriously:

"You did not like him?"

"Oh, no! Would you? And he lives in the deep desert; his tribe moves all the time. The life is very hard; the women must work like men, unload the camels, load them, carry water, cook. There is never enough water to bathe all over, no pretty clothes, nothing. One might as well turn into a she-camel, monsieur."

"Right," Torval assented immediately.

"I ran away and hid, and he had to go back to his people. But when I was caught, I found out that he had left the money with a third party, and some men to take me to him. I wanted to kill myself, but they took away my knife. And they bound my wrists, until I promised not to. We started out, and they did not watch me closely: where could a girl go, alone, on foot, in the desert, without water? Even if I fled from them during the night, they could follow my tracks and catch me before noon.

"Last night we camped as usual. We were far, but we could see little lights. I asked one of the men what it was. He did not know I had been born among French people. He said: 'There live Christians, infidels—Allah curse them and rid our land of their ilk.' You know the tales they tell of Frenchmen? That they are like dogs, that they eat human flesh. They thought I believed such nonsense, and would be afraid.

"But my mother had told me how kind the French were to women. I remembered many things that were good to eat, good to look at. Fountains built into the walls of big houses, that flow from the turning of a handle. Pretty clothes, and little shoes with heels this long!

"They went to sleep, leaving but one man on guard. I could see the lights, and knew they were quite far, although they seemed near. But I can walk fast, and a long time. I rose and went aside, and when I was some distance away, I ran softly, softly. It was several minutes before the guard became suspicious and looked for me. Then he called upon the others to awake and pursue. When they passed near by, I would lie down in a gully, or near a big stone, in the shadow.

"But they had guessed where I was going. Where else could I be going? So they kept between me and the walls. They heard me, and called out that I must stop, or they would shoot. Then, when I did not stop, they shot. You see, monsieur, they are not bad men, but they were afraid of their master, who paid much money for me, and trusted me to their care. They knew they would be forgiven easier for bringing my body in, than not bringing me at all. They were afraid for their own heads.

"I would hide, then run. They would hear, then shoot. But it was so very dark that I was not afraid. And I soon learned to run only when the wind was blowing. I ran for a very long time. Then I struck against the wire.

"I knew about barbed wire; all French posts have it. I knew there must be an opening, and felt my way along, quietly. The spines cut my hands, but I didn't care. I came to the wooden uprights holding the part that moves to make way toward the gate. It was fastened, and I started to crawl through. But the things you hang on the wire to give the alarm started to make noises. They shot at me again. Then there was a lot more shooting, many guns, and a blinding light. I was struck hard in the side. Then—you were giving me to drink, very strong *rakki* that burned my throat."

TORVAL reached out to grasp her hand. He had experienced night combat, knew the fearful strain of continued danger, of unseen death creeping about. This child had undergone that for hours.

"You're a brave little girl, Louise."

"What else was there for me to do?"

"Not all people do well what they must do," he said. "Now, what is your desire?"

"I want to go to France and wear French clothes."

He refrained from a smile. That was definite and clear, in any case!

"Do you know any people there?"

"No. I shall ask at Oran, where I lived. I can recognize the house; it was on the Rue d'Arzou." She sighed with excitement: "My mother told me that there were so many big houses in France, so much to eat, so much water!"

Torval did not shrug: why end her illusions so soon? Naturally, she pictured France as a paradise. But what an untrained girl such as Louise might do in France was not his problem. It was certain that she had an exaggerated ideal of Frenchmen. Because she was among Frenchmen, she judged her troubles ended. Instead they were beginning.

"Sauvain—Arzou—Oran," he noted down. "I'll try to arrange things for

Louise was coaxed into the courtyard. She squatted before a drum

you, Louise. Meanwhile, you'll probably be here a month. No detachment is going outside before that time. I'll see that you are taken care of."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"Call me Lieutenant Torval, or Jean."

"Which do you like best?"

"Jean."

He rose and held out his hand. To his keen embarrassment, she pressed her lips to it, like a native girl.

"Better rest awhile, Louise. I'll see you later."

He left the room, thoughtful. Louise Sauvain made an attractive combination, with her shapely body, her woman's voice, and the manners, the simplicity of a very small girl. He reflected that *his* beard was dark, his teeth sound and solid, and that she appeared to have noticed those important facts. But he shook his head when he remembered the upset she had caused in his quarters: That was, in a small way, what a woman did to your life, he thought.

NEVERTHELESS, a few minutes later, as he was relating her story to Sergeant Charanov, he found himself looking at the Sergeant with a new interest. The man was older than he, but with his great stature, his muscular shoulders, his slim hips, he was an attractive fellow. His very light blond hair might be an additional advantage. Louise might like it.

"So, here it is," Torval concluded, fighting down his pang of jealousy. "I hope to get permission to send her away

and they persuaded her to sing—chants of love and fighting.

soon. I'd like to send her away as soon as possible. You know why."

"Sure, Lieutenant." Charanov grinned. "In a dump like this, guys are bound to make a play for her, and some of them play pretty rough. If anything happened to her, it would be a black eye for you. I mean for us."

"Maybe we'd better place a sentry before her room."

"And a sentry to guard the sentry, and another to guard that one, and so on—" Charanov laughed. "No. We get the same result by putting no sentry and having everyone watch everybody else. Just the same, expect trouble: a woman in an outpost always means just that."

Torval sent in a long radio report to Headquarters.

The official reply was simply that the matter would be investigated, and that the Post of Moziba should shelter and care for the woman until further notice. Then the news spread, buzzing from station to station in the Occidental Sahara, eddying to scattered spots, to Tabelkala, to Timmimoun. Amusement is comparatively rare in the desert, and a number of kind friends sent him humorous messages. The wireless-operator made two copies of each message, one for the lieutenant commanding, one which he smuggled to the men in barracks.

LOUISE fitted in with the routine of the post as easily as a sharp pebble in a tight shoe. Having admitted her as French, Torval could not well turn her

over to Kheira, have her live in the *goumiers'* quarters. On the other hand, she was outwardly a native woman, liked to eat with her hands, preferred to squat on her haunches.

To make matters more awkward, she had the democracy of the Arab, among whom all creatures are as one before God, where classes are so elastic that a slave can become a sultan without arousing wonder. She was as active as a crow, and twice as curious. She took an interest in everything, went everywhere, hanging around the wireless-room, holding long conversations with the muleteers on the proper care of their animals, with the *goumiers'* women about babies, with old Kheira about home remedies for sundry ailments.

She did not except Torval. He had ordered a storeroom cleared out and made ready for her use. But she invaded his quarters at unexpected times, hung about his office, begged to be taken out on patrols. Within a couple of days she had discovered many tricks, and Torval might find her trying on his boots, or making herself tea in his room on his pet alcohol stove. Her tea was half sugar, and she was proud of it. When he tried to check her a bit, she would squat against the nearest wall and sulk.

One worry was soon lifted from the Lieutenant's mind. Louise could take care of herself. The pharmacist-corporal lured her into the infirmary, showing little bottles and odd boxes. He emerged from a brief interview looking as if he had spent ten minutes in a bag with a cat. Torval realized that he had forgotten that she had been brought up among natives, and had a casual understanding of matters ordinarily unknown to young girls at home.

She bore the young fellow no grudge, kept Torval from dealing severely with him. And the very next day she helped him prepare the fascinating potations needed by his calling.

The noon message from Headquarters, on the fourth day from her dramatic arrival, brought the first news:

ORAN POLICE CONFIRM MARIUS SAUVAIN, WIFE, DAUGHTER, RESIDING THERE SOME YEARS AGO. OUJDA POLICE CONFIRM MARIUS SAUVAIN, WIFE, DAUGHTER, SUTLER IN TAZA REGION. INVESTIGATION BEING CONTINUED. ORAN POLICE REPORT SAUVAIN HAD SISTER, LIVING PERPIGNAN, FRANCE.

Torval handed the information to Louise.

"Perpignan? Is that a nice place, Jean?"

"Very nice."

"You'll come to see me there?"

"Oh, surely."

That settled, she located his portable phonograph and put on a lively record. And tried to match the tune on a mouth-organ one of her loyal admirers had given to her—because she had asked for it. The Legionnaires liked her, because she put on no airs and used "thou" to any one of them.

She seemed perfectly happy and in no hurry to leave.

CHAPTER III

THE following morning, however, her fifth at Moziba, matters took a new turn. The sentries reported the appearance of a mounted group of men approaching from the south. Torval climbed to the platform, adjusted his field-glasses: There were nine men, all of them armed, some with military rifles, others with long-barreled shotguns. When it was clear that they intended to call at the military post, the Lieutenant put on a freshly starched white uniform: it was plain to him that one of the newcomers was a man of importance, from his embroidered red cloak.

The natives halted five hundred yards from the walls, and but three of them climbed the incline and asked for admittance. They knew Torval's name, for they specified they wished to speak with him. They had left their rifles behind, but bristled with small arms, revolvers, knives.

The leader was a very tall man, between fifty-five and sixty, half a head taller than any other man in the place. He had a flowing, grayish beard, and a swarthy, hawklike proud face. A young chap, twenty-two or -three, resembled him enough to be known as his son at once. He was less regal in appearance, seemed to have a negroid strain, and was a rather sullen moron.

The third was a fat chap in pearl-gray cloak, whose round, yellowish, almost hairless face glistened with sweat. From his garb, from his speech, he was from Fez—a sort of minister-secretary to the big fellow, Torval supposed. This was confirmed when he spoke, as the Lieutenant met them at the gate.

"My Lord Moulay ben el Haj Mahomet has journeyed three days to come to

speak with thee, My Lord Lieutenant. He is a great friend of the French Government, as attested by papers I have here." He touched an ornate leather bag hung at his side. "However, for the sake of decency, our conversation must be private."

Torval led them to his office, and they sat on mats, around the teapot. Blameni, the fat one, spoke freely, proclaimed his master *Bachagha* of the Ahel-ed-Doula tribes. Sergeant Charanov was one of the guests. The old man pretended not to pay interest to anything that was said; his long fingers played with a long string of wooden beads. By his side, his son seemed chiefly absorbed by the curious weapons displayed on the walls, Tuareg and Soudanese spears, shields, knives and clubs.

"In what way can I be of service to Sidi Moulay?"

"First, look at the papers, to prove we are indeed friends of France." Blameni produced a number of documents, bearing impressive seals and signatures. One was an official letter of thanks from the Moroccan Protectorate, for some service rendered lost aviators. Another acknowledged the formation in Moulay's tribe of a partisan group, to serve with the French on occasion. A third announced the grant of forty rifles, ten Gras, thirty chassepôts, with four cases of ammunition, to arm that partisan group.

"Thou art right," Torval agreed. "What can I do for you?"

BLAMENI smiled gently.

"Return the woman you hide here," he said quietly.

Torval knew at once who was meant, and what his reply must be: Louise Sauvain being a French subject, could not be surrendered.

"I hide no one," he said. "What is her name?"

"Zaya bent el Tobbal."

"I know no one by that name."

Blameni consulted with the others, in a dialect of Arabic which Torval did not always understand. The older man grunted, lifted his piercing eyes to sweep the officer's face.

"We know not by what name she is called here. But we do know that she is here. She is the daughter of El Tobbal, notable among the Ait-bu-Khetras. And the wife of my Lord Moulay. The stipulated price has been paid, in silver. She fled to this place a few days ago—four, five at the most. If I must be plain, she is tall for a woman, untattooed, with blue eyes."

"Such a woman came here," Torval admitted. "But as she is a Frenchwoman, I cannot release her to you without official order."

"She is not French. She was born in the Sahara."

"Dost thou read French, Blameni? Yes?" Torval handed him the official telegrams concerning the girl. "Seest thou? You must go to Béchar Headquarters and present your claim there."

MOULAY'S head snapped up from contemplation of his beads.

"And by that time, she will have vanished somewhere, as before," he said, in very pure Arabic. "And I shall be laughed at." His eyes rested fiercely on Torval's face. "This I can tell thee, O young chieftain, that what is mine is mine, that what is mine I take, by force if it is refused to me in peace."

"Five hundred men would be needed to take this place," the Lieutenant smiled. "Five hundred good warriors. We are but thirty, but we have walls."

"That five hundred shall I bring—and five hundred more."

"My Lord, my Lord!" Blameni protested. "Let there be no talk of war against our friends. The young chief knows the law of the land: the French do not interfere with local customs. The woman is clever, has deceived him. But when he is persuaded she is not of his race, he will yield her."

"True words," Torval agreed. "But she is French." And he related Louise's story.

"The woman lies." Blameni smiled. "Oh, it is easy to believe such lips. By Allah, Lieutenant, I swear to thee that, although she says that she came to the desert half-grown, these eyes of mine saw her as a fat baby. Her father is the Lame Kaid; her mother was half Moorish and half Maltese. She is pure white in skin and blood, but she is native to the land, to our race. And a fine liar. Bring her here to face us, and we shall show you she lies."

"You will not attempt to harm her?" Torval asked. He knew the people he was dealing with—overquick to use a knife to settle an argument. Moulay might well kill her rather than face the humiliation of losing her.

"We swear by Allah," Moulay answered for all three.

"Sergeant Charanov, will you bring Mademoiselle Sauvain?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

He was gone fifteen minutes, and he returned with the girl, according to his orders. But he was flushed and sweating. Louise's whole expression had changed; she looked defiant and fierce as a wildcat. Underneath, she was afraid, for her knees trembled.

"Greetings, O Zaya bent el Tobbal," Blameni said.

"I do not know them," Louise said in French.

"Thou hast never seen me?"

"I have seen thee, fat one. And the others. But you are nothing to me."

Moulay smiled, a slow, set smile. But his eyes reflected less passion than fury. He did not address a word to her, and after one brief glance he did not again even look at her.

"Tell the Lieutenant the truth: You were born in the Sahara."

"I was born in Oran."

"Ah, thou wert born in Oran? At what age didst thou leave?"

"I was seven."

"A child of seven has eyes, ears, memory. Lieutenant, thou dost know Oran. Ask her of the city."

TORVAL nodded, and spoke in Arabic, to show there was no trickery intended. He asked a half-dozen general questions, which Louise replied to with a scornful air, quite correctly. The officer looked at Blameni and shrugged.

"She has learned this from someone, learned carefully." Blameni smiled on. He was silent awhile, and Torval was worried. If Louise had lied, this fat fellow would prove it. He was by no means a fool.

At last, Blameni spoke: "Among all people, little children are taught certain songs, little songs, to play games with. Those songs cannot be forgotten. A child may be removed from his birthland, forget his language, his people. But the music will evoke the words. Thou, Lieutenant, knowest the music, we know not the words. But thou art a French officer, and thy word is law. Let us see if she can recall the words."

Torval was confident that Louise had told the truth. But he grew worried when he saw her become pale, support herself on the table behind her.

"A little song, Lieutenant, a song any child knows—that she may give the words."

Torval's mouth was dry, and he could hardly whistle. There was no way of avoiding the test now, and he knew that it would be hard to deceive Blameni. But if the girl only contrived to put up a bluff, if she didn't know! He found himself ready to stretch a point, despite Blameni's purposeful flattery.

He whistled *"Savez-vous planter les choux,"* then, *"Le bon roi Dagobert."* Louise wrinkled her brows, shook her head. Perhaps it was harder to improvise French words than he had imagined! She flunked on *"Papa est en bas,"* gulped on *"Sur le pont d'Avignon."* But she uttered no words, right or wrong. Blameni's simple trick had worked perfectly.

DESPITE the seriousness of the situation, both Sergeant Charanov and the moronic son were grinning widely. True enough, the sight of Torval with his lips pursed must be amusing.

Louise opened her mouth, tried to speak. Then she shook her head, sobbed: "I don't remember—I was too little." Suddenly she threw herself on her knees beside Torval, hid her face against him: "O Sidi, Lieutenant," she pleaded in Arabic, "don't let them take me away."

Blameni nodded: "Seest thou?"

Old Moulay rose, came forward, and as the girl shrank away from him, Sergeant Charanov put down the leg he had crossed over the other. Torval himself had to refrain an overwhelming impulse to push that fierce, white-bearded face with his palm. Right or wrong, whether Louise were French or not, this was not a pretty thing he was asked to do.

He rose, pushed Louise behind him gently—or Zaya, as was possibly her real name.

Some lingering caution warned him: he was an officer in French service. Interfering with family affairs of an important native leader might have serious consequences for him. The Native Intelligence Service would not hold that a young woman's choice of husband, her happiness, possibly her whim, weighed at all against military interests and human lives.

Very possibly interference now would wreck his career in the service. But he felt as if a powerful spring within his chest had been coiled too tightly and strained for release. If Moulay reached out with those long, slender, muscular hands, laid a finger on the girl, important chief or not, young or old, Torval would punch him on the nose.

Moulay realized this himself. It is unlikely that he would have flinched before a blade or a gun-muzzle, but he backed away before a fist. Even the death of the man who struck it did not wipe out the humiliation of a blow on the face. His hand touched the hilts of the knives in his sash.

"Peace, my Lord." Blameni spoke softly, as always. "Have no fear; thy woman is safe in his keeping, I swear. The young chief would be rash because of his youth, but he must consult older and wiser people. Let him do so."

"You brought no proof of the marriage," Torval retorted. "Even if what you say is truth, you must take the case of a fugitive wife before a native judge, a *cadi*. That is the Law."

"Not in this territory." Blameni waved his hands lightly. "However, however! When will thy chiefs answer your message concerning my Lord's demands?"

"Within four days." Torval forced himself to hospitable words. "You and yours shall be my guests."

"We must be off. We come back, in four days."

The three visitors affected to have forgotten Louise. Torval and Charanov escorted them to the gateway, where the sentries presented arms. There were the needed rites, the salaams, the touching of palms, the fingers laid on the lips. Then the three cloaks, one scarlet, one white, one gray, swung down the slope.

CHARANOV began to roll a cigarette. "You know, Lieutenant, the old chap has decided to do us in. Blameni knows it." The Sergeant licked the paper. "He wanted to get his boss out before he started knifing about. We better watch out. They'll be back as soon as they can bring along, as the old bird put it, that five hundred and five hundred more. Looks like a merry week ahead."

Torval strode back to the office. Louise had left. He found her in his room.

She crouched before him, as if she were afraid of being struck. He lifted her to her feet, held her by her elbows:

"Look here, are you really French?"

"Yes."

"They say you were born in the desert. Who lies?"

"I'm French, I'm French—"

"Listen to me!" He shook her. "You know that as I have based my refusal to give you to them on your being French, if they prove you are not—I'll have to let you go."

Then she was in his arms, clinging to him. She besought him with her voice, with her hands, with the pressure of her body. She drew his head down, and he tasted the tears on her cheeks. He was aghast at her distress.

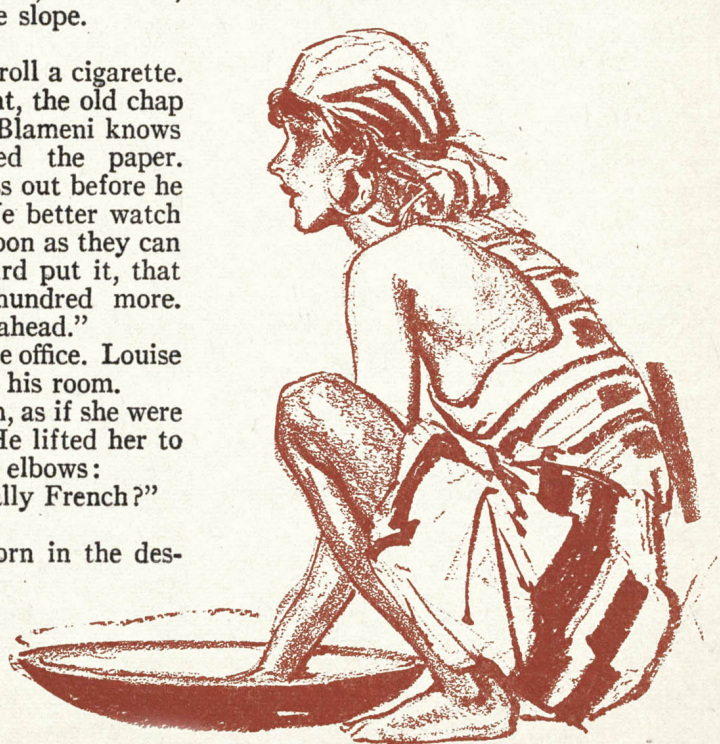
"I don't know those songs—I was little. I'm French—you won't let them take me away? Jean, Jean, I love you. Please, please, please! You know he'll have me beaten like a slave, then kill me. He'll cut my throat and have me thrown to the dogs."

Torval realized that these wild words were absolutely true. He knew natives, such natives as Moulay. It was certain that he would avenge his humiliation, that the girl would not be allowed to live more than a few days. And as sure that she would welcome death then. It was expecting too much of him to suggest that he turn over this young woman to certain death, to torture.

"No, I won't let them take you," he said.

"You promise, you swear?"

"Yes, yes." He shrugged. "I'll find a way out. I'll explain that this is an exception. They can't ask me to—" But



She was as active as a crow, and twice as curious. She took an interest in everything.

he could not deceive himself: those in authority would order the man's wife turned over to him. In this doubtful zone, apt to flare into costly rebellion overnight, they would not risk siding with a fugitive native wife.

Louise's lips were warm under his own.

"Jean, he will come back with many men. Maybe it would be better if I die soon."

HE stroked her hair, spoke absentmindedly, words of consolation. Then the impact of her words reached him: There would be fighting, death. And he had no right to hold her, to kiss her—it seemed indecent for him to caress a woman for whom many would die. He pushed her away gently.

"Jean, you're angry."

"No." He gestured widely. "All right, as long as I am alive, you have nothing to fear. I shall not give you over to Moulay." His voice strained, broke: "Isn't that enough, enough?"

She threw herself on the couch, her face in her hands, sobbed. He wanted to lift her to him, to kiss her. The poor, frightened, helpless little savage! Then he detested her as he detested himself: Men's lives, thirty men's lives!

He composed his message in the office. If he could make those chaps understand his situation, how impossible it would be for him to see that girl caught and bound, carried away like a captured animal! But they would see words where he saw a terrorized, weeping girl, see influence and power where he saw a proud, lustful old man. They would laugh at the reluctance of a native woman to accept her assigned husband. What did such things matter to a *mauresque?*

He was still writing when the radioman came in with an official message:

ADVISE YOU MOROCCAN AUTHORITIES INFORM US MARIUS SAUVAIN, WIFE, DAUGHTER, AMBUSHED AND KILLED SOUTH OF TAZA TEN YEARS AGO. ALL THREE BODIES WERE RECOVERED AND POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED. WOMAN AT YOUR POST UNDOUBTEDLY IMPOSTOR. AUTHORIZE YOU KEEP HER POST MOZIBA UNTIL REAL IDENTITY ASCERTAINED OR SHE IS CLAIMED BY FAMILY.

Torval had to read this several times before the words took some meaning. The girl was an impostor. It was useless, after what he had heard from Blameni, to hope that there had been a mistake in identification of Louise Sauvain's body. She was, as the fat one had claimed, a born Saharan. She had lied to obtain protection. And she had thrown herself at him because he was the lesser of two evils—because she was afraid of death.

"Send this," he ordered the Legionnaire. "Let me know as soon as you get an answer. Even if I am asleep."

He did not want to see Louise. . . . Louise? Zaya! He ascended to the machine-gun platform. He saw the place where her body had rested, that first night. The stains were her blood. Five days ago, only five days!

Charanov handed him field-glasses.

"Still in sight, Lieutenant. Want a look?"

Torval nodded. As he adjusted the glasses, the party of native riders shaped out of the fiery haze, almost on the southern horizon. Light flashed from gun-barrels, buckles, stirrups. For long minutes he watched the silhouettes bobbing through the glare, growing smaller, thinner, thin as a pencil, thin as a hair. The Lieutenant lowered the glasses.

Before long, they would reappear on the rim of the horizon, growing taller and wider, coming back out of the south. And behind them others—five hundred, and five hundred more.

CHAPTER IV

"THEY'RE in sight, Lieutenant."

"Sure?"

"Can't mistake Moulay's red cloak."

Three days and four nights had elapsed. And the mental strain of those eighty-four hours had dug lines in Torval's face. He had shaved off his beard; chin and cheeks showed pink against contrasting tan. It was plain that he was under tension, but his eyes were resolute, his determination evident.

"I'm nearly ten years older than you," Charanov stood in the doorway of the officer's room, one shoulder resting the wall. He rolled a cigarette, and spoke casually. "I have lived and suffered more. I know what being poor, an outcast, can mean. I unloaded freight in Bizerte, competing with native laborers. I lived on stale bread and rotting fruit. Picked up butts to smoke. You'll have a hard time if you lose your commission. If the Army throws you out, your family may not like it. And—there are a lot of women in the world, Lieutenant. You could forget this one."

Torval turned on him angrily.

"I'm not in love with her. In fact, I don't want her. But I couldn't face myself if I let her be taken away to be killed. Question of human decency."

"One says that." The Sergeant nodded, as if remembering something of the sort. "But if you come out of this alive, you'll be in love with her. Because it isn't what women do for you that makes you love them; it's how much you do for them. This girl has nowhere to go, no one to turn to, except you. So you'll be stuck with her. When you take a dog in out of a storm, you can't put him out with a kick in the behind when the sun shines."

"You'll see. Once she is safe, I'll wash my hands of her." The young Lieutenant rested his hand on Charanov's shoulder: "What would you do in my place, old man?"

"Exactly what you intend, Lieutenant." Charanov smiled. "But it would be easier for me, if I survived. I wouldn't have regrets. What happens must happen: I am Russian."

They went out into the small courtyard. Torval knocked on a door. It opened, and the girl peered out. Her face was tear-stained and sullen.

"What do you want?"

"They're coming. Stay out of sight and don't worry."

"I'm ready to go with them," she retorted. "Yes, I am afraid. But I'd sooner die than have you look at me the way you do. You hate me; you won't speak to me—I must eat alone. . . . I don't want to have all the men killed—" She drew breath, added with concentrated spite: "I'm not as afraid as you men!"

Torval shrugged wearily. He had tried to explain why he could not appear to be too friendly with her. Too many would be eager to accuse him of having served his own purpose, followed his personal wishes.

"Be quiet," he said.

AT the machine-gun platform, he lifted the field-glasses. The air was crystal clear, and even at extreme distance he could identify Moulay's red cloak, the pearl-gray burnous of Blameni. Many riders were with them.

"They'll be here in three hours, Charanov. You heard what she had to say—"

"Yes. But it's like drowning. Not a question of making up one's mind. At the very last, she'd scream and struggle; you couldn't stand by idle; nor could I." He indicated a bugler, standing with his instrument resting against his hip, in a classic pose: "There he is."

"Assembly. Everybody."

Through force of habit, the bugler twirled the instrument expertly; there was a whirl of colored tassels, a brassy scintillation. Then the three notes in ascending scale were repeated several times. Men emerged from the low structures, from the long dormitory, from the stables, the kitchen, the baker's cell. They wore white fatigue uniforms, with the broad blue sashes, small skull-caps or the scarlet-crowned képis. Twenty-six Legionnaires, second-class, first-class and corporals; two junior sergeants—Chapuis, short, young, pink; Loffheim, swarthy, wrinkled, gray.

"The roll, Chapuis."

"Yes, Lieutenant." The Sergeant did not need the list. He had been calling those men for a year: "Abermann, Fred—Blaum, August—Buschjost, Heinrich—Hassani, Tayeb—Kruyswik, Cornil—" He strung out names and surnames.

FOR a moment Torval looked down upon them. He knew each one personally, knew some intimate detail about each one. They were his subordinates, his Legionnaires, but they were also old acquaintances, human beings, friends. He saw the devotion on their bronzed faces, wondered if they had not guessed what he intended to ask.

Some of them were mere boys, enlisted months ago as eighteen, probably just reaching seventeen. Two or three were on the verge of being old men—Holzhauser, for instance, with the hair on his chest showing white through his unbuttoned tunic. Ordinary men taken from everywhere, poured into the crucible, forged into that matchless alloy, that superb weapon: the Foreign Legion.

"Zerbster, Otto!"

"Present!" the last man answered.

"All present, *mon lieutenant!*"

Torval looked at them for a while longer. Some of the things he was about to say demanded tact. For instance, Tayeb Hassani was a Berber, enlisted in Morocco. Theodore Cameron was a Negro from Jamaica. Kalmikoff clearly had a mixture of Asiatic blood, who knew just what? And several others were sensitive about racial or class distinctions for other reasons.

"At ease, Legionnaires." Torval shoved his képi far back on his head, hooked a thumb in his belt. Feet apart, he was

"Among all people," Blameni said, "little children are taught certain songs. Those songs cannot be forgotten. Let us see if she can recall the words."

informal, friendly: "Legionnaires! We have known each other a long time. We are not strangers. I can tell almost to the pint the capacity of each one of you, and also other personal details which we won't mention just now—"

This brought the grins he had expected.

"Why not, Lieutenant? We have no secrets!"

"Legionnaires! About ten nights ago, we took in a wounded woman, a girl. You all know the negotiations concerning her, as I am under no illusion that the wireless operators are mute with their pals. So you know that I have been ordered, absolutely ordered, to surrender her. Because her claim that she was a French subject has been disproved—"

"Tell them to go to hell! It's a dirty trick! Keep her here!"

"Shut up, Legionnaires! I am doing the talking for a while longer." Torval

held up his hands for complete silence. "In a couple of hours, they will come for her. In case the operators have been unable to decode the confidential messages, I must add that the aviation has reported several hundred men coming in this direction. As you know, we were placed here to guard an auto road which never was finished. So help cannot reach us by land under a week's delay. As the orders sent to me preclude the possibility of trouble, that help has not started as yet. So we are on our own for at least a week, against who knows how many hun—"

"Let them come, who cares! The more, the merrier!"

Torval grinned wryly.

"Close that mouth, Brichaux! The aviation can reach us soon, but as we don't read the technical magazines, and only believe what we see, we know what that means out here. They'll machine-gun the ground and blow up sand dunes. What you can't see—you can't hit! So there is a strong chance that if the guys who are coming are well led and fairly game, we'll all have our throats sliced. That is our situation.

"So far as I am concerned, my decision is made. The Legion saved that girl once; and the Legion can—but I am getting ahead too fast. I have decided to disobey my instructions, placing my conscience as a man and a Legionnaire above orders. That leaves three possibilities: When the natives reach here, you can throw the gate open to them, and they can come in to get the girl. I'll defend her alone as long as I can. Or I can ride out with her and run.

"You know what the result will be in both cases. The third is that you will volunteer to disobey orders with me. It means your lives. I would not ask it of anyone else—I have sent away the *goumiers* and their folks. But you are Legionnaires, and I would not insult you by deciding for you. Remember that you are not called upon to obey my orders, for I am already guilty of rebellion, or mutiny. I give you an hour to consider the matter. If you decide to stick it with me, inform me. If not, inform Sergeant Charanov, to whom I shall hand command at once."

CHARANOV took three steps forward: "Lieutenant, don't name me. I'm with you, whatever you decide."

"Then inform Sergeant Chapuis."

"Oh, no!" Chapuis, from below, grinned happily: "Never leave me out of anything damn' foolish, Lieutenant! I think I can speak for all, and—"

"Do things according to some rule," Torval protested. "It's life or death; everyone should have a say. I give you an hour. Just a moment, Legionnaires: You understand, naturally, that I have no more reason to protect that girl than any other man in this post. She is nothing to me."

"Why? Did she say no? Don't you know your way around?" a dozen voices lifted; they all laughed. It did not matter greatly to them.

"All right, dismissed." Torval addressed the sentries: "You fellows can leave one at a time, to give your vote."

The men dispersed slowly, arguing, gesticulating. Perhaps there were a few dissenters, for groups massed in remote corners, hemming in individuals.

"THEY'LL stick with you," Charanov said. "Those guys wouldn't lose any chance to do something cockeyed. They're not worried about the mutiny business. They figure that if there's anything left to be court-martialed, they'll be let off if they put up a good fight. The Legion's always the Legion. It will be different for either of us who comes out of it."

Torval looked through the field-glasses again.

The head of the procession had crept much nearer. More men, some afoot, others mounted on horses or camels, swarmed in a thin, antlike flow over the rim of the horizon. There were four or five hundred in sight already, and they kept appearing. The officer wondered how Moulay had been able to gather so many inside three days, for Saharan tribesmen live in scattered *douars,* a few families to a group of tents, many miles apart.

The wireless-operator brought a new message.

MAINTAINING INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN. DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOUR CONDUCT. WARN YOU OF GRAVE CONSEQUENCES. OFFICER NATIVE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE STARTING FOR YOUR POST AT ONCE. SUGGEST YOU PROPOSE PLACING LOUISE SAUVAIN, SO CALLED, IN CUSTODY OF THE KAID, WITH UNDERSTANDING SHE MUST BE HELD SAFE UNTIL CONFERENCE WITH OFFICER.

There was more, which Torval read with a bitter smile. They were beginning to wonder at his obstinacy about a native girl, out there. Let them worry! And

their concession was stupid: Surrender the girl to Moulay! As if it was likely that a man who was willing to storm a military post to get a woman would be likely to spare her until he had a talk with anyone!

HIS orderly called him for lunch. He found Louise waiting beside the table. She wore a white military tunic with brass buttons, voluminous pantaloons of white silk, bought from Kheira, which left her slim ankles and small feet bare. The flame-colored scarf was around her head. She was puerile, ridiculous and most charming.

"Where did you get the coat?" he asked.

"Little Heinrich gave it to me." She shrugged: "He likes me."

"Good. Why don't you eat?"

"I ate already. The cook made me an omelette, with jam in it."

"He likes you too?"

"Yes." She watched him for a long time in silence. Then she began to talk, in a monotone: "I am a big trouble. But what can I do? Old Moulay will kill everybody because I am here. But what can I do?" She started to weep, with her back against the wall, holding her knees with henna-stained hands: "You're very angry with me, because I am a trouble."

He could say nothing to console her. Because, when he spoke to her gently, kindly, she came near, fondled his hands, kissed them. How could he make her understand why he could not allow himself to do that? That only so long as she was no more to him than to others, could he feel justified?

Yet her grief tormented him. It was not her fault. Was he falling in love with her, as Charanov had said he would do? By now, how much personal jealousy was mixed with his decision to keep her out of Moulay's hands at all costs? Had she been a toothless, wrinkled old woman, Kheira, for instance, would he have risked what he would be risking?

She repeated that she loved him. Was she telling the truth? Did she not love him because he represented protection from worse? She knew how to lie, to deceive. Torval was convinced now that she was not Louise Sauvain, but how easily she had persuaded him! Even now, she insisted that she was French. She might be, so far as physical appearance was concerned, if one forgot her costume, her manners. But she had not lived among French people for long, at any time.

He finished his meal rapidly, nodded to her and left. Chapuis and Loffheim were waiting in the courtyard for him. They came to attention, saluted. Chapuis was grinning with satisfaction.

"Everyone consulted, Lieutenant, and we're all for you."

"*Ja,* Lieutenant—unanimous," Loffheim ratified.

"Thank you."

As he climbed to the platform, Torval thought how banal, how short, almost comic, that answer had been: A casual word for the offer of their lives. But a long speech would have been ridiculous.

The leading group of natives had halted three hundred yards from the military post: Moulay, his son, and Blameni, surrounded by what probably composed the staff of the expedition. The Lieutenant noticed several standards, some green, some yellow and red, and two riders supported a sort of enormous parasol to shade the Kaid. Through the glasses, Torval watched his face. A handsome old guy, Moulay, all pride and passion.

AFTER some minutes the chieftain lifted his hand, the parasol was furled, and the party split. Moulay rode off with the main body; Blameni and a single rider came toward the wall. The escort horseman carried a long staff from which was suspended a white cloth. The fat fellow knew the prevailing usages of European warfare, manifestly, for he came protected by a flag of truce.

The Lieutenant guessed what the conference had been about: Moulay wished to call on Torval personally, and Blameni undoubtedly pointed out that if they entered the outpost, the Lieutenant might hold them as hostages. That thought had indeed passed through his mind.

"Greetings and salvation on thee, Lieutenant Jean Torval," the fat man hailed. He sat at ease on his gray horse.

"On thee peace and salvation," the officer called back.

"What is the answer?"

"I have received instructions from my chiefs. The girl must be held until one of our Intelligence officers comes to identify her and decide of her fate with your Kaid. It will be a matter of but three to four days."

"My Lord is weary of delay. What is thy answer?"

"Nothing can be decided until the officer arrives."

"Dost thou yield Zaya to her master this day?" Blameni called out, for the third time. "What is *thy* answer?"

"Stubborn beggar, isn't he?" Charanov commented.

"My answer must be no," Torval shouted back.

IT was difficult to see clearly in the sun's glare, but it seemed that Blameni smiled as if pleased. Torval expected the man to turn and leave. Instead, the fat native resumed speaking. He shaded his eyes with one hand as he peered up at the group of Europeans above him.

"I shall attempt to make my Lord Moulay delay his just ire until the arrival of the officer you mention," he said pompously. "I am sure of gaining time, until tomorrow, at least. I am a man of peace, you see. But to extend that time, we shall have to talk more. Tomorrow, an hour after sunrise, I shall return to this spot."

He lifted his hand to his turban, in a poor imitation of a military salute. Then he turned his horse about, trotted away. His companion, the flag-bearer, was not too sure that he would not be fired upon, and peered over his shoulder often.

"Back for more talky-talky at dawn," Charanov commented with a laugh. "Probably means that they'll jump us during the night."

"Undoubtedly," the Lieutenant admitted. "We'll be ready."

One worry was spared the garrison: It would not run out of ammunition. The Government's intention originally had been to establish a very large post at Moziba, and caravans had brought an enormous stock of cartridges, grenades, small shells for a thirty-seven-millimeter cannon that never arrived, explosives for blasting in road construction, rockets, flares. There were twenty spare Lébel carbines, of the most useful type in the Sahara, fifty Gras rifles, one hundred chassepôt rifles, that would have been distributed to auxiliary native forces of the region had the road been finished.

If the situation grew hopeless, Torval was prepared. The storehouses would be blown up, to keep the supplies out of the natives' hands.

Even with a future probably limited to a couple of days, he and his sergeants took a professional interest in the tribesmen's use of the ground. Their ability to conceal themselves was phenomenal.

Men and animals moved about, seemed to seep into the arid soil, to be absorbed by the sand, so cleverly did their chiefs avail themselves of the hollows and natural covers. For instance, the officer counted one hundred and eighty-four men filing into the small palm-grove. Yet within fifteen minutes, not a sign of them could be discerned with the naked eye.

Twice within the next hour, Headquarters radioed for further information.

Torval understood what was happening. He had not informed the Territorial Commander of his intention to disobey orders, in so many words. That would have been poor policy. But neither had he reported turning the woman over to her "legitimate protector, her husband according to local law," as one message had it.

They were beginning to think that the Lieutenant was following his own wishes, and this worried them. Of course, it had been impossible for Torval to wireless in detail all he felt about the matter. So they presumed that he was affected by his long stay in the desert, was the prey of a fit of the fabulous Saharan illness, the *cafard,* which is a sort of truculent, hysterical spleen. Moreover, as they knew Legionnaires and their legendary devotion to their officers, they did not dare count too much on being obeyed by subordinates.

Torval's answer was purposely vague concerning the pseudo Louise Sauvain. But he gave a very clear picture of his situation, reported that his post was surrounded by between one thousand and twelve hundred armed men, whose hostile intentions were very plain.

At three-thirty motors throbbed remotely, and a dark spot emerged in the northeastern sky: an airplane. That was not unusual, for machines flew above Moziba two or three times each week, often dropping a bag of mail. On rare occasion, one would land near by, and the pilot and observer come in for a visit. Moziba, a week away from other posts by horse or camel, was but one hour by airplane.

THE machine flew low over the outpost; the Legionnaires could see a man waving his hand from the rear seat. It rose again, soared on some distance, then banked, turned into the wind, and started to glide for a landing on a convenient flat stretch two hundred yards from the gateway.

Torval did not know whether to be glad or not: This might settle his problem by

taking matters out of his hands. Probably it had been decided to dispatch the special officer by plane rather than camel. He must be in that plane. That would end the Lieutenant's rebellion, for officers of the Native Bureaus are energetic fellows who know how to cope with awkward situations.

But while it did not seem possible that a European officer could see, converse with Louise and decide to surrender her to Moulay, Torval was not too sure. Certain members of the service were as calloused to ordinary human feelings as were the Saharans themselves. Ten or fifteen years in the constant company of camel-drivers and warriors did not lead to the cultivation of tender sentiments. Past a given zone of civilization, women became breeders, toys, prey or marketable merchandise—and no more.

But his speculation ended very quickly.

As the pilot cut off his motors, rifles crackled from the palm-grove, from hollows and low dunes. A hail of lead spattered around the machine. The wheels did not even touch the ground; the motors picked up again; the plane lifted rapidly, described an immense circle before undertaking another landing.

Again the fusillade started.

The aviators then realized that they were not wanted. It would have been madness to land in the open. The machine would have been riddled in two minutes, destroyed, while the occupants could not hope to gain the shelter of the walls in time to avoid death. Very soon the plane was a remote dot against the sky. Then the vibrating drone of the motors dwindled, died out.

The men were jubilant.

"They'll see what the swine are up to now," was the general comment.

BUT Torval knew this first shooting would be considered the direct result of his disobedience of orders, which it was. In fact, inside another hour, a message was picked up, announcing in careful terms—the scandal was becoming embarrassing and all posts were listening in—that Lieutenant Torval was temporarily relieved from command pending investigation, that his second was to assume responsibility. Within Moziba, this meant precisely nothing. Sergeant Charanov signed the next report, a mere acknowledgment of the orders.

The operator intercepted many other messages, showing feverish activity. The mounted company of the Foreign Legion at Erfoud was ordered in readiness. The meharistes' platoon, at Tabelbala, was ordered to start eastward; the Saharan Company at Atchana was dispatched southward; all irregular formations recruited from loyal tribes, *mokhrazenis, goumiers, partisans,* were instructed to proceed immediately to concentration-points as indicated on "Schedule Number Three."

It was too late to draw back now, even if Torval had wished to.

"Some of those outfits could be here inside five days," Charanov declared. "But they won't want to arrive singly. And I can't blame them! We can expect relief in about six and one half days."

"They'll rush us tonight," Torval said.

"When do you expect them?"

"When the moon sinks."

A GIBBOUS Sahara moon shed enough light to make approach dangerous. While the natives could not hope for complete surprise, they would not risk the game as long as the distorted, luminous half-disk rolled across the cloudless sky. The Legionnaires knew they were safe for several hours. And they carried on with their usual activities during the early evening.

Talented fellows performed on mouth-organs, flutes, improvised instruments of one sort or another. From the outside came the distant sounds of other music, monotonous melodies.

Torval paced the platform, like an officer on the bridge of a ship. More than once he had realized that analogy. He was the captain of a motionless vessel that moved only through time, a vessel of cement and brick resting on a petrified sea. The gusts of wind, scented by the Atlas snows, swept across his face.

After dinner the girl had retired to her room. But before long little Heinrich Buschjost headed a delegation that knocked on her door and requested her presence. She was at last coaxed into the courtyard; men pushed each other to give her room, and she squatted before a drum. Very soon they persuaded her to sing. She had a sweet, rather deep contralto voice, but she handled it like a native. This embarrassed her, because she knew it was amusing to these men.

Before very long, however, she was beating the drum, rhythmically. Regional chants, of love and fighting, of flowers and blood. Those who understood Arabic translated, and they would all laugh.

One song was a favorite, and oddly, it fitted the situation somewhat:

Oh, the Old Man is full of faults,
But he has the bags of silver.
Allah took his strength, gave him wealth,
Gave him food for a weak stomach!
I begged him for fire for the hearth—
He brought a handful of ashes!

Little Heinrich—who had been three years in service even if he was still under nineteen—accompanied her on a flute, imitating a native musician, with burlesque flourishes and squeaks. Like the others, like Louise herself, all thought of approaching death and danger seemed to have been wiped from his mind.

At nine, Torval halted the singing.

"All men off duty turn in; you'll be called at two o'clock. Try to get some sleep. Keep your guns handy, magazine loaded, but chamber empty. Get going!"

He escorted Louise to her room, screened the narrow slit serving as a window with a plank shutter, then lighted a lantern. The cell held no furniture, except Torval's portable phonograph. She slept on a mattress resting on the floor. But she had adorned the walls with picture postal cards and photographs, gifts of the men.

"I want you to promise me that you'll stay in here,"—he hesitated, then used the only name he knew—"Louise. If you came out when the fighting is going on, somebody would be sure to leave his post to watch over you. You're best out of the way."

"I can shoot," she said.

"I know." He took a small-caliber automatic from his pocket: "I can leave this with you. All you have to do is push this little thing here, then pull the trigger. Nine shots."

THERE was no need to warn her not to play with the gun. She was familiar with firearms, knew they were not toys. Charanov, who knew his business, said she was better than average. No need, either, to tell her what to do in case the post was taken by storm. Louise might be a bit of a liar, but she was no soft, panicky woman.

He turned to go.

"Jean—is it true that if—if you are alive, you will no longer be a chief, because of me? That perhaps they will put you in prison?"

"Hardly that, Louise. Who's been talking to you?"

"Nobody. But I can hear people talking, you know."

"Well, don't worry about it now."

She caught his arm, and lifted her face. He bent down and kissed her warm lips; then as he held her close: "Don't worry," he repeated. "I know it isn't your fault. You came here. Where could you go? And what does it matter who you are?" He shrugged and smiled. "Does little Heinrich care? Put the bar across your door. Good-by."

He waited outside until he heard the heavy iron drop into the sockets. Would she open that door for him, ever again? He looked up at the sentries, called out:

"Anything moving?"

"No, Lieutenant. All quiet."

HE turned in, to give a good example, not expecting to sleep. To his bewilderment, Charanov had to shake him, some hours later: "Moon's going, Lieutenant. It's after two."

"Right with you."

He buckled on the pistol-belt, slipped four additional clips into his tunic pockets. The night had grown very dark. The four sentries paced the upper wall.

The men were gathered in the yard. They talked in quiet voices, and when the wind-gusts were loud, would cease talking, listen tensely. Torval spoke to them, chiefly for the moral effect, as they had been given instructions before.

"Don't fire without order. The machine-gun and the two automatics will be enough if properly handled. The rest of you can put down your rifles and use grenades. But be careful, don't fling them at random. Drop them, unless you see targets clearly, in the cleared zone between the wire and the bottom of the wall. That is where many of them will be, stopping to put up whatever scaling apparatus they have.

"Don't get excited, don't yell, don't stand up and jump about like a lot of clowns. Remember that some of them will be shooting from the outside, and that you can work as well crouching or kneeling. We aren't enough to lose men unnecessarily.

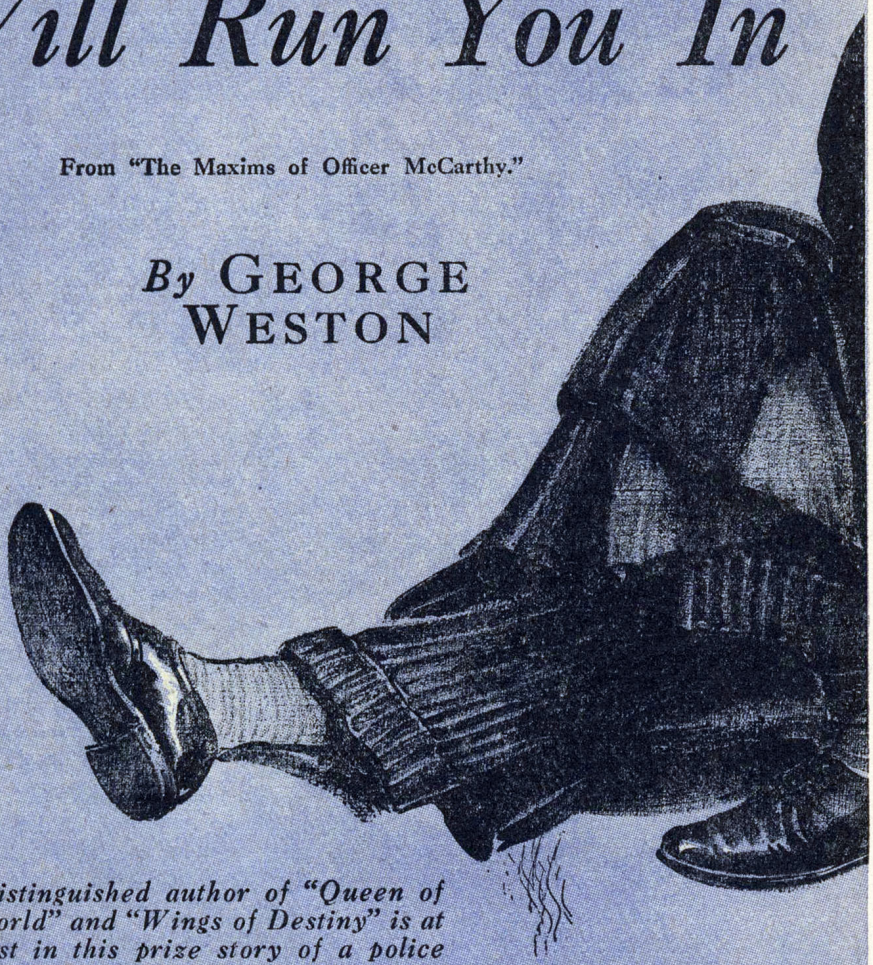
"Now, even if some of them should break through at one spot, even leap down into the yard, let those nearest handle it, don't all turn and go after them. Legionnaire Holzhauser will be on guard permanently in the yard, with a case of grenades handy. That's all. Get to your stations quietly."

This strange drama of the savage Sahara continues in the next, the April, issue.

Be Sure Your Sin Will Run You In

From "The Maxims of Officer McCarthy."

By GEORGE WESTON



The distinguished author of "Queen of the World" and "Wings of Destiny" is at his best in this prize story of a police department's strangest case.

I WOULDN'T be doing this if it weren't for the circular letter which was pinned on the board in all the precinct stations. And maybe at that I wouldn't be doing it, if Captain McCarthy hadn't tacked up the letter himself and called to me over his shoulder that here was the chance of a lifetime, and what was I waiting for?

"Look, Bart," he said, "it's got to come out soon, and you can tell the world about Jo Jeeps, and the dead man who tried to stay under water but had to come up to cough, to say nothing of the devil's own horses that kept an otherwise honest man from going to sea until a good woman with red hair got hold of him. Yes, and then there was Deacon Double-or-Nothing, the pitcher that went to the urn just once too often, though hiding back of a widow's weeds, and a gun within the dark full bosom of his dress."

("Yes," I thought, *"and if you're talking about the case that I think you are, you might have mentioned the Plymouth Rock rooster in the home-made pants*

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

which crowed at a funeral and brought on a wedding. Even at that you'd still be leaving a whole lot out.")

So over I went and read the letter. It was written by the president of a moving-picture company, and although as a rule the regular detectives of the force get nothing but a crawly deal from the movies, maybe this one had got religion or something in its higher offices, because it offered five thousand dollars and two free trips to Hollywood for the best true story from any *bona fide* member of the detective force, dealing with and appertaining to the detection of crime as it actually exists, only heretofore unpublished and untold.

"Well," said Cap McCarthy, "we are here today and gone tomorrow"—which is a favorite expression of his. "Do you think you'll be gone any sooner," he says, "if you take a chance at this?"

SO I'll take a chance by saying it was nearly three years ago when Captain McCarthy, who was then Lieutenant Mc-

Carthy, came into my room and said: "I am sick and tired of having a race-track in my precinct. For ten months of the year," he said, "I can run a model station-house with half the boys asleep in their cots, and the other half asleep on their feet—and why wouldn't they be, with nothing more to keep them awake than one or two little murders a month, and barely enough miscellaneous crime to fill only half the newspapers. But just as soon as the racing season starts, there's the devil to pay, and I have to run around and wake up my boys to see if they have any hot pennies."

"SOMETHING tells me, Lieut.," I said, "that you are leading up to something."

"I am leading up to this," he said. "In the various siestas that you have enjoyed around the race-track stables, did you ever hear of an inmate named Jo Jeeps?"

"Yes," I said in a cautious manner.

"Well, he has a little explaining to do," said the Lieut. "Abe Morowitz, a bookie, was robbed last week of seven thousand dollars in cash and three diamond rings with stones as big as hickory nuts. He was insured, howsomever, and the Company's men have been working on the case. It seems Jo Jeeps knows Abie pretty well. He sometimes clocks for him, and sometimes drives his car. Now the day after the robbery, the aforesaid Jeeps was seen around the stables with a roll of bills that he couldn't get out of his pocket without bringing the lining too. So now the insurance men would like a little official pressure put on Master Jo-Jo, asking him where he got his roll and checking up on his answers. So you go out and bring him in, but don't say why, and don't come back without him."

I started for the track, but it sounded screwy to me—about Jo having money, I mean. The *Jo* in his name was short for *Jonah,* and though he was a nice tall quiet kid, I don't believe he ever had a day's luck in his life. Why, if he tried to hold up a guy, he'd probably lose his gun. And me, I knew him pretty well, because he and my wife's sister, young Patsy, had a crush on each other like the two long sides of an accordion, and now and then he'd give her a sample page of his history, which practically always made her cry. And Patsy's one of these red-headed young queens with violet eyes and a shortish nose; and when she's been crying, it's as plain to be seen as the world must have looked after the flood.

It was no good telling her that Jo was a bum and would come to a bad end, because she was sure she knew better. He wasn't working around the stables because he liked it, Jo had told her, but only because he didn't know anything else.

He had been brought up on a stock-farm in Indiana, and ran away to sea as soon as he had his growth, because he wanted to get away from horses and be a sailor and see the world.

HE stowed away in a steamer at Newport News, and when he came out of the lifeboat on the second day to get something to eat, he found he was with a shipload of horses bound for France.

At Havre he skipped the boat and finally got to Paris, but the only job he could get there was at the race-track,

The only reason I wasn't alone was because I had given the Deacon a smell of my badge.

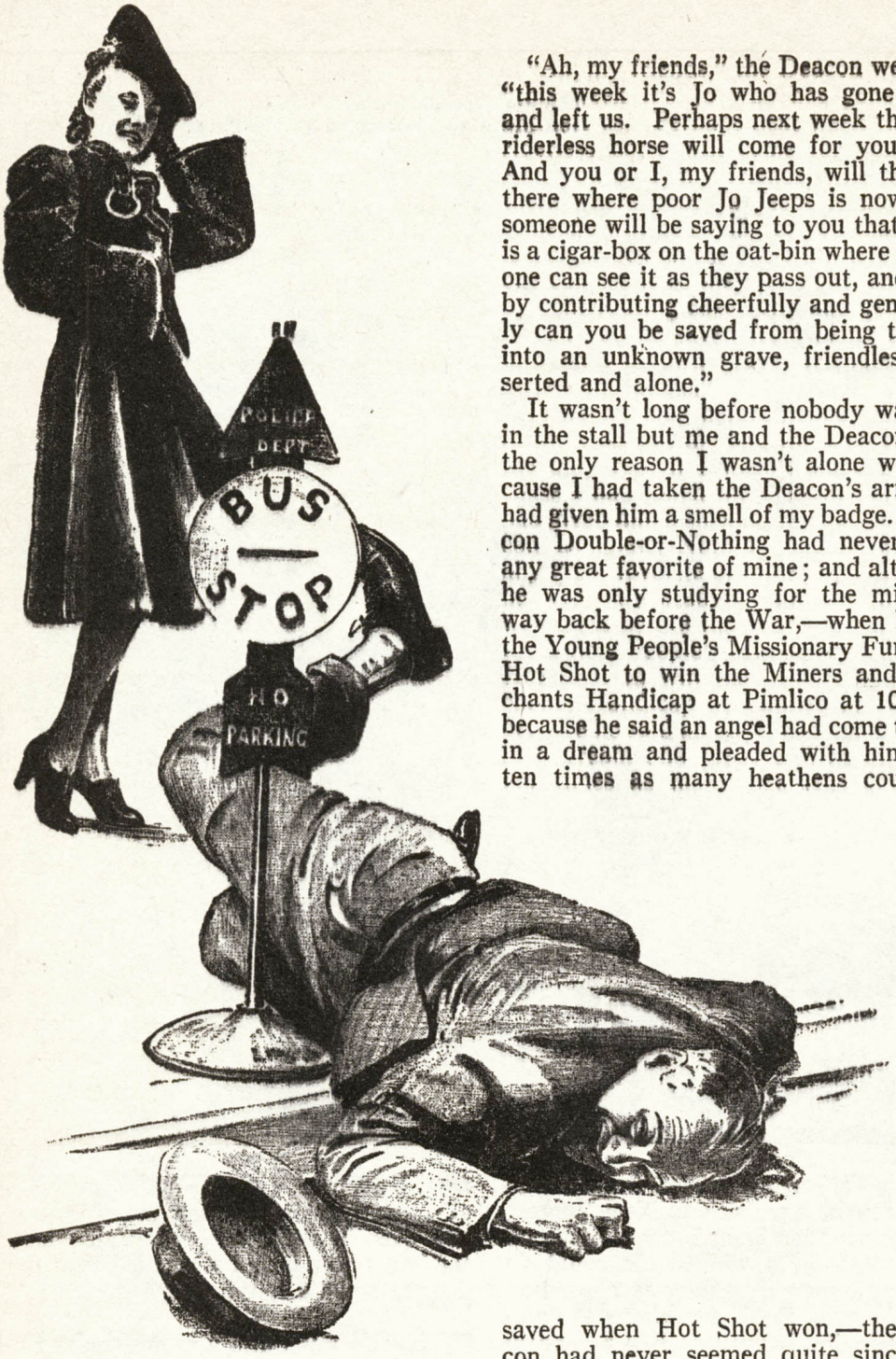
working for an American trainer who later brought him back to New York.

And since then he had sort of given up the contest for a while. He could do most anything with a horse except bet on the right one. He'd save his money and keep changing it until he had a century bill, and then he'd smack the whole bill on the nose of some poor old long shot. Which is of course just one more reason why bookies have diamonds as big as hickory nuts, and people like Jo Jeeps are told the Captain would like to see them at the station-house, and let's go now, because the Old Man's liver is on the fritz again, and he hates to feel that anybody's keeping him waiting. . . .

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when I got to the track and asked a stableboy if he'd seen Jo Jeeps. "Well, now, boss," he said, rolling his eyes, "I aint rightly *seen* him this morning, but he's over in the double box-stall where the horseshoes have been nailed over the door to make a four-leaf clover."

THERE was quite a crowd under the four-leaf clover, and when I pushed inside, who should I see but Deacon Double-or-Nothing standing by a barrel that had been covered with a black blanket and had two candles burning on it. And in between the candles was a square cardboard box, with a fruit-jar full of paper lilies on top of the box.

"Ah, my brethren," the Deacon was saying, "his number was up on the Official Board, and there are no scratches there. And even as the running of his life's race was a lesson to us, so also was



She got her feet mixed up with mine, and I went sprawling

the manner of his dismounting. As long as he stayed with horses, all was well with him. But when he strayed from a horse's back into the driver's seat of a man-made car, what happened? . . . . He tangled with a gasoline truck in such a sorrowful manner that the very sky was reddened, and strong men turned their heads away and could not bear to look.

"Ah, my friends," the Deacon went on, "this week it's Jo who has gone away and left us. Perhaps next week the pale riderless horse will come for you or I. And you or I, my friends, will then be there where poor Jo Jeeps is now, and someone will be saying to you that there is a cigar-box on the oat-bin where everyone can see it as they pass out, and only by contributing cheerfully and generously can you be saved from being thrown into an unknown grave, friendless, deserted and alone."

It wasn't long before nobody was left in the stall but me and the Deacon, and the only reason I wasn't alone was because I had taken the Deacon's arm and had given him a smell of my badge. Deacon Double-or-Nothing had never been any great favorite of mine; and although he was only studying for the ministry way back before the War,—when he bet the Young People's Missionary Funds on Hot Shot to win the Miners and Merchants Handicap at Pimlico at 10 to 1, because he said an angel had come to him in a dream and pleaded with him that ten times as many heathens could be saved when Hot Shot won,—the Deacon had never seemed quite sincere to me, and I sometimes found it hard to stop myself from wondering whether the heathen would have got a break if Hot Shot had won that day at Pimlico instead of being disqualified for fouling.

Anyhow, now at Jo Jeeps' funeral, the Deacon stood watching me with his little bright eyes. He was dressed in a long, black duster that looked something like a cassock; and over his shoulder in the other box-stall was Glamour Boy, which Jo had once told me was the son of High-

ball out of Whoops My Dear; and on the partition between the two stalls was Speckles, a Plymouth Rock rooster, the stable mascot, wearing a little pair of pants that Jo had made for him the week before Jo took his fatal ride.

The Deacon was telling me about his identification of what had been left of the late departed, and how he was going to have his ashes placed where they would have beautiful tender care with organ music at half-past ten every morning and half-past four every afternoon, when all at once Speckles dug in his toes and started crowing too. The Deacon broke down then, and sobbed how much the rooster had missed poor Jo, and in his grief he knocked over one of the candles and set fire to the paper lilies. So with one thing and another, I wasn't sorry when at last I came away. It was while I was reporting to Lieut. McCarthy that we heard a noise in the doorway, and there stood Patsy Condon, all red and white and dithery.

The poor kid had come to tell us that Jo was missing, and would the Department please do all it could to find him for her and keep him safe from harm. She never thought she'd come to this, crying in front of me in a station-house; but even a cop, she seemed to say, might sometimes be a little help.

It was the Lieut. himself who finally told Patsy why even the finest organization of men on the face of the earth couldn't find Jo Jeeps. But in order to scotch all reports to the contrary, I wish to report here once for all that it was I who led Patsy into the Lieut.'s room and shut the door, and that it was I who led her out ten minutes later, still crying as if her young heart would break, and so blinded with tears as to where she was going that she got her feet mixed up with mine as we came down the station-house steps, and I went sprawling and nearly broke my neck. It was all I could do to put her in a taxi and see that she was started for home.

I WAS pretty busy the next few weeks, for all at once an epidemic of jewel-robberies broke out in our precinct like measles in a children's home. And once or twice, believe it or not, I had a mean thought connected with Deacon Double-or-Nothing.

At one house while the family was away, the maid said that a minister called and asked if he might leave a note. But while he was writing it, he took time off to sneak upstairs and ask a blessing on the family bric-a-brac, taking it with him to give it a better chance.

And another place where the lady of the house saw the thief for a moment when she snapped on the light at the head of her bed, all she could remember were a pair of little bright eyes and a faint smell of horses. Still and all, neither of them could positively identify the Deacon, and seeing that he had an alibi for both occasions, there was nowhere to let him go but out.

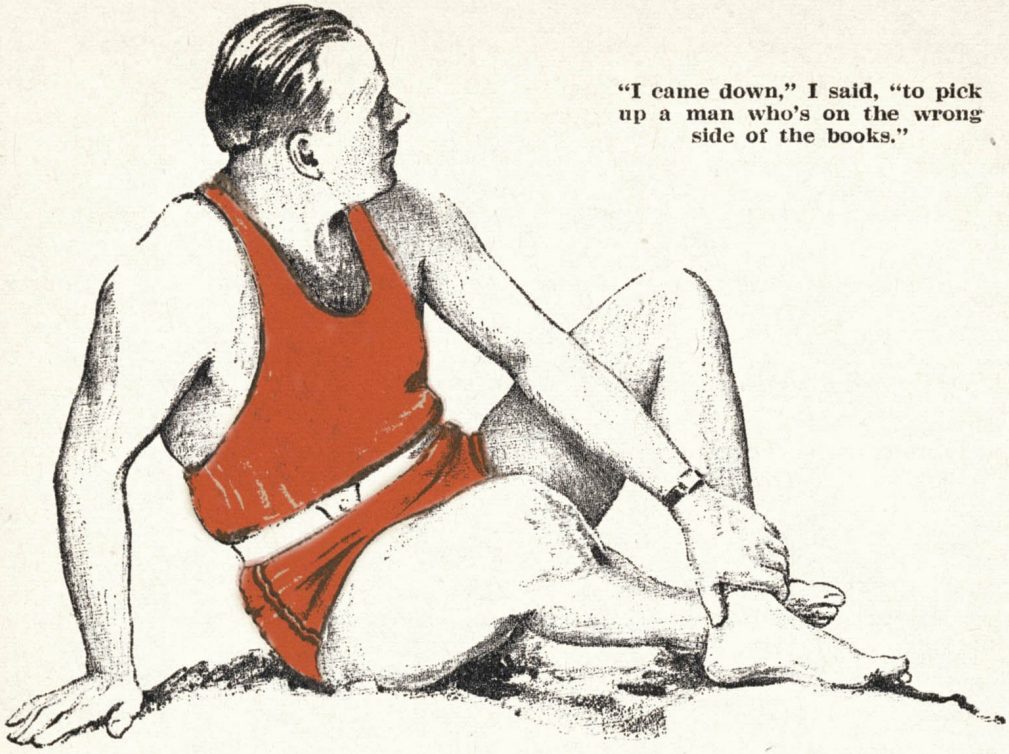
WHILE I was playing with the Deacon, little Patsy decided that it would be better if she cleared out of the precinct with all its sad associations and started a new life, say somewhere down South, she said—not that it made any difference where she went. And seeing she was always worth thirty or forty dollars a week from any beauty-parlor that was lucky enough to get her, and had sense enough to put her near a window where she could be seen by passing plump and middle-aged wives and widows who had given the best years of their lives to whatever it was, we didn't worry much about Patsy's going.

She finally decided that she might as well go to Miami, and as soon as I heard where she was headed, I thought to myself: "She'll soon forget him. Yes, there beneath the coconuts and the tropic moon, soon love will once more thrum its soft guitar, for there is always a brisk demand for goods like Patsy Condon, and as the pattern is strictly limited, where will you match this sample, brother, unless you speak for it now?"

No, and it wasn't three months later when we got a postcard from Jamaica, where the ginger comes from, saying: *"On our Honeymoon. Patsy and Tom."* About two months later we get another postcard, this time from Honolulu, saying, *"Still on our Honeymoon. Patsy and Tom."*

"Can you beat it?" asked a certain party that I had once taken on a honeymoon myself, "and the farthest I have ever been away from this dump is Saratoga Springs, New York?"

Patsy was never very strong on letter-writing, most of her communications being by voice and eyes, and these generally being sufficient if indeed not more than enough, so nobody worried when we didn't hear anything more from her, except once a post-card from Nassau, and later another from Cuba, both saying:



"I came down," I said, "to pick up a man who's on the wrong side of the books."

"Still on that same old honeymoon. Patsy and Tom." And with one thing and another, I guess it was all of three years after she was married that I was sent down to Miami to see if I could pick up Spike Spikowicz, who was headed down in that direction on the good old hop, skip and a jump.

Now the reason I was sent to Miami is because I knew Spike, he being a recent graduate of the old race-track gang, and now wanted in our precinct for a jewelry-store job where tear-gas bombs were thrown and the place cleaned out by a guy with a gas-mask on.

Spike didn't wear the mask, but was suspected of driving the get-away car. The guy who cleaned out the place had gone in dressed as a minister and was looking at gold crosses, but couldn't remember whether the Sunday School needed a hundred and thirty-five or a hundred and fifty-three. So they gladly let him into the office to telephone; and it was while he was in the office that he cut the telephone-wires and put on the mask and threw the tear-gas pineapples.

NOW it wasn't much of a trick to get Spike—because, first, he liked company, and second, he liked to play the horses. So all I had to do when I got south of Palm Beach was to keep asking where I'd find the biggest poolroom with the longest bar. I picked up Spike in the third joint I tried, and put him in a safe, cool place where he'd be sure to keep till morning. . . .

"According to Captain McCarthy," I thought, "we are here today and gone tomorrow."

No matter how I figured that out, it still gave me another day in the South, with plenty of time to run over to Miami Beach for a dip in the surf. The local boys lent me a pair of trunks and rode me over in a police-car to where the surf was best. And there I lay me down in the sand to get a tan that would knock everybody's eye out when I got back to New York.

I DON'T know how long I lay there, but as I was turning over to do the other side, I happened to look at the Atlantic Ocean, and there was one of the cutest kids you'd ever hope to see—a little queen with curly red hair and a short, saucy nose. She was wearing a green bathing-suit, and she had a shovel; but instead of digging in the sand, she was using her shovel to paddle a boy who was twice her size, and making him cry for his mother.

"I wonder why she reminds me of Patsy so much," I thought; and then I added, still speaking strictly to myself: "Now, wait a minute. Didn't Patsy come down to Miami when first she tried to get away from it all?"

By that time I was sitting up, and the next thing I saw was Patsy herself, coming up out of the sea to tell her young daughter to go easy with the shovel. "But Mamma, he pinched me, he pinched me here," the young one told her. "Oh, well, if he pinched you there," said Patsy, "hit him with the pail too, next time." And then she saw me, and even under her tan, I could see the color go out of her face.

"Bart!" she exclaimed, and came and sat on the sand in front of me. "What on earth has brought you here?"

"Oh, business," I said with a wave of my hand. "I just came down to pick up a man who's on the wrong side of the books."

At that she jumped up, and though she's only half my weight, and I'll never know how she did it, she pulled me up with her. "Come on and have a drink," she said. "I'm simply dying of thirst." But just then Little Rosebud said: "Oo, can't Daddy come and have a drink, too —I know he'd like one." And I turned to look where she was looking—being more than a little bit curious to see who had been lucky enough to mend Patsy's broken heart so well and so soon.

With the tail of my eye I saw someone disappearing under the water just beyond the breakers. "Oo," said Little Rosebud, "Daddy's swimming under water—Daddy's swimming under water!"

"You be quiet," said Patsy, and I wouldn't believe that any mother, and especially a young mother, could make such a face at a child.

But as soon as she turned to me, she was smiling again as bright as you please. "Oh, come on, Bart," she said. "Surely you haven't grown so tight that I can't shake you down for a drink. And I have so much to tell you."

I think I would have fallen for that one, but Little Rosebud proved again that she was Patsy's daughter. "Oo, look," she said, "maybe Daddy is drownding. Don't you see how everybody is looking where he went under the water?"

AT that I turned and galloped, and dived and chopped through the surf to where the bathers were looking, and all at once a man came popping up from under the waves, coughing and spouting.

For just a second, till he turned his head my way, he reminded me of a trained seal that I had once seen with a fish stuck in his gullet. But the moment he turned his head, I couldn't think of seals or fish. I couldn't think of a thing in the world except the one man

I was staring at, and that one man was Jo Jeeps.

Even then Patsy kept on denying it. "Jo Jeeps is dead," she said. "He's dead and you know it, Bart," she said. "Why, even Captain McCarthy at the station-house told me he was dead—and I have you as a witness to prove it."

It wasn't till Little Rosebud had been put to bed for the night, in a pretty little bungalow as cute as a bug's ear, that I got the story straight.

"MY name is not Jo Jeeps, and never was," said Jo. "My name is Tom Mulholland, but when I was caught as a stowaway on that ship that I told you about, I wouldn't disgrace my family by giving my right name. So when they asked me who I was, I said, 'I guess I'm Jonah.' And the bos'n who had taken me up to the Captain said: 'Jonah—Jeeps!' So the Captain put me down as Jonah Jeeps, which soon became Jo Jeeps, and as long as that name stuck to me, I had nothing but rotten luck.

"Patsy knew my right name, and she was all for me taking it back. 'Any name with *Jonah* in it, either long or short,' she used to say, 'will naturally be unlucky.' The last time she told me that was the day I had finished saving my last hundred dollars; and just to try things out, I went to a bookie that I had never seen before, and put the hundred on Aunt Fanny's Lover to win the Sheepshead Handicap at 30 to 1. And instead of having the money go down in his book as Jo Jeeps' bill, I gave him my own true name, Tom Mulholland.

"You may not remember who won the Sheepshead Handicap that year," he said, "but Aunt Fanny's Lover did, and there was I, with all that dough, and Patsy saying: 'See now—didn't I tell you? And now you listen to me,' she said: 'I wouldn't marry you with a name like Jonah Jeeps hanging over you, not if every hair of your head was strung with diamonds. Not only that,' she said, 'but if you ever expect to see me kneeling by your side with a lace veil over this hair of mine and matrimony in my heart, you've got to find a different job from the one you're working at now.'

"Of course that suited me," said Patsy's husband, "for as long as I could remember I was fed up with stables, and here was the chance of a lifetime. So I fixed it up with Deacon Double-or-Nothing that for one hundred dollars and expenses, Jo Jeeps would disappear, and be theoretically cremated, and have a farewell sermon preached over him. That way, not only would all the boys stop wondering about me when I disappeared, but I was nailing the barn-door shut so Jo could never come back again and begin doing more chores for the ponies.

"Meanwhile I had come down here to Miami and was waiting for Patsy. Patsy came down on a cruise-ship, and to save money she was working out her fare in the beauty-parlor, making such a hit with the wife of one of the directors, that they offered her the same job in another ship, following a few weeks later on a cruise around the world. Patsy said she would take the job if her husband could come along too, as ship's barber. And boy, when she got to Miami, did she put me over the hurdles for the next three weeks, trying to teach me to cut hair and use an old-fashioned razor. She even had me lathering her chin and practicing on her!

"Of course I had roached many a horse's mane around the stables, and by the time the world-cruise was a month or two old, darn me if I couldn't cut hair as good as the last man, but I guess I was the only known barber on the Seven Seas who always shaved his customers with a safety-razor, my reason being that what with sudden squalls and tidal waves, I didn't want my clients to come trotting in the barber-shop with two ears and go galloping out with one."

WELL, with one thing and another we sat up half the night chewing over old times, and once Tom said: "Did you ever have your doubts about Deacon Double-or-Nothing?"

"For reasons too long to tell you," I said, "I've had enough doubts of the Deacon to build a jail around him and warm one of the chairs with an electric heating-pad. Do you mind?" I asked.

"Far from it," said Tom. "As I've already told you, he promised to bury Jo Jeeps and preach a good sermon over him for one hundred dollars and expenses. But why he had to buy a marble urn with silver chain and padlock to hold the ashes, to say nothing of valuable space on the shelf of that mausoleum, is something I could never figure out."

"Perhaps he was kidding you," I said. "You being dead, you couldn't kick."

"No," said Tom, "I saw the receipts; and believe me, they called for plenty of dough. You may remember that when he preached the funeral sermon, he was

supposed to have the ashes in that box between the candles. Well, I happen to know there was nothing but oats in the box, and I've often wondered what he put in the marble urn with the silver chain and padlock."

"DO you remember the name of the mausoleum?" I asked him, yawning as if I was only killing time by asking fool questions.

"Yeah," said Tom, beginning to yawn too. "The Pine Springs."

"What I never had explained to me," said Patsy, "is how the Deacon fooled such a bright young dick as you, Bart. He even had a death-certificate made out and charged for on his expense-sheet. And later he told me that you never even asked to see it. Is that right?"

"That's right," I told her. And thinking back hard, I said we had just reached the stage where ordinarily I would have asked to see the papers, when all at once the rooster started crowing, and the Deacon broke down, and the paper flowers caught fire. So with one thing and another, I guess the good old routine must have skipped my mind for the time being.

"You want to look out for fat blondes on the subway with boxes of candy," said Patsy, "or some fine day another good old routine will skip your mind for the time being."

We went to bed on that one, and the next day after I had looked at the Deep Sea Beauty Parlor that Patsy and Tom had started and were making a fortune at, I got Spike Spikowicz on a plane and flew him up to New York. Headquarters had taken charge of the case by that time, and when they got through with Spike, a general call went out to bring in Deacon Double-or-Nothing. . . .

"It's a wise bull that knows his own flowers," said Captain McCarthy after I had told him that I had a hunch where I might pick up the Deacon. Maybe it was all right for Headquarters to take this case. But it was this precinct station that found Spike, and wouldn't it be just pitiful, now, if we found the Deacon too.

"Go to it, Bart," he said; "it's the chance of a lifetime; and if you can bring the Deacon in, those master-minds on Mulberry Street will begin to see that, such as it is, we have a bit of a precinct station here. We may not be Headquarters," the Captain said, "but we won't be hindquarters either."

So off I went to the Pine Springs Mausoleum; and though I wouldn't have been surprised not to find it, there it was on the records: *"Jonah Jeeps. Niche 717. Chapel of Sweet Memories."* And there was the marble urn in Niche 717 with silver chain and padlock. It was on the bottom tier in the farthest corner of the Chapel of Sweet Memories; and the only way I could watch it without being seen was from up in a balcony, where I felt like an audience of one waiting to see a show that, for all I knew, might never begin.

However, I was pretty sure that I could spot the Deacon at twice the distance. So I drew up a chair to the iron rail and I thought: "How little my mother knew, when she put my first pants on me, that her baby boy would be making his living some day by flying through the air with Spike Spikowiczes, and snooping in mausoleums for a guy who robbed a jewelry-store by making everybody cry!"

I don't know whether I dozed off for a few minutes then, but all at once I found myself staring at a widow in very deep mourning who was kneeling enough in front of Jo Jeeps' urn so that I couldn't see it. "I wonder if the Deacon's married," I thought, as I made for the stairs. "I wonder if anything has happened to him." At the same moment when I started for the stairs, the widow must have started for the door. I fell in step beside her, and we walked through the vestibule together.

"Pardon me, madam," I said, "but are you Jo Jeeps' mother?"

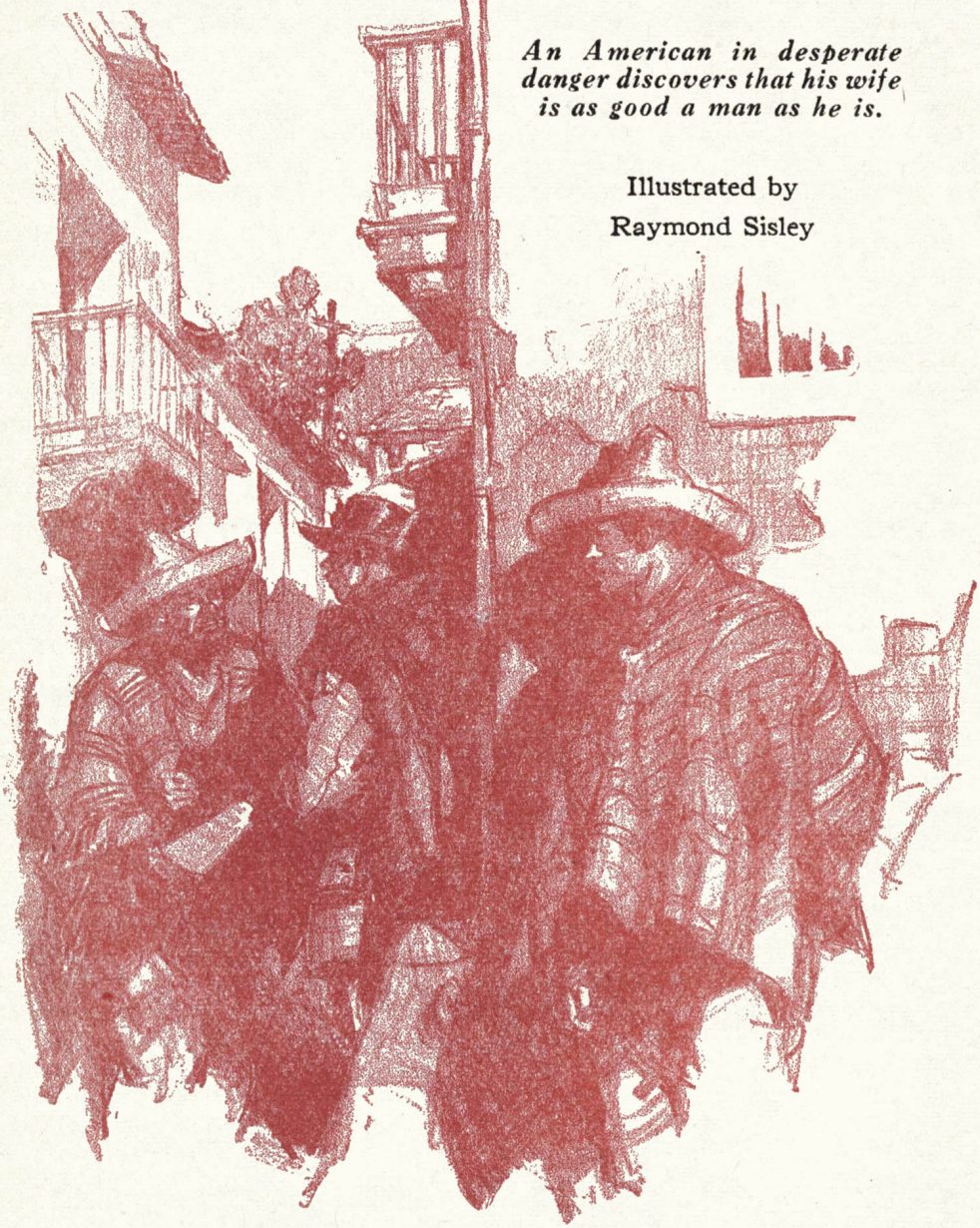
EVEN Patsy wouldn't have thought I was dumb if she had seen the way I grabbed the widow's hand after she had reached it into the front of her blouse and brought it out with a gun in it. I have an idea that she meant to walk me quietly over to her car. In the wrestling-match that followed, her veil came off and I saw that the widow was Deacon Double-or-Nothing. But by then I had plenty of help, and everybody had a lovely time except the Deacon.

He didn't like it at all when I snapped the cuffs on him, and he liked it less yet when I took the key out of his pocket and unlocked the silver padlock that held down the cover of the marble urn. He knew then that I was looking at the stolen jewelry that he had hidden inside; and me, I couldn't help thinking of another of Captain McCarthy's sayings, and also one of Patsy's: *"Be sure your sin will run you in,"* I thought. And: *"Even a cop can sometimes be a little help."*

PARAGUAY

An American in desperate danger discovers that his wife is as good a man as he is.

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley



THIS man with the two mules came up the long western slope toward Sao Paulo with some baskets of tangerines. Obviously he was not a Paulista, nor, judging from his accent when he stopped for a cup of chocolate, was he even a Brazilian. He might have come from Paraguay, but that was a long distance for a muleteer, and he would not be bringing oranges to a country where oranges are grown.

Wherever he had come from, his mules trudged, lop-eared and scratched and saddle-sore, through a jungle of orchids and past the electric generators of a power-plant. He knew then he was near home.

He had pictured his home—a white house and a garden of flaming flowers—during all that terrible journey. Or rather he pictured the soul of the home—his young wife.

The longing for her was in his haggard frightened eyes. They were the eyes of a halfbreed, apparently, for although his skin was mahogany, the whites of his eyes were more like a North American's

FUGITIVE

By KENNETH H. PERKINS

—one who, let us say, is drunk. They were sunk and dazed and bloodshot and dreaming, but just the same they were not the eyes of a Brazilian or Bolivian or Paraguayan. They lacked the glorious dark luster of the South Americans.

The man was handsome in a dark, wretched, tragic sort of way. But his clothes did not draw attention to his looks. He wore a ragged cotton blouse, sandals, and a poncho slit in the middle where his head poked out. One did not see his face for the reason that his big tattered hat of straw hid all but his mouth and chin. Even if one chanced to see his eyes, when he stopped to buy fish or chocolate, he dropped or shifted them quickly. A straight look at those eyes would have suggested that he was lying. These were not his usual clothes; his skin was not mahogany but white; and his occupation was not a muleteer's.

But the rest of the truth would be hard to reach. None would guess that at the bottom of his baskets some of his loose jacket oranges were stuffed with *pepitas* of platinum. Nor would anyone guess that he was the plant engineer for one of the dredges of the Penn-Paraná Mineral and Oil Company. It would have been a profitable guess if someone went up to him and said: "I think you are an American, and that you may be Ted Barlow, who is wanted for robbery and murder."

If he could only reach his wife, Ted Barlow thought, he would be saved. She could go ahead of him down to Santos and tell his story to Cap Turgeson. The Captain had a steam schooner that carried coffee up to Trinidad. Barlow could not tell the story himself, because there was hardly one chance out of ten that the Captain would believe it. If he did not believe it, he would most certainly turn the fugitive over to the Guarda Civil.

Barlow needed his wife as an intermediary. He needed her desperately. He felt like a small boy in trouble needing his mother, and wanting to go to her and put his head in her lap. He yearned for Celia with all his soul and the marrow of his bones. He panted with the thirst for her.

When he found her, he would pour out the tragic story of his flight, knowing that she was the one person, the only one in the world, who would believe it.

IT was three weeks ago that the manager of the Penn-Paraná Company had called Barlow into his tent on the river clearing.

Before the clearing in that stretch of the river leased to the American company the great dredge was scooping up tons of sand and gravel and water, which passed through the screen and over the riffle-board, washing for that stuff which in the time of the Conquistadores was called "unripe gold." This platinum was shipped to Sao Paulo and Santos, thence to the States to be used for fine fuse-wire for torpedoes and shells, or for contact-metal for magnetos, or for the ornaments of rich women.

There was a big shipment this month. That is why the manager, Herman T. Philbin, dismissed the company clerk and assistant engineer, and announced quietly to Barlow that he had a very special and confidential job for him.

"In a roundabout way I've been warned that we may be robbed when we're taking this shipment up to Itapura. I'm announcing to everyone, even Wilson and Carbury, that this shipment is to go out tomorrow. Instead, you're to smuggle it out tonight."

He then described the method of smuggling. These shipments were always taken from the concession up the Paraná River to the railroad station at Itapura, thence by railroad down to Sao Paulo. Ted Barlow was to follow the same route merely as far as the railroad, disguised as a muleteer. Once on the train, his disguise would no longer be necessary.

Barlow had performed his task perfectly, reaching the railway about noon two days later. He found a crowd at the station and two officers of the Guarda Civil. He surmised that Philbin, the manager, had telegraphed for the Guarda to be there in case Ted Barlow needed them. Possibly they had been told to be on the watch for him.

His surmise was right. The Guarda Civil were watching for him not only at Itapura, but at Cervo and in all the stations on the road as far as Sao Paulo. They were watching for him in the whole state, as well as in the states of Paraná and Minas Geraes. They were watching for him at Rio.

He heard all this when he was almost on the point of going up to one of the officers and revealing his business. He heard it from anyone at the station or in the plaza that he cared to listen to. Herman T. Philbin had been bludgeoned to death during that night when Ted Barlow smuggled out the shipment. This had occurred sometime after Ted left the camp. The rest of the story concerned himself: "The plant engineer, Ted Barlow, has disappeared with the whole consignment of crude platinum!"

Barlow was about to rush up to the officers and explain, when a point occurred to him. It struck him like a blow on the chin. The officers would not believe him! And Barlow had no remote way to substantiate his story. No one except Herman T. Philbin could substantiate it, and he was dead. Even the other two Americans at the dredge, Wilson and Carbury, knew nothing of the plot. In fact it was they who, with good enough logic, had broadcast the accusation: The plant engineer had murdered the manager of the Penn-Paraná Company, and robbed him.

BARLOW stopped to think. . . . Easy enough to see what had happened! A robber had contrived somehow to get by the night guards and into Philbin's tent. He had forced him, doubtless, to open the safe, thinking that the shipment was there, ready for transportation on the morrow. But just who the robber was, Barlow had no way of guessing.

His first impulse was to turn back and trek into the jungle, and tell the fellows at the dredge what had happened. But they were small spuds. One was his assistant, the other a clerk just out of the States. Even if they believed him, their testimony might have little weight. It would look as if he had reneged, fearing to be caught with the goods, and had decided to make restitution. His yarn would be considered a desperate attempt to clear himself of murder. There was a better way out: to go down to Sao Paulo and see the resident manager.

He came into the city at sunset. The brilliant metal butterflies stopped hovering about his bright oranges, and instead doves cooed and fluttered around his head when he stopped and fixed the fiber nose-bags on his mules. He was sick to death of the road, sick of mutton and frijoles, sick to death of fear. Celia would end all that. When she had him cleared, she would give him a dinner—something besides jerky and corn boiled in lime. Her slim warm arms would be about his neck. It would be heaven!

They would sit in the patio under those strange ferns that shine and droop like the feathery tails of birds. They would breathe the flower-of-midnight as its fragrance started after sundown, which is its way. And they would listen to the cooing of doves. It was these doves hoping for grain that brought the picture to vibrant life, stirring his whole body.

HE got there two hours later. He knew he must not go in, for his home would be watched at all times by the police. He dared go no farther than the iron-barred gate of his patio. His woman servant, a *crillo* girl, came out. Luckily she had seen little of Barlow, and did not recognize him. Besides, the dusk was deep. It was heavy and thick as if the fragrance of the patio itself had made the purple air more misty.

"Yes?" she said. "And what do you want?"

"I want to see your mistress."

"She's not here. She went out. You may as well go away."

"Where is she?"

"And why should a man like you who drives mules, ask that?"

He gave her a piece of silver—a milreis. Her manner changed when she glanced up at him; for besides the money, she discovered for the first time that this muleteer was very handsome in the purple gloom.

"I will tell you something," she said, warming to the romance of intrigue dear to her race. "The mistress has gone to see her lover."

In that gloaming she did not notice the man's eyes; but she must have seen the sudden stiffening of his lank body.

"That surprises you, eh? And it surprised me, I can tell you!"

"Who is the lover?"

"One who lives down this road in the magenta-painted house. She has been going there every night for dinner, and she stays a very long time."

The muleteer stood for but one moment stupefied, then swung around to mount. He reminded her of a fierce ani-

mal that is caged—swinging in a very small space, but wanting the jungle.

She called out in perplexity: "Go with God!"

RIDING down the road, Ted Barlow tried to come out of his daze. He knew the man in the magenta house—Morris Braig, part owner of an artificial silk factory on the edge of town. He and Celia danced together and talked a lot. He had often come to the Barlow home, and Ted talked to him about the Company and the dredge and the river and about labor troubles. They had that in common. Braig was always vitally interested in every word—the pay and the hours of the workers, the weight of the platinum and its worth. But it was not his pretended vital interest in platinum dredging that brought Braig to the house. It was Celia.

Ted had never given a thought to Braig's attentions to Celia, except that he was something of a sport, an habitué of Sao Paulo night-clubs who threw his money away like a sailor. If Barlow had thought Celia would let him so much as touch her hand he would have told him to stay off or get shot—take his choice.

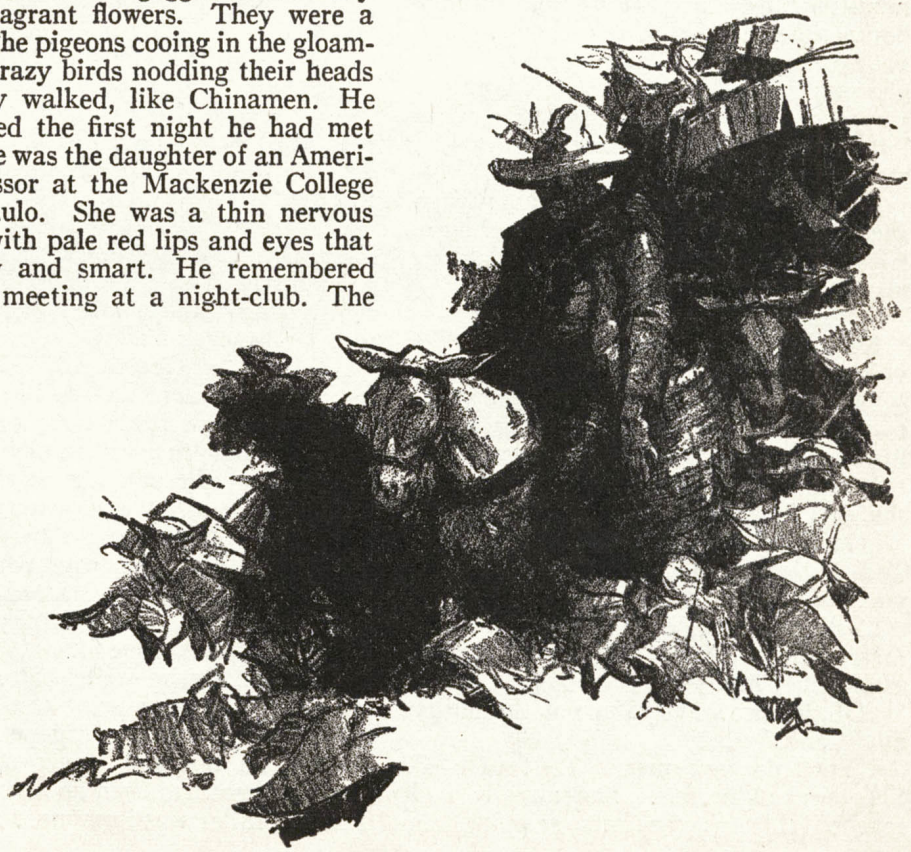
The flower-of-midnight set up its strong growing scent which gagged him. They weren't fragrant flowers. They were a stench. The pigeons cooing in the gloaming were crazy birds nodding their heads when they walked, like Chinamen. He remembered the first night he had met Celia. She was the daughter of an American professor at the Mackenzie College in Sao Paulo. She was a thin nervous creature with pale red lips and eyes that were gray and smart. He remembered that first meeting at a night-club. The Brazilian marchas, maxixes and sambas played on her delicate body as if the music came over the air and she received it, so to speak, transmitting the harmonies into something visual.

All right, he had lost her. Her love for him was not strong enough for bad weather. It was like the cacao and copra, which need to be spread in sunlight lest they putrefy. Her wild, warm passion for him was like the bloom of the coffee *fincas* which lasts only twenty-four hours. . . .

Here was Morris Braig's house.

It had a patio like his and he peered through the *cancel*. Begonia canes six feet high partially screened the two figures who were sitting at a table, but Barlow could see them—the man and the woman—sipping their iced drinks. The volcano in his breast gathered heat ready to tear its way out into the open air. He fingered the gun that he wore under his arm where the shoulder holster, strapped under his cotton blouse, had chafed a sore. It might have been the sudden pang of that sore that brought his mind back to his own body, his own self.

Why should he give up his life for this woman? Why defend his own honor for her? He had no honor. He was a mur-



derer in the eyes of every Paulista, every man in Brazil, every man in the world that would read his name. If he fired his gun, he would be caught, his identity discovered when the police examined him closely. The platinum would get back to its rightful owners, but he would die.

HE turned back to his mules. He had no plan. He could not decide in that blind, mad moment whether it would not be justice enough to go down to Santos and get a boat and keep the platinum. He had suffered for it and worked for it. He had lost his honor and his name and his wife for it. He knew Cap Turgeson. He might believe his story. If not, he could be bribed. Let Brazil go to hell.

The bells on the hames of his mule tinkled as he mounted, breaking with a happier jingle on his thoughts. It occurred to him that Celia was not exactly faithless. She lacked faith in him, yes, and believed him a killer and a bandit. That might have been the reason she had succumbed at last to Braig's love. She should know the truth, whatever else happened. . . .

He waited under some calabash trees across the street. He waited a long time. It seemed hours. A man went up to the front door, apparently a native. He was admitted, and Morris Braig went into the house. Except for a houseboy coming out for a moment with another drink, the girl was left alone out there in a pita hammock, smoking a cigarette. Barlow left his mules tethered and crossed the street to the patio gate.

He was about to call her name when she got up and went into the house. After a long time she came out and paced up and down the flagstone walk.

"Celia!"

She turned with a gasp. She knew that voice readily enough.

"Ted!" she cried voicelessly, running to the gate. Her whole soul, her whole life of love and faithfulness breathed in that one word. He had the illusion that she still loved him wholly and fiercely.

"Go in and tell him you're going home," Ted Barlow said. "I want to talk to you."

"Ted, your voice is so queer! You aren't guilty—I know that. But it sounds as if you'd murdered someone!"

"Of the two of us, I'm not the guilty one, Celia."

"What do you mean, Ted! Oh—" She checked herself. She already had reached through the bars gripping his wrist like a vise, but her fingers went dead, opened weakly. "Oh, I see. I see what you mean."

"I didn't kill Philbin," Barlow said without spirit. "He sent me with a consignment of ore ahead of time and in secret. Someone killed him after I left. Of course you won't believe that."

He stepped back, evidently about to fade into the dark, fade out of her life.

"Ted, wait!" She kept her own voice down although it was hysterical and sobbing. "I know what you're thinking, at finding me here having dinner with Braig. You've got a good case against me. Maybe you won't believe that till you have proof. We've got a good case against each other. Everyone in Brazil thinks you killed Herman Philbin. You're a murderer and I'm a faithless wife. You want proof it's a lie. I don't—because I love you, Ted."

Ted Barlow wiped his hot neck. A breeze through the calabash trees blew on his chin and turned the sweat cold. He shuddered because of that wind and because of a feeling that something vital had been torn from him. He stared at her figure which seemed to catch all there was of light in the patio—the light of the stars and the Southern Cross.

"All right," he said in a tense voice, "I still—" He corrected himself: "I love you too."

Morris Braig came out, talked a moment to Celia, then went back again into the house. He was concerned apparently with this man who had called on him. Ted had noticed that his smooth tanned forehead was knotted.

CELIA came back to the gate and opened it. "Where are you going, Ted?"

"To the resident manager. I'll have to take my chances."

"You can't! You can't!" She gripped his arm. "I went to see him the first thing. He says it's a clear case. That there's no remote doubt in anyone's mind—anyone at the office or at the dredge, or the police or anyone. You were seen alone with Philbin before he was killed. Wait now, Ted. I know you didn't do it. I'm the only one that started with that idea first of all. Then I tried to think who could have done it."

Ted gave a grim smile. She was talking about the very point that made his case hopeless. Since everyone took it for granted he was the slayer of Herman Philbin, there had been no investigations. The real killer was immune. . . .

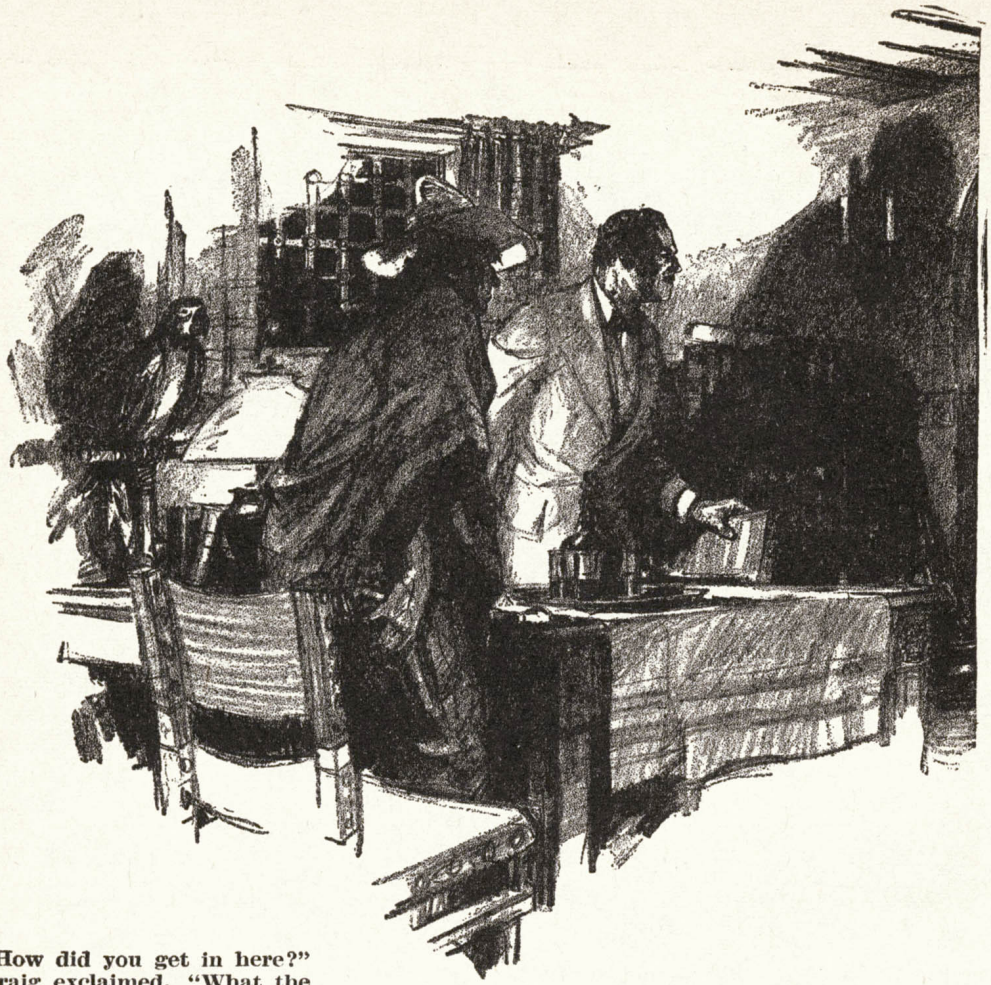
"What are you going to do, Ted?" she gasped. "Ted—please! Don't go in there!"

His wife said in rapid hysterical statements scarcely above a whisper: "You remember how Braig kept coming to our house and talking to you about the dredge? He wanted to know how many workers you had and the jobs and the time everyone worked. You told him about the tents and the launch and the sluicing—and I remember now, although it didn't mean anything then, that he was astonished when you said that platinum is worth two hundred milreis an ounce, and how easy it would be to steal and carry through the jungle."

"I remember all that. What's that got to do with this?"

"Juana happened to see that night watchman of yours, Carlos."

Juana was their house servant. Carlos, the watchman at the dredge, had been discharged for negligence after Philbin's murder. He was a Paulista, so there was nothing especially significant about his being seen in town. But Ted Barlow's



"How did you get in here?" Braig exclaimed. "What the devil do you want?"

wife had added things together, basing all on the one unbelievable fact: Ted was innocent.

"That night watchman is in the house now. He's been coming here every day or so. When I heard what had happened to you I rang up Morris Braig right away. He was the nearest friend. I needed help badly. But he wasn't home! They said he'd been gone two days. And he didn't come back till three days later. Can you put all that together, Ted?"

There was a glimmering light in back of Ted Barlow's mind. But it was nothing compared to the great hope burning in his heart.

"You've been coming here and letting him make love to you so you could trap him!"

"That's what I've been trying to do, but I can't. He never talks to Carlos when I'm in the house. He sends him away—or else sends me out here."

IT was easy for Ted to guess what Carlos, the night watchman at the dredge, was doing here. He had connived with Morris Braig to rob Philbin. He had let Braig into the camp and he wanted his part of the swag. Braig had found the safe empty, but since the platinum shipment had disappeared, Carlos refused to believe the killer's story. He was here blackmailing him.

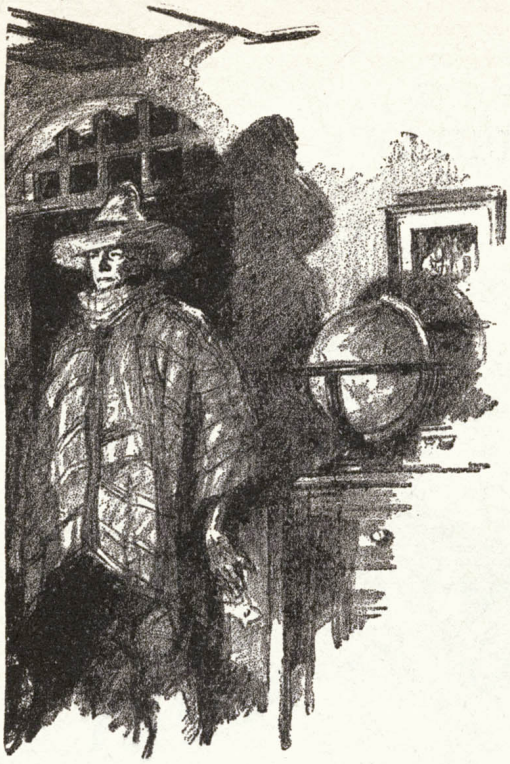
Ted Barlow went to his mules and got a tangerine, then came back to the gate, opened it and stepped in. He took his wife in his arms for a moment—a moment that he wanted to be everlasting. He knew that even now he might lose her, for his life was as much in jeopardy as ever. There was no way of proving Braig guilty when it was actually he, Barlow, who had smuggled the shipment out of camp on the night of the murder. But he had one desperate hope.

"You wait here in the patio," he said. "Don't follow me into the house. You might get hurt."

"What are you going to do, Ted?" she gasped. "Ted—please! Don't go in there!"

"Don't worry about me, my darling. I have a gun."

He turned to walk through the ferns toward the house when she called out in



a terrified whisper, "Ted! The Guarda Civil—they're coming! They've been watching me. They saw us talking."

"Hold them. Lock the gate. Keep them as long as you can." He hurried to the patio door of the house and walked in.

In the front sitting-room, Morris Braig, badgered by his blackmailing henchman, turned his tortured face and saw the man standing there: a lank brown man in a poncho. Carlos, the night watchman, gulped. He had seen this man somewhere, but for the moment, because of the straw sombrero, he could not remember who he was.

"How did you get in here?" Braig exclaimed. "What the devil do you want? Who let you in?"

"I have the treasure, señor, that you told me to hide for you."

"You what? Who are you? What are you talking about?"

"That platinum, señor. I have it on my mules, hidden in this way." He held out a tangerine, the red skin of which was torn open. They saw the flattened, greyish-white, steel-like grains, the size of linseed. He looked up slyly at Carlos' bulging eyes. "This is Carlos the night watchman you told me about?" he asked Morris Braig.

"Say, look here: What in the name of hell's fire—"

"We all three are to divide, is that not the arrangement, señor? We are all three together in this, friends. Only we three know of this matter."

Carlos stood with his mouth open, his eyes bulging and red and murderous. "So!" he cried, turning to Braig. "You lied! Just as I thought. You said the platinum was already shipped and gone from the safe." He raised his voice, shrieking in anger. "You think that you could fool me—Carlos—and keep my share! Oh, no!"

Braig was staring, his face drawn and ghastly. He held his breath, then exhaled the name, "Ted Barlow!"

The native Carlos recognized him the same instant. Carlos, needless to say, had come on these blackmailing expeditions always armed. He drew his gun.

From under his poncho, Ted Barlow fired, the detonation partly muffled. Carlos staggered back, holding his shattered hand. His gun clattered to the grass mat and his head wobbled like a man whose neck muscles are paralyzed by the bite of a yellow-beard.

At the door the girl stood with two officers of the Guarda Civil. The latter were in blue suits and white spats. Barlow had never liked the looks of those natty spats until now.

Carlos sank to the floor clutching his mangled hand. Barlow said to him, "If you want your life, you'd better tell the truth. There's no hope for this man here,"—he nodded at Morris Braig whose face was the yellow of a toucan's bill—"but you might save your own life if you tell everything."

"I will tell you everything, señor. I am innocent. I have not touched or seen a grain of the shipment. Nor was it any understanding of mine that this man intended to commit murder when I let him into the camp!" He turned his bloodless face to Braig.

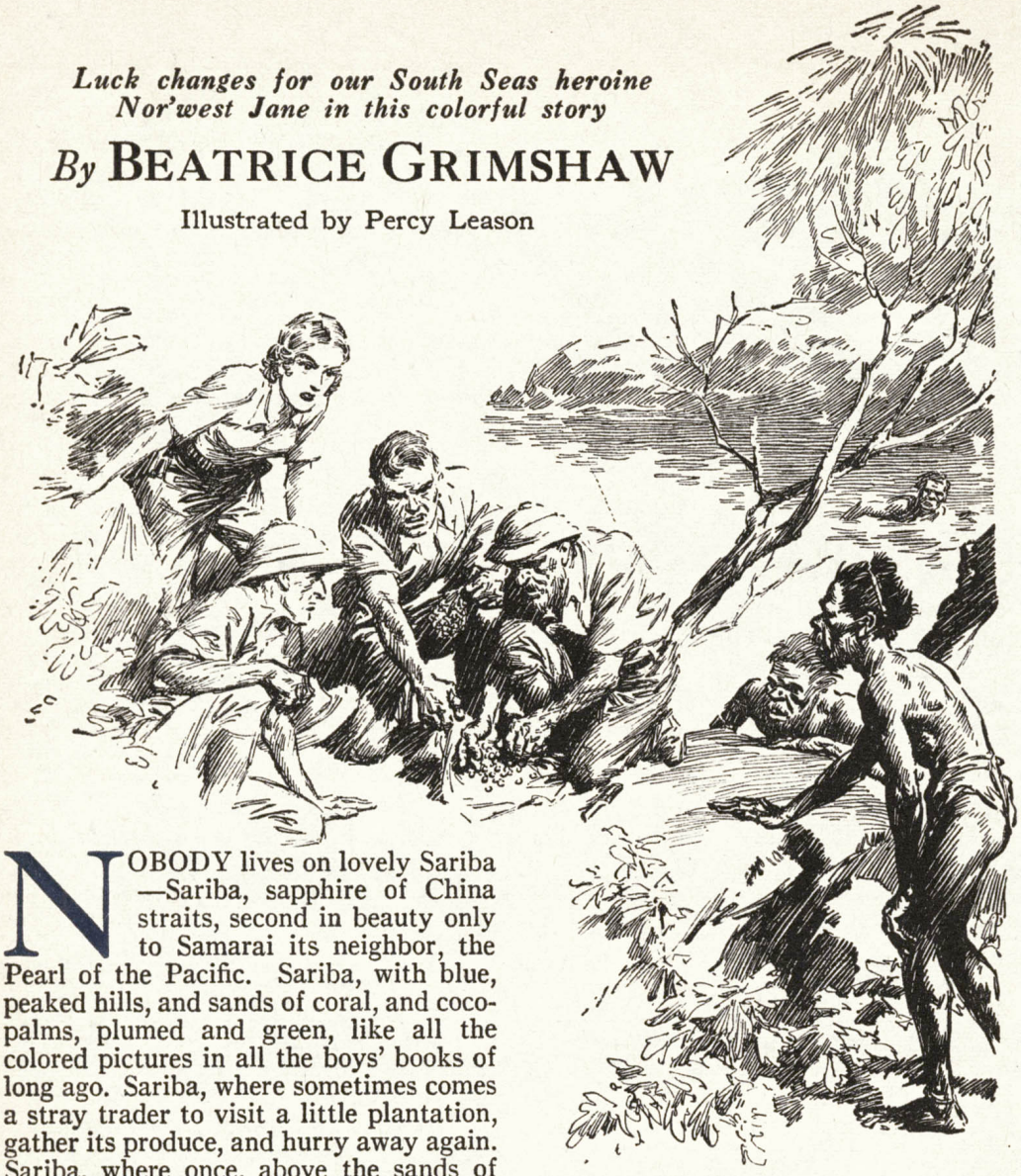
THE next day at sunset Ted Barlow was sitting in his patio and living the dream he had dreamed for many fearful days. The long rocky road, the jungle and the stinging ants faded away like a dumb man's dream, unspoken, never real, swept away by the warm purple glow in the garden.

Celia came out after directing that certain dishes be prepared for him—something that would make him forget tortillas and mutton and whisky and beans. They sat there watching the doves and breathing the coming scent of the flower-of-midnight. This was what he had yearned for.

Luck changes for our South Seas heroine Nor'west Jane in this colorful story

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Illustrated by Percy Leason

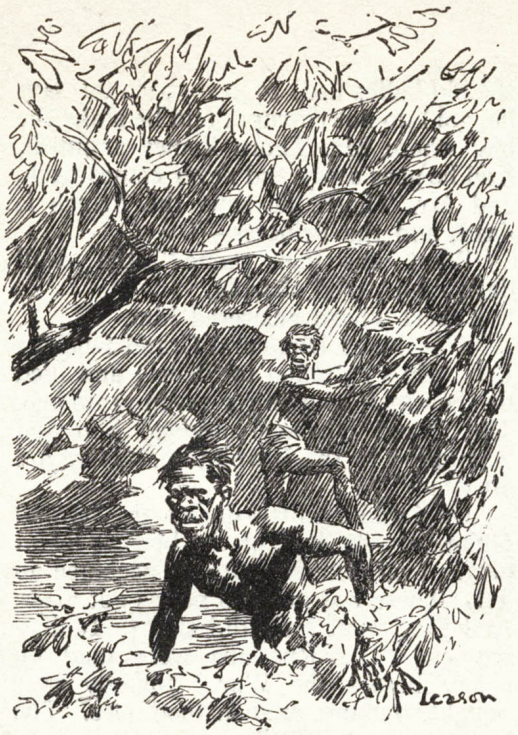


NOBODY lives on lovely Sariba—Sariba, sapphire of China straits, second in beauty only to Samarai its neighbor, the Pearl of the Pacific. Sariba, with blue, peaked hills, and sands of coral, and coco-palms, plumed and green, like all the colored pictures in all the boys' books of long ago. Sariba, where sometimes comes a stray trader to visit a little plantation, gather its produce, and hurry away again. Sariba, where once, above the sands of coral, a white woman lived alone; loved, waited, lost and went away forever. . . . Sariba, beautiful and lonely.

Forty-odd years ago, the Sapphire of the Straits was as lonely as it is today. For that reason, maybe, the Grand Duke Leo of Russia, who had recently made history by becoming "bushed" in the hills beyond Port Moresby and had been saved when almost dead of thirst, by one Jim Rockett, a gold-miner, chose Sariba, before he left the country, for the planting of a secret hoard. And chose Rockett, his good friend by now, for his companion, because everyone said that Jim was a "bonzer bloke" whom you could trust; and everyone knew the miners never talked.

Jim didn't talk. He went with the Grand Duke to the loneliest bay on the great blue island; and there, at night, by the light of an oil lantern, helped him to plant his secret cache. The Grand Duke said he was following the example, in what he did, of no less a person than the lovely Empress of Austria—at mention of whom he stood upright, and raised his hand in salute. And Jim said: "That's right." The Grand Duke, before he went away, told Jim that he would come back again in three years or send a messenger, accredited by his ring. And Jim said, "Good-o!" The Grand Duke said the Grand Duchess was waiting for him in Sydney, where they had broken their round-the-world tour to let him enjoy adventure in New Guinea; he'd have to get back now, but he would always remember Jim, and hoped Jim would remember him. And Jim said "Good-o—that's right."

So Grand Duke Leo went away, and Papua remembered him for a while as the prince who had "got himself bushed,"



The Bag of Gold

and then forgot him. They didn't even know that the Czar had sent him to Siberia for treason, and that he died on the way, nor that the Grand Duchess was murdered. Jim didn't know, because these things were kept out of the Russian newspapers; but as years went by, he guessed that something must have happened to his Grand Duke friend. For that was a very special cache indeed.

WHEN Rupert Thorn came to Papua forty-odd years after, and went gold-mining, Jim was still going strong on the new fields, and Thorn joined in with him on a claim. It collapsed before Thorn had had time to cheat his partner out of the proceeds—which was one of his merry ways; a merry fellow, Rupert. So Jim, before he died of the effects of a blast misplaced, hadn't had time to find out much about Rupert. Liked him, thought him a fellow you could trust. And anyhow he had no one else to speak to, at the end.

So, dying, he told Rupert, and made him promise something. And Rupert promised it readily; he had always been considered a promising youth. And hearing much in the country about a remarkable woman called Nor'west Jane, who lived all alone in her trading-station on a distant island, he managed to beg a passage to Nor'west, and to see Jane.

It was growing dusk on the veranda of the trading-store when Rupert walked up from the beach; but the sea behind him —the lonely ocean seldom stirred by ships, that thrice-locked door that bars away from Papua's islands all the "fever and the fret," the memory of the dull, accursed places where "men sit and hear each other moan"—was silver-washed by sunset. Jane could see, plainly, set against the light, the figure of Rupert. A fine figure, cut out in silhouette. And when he reached the house, swept off his helmet, and asked, with a smile that many women had found irresistible, whether he might come in, Jane, seeing his handsome face, his sculptured nose and mouth and merry innocent-looking eyes, was impressed.

Lombard, the young, clean, light-haired anthropologist who was so intriguingly unlike any typical professor, had just come in from an afternoon in the cannibal villages that Jane was taming. Britten, a dark, feeble man who existed somehow on an old-age pension, wandering indefinitely about the D'Entrecasteaux and the Louisiades, had followed Rupert up from the schooner, saying to himself that he didn't know what that pretty-girl chap might be wanting with Jane, but anyhow he didn't like the cut of his jib. He said as much to Lombard, at the far end of the veranda, while Jane and Rupert talked.

"I never feel attracted to men with that type of small round head," Lombard allowed. "Anthropologically speaking, such a head is—"

"Speaking as a man who knows a skunk when he sees one," Britten cut in, "it's a rotter's head. —And body," he added thoughtfully.

"Jane doesn't think so." There was something wistful in Lombard's hard face, as he watched the tall handsome woman, with the blue-green eyes, so like the sea she loved, and the coiled red-gold hair, smiling on Rupert.

"It's a damn' pity," Britten remarked, "that that Jack of hers got himself smashed up—"

"On their wedding day," Lombard said, a little quicker than was necessary.

"And she sticks to him, in the hospital away down south, as if—as if—"

"I believe he never was much good," the dark man said. "He'd've made love to a broomstick with a petticut on, when he was able to get about, and even now, he'll kiss a nurse as soon as look at her. I been to that hospital once, seeing a mate of mine, and Jack was there; star boarder of the place, you might call him."

"What was he like?" curiously asked Lombard.

"A bonzer chap to look at. And the nurses all buzzin' round him like flies. No, they say there's no chance of his gettin' better, but of course you never know, these days, with all their discoveries."

"Any chance of his dying?"

"Not a hope," coolly answered Britten. . . . "But they've done their talk; I wonder if you and me comes in with this or not?"

HE was not left in doubt. Jane came striding down the veranda, as if she were about to start immediately for a destination miles away. She checked in front of the two men like a horse pulling up on its haunches. "Here," she said, "let's you two listen to what he says; I reckon we're on to something good at last." Without waiting for the smiling Rupert to speak, she went on: "He says that chap Rockett what died a couple of weeks ago, was his mate, and left him the papers about a bag of pearls that's stowed away underwater off Sariba. He says they was put there by a Russian prince—that feller who come to Port Moresby forty years ago, and got lost and found again—and the Prince put them there because they was losing their color, and they say if you put pearls back where they come from, they get all right. The Empress of Austria, she done it with hers, only somebody pinched them and she never got them again. And the Prince, he said to the Princess, says he, they come from Torres Straits in the first place, because they was Thursday Island pearls, as white as snow—"

The little dark man nodded.

"Thursday pearls are that," he said.

"And, says he, the Prince I mean, says he, Papua's all the same; it touches on the straits; so if I sink them somewhere off that savage land, they'll be in their own land, and safe, with no Japs about to know. There was Japs all over Thursday even then. So he puts them away in a gold bag, like them gold-chain bags the old ladies used to have, because, says he, gold do not corrupt; and he sinks the bag where Mr. Thorn knows about it. And he goes away and never comes back, and Mr. Thorn, he says the Prince is dead, and the Princess—"

"What was their name?" the small dark man asked sharply.

Rupert Thorn answered him.

"The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Leo. He was taken to Siberia and died on the way, about thirty-seven years ago. The Grand Duchess survived him and was killed in the Revolution. They are all dead."

"Oh," said the little dark man. "Grand Duke Leo—he bought the biggest lot of pearls ever matched for a necklace in T.I. There was no such pearls got after. And they went sick, did they? It does happen. The Russians were mad on pearls before the War. Nobody ever bought so many, or such good ones. The Leo pearls—cripes!"

"There," said Rupert gayly, "Mr. Britten confirms all I said."

"Some of it," Britten commented dryly.

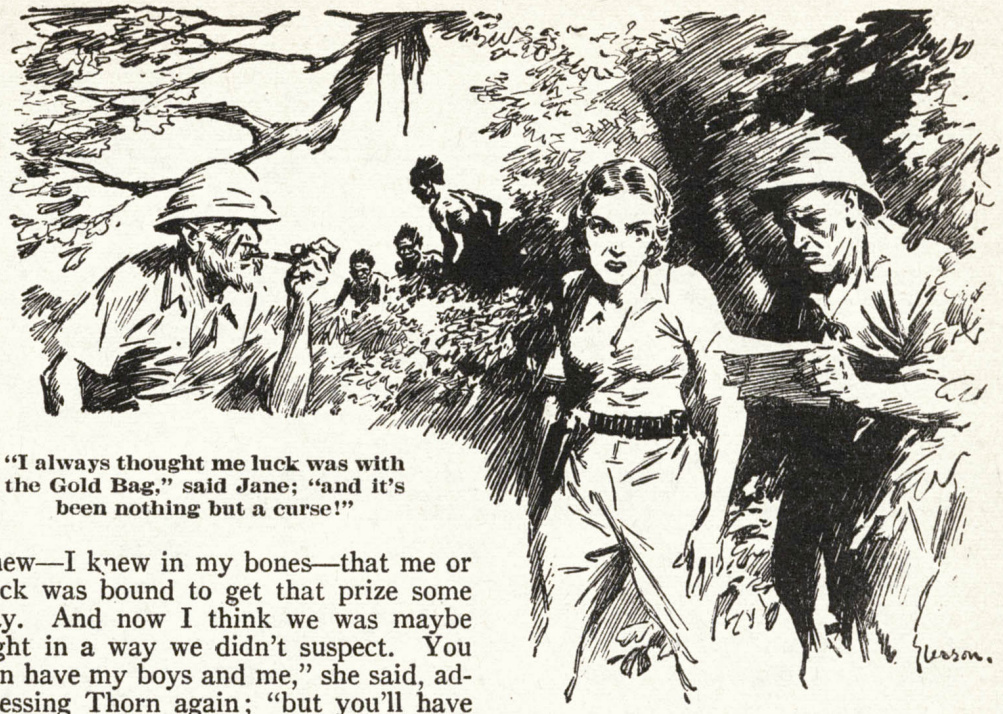
"He wants," said Jane, "that I'd lend him some of my diving boys and come along to Sariba. He says he'll pay me what I charge for taking people about, same as I took Mr. Lombard." Her voice softened as she spoke the name; Britten noted that, if no one else did. "That's a pound a day, and expenses. And I says to him, says I, you're a very pretty boy—and so he is. My boys gets the pearls, it's shares, and I'll have my fair whack. I've got my store to see to," she said, turning to Rupert, "and my boys are lifting trocas shell what's ten shillings a kerosene tin at present; and if I'm to lose all that, I must be paid."

"You seem sure you're going to get the pearls," satirically remarked Britten.

"I'm that excited," Jane declared, "that I can hardly stand; because you may think me as superstitious as you like, but I believe it's my luck come at last. I believe that gold bag's bound to do it. The very sound of it—why, me and Jack, we've been taking tickets in the Bag of Gold lottery down south, for seven year, and never got so much as a fi'-pun note out of it, and luck's bound to turn one way if not another; I always thought one of us would win the lottery—"

"What's the prize?" asked Lombard in a superior tone. Lotteries were not much in his line, but he felt curious.

Jane said, breathing hard: "Five thousand pounds is the first. And I always



"I always thought me luck was with the Gold Bag," said Jane; "and it's been nothing but a curse!"

knew—I knew in my bones—that me or Jack was bound to get that prize some day. And now I think we was maybe right in a way we didn't suspect. You can have my boys and me," she said, addressing Thorn again; "but you'll have to give me twenty-five per cent, if you get the pearls."

"Ten," said Rupert, with a smile like breaking day. "And too much!"

"Thirty," said Jane, "or you don't get my boys, what can't talk no good English—I've just got that lot; I'm learning them; and when I say I'll learn a boy to talk good English, I'll learn him or I'll kill him. But they can't yet, nor understand it, and if you get diving boys from anywhere else, they'll have it all over Papua before you get the pearls raised. Every flaming mother's son of them's been to Thursday Island, except mine, and there's nothing gossips like a diving boy, except one of them magpies in the bush. Thirty. And it'll be fifty next time."

"Is there something you want to buy very much, Mrs. Jane?" Rupert asked.

"A husband; that's what I want to buy."

"You, the handsomest woman in Papua—a husband! What's the matter with me?" Rupert's smile, then, would have melted the heart of any woman between China Straits and Cairns. But Lombard, watching, saw that with that smile, the innocent expression that had been spread upon Rupert's countenance like butter upon bread, faded and disappeared, its place being taken by something that was far from innocent.

"This is where I come in," he thought. And briefly he told Thorn of Jane's situation; of her disastrous marriage, her invalided husband, her fruitless hopes of an expensive cure. He did not mention that he knew—had reason to know—that only a certain misplaced sense of loyalty held this woman to the man whom she once had vowed to love. Jane was Jane; there was nobody else like her.

And, he thought disconnectedly, lessons in grammar don't take long.

Thorn knew when he was beaten.

"Thirty, if you insist," he said with a cheery smile.

THERE where no one came, at the back of Sariba, it was always quiet. You might be living in the Nineteenth Century, with the enormous peace of the Victorian day, its huge distances, not yet abolished by the power of the plane, its dreaming and its content, wrapped round you like a magic robe of bliss. In forty years and more, nothing had changed. The palms that had watched the Grand Duke Leo hiding away his treasure were fallen, but others had taken their place; the hills behind were uninhabited yet; the tradewinds scoured along the almond-white beaches, singing like a thousand silver wires, theirs the only voices audible still.

They camped behind the beach: Jane and her island boys and Britten and Lombard, and Rupert Thorn, who had made no objection to the size of the company—seeing, with those small bright eyes of

his, that Lombard and Britten meant to come, allowed or not. Britten, indeed, might be useful; it was known that in his long-past youth and middle age, he had been a pearling expert; and Lombard—

Well, Rupert, to whom all women were fair game, thought he would rather enjoy showing Lombard what a man like himself could do with other men's loves.

Jane did seem to be fascinated. A woman runs true, for the most part, to her first choice; Jane had always had a weakness for handsome men, and Rupert was superlatively handsome. But Lombard, watching with jealous eyes, could not be sure whether Jane's excitement, her constant talks with Rupert, her readiness to believe every word he said ("and half of it, I'm sure, is lying, but I don't know which half," Lombard despairingly thought) was due to love, or the spirit of gambling. Or both.

Anyhow, there was work to do, and Jane and her boys were starting to do it.

Rupert had a map, roughly drawn by the dead miner; it showed, clearly, a certain isolated bay, where there was a ledge of rock covered to a depth of about three fathoms, but not exposed to storm. About the middle of it Rockett had marked a spot where, in a pothole, covered by a stone, the gold bag lay.

IT all seemed very simple; but the first day or two produced nothing but weariness for the diving boys, and impatience among the whites. There were many potholes in the rock, and most of them contained stones—loose stones that, as Jane impatiently said, might very well have ground to powder anything placed in their neighborhood. Also, it was hard to say exactly where the middle of the rock might be; the map was neat and clear, but the Pacific Ocean and its edges weren't.

"If I hadn't've knowed Jim," Jane declared, "I'd've said he was nothing but the two ends and bight of a damn' fool, for putting the things there. But he wasn't that."

"Are you sure?" suddenly and disconcertingly asked Britten. Britten, little old Britten, who was almost done with life; who had gone pearling, and sandalwooding and *bêche-de-mer*ing, had commanded schooners and loved the daughters of dark kings; who was content, now, to sit in the shade and watch the wide Pacific sunsets, the while he waited for the last sunset of all. Not for a long time had anyone seen him take part in the affairs of other people as he was doing now. Some memory of past days, some unacknowledged interest, seemed to have set the dead ashes flaring up again. Britten was curiously alive and alert.

"Of course I'm sure!" said Jane the unsubtle, "or I wouldn't be here. Jim was a bonzer bloke if ever there was one."

Britten smoked his pipe and was silent, watching. Lombard, with a mind woven of finer stuff than Jane's, was inwardly conscious of trouble in the air. "I'll get at Britten privately," he thought. "Whatever comes of it, Jane mustn't be disappointed."

But as it happened, events overtook him in their march.

Jane declared: "This job is going to take longer than we thought. Who'll go over to Samarai in the launch and get some bread, and the letters? The *Macdhui's* just left the wharf; I seen her smoke going out towards Rabaul."

Lombard volunteered. The beautiful stranger was getting on his nerves; he didn't like to see the way Rupert looked at Jane, nor yet the way that Jane, occasionally, looked back at Rupert. Jane was faithful as a dog to her useless husband, but now and then, in looks and laughs, in rare hand-pressures, blushes, merriment that suddenly flashed up and as suddenly died, defeated nature spoke.

"If she were free," he thought, "if she were free—I'd reach out quick; I'd snap the fruit from the bough!"

And so, free or not, would this beautiful conscienceless stranger—as Lombard knew.

He went away in the launch. The Straits, gem-blue, gem-green in the piercing sun, ran quick behind him; the peaky hills, colored like many-hued petunias, opened out. Samarai sparkled close at hand. He went ashore, bought bread, called for the letters, and returned.

The boys were still diving. They had systematically explored almost every pothole in the underwater terrace; and the catch, so far, was represented by a few handfuls of shells. Jane, looking tired and worried, left them at work while she unfastened Lombard's parcels and took the letters. In the shade of a mighty calophyllum tree, behind the beach, she sat and read, tearing open envelopes, looking at a newspaper or two, flinging scraps of news to the rest of the party.

Before she had finished her mail, a sudden burst of sound came from the rocks.

One of the boys, bobbing up with wet woolly head and staring eyes, broke into yells and native talk. The others—all well aware that treasure of some kind was being sought—joined in with excited shrieks. Rupert shouted: "Jane, Jane, come here and tell us what he says; I'll swear he's got something!"

CLUTCHING her mail, Jane hurried to the rock. Lombard, Britten and Rupert were hanging over the verge, striving to pierce the veil of lime-green water that lay three fathoms deep upon the shelf where Grand Duke Leo, forty years before, had cached his lady's pearls. The diver, breathing heavily, pointed to a spot below. He gestured, chattered, step-danced on the burning rock. "He says," translated Jane, "that he's found a hole where there's no loose stones, only one biggish one wedged tight in, and he put his hand under, only he can't lift it; but he swears there's something like a bit of chain below, and he says it's sort of protected by the rock, lying loose; and he says—"

"Hurrah!" interrupted Rupert, snatching off his Panama and wildly waving it. "Three cheers—damn you, all of you—hip, hip, *horray!* Join in, join in!"

Nobody joined. Jane was almost crying. "I always knew my luck'd come with the Gold Bag," she half-sobbed. "It's too good—too—"

Lombard looked on, silent, watchful. Britten curtly remarked: "Wait till you get it."

"Well," declared Jane, wiping her eyes, "it shows they wasn't no sort of fools, after all. Here, you,"—to the boy,—"take a hold of this rope and go down again, and don't come up till you've passed it under the stone, even if you drown first."

The boy seemed to understand. He went down quickly, and they watched his brown body, glassed with beads of air, balancing itself head down and struggling to pass the rope beneath the stone. Lombard, watching, wondered if the native mightn't come pretty close to carrying out Jane's command, it seemed so long—though it was in truth less than two minutes—before he had the rope in place, and rose to the surface, gasping and exhausted. Jane wasted no time over him; she snapped out another order, and two more boys seized the rope and began to haul. Up came the stone; it was slung away, anywhere, nowhere; another boy, without even waiting for orders, went down and thrust his arm into the cavity.

There was no need for Rupert's cheerleading when the native rose, leaped out, and flung a mass of weed and tarnished metal at the feet of Jane. Everyone exclaimed. Rupert shouted "Hurray!" Lombard cried out: "Good!" Jane simply screamed. Britten, with his hands behind his back, bent forward, looked at the little heap of crusted, weed-grown links, and coolly remarked: "Got 'em; and now I hope they'll do you quite a lot of good."

Rupert had the trove in his hands. It was not a large treasure to look at; when the weed was torn off, and the dulled links of the bag appeared, you could see that it had been one of the small gold-chain reticules carried by fashionable women nearly half a century before. The sides were swelled out just a little—just enough to show that something more precious than the bag itself was guarded within.

Rupert's eager fingers were working at the rusted catch.

"Hold on," came Britten's voice, suddenly and sharply. "There's something you—and Jane—have got to know. I didn't mean to say anything unless you found it, but it looks as if you had."

"It looks like it," Rupert agreed, still eagerly twisting and wrenching.

"Wait!"

"Do you hear him? Wait!" snapped Jane. She didn't understand—she didn't like the tone of Britten's voice; but she did not care to see him ignored.

Rupert, flushed, angry, stayed his hand. "What's all this nonsense?"

"No nonsense, and I reckon you know something about it, seeing that you were so keen on keeping it all quiet, and seeing you're not long up from Sydney. There's an owner for this stuff."

"Yes, there is. Me!" declared Rupert, clasping both hands about the bag.

"There's the granddaughter of Grand Duke Leo, living in Sydney today, old and plain, and as poor as Job's turkey, earning her living selling flowers in Martin Place. She uses her title to help her get a bit of bread; she's well known as Princess Leonie, the pauper flowergirl. It's only a few months since she started on it, so I reckon Jim Rockett didn't know; but if he'd been alive today, you know what he'd have done. I heard it from a cobber of mine, an old pearler same as myself; he got sick and went to hospital in Sydney, and it was there he heard it, and saw her. Now, you, what are you going to do about it?"

"Me?" Rupert laughed his innocent childlike laugh. "Findings are keepings! I'm keeping what I found. Lend me a knife, some one; I'll have to cut these links—damn the—"

"Mrs. Jane! What are you going to do?"

It was plain what Jane meant to do, but it was also plain what that was costing her. Her face was yellow-white as she replied: "The decent thing. I don't handle no jools that belongs to the orphan."

"Then," said Rupert sweetly, "there's just thirty per cent more for me."

"I hope it sticks in your throat and chokes you," Jane revengefully said. She swallowed sharply; her eyes were dim. To see this man, devoid of honesty, carrying off everything, just because he was a crook—it was almost too much. And Jack—and the famous surgeon of Chicago, who was to cure him—who wouldn't have the chance, now!

"Give it here," suddenly said Britten, producing a knife.

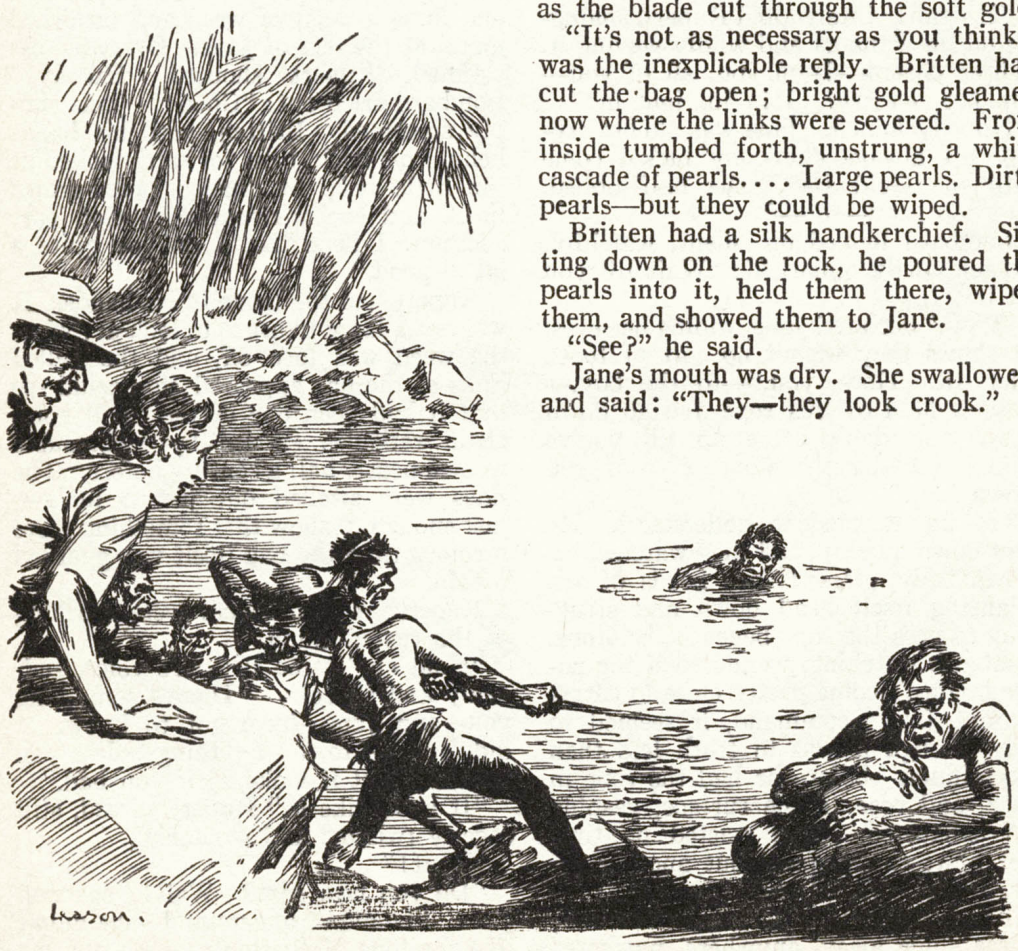
"Take care," almost shouted Rupert, as the blade cut through the soft gold.

"It's not as necessary as you think," was the inexplicable reply. Britten had cut the bag open; bright gold gleamed now where the links were severed. From inside tumbled forth, unstrung, a white cascade of pearls.... Large pearls. Dirty pearls—but they could be wiped.

Britten had a silk handkerchief. Sitting down on the rock, he poured the pearls into it, held them there, wiped them, and showed them to Jane.

"See?" he said.

Jane's mouth was dry. She swallowed, and said: "They—they look crook."



The diver rose, gasping. Two more boys seized the rope and began to haul.

"Jane, they *are* crook. They've gone dead. And nothing will ever set them right again."

Rupert, with scarlet face, snatched at the handkerchief. "Give them to me. They're only discolored. I don't understand. Everyone knows that if you put a sick pearl back in its own sea—"

"People who write stories know, maybe. And people who read them. Newspaper chaps. Not pearlers. We know differently. Salt water kills them."

"What! That's damned nonsense. They come out of salt water."

"No. They come out of the oyster. Out of its flesh, out of a pocket in the beard, mostly."

"But the Grand Duke—"

"Grand Dukes and their kind," said Britten with something like a sneer, "know just what's told them. Believe any tale. It's a very general mistake, that about curing sick pearls in the sea. I dare say they weren't so bad when the Grand Duke put them down; but they're past praying for now. And the little Princess won't get any good out of them, any more than you. And if you happen to doubt me, just ask any—any—*any* of the pearl-buyers of Thursday Island or Broome. And put what they say in your pipe and smoke it."

There was silence for a minute, broken only by the hard breathing of the native boys, and the endless, careless soliloquy of the sea.

Jane spoke first. "If you knew this all along,"—to Britten,—"why did you let me and my whole outfit come along here, and work the guts out of ourselves looking for crook pearls that didn't belong to nobody?"

"I wanted to see," said Britten coolly, "whether you were as straight all through as you look, Jane."

"Yes, and what else?" she persisted.

"And I wanted to show you,"—with a monkey twinkle in his eye,—"who wasn't. In case you needed to know." Carefully, he did not look at Lombard.

Jane said, "Sling them pills back where they came from," and turned away.

THEY saw her go back to the shady seat where she had left her mail. They saw her take up the letters and go on reading.

It was only a minute before she sprang to her feet with a cry.

"What's bitten you now?" Britten demanded. Lombard did not wait to ask questions. He was instantly at her side.

"Jack!" she said. *"Jack!"* Her hands were crisped upon the letter she held; she was staring at it as if it had been a snake about to strike. "Read that," she told Lombard. "Read it aloud!"

He had to unclasp her fingers to get the sheet. He read—to Britten alone, for Rupert was nowhere visible.

"'Dear Jane,

I did not tell you lately how much better I have been, for Nurse Gladys, who is my very good friend, said it was no use unsettling you until we knew."

"We?" said Jane, with heaving breast.

"'But the fact is that I am now practically cured, and Nurse Gladys and I have decided to throw in our lot together. You can get a divorce as soon as you like. I will send you all the evidence necessary —unless you and that bughunter man—"

"He means you! The—"

"Don't worry, Jane. . . . Where was I? Oh, yes—"

"'—Unless you and that bughunter man choose to save me the trouble. Cheerio, Jane; I know you never cared much about me.

"'Your husband for the time being

"'Jack.

"'P.S. I won the Gold Bag Lottery last week, as you always said one of us would, some day.'"

Jane said, dropping her hands and staring out at the silver-dazzled sea: "I always thought me luck was with the Gold Bag somehow or other; and lookit, it's been nothing but a curse!"

Britten was an old, old man; but somehow he managed to remember in that moment that he had once been young. Had loved women, dark or fair; none of them, though, as fair as this tall, golden Jane, from whom the fetters of a luckless marriage were now being roughly wrenched away. So he found an errand out beyond the palms, and did not hear Lombard, suddenly emboldened, say to Jane:

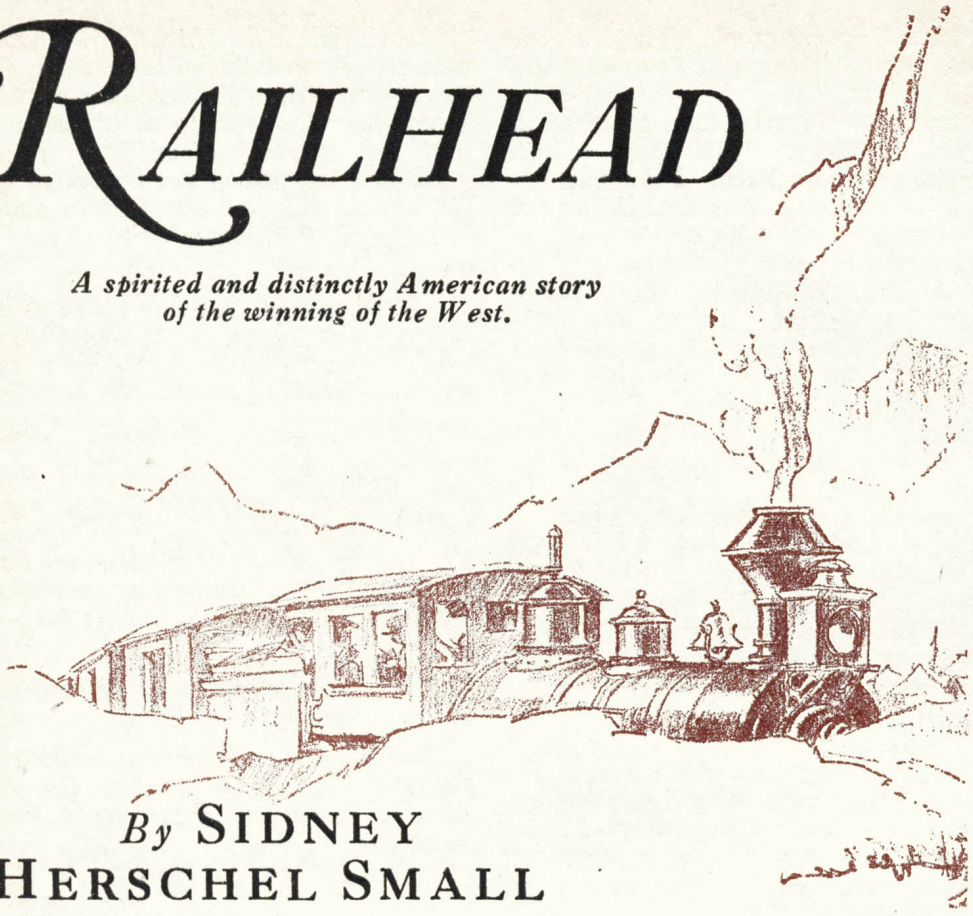
"Maybe the Grand Duke's bag has been a curse to everyone—but not the Gold Bag that Jack won— Jane, Jane!"

There was no one to see Lombard's arms outheld; no one to watch Jane, like a homing bird, hesitant, wavering, as might be a bird in the midst of storm, come slowly into their longing clasp.

And nobody, for quite a long time, noticed that Rupert the resourceful had vanished with the twenty ounces of twenty-two-carat gold.

RAILHEAD

A spirited and distinctly American story of the winning of the West.



By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

THE log cabin on Saleratus Flat, with the bare spines of the high Sierras rising almost from the blank north wall, was nothing to look at. Samuel Phelps' uncle, back in Eastfield, housed his hogs far better.

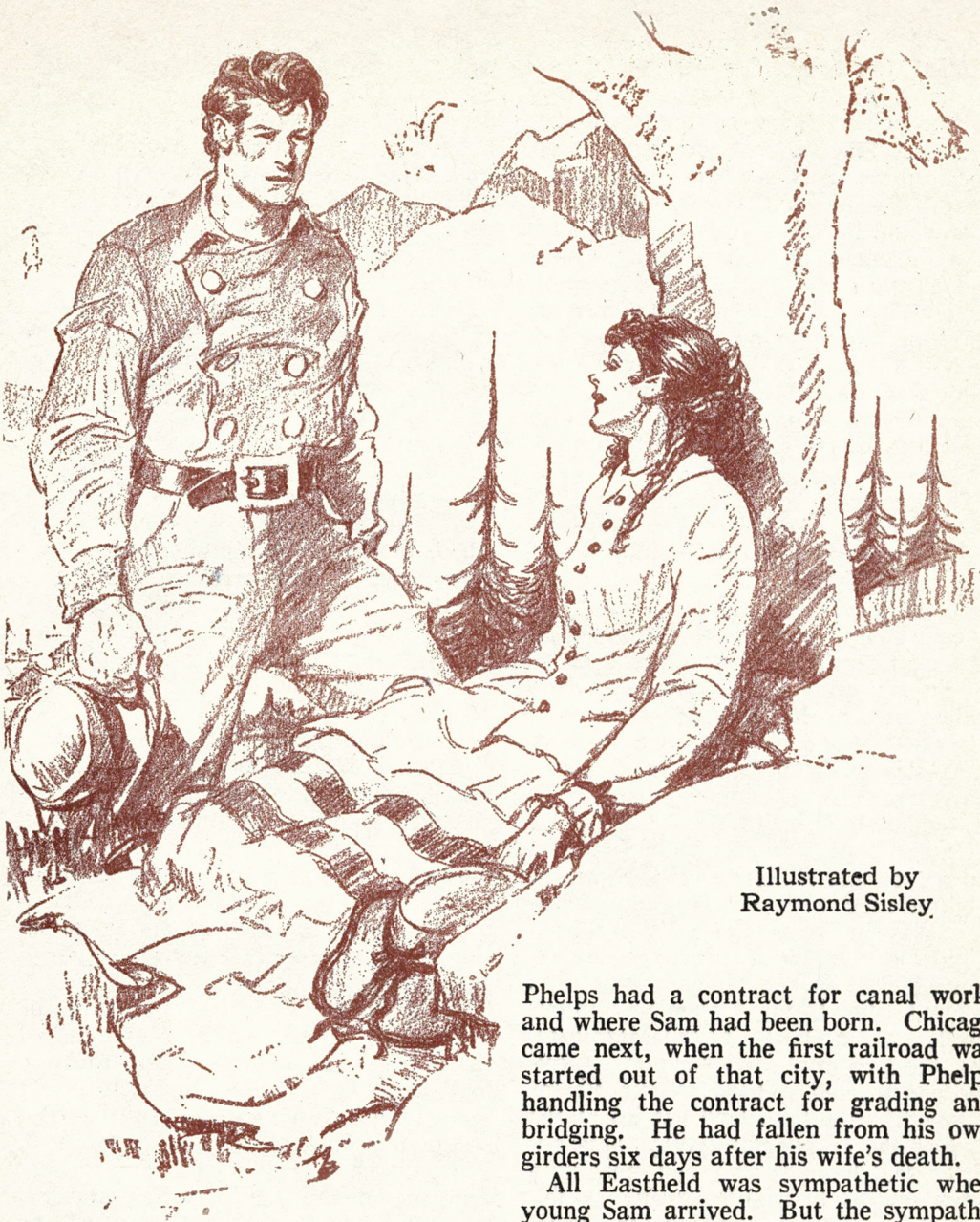
"That boy," Sam's uncle had said,—when it was no longer possible to deny that the orphan had run away, presumably for California,—"has made his bed. Let him lie in it." Sam had done so for ten years; and if there were a few wrinkles in the wool blankets spread over the pine needles in one of the bunks, there was also no Aunt Sarah to smack him for it.

His flannel shirts and overalls, and one black suit, hung on nails. There was a hard-packed dirt floor, three-legged stools for seats, a plank for a table. The fireplace was enormous, and taking up one end of the room, had been formed of native stone, in all shades from gray to green, with fools'-gold glittering in the rougher rocks. For cooking, a coffee-pot was on the cold hearth, and a frying-pan. The Dutch oven served for baking both bread and beans. A small amount of food was on a shelf, away from raiding chipmunks: coffee, tea, dried apples, wheat flour for flap-jacks, cornmeal, beans, bacon and salt pork.

Sam Phelps, at the table, was writing another figure in his book. He put down, *"3 oz.,"* and although three ounces of gold wouldn't buy a man much of anything, Sam was humming as he wrote the number. It represented the week's take, and every grain had been laboriously panned.

"I live on swine," sang young Sam, *"till I grunt and squeal."*

A MAN would starve, freeze, unless he panned more gold, with winter just a few months off; if the shortening days were hot, and the sunsets red, the nights already had the touch of cold in them. You couldn't stay in the hills, snug and warm and with plenty of food and tobacco—not on three ounces, you couldn't. Men who hadn't struck it rich, slunk back home, or went down to San Francisco, or drove jackasses for the railroad which, a mile from Saleratus Flat, was being blasted, bored, shelved and bridged higher and higher into the Sierra wilderness. Two dollars a day, a white man was paid. Riding-bosses earned three.



Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

When Sam Phelps stood up, it seemed incredible that such a man could have grown from what Eastfield had called poor Martha Mason's skinny brat.

"Yes sir," Sam thought, "I bet Uncle Andrew busts when I tell him I been working for a railroad." The notion of Andrew Mason's anger was intriguing; nevertheless, the seat of Sam's overalls tingled with remembrance, although it hadn't been the switchings which had caused him to run away. Every fellow was switched.

Sam's mother had been Andrew Mason's sister. Exactly where she'd met George Phelps, not even Aunt Sarah had ever found out; but she'd married him, and gone off to Pennsylvania, where Phelps had a contract for canal work, and where Sam had been born. Chicago came next, when the first railroad was started out of that city, with Phelps handling the contract for grading and bridging. He had fallen from his own girders six days after his wife's death.

All Eastfield was sympathetic when young Sam arrived. But the sympathy was for Andrew and his wife, having an orphan to raise. The uncle began on Sam immediately, hammering home certain facts, such as working on borrowed money and leaving nothing, and what railroad men were, and that if there were any sort of that adventuring in Sam's blood, it would be driven out. Aunt Sarah began early on his morals.

No one thing, nor one switching, had caused Sam to run away. Gold, and California, was in the air. Those who went after gold, Andrew Mason said, were the kind who'd starve as easily in Californy as in New England. The ne'er-do-wells, looking for something for nothing. "If you ever try it, boy," said Andrew, "I'll make you sorry for it!"

So Sam ran away. His first job, logically enough, had been as water-boy, carrying bucket and dipper to thirsty railway laborers. Since oxen were used to do the hauling of ties, Sam, as George Phelps' kid, was told to pick up ox-talk so he could handle a yoke. Before long he was engaged as driver for an Overland ox-train, California or Bust, crossing river, prairie, desert, mountain, in search of shining gold; and if he lacked the heft of the other drivers, it saved him many a thrashing, because it was unnecessary to brag of his prowess. "I'm the worst man in seven States!" was always sufficient to start a fight.

There was no good, Sam learned, in blowing your own horn when nothing could be gained by it. Uncle Andrew had said that. Well, Uncle Andrew couldn't be wrong about everything.

Once in California, with his wages in his pocket, Sam Phelps bought pick, shovel, and a thing called a cradle, amazed at the cost; bacon, beans, and flour; and if he had but a single shirt then, and not much chest under it, he had several now, and there wasn't a man about, who wanted to stand up to him.

He had worked alone; he had panned and rocked and sluiced, and there wasn't a better man with a Long Tom, when there was dirt to be washed down from a hillside. When a digging was exhausted, Sam moved along. Sometimes he hired a few Chinese when he couldn't handle a claim alone. At Saleratus Flat, now, the men were sorry for him. A fellow who worked as hard as Sam Phelps deserved better than he'd got up at the head of the grassy flat. Why, he'd admitted that he hadn't panned more than a few ounces in a solid week. A fellow'd be better off working for wages, and the miners told Sam so.

"That three ounces has done it," Sam thought; and in a way, it frightened him a little. A man couldn't keep thinking about something for ten years, and all of a sudden, when what you wanted had happened, start in right away thinking about something else.

HE said, "Forty thousand dollars!" without knowing he spoke aloud. That was the amount which Mr. Strawbridge, Eastfield's one rich man, had been worth; and Sam's mother, Aunt Sarah had said, could have married into that family just by lifting her little finger. It had been this fabulous figure at which Sam had aimed, and which he had finally achieved by panning this last three ounces. The gold had come from many diggings and placers: Kanaka Creek, Pike County Mountain, Humbug and Port Wine and Poverty Hill. And every red cent of it was safe down in San Francisco. In the past, Sam had always said, "When I'm worth forty thousand," and now this was a fact.

FOR ten years the goal had been before him. Now he'd begin thinking about the next ten years. Save for returning to Eastfield, wearing a gold chain with a watch at one end, and new clothes and a hat like Mr. Strawbridge's, he didn't know what he was going to do. His case was different from the other miners'. There was no girl at home; there wasn't even what a man could rightly call a family. "Dressed all highty-tighty," Aunt Sarah would sniff, "just like his father." And Uncle Andrew would add that Sam didn't have a cent in his pockets, either.

Then Sam would say that he'd been in California, working for the railroad. His worth wouldn't be known until he deposited his draft in Mr. Strawbridge's bank. He would work for the railroad too; there must be no real lying about that. "I'll say," thought Sam, "that I got two dollars a day, and I worked alongside of Chinamen." He rolled the morsel on his tongue.

A work-train hooted as it puffed up the long grade toward railhead, the end of the rails. The bankers in San Francisco had suggested that Sam ought to invest a portion of his money in railway stocks, and young Sam had been badly tempted. It would have been nice to inform Andrew Mason that the forty thousand had been doubled, trebled by means of the iron horse; on the other hand, if the money were lost, the laugh would be on Sam. He wasn't going to be laughed at. You bet not. And besides, he knew too much about the Sierra Pacific.

Everybody in the near-by mining camps and diggings were amused at the route which the railway was to follow up to the Sierra summit and across to Nevada. It was no wonder Mr. Lincoln in Washington had waited a long time before signing the Railroad Bill; why, Mr. Lincoln undoubtedly had been informed that these fools intended to try and lay rails around a mountain of smooth granite well named Cape Horn, when any miner knew black powder wouldn't work on rock which neither ice

nor lightning had been able to crack. The best black powder, shipped dry around the true Horn, would blow out of the drilled holes like charges from guns. And if these engineers couldn't cut a slice for rails around the Cape, then they'd be forced to give up many an expensive mile of construction, and start all over again.

There was even more to Sam's refusal to invest. He, like everyone else, knew about that other railway, called the Midland & Western, which was stretching westward to join the Sierra Pacific somewhere on plain and desert; when the rails met, there would be a way to cross the continent without so much as changing cars. However, future profits would be measured by the number of miles owned by each railway; and the M. & W. had no such problems of construction as the California-financed line. No sir, Sam would have none of it. Gold was what he'd come for, and gold was what he had; and gold was what he was going to keep.

"I've done it," Sam thought; and for the first time, as he looked about the cabin, everything in it was wrong. He put the account-book in his pocket; he went to one of the cans on the shelf and took out the final gleaning of golden dust, and putting this also in his overalls, he walked quickly out of the room. He crossed the flat rapidly, stopped at the first cabin, sold tools and clothes and food for a few additional ounces of gold; then, nodding at farewells, he started up the trail which led to the railway construction-camp.

BEFORE long he could see the bulk of the dome called Cape Horn, and row on row of spiny peaks behind. The dark river swirled without undercut at the base, indicating the solidity of the massive rock. The sky was stained glass, vermilion and scarlet back over the curving rails, yellow above the granite mountain, purple, blue and green eastward toward the pass. Railhead itself, shelved against the hills, and reaching squarely to the steep dome, was white with laborers' tents, with the brown canvases where the hangers-on lived, a quarter-mile back. Phelps could see the tiny cooking-fires of the Chinese coolies, and the diamond-stacked engine with the train behind which housed the engineers and bosses.

"I'll say," Sam decided, "I was paid a dollar a week for my first job, and two dollars a day for my last. That'll be truth. Uncle Andrew won't ask me what

happened between. He'll be too busy saying something about my rise in the world." He wondered if Aunt Sarah'd ask him to stay for supper, and if she still sliced big peaches into blue bowls, and had hot crumb-cake along with the fruit.

Tonight he'd eat at railhead, before he tackled anyone for a job. No camp stew. Cove oysters and fried beef and potatoes. He'd go to the toniest place at Hell-on-Wheels. Oh, he knew the stories which miners told about visiting the hangers-on encampment, and how a man could have monte or liquor or women or faro, or a big meal, or all of these things together, if he had the price. The skinners and rail-handlers, Sam had heard, spent every cent there. Only John Chinaman saved what remained of his dollar after the cost of his rice and the number-one man's percentage was taken.

The trail dropped sharply to the river Just before he waded into the cold water, Sam could hear the singing up at Hell-on-Wheels, and he grinned as he paused to listen. The railway workers had taken to the miners' songs; "John I. Sherwood," and "Joshua, James, and John;" "Joe Bowers," "Selby Flat," "California Boys." Then Sam Phelps went in to his waist, and shoulders; he swam with ease for fifty feet, let himself touch bottom, and clambered out. He whistled as he began to climb up to railhead; he thought nothing at all about being wet.

When a fellow was broke—well, then he went back and told what a high old time he'd had.

When he reached the tracks, he was able to see exactly what had been accomplished. The cut had been made along a dozen levels, like gigantic steps, each just wide enough to accommodate a Chinese and his dirt-filled barrow, and it must have proved a rapid way to progress. Smart! For an instant Sam Phelps regretted his decision not to purchase Sierra Pacific stock; and then he saw Cape Horn again. No smartness was going to get rails around the Cape.

Tents were ranged on both sides of what a board claimed was Grizzly Street, and this thoroughfare of Hell-on-Wheels was filling with workers from railhead. There were a few Indians, trying to sell deer-meat, strings of trout, and berries; although Chinese outnumbered the white laborers twenty to one, there were no Asiatics here.

There were tents in which to gamble, drink, eat; one larger spread of canvas had nothing to show what was within; and this, Sam Phelps believed, was the fandango house. He heard fiddling inside: "Johnny Am a Lingo Lay," and in snatches, a few words of the song involving 'lasses candy and gin slings made of brandy. All miners went to the fandango house; each went inside, and had a drink, and then picked out a girl and danced with her, and had another drink and another dance, and then began to feel that his luck was in, and had his sack of dust weighed at the bar. Then, with the girl beside him, he went to a table and started to play. And when he was broke, the sports staked him to the best meal there was, provided a man were sober enough to care about it. And then—well, a fellow went back to the diggings, and told what a high old time he'd had. You bet.

Sam, now walking slowly through the crowd, supposed that was what Uncle Andrew would expect him to do. His face was sober enough until he saw a small tent with a sign on it, which proclaimed that good gold-mine stocks could be had inside; at this, Phelps began to grin. If Hell-on-Wheels robbed miners, maybe things were evened up sometimes. Good gold-mines—why, if a man had a good claim, he kept it as quiet as he was able. Or Sam had.

Although there was no woman in sight at all, there was a heady perfume in the street, issuing blatantly from some tent, and it was particularly noticeable to a man accustomed to simpler scents, pine, or pine-wood smoke. It was neither distressing nor disturbing, but merely different.

He was aware, at the same time, of a girl walking between the line of tents of Hell-on-Wheels, and toward him. Which tent she had come from he couldn't tell; it was logical to suppose that a lifted flap had let the perfume out into the street. She wore no ruffled skirt, no tight bodice; there was no comb in her hair. However, fandango girls must go about dressed like other women when not dancing, in just such dark dresses buttoned to the neck, and with the smallest bit of white ribbon there. This girl was slender, and yet she wasn't slender. She walked with her head up; and now Sam saw that she was being escorted by a man, who wore as good clothes as any gambler.

AN idea came to Sam Phelps as the girl approached. Suppose he took her home with him to Eastfield? That would be the sort of thing his mother had done, according to Aunt Sarah—only the sex would be different. Then, bringing

him up short, a man spoke to the girl, baring his head as he saluted her. "How'do, Miss Strawbridge," he said.

The name slapped Sam across the face. Whatever he'd been thinking disappeared; here, before him, was Eastfield, and forty thousand dollars, and Uncle Andrew and Aunt Sarah; and were they alive, and did they believe him dead? And—surely this girl could tell him. Ten years swept away, and Sam Phelps was barefoot in a road as Mr. Strawbridge walked past him on the way to the bank. That there might be more families of the same name did not occur to him. He had his wet slouch hat out of his pocket, without knowing it, and holding it tightly, he stepped squarely before the girl and her escort.

"Ma'am," said Sam Phelps, "I want to ask you something."

THE girl was staring at him, at six feet of flannel, duck and leather, all very wet; and she paled as if Sam had said something actually insulting. Her escort, his own face pale wherever there was no whisker, stepped forward. "Apologize," he said. "If I say the word, our men will throw you over the cliff."

"All I want to know," Sam said stubbornly, "is this: does she come from Eastfield?" He looked past the man and at the girl. "Do you?"

Color slipped back to her cheeks. "Well," she said; and she added, "Uncle Roger lives there. Are you an Eastfield boy?" Mary Ann Strawbridge pushed her companion to one side. "If you are, I suppose you don't realize what you said. But you ought to remember your manners, and know that this is no place to talk to me." She nodded briefly, put her hand on her escort's arm, and walked away.

It was difficult for Sam not to turn and watch her; as he stood there, he saw a woman, all ribbons and ruffles, step out of a tent, and at once men called to her, "Hey, sister, wait; I want to ask you something." Sam's face began to burn. He hadn't known that this was a camp formula. Then he thought: "If I were the man with her, and somebody said what I guess I said, I'd knock him down. I wouldn't say I'd call anybody to do it for me."

He had his supper, listening while he ate, to the possible attractions for the evening, and then remarked that he hadn't struck it rich. If he had come looking for a job, he was told, he'd better go back to gold-grubbing. Things weren't going well at railhead; and if he wanted to know why, all he had to do was look at Cape Horn. Yes sir, Cape Horn had the railway licked.

When Phelps walked along the tracks, heading for the work-train's office-car, where he would find the bosses, he was able to see the thousands of Chinese workmen sitting about their dying cooking-fires, coolies already tamped full with rice, and smoking the one evening pipe while one of their number sang. Along the tracks were smooth telegraph-poles, so freshly cut that the wood hadn't darkened. Twice Sam asked the same question, and twice was given the same answer: Mr. Strawbridge, superintendent of construction, did his own hiring, but wasn't engaging so much as a skinner these days. Be a waste of time to see him. Sam nodded, and went anyhow.

Cape Horn, with the moon up, and the stars close and bright, was a mound of silver. The bulk of the dome was tremendous. It must be unsettling, Sam decided, as he walked toward the office-car, to have that obstacle forever before you, and to know that if it couldn't be overcome, railhead must retreat, and a new way carved into the hills, either north or south; and it wouldn't help the stockholders any. It was no concern of his, this problem. He couldn't help it if the neighboring peaks, southward, were gigantic, nor if the rails, here, were so high above the river that bridging was not to be thought of. If he couldn't get a job here, he'd go down to Sacramento and get one. He made no effort to analyze why he wanted to stay at railhead; he had done enough of figuring things out during the long snowy nights in a cabin, watching the fire leap and dance. Why, he didn't need any figuring any more. Forty thousand dollars'd do that for him. There was a figure for you, you bet!

All this was merely interlude, preparing for the play-acting at Eastfield. He did grin once as he stopped outside the car. "I should think," Aunt Sarah would say, "that you'd think shame to ask a Strawbridge for a job!" Then, at that moment, a new idea came to him; and the longer he thought of it, the more certain he was that he intended remaining at railhead.

IN the car there were engineers and bosses, all smoking cigars, and almost all talking. Cape Horn was the problem; it was of it that the men argued vehement-

ly. It was obvious that the quiet man leaning against the doorway was Mr. Strawbridge; he alone seemed to take no part in the discussion, and it looked to Sam that he was either beaten or was letting the others arrive at no decision—and then would make one. There were two opposing sides. One wished to backtrack, make a new start along a new line; the girl's escort, Sam observed, was one of these; and as Sam listened to the man's argument, he found it very convincing, although Sam was more interested in the glossy whiskers and immaculate shirt of the dandy. The other party favored tackling the Cape according to the planned survey, and sending men, horses and equipment over a southern mountain pass and back down to the far side of the dome, so as to commence chiseling a way for rails from each end.

THE dandy's name, Sam heard, was Arthur Woodford; unlike most of the men, his technical training hadn't begun by carrying pails on the Rock Island & Peoria, or packing ties on the Illinois River Railroad, but in college. When he summed up his contention, however, he spoke very simply: "You want us to inch our way around the Cape? What will the stockholders say to that? Why, the Midland & Western will be clear to California before we're halfway round. We've got to change the route." He suggested then that the question be put to a vote.

Strawbridge spoke then for the first time since Sam had come. "Votes won't lay rails," he said, still staring at the Cape. Then: "Have you observed a ledge some hundred feet from where grade should be? We're going to cut steps into the dome, up to that ledge, and along it we'll drill holes every foot or so. We'll set long spikes in these holes, tie ropes to them, and lower workers in bosun's chairs. In that way several hundred drillers can manage to work at the same time, all along the face of the cliff. Setting off charges may be dangerous, although black powder, unlike this new explosive, is slow in exploding." He nodded to the others, and without waiting to hear what they thought, stepped down from the office car. He walked immediately over to Sam Phelps. "What d'you want?" he asked.

Sam had been admiring the way Strawbridge had handled the problem and the men. All of them seemed well satisfied.

Woodford, ahead of the others, had jumped down, and seeing Sam, said to Strawbridge: "That's the man."

Strawbridge said, "Is it?" and: "Want work?"

"Say the word," Woodford suggested, "and I'll have him run out of camp."

Flushing, Phelps said to the older man: "I'm sorry about that, sir. Yes, I want to work here."

The superintendent was studying Sam, and the younger man knew it. At last Strawbridge said: "There's always a job for a railroad man."

"I carried a bucket back on the New Jersey, sir. Ten years ago," Sam added. "My father was a railroad man, sir."

Strawbridge said: "I hardly care what a man's father did." Casually, perhaps too much so, he added: "How long did you work for the Midland?"

Sam saw the reason for the question. Spies! A fellow couldn't keep his ears open at Hell-on-Wheels for a half-hour without knowing about the desperate rivalry between the two lines. He said: "I never have, sir. I know I'm a greenhorn about construction. I've handled coolies out here, or a few of them, anyhow, and I can handle powder."

Strawbridge seemed to be thinking about more important matters. Andrew Woodford said: "Maybe he'd make us a good man. I'm told that miners can accomplish wonders with a handful of powder." This, to Sam, was surprising; one instant, the dandified engineer had wanted him run out of camp; the next, he was speaking up for him. "I suggest, sir," went on Woodford, "that he be employed."

"Come to the office in the morning," Strawbridge said, nodding. He gave Sam a quick smile. "I suppose you ran away from Eastfield, eh?"

So Sam Phelps knew that the girl had spoken of him; this was worth knowing.

IN the morning Sam found that Mary Ann Strawbridge's father had taken him at his word, for he was given charge of a gang of blast-setting coolies. At the start, Phelps watched drillers making the first holes for blasts to be set, in order to make the steplike trail which was to lead up to the ledge where real operations would begin. The number-one Chinese of the gang urged his men to higher and higher speeds with a constant *"Hai! Hai!"* and the blue-denimed coolies made up for lack of weight by the swiftness of their movements. Sledge clanged on drill; blasts were set and warning cries rose, while the coolies scuttled to safety; when the powder was shot, the tops of the

Sierra pines trembled, and nuts dropped from their cones, and the water in the fall south of the Cape seemed to twist and contort. Sometimes the black powder merely shook the rock a little, and a deeper drilling became necessary, and a heavier charge.

Strawbridge, other engineers, came to watch. The superintendent was allowed few uninterrupted minutes. A riding-boss reported that a trestle needed retimbering. An engineer argued the elimination of a rearward S-curve. Plans were brought, showing the substitution of masonry piers for wood. The camp was down to its last two hundred sacks of rice. And yet all the time, Sam believed, Strawbridge was studying the worth of a new man. Well, Sam's worth was forty thousand dollars, and he didn't care what the older man thought of him. Why, tonight maybe, Sam intended to quit. One day was enough for his purpose.

BY noon the trail zigzagged twenty feet up the side of the Cape; by night, almost fifty. Sam ate with the bosses, listening to camp gossip, to a discussion of a new type of explosive which old Strawbridge was testing somewhere in the hills. Bets were made as to how long it would take the Midland to learn what the S-P were doing; and, "It's nothing to laugh about," a big rail-handling boss informed Sam. "We'd like to find the boy who's the spy."

It took three days to reach the ledge. Sam hadn't quit. For one thing, he was curious as to whether the plan was going to work; for another, there was really no hurry; for a third, he wanted to apologize to the girl, and she had gone down to Sacramento with her mother. Woodford had accompanied them, with a report to the directors there.

Up on the narrow ledge, high on the Horn, high above the river, the drills now bit deep as white men were put to work in place of coolies; there was something powerful, stirring, in the way the long echo thundered down the cañon. Unlike the Chinese, the laborers sang as they worked, of the Auld Wife, Highland Mary, Sweet Fanny Scott—miners' songs . . . "She left her lousy miner, in search of shining gold,"—always of women, the songs were, and of love.

Everyone, thought Sam Phelps, had a woman somewhere, or the dream of one. What he had, he told himself, took the place of that, and maybe it was better. He'd had it for ten years, and it had never run away with another man. It stuck to you. It grew. The longer time elapsed, the more clearly you could see yourself walking into Aunt Sarah's kitchen. . . .

Sam himself had little to do; he watched while the holes were drilled along the ledge; next, while a few of the directors stood around also, he saw how ropes and chairs were rigged, and Chinese laborers swung over the chasm, to begin the actual work of getting around the Cape. If Strawbridge said a word or two to the directors, Arthur Woodford, back now, was everywhere. And Sam heard that Woodford had done good work at headquarters—yes sir, and had a high time with Strawbridge's daughter into the bargain, which was all right, since they were to be married.

"I'll get out of here tonight," Sam decided.

Then, with the other men, he raised his hat. As Mary Ann, alone, walked up to the gathering, she smiled at them all, said a word to her father, and to Sam's complete amazement, walked over to him. "Mr. Phelps," she said, "I wish a fern for our car. My father says you are not busy, so come with me."

"Me?" said Sam Phelps. "Now?"

She said under her breath, "Oh, you big booby!" And seeing that he had heard this, she said aloud: "You must tell me how Uncle Roger was, when last you saw him." And since she started walking away from railhead, Sam Phelps had nothing to do save follow her.

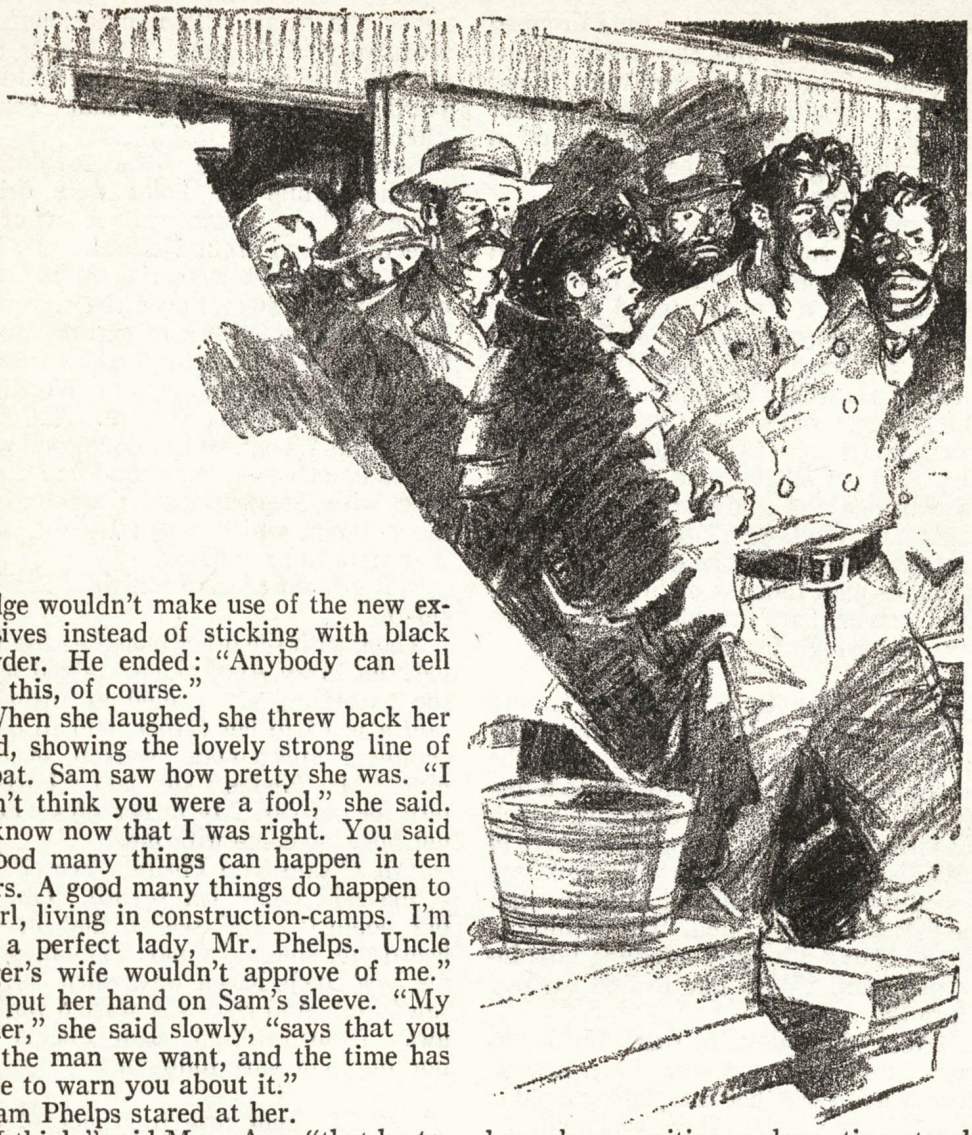
ABOUT them rose fragrance of drying pine needles, the more aromatic intensity of the cones; Sam had never found the air so sweet. When he glanced at the girl, the jet buttons on her dress seemed to send out sparks of fire. They were a distance from camp, up into the long upward curves of the mountain-flanks, before she stopped.

"Don't you ever talk?" she demanded.

"When you've been alone for ten years, you don't talk much."

Mary Ann said: "Sit down. . . . Oh, here beside me. Well, do the men believe that my father"—there was a proudness in the word—"will conquer the Cape?"

"They think he can do anything." Was this why she had come off with him, while everyone had watched? Sam continued speaking, telling her what he had heard. That it was a slow process, and the M. & W. must be gaining many a mile of rails. That it was a shame Mr. Straw-



bridge wouldn't make use of the new explosives instead of sticking with black powder. He ended: "Anybody can tell you this, of course."

When she laughed, she threw back her head, showing the lovely strong line of throat. Sam saw how pretty she was. "I didn't think you were a fool," she said. "I know now that I was right. You said a good many things can happen in ten years. A good many things do happen to a girl, living in construction-camps. I'm not a perfect lady, Mr. Phelps. Uncle Roger's wife wouldn't approve of me." She put her hand on Sam's sleeve. "My father," she said slowly, "says that you are the man we want, and the time has come to warn you about it."

Sam Phelps stared at her.

"I think," said Mary Ann, "that by tomorrow the whole camp is going to know that the M. & W. have been informed of a good many things. Oh, not only what we're doing here. Our plans—our finances, which are none too excellent. Everything. I believe that you will be accused of telling them." She held up her hand. "You are a new man. None of us know where you come from. You are the logical one to accuse, Mr. Phelps. I—I've had a hint of it, or I think I have."

Sam said: "I'd just as soon not be here when the men hear about it. So I'll get out tonight. That will be a good as any confession."

"We don't want you to go. You can stay, safe, in our car. I'm sure we know who has been doing the spying. It will be the man who accuses you."

"I'd rather go," said Sam. He picked up a pine-needle, snapped it in half. "I have been waiting a long time to do something. Nothing must interfere."

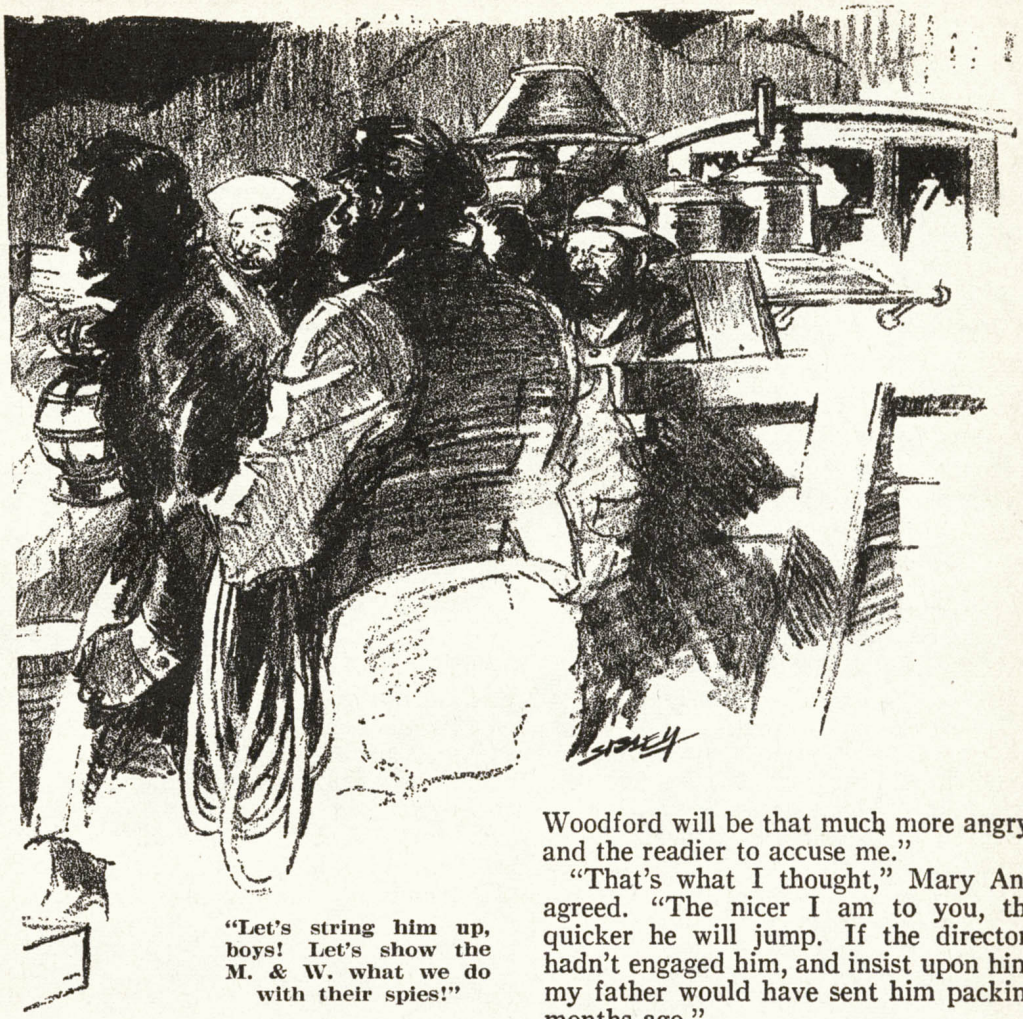
"Afraid?"

Sam said: "Why, no. I don't suppose I am."

The girl leaned back against the rough bark of the tree; and this was unfair, since Sam was forced to look at her. "It's a lot to ask," Mary Ann Strawbridge admitted, her voice low. "Until the truth is learned, the men will hate, despise, you. You'll be given a better job, after. A hundred and fifty dollars a month." Sam said nothing, thinking of his forty thousand. "That doesn't interest you?" She put her hand on Sam's shirt-sleeve. "Do I?" she asked.

"No," Sam said, but very slowly.

"I'm not so positive. It would be easy if I did." Her lips curved distastefully. "I ought to know." Then she faced Phelps, and there was honesty in her



"Let's string him up, boys! Let's show the M. & W. what we do with their spies!"

eyes, and a great intensity. "My father said I should tell you the truth; that he would bank on you. He isn't often fooled. We've got to get a spy out of railhead, and I am trying to help. He didn't want me to. He doesn't now. We've got to find the man; we're sure who it is. Or I am." She went on fiercely: "Do you think I liked running about with Arthur Woodford, with everyone talking? Do you?"

Sam said, "That's who it is?" and thought she nodded. He realized fully how much her father's happiness, success, must mean to this girl, or she would never have walked away with him down at camp, leaving everyone to talk, nor have thrown herself at him now. Well, it was like the way he felt; the only difference was that she loved someone, and he didn't.

"We'd better get that fern," Sam suggested quietly. "Of course I'll do as you want. I'm big enough to take care of myself." He stood up. "Or perhaps it'd be better if we didn't get the fern at all. Woodford will be that much more angry, and the readier to accuse me."

"That's what I thought," Mary Ann agreed. "The nicer I am to you, the quicker he will jump. If the directors hadn't engaged him, and insist upon him, my father would have sent him packing months ago."

Sam found himself saying, "You can be as nice as you wish," and if the girl frowned, when she saw how red Sam's face became, she laughed again. Sam discovered that he also could laugh, as they walked slowly down the slope and back to railhead; and he knew that Woodford had seen them return.

THE new explosive had been tried in the hills, and a vast superiority reported. It fairly ripped rocks asunder, although care was needed in handling it. Despite this, Strawbridge refused to sanction its use along the Cape cut. He intended to do his experimenting elsewhere than a place where men had to be pulled up by ropes. . . . And then, after a full week, the first narrow foothold was gained all the way along the Cape, and work began in earnest on the man-made ledge. A coolie—two, a dozen—fell over the cliff. The cut was widened, and the first shelf made; soon two Chinese were able to work abreast.

On the far side, construction—as much as was possible without heavy equipment, that is—was already stretching out upward again, toward the pass and Nevada.

It was on the evening that Strawbridge announced that the following day rails would be laid around the Cape that Mary Ann said to Sam: "Were we wrong, my father and I? I've done everything to make him jealous. I hope it hasn't been hard on you, Sam. And Arthur has been sweeter and more considerate than ever, although I don't let him get me alone." She flared suddenly: "If the times I let him kiss me were wasted, I'll hate myself forever."

Sam said: "You needn't have let him kiss you."

They were standing where the winking eyes of the fires, scattered about like Indian paintbrush, transmitted red and shifting light to the rails. Sam knew how she felt, how you mustn't allow anything to stop you short of accomplishment. Without warning, unable to help himself, he began to talk. Once started, the words came swift as water down the fall south of Cape Horn; and he again ran from Eastfield, and carried his dipper and bucket, drove oxen, crossed the plains, mined in a dozen ways for gold. All for the same purpose.

"I can go home now," Sam ended.

The girl stepped away from him. "How can you hate so terribly, so long?" Mary Ann asked. "There are so many other things." Shrewdly, without pleasure, she said: "And one of the things you'll say, in Eastfield, is that a Strawbridge girl threw herself at your head!" She stepped close again, and raised her face. "Tell them anything you want. Do what you like. Only, stay in camp until this is settled."

Sam's face burned; he remembered that he'd considered taking this girl back to Eastfield, before he'd known who she was, and that he wished he could take her back, in different manner, after he knew. She waited, a full minute, as they faced each other; but she was gone before Sam knew he might have kissed her.

THERE was no reason for remaining in camp, despite her request; Sam realized this as he lay on his cot. The riding-boss whose tent Phelps shared was asleep. It was a night for sleep, quiet, rather close, with Hell-on-Wheels silent, since Strawbridge had given the order that work was to start, rail-laying around the Cape, at daylight. Sam could hear the singing of the pines, the hissing and foaming of the waterfall.

No reason. Cape Horn had been rounded. In the morning, good fifty-six chair-joint rails would be laid, and not the unevenly tempered French steel which someone had suggested to the directors, only to have them break with hand-curving. The M. & W., according to camp gossip, had tried such steel and found it useless, and laughed at the predicament in which the Sierra Pacific found itself because of it. And gained fifty miles of track by reason of it! Which of the engineers had made the recommendation wasn't known, although there had been an argument about that, in which Woodford and the man who'd actually put the suggestion in writing were both involved. "Liar!" had passed between the two men.

Sam was unable to convince himself that the girl hadn't complicated things for him, although she had told him from the start that this was all play-acting; yes, he had stayed on because of her. It was ridiculous to let a few weeks with a girl balance the intention of ten years. He'd get out in the morning. Nothing had happened to indicate the spy; and nothing, now, would. He'd go down to San Francisco, and while waiting for passage east, forget her. His last waking thought was: "What does she really think of me?"

SOMEONE was yelling: *"It's struck us!"* Sam, struggling from his cot and running to the tent-opening, fell against his tent companion. The sky was dark, but not with storm; it had not been thunder which awakened railhead, but an explosion. Sam saw that there was no flaming at the supply-sheds; black powder hadn't gone up. The stars were white and hot, with dust, and streamers of pale smoke feathering across them; Cape Horn, black as ink, was again as smooth as before the cut had been made, although the angle of it, at the river-base, appeared less sharp. Where water had flowed deeply, blackly, it was now broken by moonlight spray, as if obstructed. The cut itself was not to be seen.

Sam pulled on pants and shirt; then, running, he joined the crowd at railhead. Workmen milled about; lanterns appeared. Over in the camp of the Chinese, shrill voices told the story, and if powder was involved, so were mountain demons. Hell-on-Wheels sprang to life; its inhabitants began hurrying across the tracks.

The full force of what had happened struck Sam Phelps with the force of a

sledge, although he didn't know how it had been done; then one of the engineers, running along past him, yelled something about the new explosive, and that nothing but it could have made such great havoc. "That's it," a drilling-boss shouted. "The stuff must have been placed in the holes along the upper ledge. The whole side of the Cape's been blown off."

Beside Strawbridge, Sam saw the girl, white oval of face above dark cloak. His movement toward her was done without thinking. Strawbridge said levelly: "You will observe, gentlemen, why I refused to employ dynamite until we knew how to handle it. However, although the cut is filled with debris, a week, at most, will clear it. I see nothing which can be done tonight."

"There's plenty to be done tonight," Sam heard next. The lantern thrust in his face was held by Arthur Woodford. "Here's your spy, boys! Here's the man who boasted he was a good man with powder." Someone had a hand on Sam's shoulder; someone else had his arms. Light was in Sam's eyes; he was unable to see anything except Woodford's face, and under lantern-light, it had a yellow hue. "Here's your man!" Arthur Woodford repeated, cutting through Strawbridge's protest that a good many men about railhead knew how to handle powder. "And I'll prove it to you. Why, he's got forty thousand dollars salted away in a 'Frisco bank, and who'd keep on working for wages when he's got a fortune like that? You know how he got it! Spying for the Midland! Blowing up our cut around the Cape. Let's string him up, boys! Let's show the M. & W. what we do with their spies!"

Sam's first words, "I was in my tent—" were slapped back down his throat; he had no chance to say anything more, nor to explain, nor ask for time to prove the truth of what he wasn't able to say anyhow. Spy! No matter what he did, fists beat at him, and the shrill curses of Hell-on-Wheels' women were in his ears, just as the taste of blood was in his mouth. He didn't try to speak again. What was the use? If only they'd give him time, to bring up miners, or the bankers at San Francisco! But Judge Lynch took no cognizance of evidence.

ONLY Strawbridge's voice could have halted the men. "If you refuse to listen to me," he was saying, "I'll clear railhead of every man in it, or you can stay here and there'll be no further pay. This must stop."

"You just don't want a hanging," a skinner yelled. "You're as mad as we are. We'll fix him. You can say we wouldn't stop, and we won't. And you won't fire a man of us!" Suppose, he added, that the charges had gone off while men were working?

A roar went up; Sam was pushed along toward the pines beyond the track, and a rope appeared. What stopped progress was the girl; and to push Sam farther, it would be necessary to lift her aside. Sam saw her indistinctly. One eye was shut. He blinked to get dripping blood from the other.

"YOU'LL all listen to me," Mary Ann said. "Then do whatever you wish. Right now, what proof have we about this story of forty thousand dollars?"

Woodford called: "I've a letter stating the fact. From the bank. Come look, boys. I was suspicious of this fellow, and I made inquiry. I—"

"What he has, or what he hasn't, doesn't matter," the girl snapped. "What I'm going to tell you is more important. Listen! All of you've heard about the high old time Mr. Woodford had with me in Sacramento. —Don't snicker, Tom McLean! Well, when does a man do his boasting? You, George—you, Henry O'Hara: when's it done? Oh, you needn't all look so innocent! If you won't tell, the ladies from Hell-on-Wheels'll tell for you! A man does his boasting when—oh, you all know! And that's when Mr. Woodford boasted to me! We'd had wine. He forgot who I was, perhaps. He said: 'In a few months I can retire, or go with the Midland as a high-paid man, or— Oh, boys, d'you think I'd admit such a thing if it weren't true? But you mustn't hang an innocent man."

Arthur Woodford started to speak; a rail-handler said: "Shut your mouth." It was quiet, wordless, until Mr. Strawbridge said slowly: "Both men shall be held until the truth is ascertained. I'll be responsible for them. Gentlemen, there'll be much to do in the morning. Good night."

It was no longer a night for sleep; Hell-on-Wheels, now, was wide open, and the bellow of singing lifted to railhead, and to the superintendent's car behind the diamond-stack engine. Strawbridge said: "Little work we'll get from the white men tomorrow. That cannot be helped." Directly, to Sam Phelps: "None of this

could have been helped. We'll send you down in the morning. Naturally, we cannot properly recompense you for what you've been through, my boy. And I don't believe the cock-and-bull tale about your money."

One of Sam's eyes was shut, and the other was closing. He thought: "If Uncle Andrew, Aunt Sarah, could see me, this moment, they'd be pleased." Then, surprisingly, he found that he no longer cared what they thought about him. It was much as if his failing vision made him see more clearly. He moved his head so that he could look at the girl.

"You're a wonderful liar," said Sam Phelps.

As it had been, one moment outside, it was silent here. Then Mr. Strawbridge said gently, "Isn't she?" and Mary Ann's face began to warm. "Nothing else," he went on, "would have stopped them, Sam. Nothing."

"I've got the forty thousand," Sam said. "California gold. Funny, isn't it, that it should be true?" That wasn't the only funny thing. He was utterly unable to focus his thoughts on Eastfield any more, and for ten years this had motivated his every action. Hate wasn't as strong as he'd supposed. Then he said: "Mr. Strawbridge, I'm not much good, but I'd like to stay here. I thought that railhead was the last place on the line. It isn't. It's the place you go on from."

"We'll clear the cut in a week. Or someone will. The directors are after haste, and this delay will enrage them."

SAM'S other eye was definitely shutting; and he actually did see more clearly. He hadn't done any thinking, really, since he'd come to the construction-camp; possibly he hadn't done any for ten years. "A week?" he said. "You know, sir, I'm a miner. I've seen more dirt moved in a day. You see, sir—"

Why, if he hadn't been blinded by Eastfield, he'd have known what he was saying now an hour ago. He'd go down to Clipper Gap, or Goodyear's Bar, where the boys were beating down the hillsides with water from their Little Giants, and borrow one. A flume could easily be laid from the waterfall down to the filled cut of the Cape, and the force of the water from the Little Giant's nozzle, fluid steel from the drop and compression, would shear away the broken rock and débris as if it were dust. It wouldn't occur to railway engineers that hydraulic force could be employed; but then, they weren't miners, and such a thing had never been done in the construction of any railroad.

The Little Giant's stream, Sam insisted, would slash out the cut and leave it clean. Rock would pound down the slope to darken the river. A few hours later the rail-handlers would be yelling at the Chinese number-one men for more steel, and the tea-boys would rush around with their buckets of scalding tea for the Asiatics, and the sun would flash on the rails, on the glistening bare backs of the sledgemen and rail-curvers.

Sam Phelps spoke earnestly as he explained; and if the girl and her father listened closely, Sam himself was hearing the clangor of sledge on spike, simulating, prophesying, the crisp clacking of wheels which would take cars around the Horn and advance railhead eastward.

WHEN he stopped, not only Eastfield had vanished, but, surprisingly, he had no thought of Woodford, although the man had attempted Sam's death. That wasn't important either; he certainly wouldn't keep it in mind ten seconds, let alone ten years. "Railhead," said Sam, because neither Strawbridge nor Mary Ann spoke. "Yes, that's the place you go on from. It's taken me a long time to find that out."

He looked up; he could see nothing. Someone moved; there was the scratch of a match, and the odor of tobacco. This faded away, as if the smoker had left the car. Then Sam heard: "Is that all you've found out, Sam Phelps?"

Sam said: "No one else would've done what you did, for me."

"Oh, Sam, Sam, if you hadn't said that I was a liar, I should have died." Something cold touched Phelps' cheek, to turn it hot; the girl's lips, remaining there, warmed also. "I told you I was brazen. I warned you, Sam." Then, so faintly that Phelps could barely hear: "I'm glad you can't see me. I'd die if you were looking at me. I ought to be ashamed, but I'm not. I'm not."

Sam Phelps held her tightly. A Chinese was singing—to bring sleep again to his fellow-coolies—of dancing-maids, slim-waisted; and of bowls of yellow wine; and of red flamingoes flying; the thin high sound was smothered as a chorus started down at Hell-on-Wheels. If women and gold were in the stalwart miners' song, so were sweat, longing, labor. Sam's arm tightened. Although he couldn't see, tonight, he knew that the girl's eyes, also, must be closed.

The Black Tom Case

The story of this famous case is specially interesting because of Blue Book's connection with it as the vehicle for the saboteur's secret message—chosen, we have always supposed, because of the somewhat anti-German attitude of Clarence Herbert New's "Free Lances in Diplomacy." . . . Let us hope that no development of the present war gives this article added timeliness. It is from Harper's Magazine for December, 1939, and is reprinted by permission of Harper and Brothers.

By HARLAND MANCHESTER

AT exactly eight minutes after two on the damp, cloudy Sunday morning of July 30, 1916, over a million dollars' worth of window-glass in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Jersey City burst into pieces and landed on the pavement—and no one heard it. The sound was smothered by a blast of gargantuan dimensions. It shook western Long Island, northern New Jersey, and even Philadelphia. Every building in New York shuddered on its foundations. Thousands of beds leaped in the air and discharged their occupants. People on the streets were pitched about by a palpable unseen force. As they lay there, knocked out of their wits, there was a second of absolute silence.

After the strange lull bedlam broke loose. There were more crashes of debris and a roar of distant cannonading. Policemen, faced with the incomprehensible, blew their whistles. Hysterical women ran shrieking through Times Square. Tenement dwellers clasped their children and thronged the streets. Fire alarms were turned in all over the five boroughs, for everyone thought the explosion had taken place in his own block. The wailing apparatus, back from futile errands, added to the jam. Uptown New Yorkers jumped in cars and taxicabs and streaked south, pursuing a fierce red glare in the sky. Baffled before they reached Fourteenth Street, they all tried to come back at once. A man came out of the subway on 34th Street and ran aimlessly toward the Hudson River. Soon he was leading a stampede.

Seventeen minutes after the first explosion, another great blast shook the terrified city. Street signs and window-glass rained upon the crowds, and ambulance crews began picking up the wounded.

There was no radio to tell people what had happened, and there were many theories, including an explosion of a Standard Oil plant, a foreign invasion, and Armageddon. But down in the harbor, where barge families and island dwellers were ducking the steady hail of shrapnel fire, the cause was clear enough. Black Tom had exploded. Black Tom Island—really a promontory—is a narrow strip of land half a mile long which juts out from the Jersey shore about opposite the Statue of Liberty. It serves as shipping terminal for the Lehigh Valley Railroad. The tracks ran over a causeway to seven large brick warehouses and four covered piers. Great quantities of ammunition destined for the Allied powers came through Black Tom. It was usually taken in lighters to Gravesend Bay, where it was loaded on transatlantic freighters; but there were times when many carloads and barges of explosives remained at Black Tom overnight, contrary to a Jersey City ordinance. On that week-end, it is estimated that Black Tom housed one thousand tons of munitions, including great quantities of dynamite, T.N.T., nitro-cellulose, and shrapnel shells, as well as large stores of picric acid and gasoline.

FOR several hours the shell-fire continued, punctuated by an occasional deafening blast as the ravenous fire went through the lines of freight cars and found new pabulum. Manhattan crowds jammed the Battery and watched the parabolic streaks of the three-inch projectiles. Bolts were blown from the Statue of Liberty and the buildings of Ellis Island were devastated, as officials hurriedly evacuated six hundred panic-stricken immigrants. Tugboat captains did heroic things. Soon after the first blast one harbor skipper fixed hawsers to two floating arsenals and, with red-hot cartridge cases pelting his deck, towed them into the current. One blew

up and vanished completely; the other drifted about for hours, keeping up a desultory bombardment.

When the menace finally subsided and the authorities of two States counted the loss, six deaths were reported. Among the victims was a two-months-old baby of Jersey City who was tossed from his crib and killed by the shock. Scores were put down as missing and hundreds were injured. Not one brick of the Black Tom warehouses was left upon another. The total property damage, including broken glass and lost barges, was set at twenty million dollars.

Before the last shell spent its aimless force detectives set to work to learn the cause of the disaster. Two days later, one Dominick Lannie, a truckman who had been cut by falling glass, became the pioneer Black Tom litigant when he brought suit against the Lehigh. The investigations and lawsuits were to continue for twenty-three years, pyramiding dizzily to a library of court records and a jack-straw heap of fiscal complexity. The secret services of six countries have been involved, and the world's leading handwriting experts and secret-code virtuosos have been employed. Lawyers and detectives, scouring the world for evidence, have made a career of the case and several have grown old and died working on it. The procession of choice scoundrels, dashing dare-devils, and bulldog sleuths which marches through the case out-points an Oppenheim thriller, and it is doubtful if a score of Hollywood films could use up its plot material.

LAST June the Black Tom case, and the case of the Kingsland, N. J., munitions plant fire, with which it is legally bracketed, were brought to their final official solution. Associate Justice Roberts of the United States Supreme Court, in his capacity as umpire of the German-American Mixed Claims Commission, heard new evidence and reversed a previous hearing in favor of Germany, thereby agreeing in effect with the American claimants that the Black Tom and Kingsland disasters were the work of Germany's secret agents, directed by responsible officials of the German government. As a result of the decision, damage awards totaling about fifty-five million dollars covered by German funds and securities held in the United States Treasury awaiting the decision, are to be distributed to the Lehigh Valley Railroad, Agency of Canadian Car and Foundry Company, Ltd. (owner of the Kingsland plant), and other claimants. . . .

While New York and Jersey City bound their wounds and swept up the debris, investigators gingerly probed the smoking ruins and questioned scores of witnesses. Stories differed, but it was finally concluded that the fire started in two places at about 12:30. First a small blaze was seen coming from inside a munitions car. No alarm was turned in for twenty minutes, a delay which was never satisfactorily explained. Soon another small fire was seen on the deck of a barge tied to one of the piers. When firemen came and turned their hose on the barge they were amazed at the persistence of so small a fire, and said later that water seemed to feed it. Both fires spread rapidly, and the firemen were driven back by the heat. When the first blast came many of them were thrown high in the air and literally blown out of their clothes, but no fireman was killed.

At four o'clock that morning a pale, jittery young Slovakian named Michael Kristoff walked down East 25th Street, Bayonne, in the area swept by the disaster. He turned in at Number 76 and pounded on the door. His cousin, Mrs. Anna Rushnak, finally let him in. He pushed her aside and rushed upstairs to his room, moaning, "What I do? What I do?" Mrs. Rushnak talked with the family and they went to the police. Michael didn't seem right in the head, they said, and he went round with drawings of bridges and factories. A man had been paying him twenty dollars a week just to carry a suitcase full of drawings. Michael would go away, and wherever he went there was an explosion. The night before Black Tom blew up Michael went out. He said he was going to the Eagle Iron Works to collect some back pay, and they thought it was funny that he should get his pay in the middle of the night. At first they didn't know where the Eagle place was. Now they knew it was just back of Black Tom, so they came to the police.

The police found Kristoff and gave him the works without much success. He said he had been in Yonkers that night. Yes, he had carried a suitcase for a man who traveled a great deal. There were maps and charts in the bag, but he didn't know what for. He thought maybe the man showed people how to build bridges. The man offered him $5,000 "to do something," but Kristoff wouldn't say what. He had met the man

in Pennsylvania Station the previous January, and they had gone to Philadelphia, Cleveland, Bridgeport, and other places. They came back and the man told him to meet him in the lobby of the McAlpin; but he wasn't there, and Kristoff never saw him again. The man's name? Grandson, Graentnor—something like that.

Later a cousin of Kristoff's swore that she had seen an unmailed letter in his room addressed to this Graentnor, demanding money. Still that wasn't enough to hold Kristoff, and the police let him go. They put a man on his trail who posed as an anarchist and worked with him for months in a chocolate factory. The detective reported that Kristoff admitted helping to blow up Black Tom, but he did not lead him to his mysterious employer, and after a time he disappeared. The identity of "Graentnor" became a crucial factor in the case, and dovetailed neatly into investigations of the Black Tom disaster's legal twin—the Kingsland fire.

IT was on the following January 11th that the Kingsland plant soared skyward. This factory, composed of thirty-eight low frame buildings, lay in the Jersey meadows seven miles west of the Hudson. The operators, Agency of Canadian Car and Foundry Company, Ltd., a New York corporation, were just completing a bothersome order of $83,000,000 worth of three-inch shells for the Russian Government, and the afternoon shift was working full blast. In Building 30 a dozen men were cleaning brass shell cases with denatured alcohol. One of the alcohol pans burst into flames, and the workmen fled, fire biting at their heels. In no time at all the flames jumped to eight carloads of T.N.T. on the siding, over the tracks to a warehouse packed with 55,000 shells, and then to a trainload of ammunition on the Lackawanna tracks. The fusillade lasted four hours and consumed 500,000 artillery shells. Amazingly, no one was killed. The shells had not been equipped with detonating fuses, and they plowed into the ground without exploding. Jerseyites made a gala day of it, gathering by thousands in a safe, remote circle and savoring the thrill of big-gun fire without its danger. The loss was estimated at $17,000,000.

There were four investigations, by Agency of Canadian Car, Ltd., the State of New Jersey, and the United States and Russian governments. First it was believed that a spark from a faulty machine had ignited the alcohol. But when the very next day the earth trembled again as two hundred tons of smokeless powder blew up at the Du Pont works at Haskell, New Jersey, it was suspected that both jobs were done by a group of saboteurs.

No outsider had set off the Kingsland blast. That was clear from the start. The works were surrounded with a stout iron fence topped with barbed wire and patrolled by two hundred armed guards, and everyone who entered was searched and identified. The fire started at the bench of Theodore Wozniak, a young Austrian Galician with a flowing mustache. A foreman said that Wozniak had had a large heap of rags at his bench and that just before the fire started he had spilled his pan of alcohol over them. When Wozniak was questioned his manner aroused suspicion. Detectives shadowed him but he disappeared. . . .

Two months after Kingsland burned, detectives stumbled upon an amazing coincidence. The Black Tom terminal had been rebuilt, and a man named Fritz Kolb was convicted of trying to blow it up again. In making the rounds of Kolb's acquaintances, police searched the Hoboken rooms of one Charles E. Thorne. They found letters and clippings implicating him in the Kingsland fire, and connecting Thorne with the German secret service. They next found that Thorne, friend of a convicted saboteur and apparently a German agent, had at the time of the fire been assistant employment agent at the Kingsland plant!

Thorne vanished as completely as Wozniak had done, and word went out that he was dead. But he was not forgotten, and sixteen years later sleuths ran him down in New York. He admitted that his real name was Curt Thummel, and stated that he had obtained the Kingsland job in pursuance of his duties as a German agent. He had used his position to find jobs for men sent to him by his employer. And the name of his employer, he testified, was Captain Frederick Hinsch, commander of the German ship *Neckar,* interned at Baltimore.

Captain Hinsch became a cornerstone of the American case, for before they could collect damages from Germany the claimants had to prove not only that Kristoff and Wozniak helped to bring about the disasters, but that their acts

were directed by responsible officials of the German government. If the actual saboteurs were not linked to their superiors it was not enough even to prove that they were German agents; for they might have been zealously exceeding their instructions. And Hinsch was a man of consequence. He was well known on the Eastern seaboard, particularly in connection with the German submarine trader *Deutschland* and her blockade-running trips to Baltimore.

THESE ramifications of the German sabotage network had not been traced when the German-American Mixed Claims Commission was set up in 1922 to settle suits arising from the War. Lehigh, Canadian Car, Bethlehem Steel, and a number of insurance firms had paid out millions in damages, and now they sought reimbursement through the Commission to the amount of about $50,000,000. They began to spend a proportionate amounts on lawyers and sleuths, and some of the best men in the field set out on the Black Tom trail, then cold for five years.

From the start they had plenty of general proof of sabotage during America's neutrality period. The solid foundation of the charge was an official cable from the Acting General Staff in Berlin to the German Embassy in Washington, giving instructions for the wrecking campaign. It was dated January 26, 1915, and signed by Captain Nadolny, an important official of "Section III B"—the German Secret Service. The cable named three anti-British Irish-Americans recommended by Sir Roger Casement,—the Irish spy later hanged in London,—who would indicate "persons suitable for sabotage in the United States and Canada," and stated plainly: "In the United States sabotage can be carried out in every kind of factory for supplying munitions of war." This was one of the many official messages which were intercepted and decoded by British agents.

Confronted by this evidence, German attorneys dismissed it as "the blunder of a subordinate," but later Judge Kiesselbach, German member of the Commission, admitted that the cable "was instigated by the Acting General Staff and approved of by the Foreign Office." The Germans insisted, however, that its instructions were intended for use only if the United States joined the Allies, and that, in any event, they had not been carried out.

Thus in the early twenties the Black Tom case resembled a ladder, with many rungs missing in the middle. At the top of the ladder was the sabotage cable—the German government's official order to blow up American munition plants. At the bottom of the ladder were the vague Kristoff and the slightly daffy Wozniak. In the years to come the great corps of investigators and experts worked to fill in the missing rungs.

Certain rungs fell quickly into place near the top of the ladder. The handsome young Captain Franz von Papen, military attaché in Washington when the cable was received, swore later that he had disregarded it; but when he was ejected late in 1915 and went home to be decorated and promoted, the British seized his records and found proof of his sabotage work. The dashing Von Rintelen, who sipped oolong with Newport's best, carried on after Von Papen's departure until the country became too hot for him. Later he was brought back and sentenced to a term in Atlanta. In his book published in London last year he told of his work putting incendiary devices in the holds of freighters bound for Allied countries, and the man who made his fire bombs has estimated that they destroyed $10,000,000 worth of goods on 36 different ships. Later, when the entire staff of the German Consulate in San Francisco was tried and convicted of a wrecking plot, more sabotage activities in the neutral years were revealed. The day after the Black Tom blast the New York Times reported that since 1914, 99 chemical and explosive plants had blown up, with 120 deaths. After the United States entered the War, and most of the German agents fled to Mexico rather than risk the death-penalty, the accident rate fell off sharply.

The investigators checked the wartime activities of prominent German-Americans, with particular attention to officials of the North German Lloyd. In 1925 this work received a sudden impetus when Amos J. Peaslee, of the Lehigh counsel, was given access to copies of hundreds of German wireless messages which the British Naval Intelligence Service had intercepted and decoded during the war. Confident that their codes were unbreakable, German officials had been amazingly verbose and explicit. From these messages, which had been stored in the cellar of Sir Reginald Hall, Britain's chief decoder, Peaslee obtained the names of Paul Hilken, Fred Herr-

mann, Captain Hinsch, Dr. Anton Dilger, and Raoul Gerdts, all mentioned in connection with sabotage work.

In one of these men, Paul Hilken, the Americans were to find an able ally. He was the son of Henry Hilken, a prosperous and respected naturalized American who represented the North German Lloyd in Baltimore. Paul, a graduate of Lehigh and M.I.T., was high in the favor of the shipping firm, and was groomed for the lucrative post of general American agent for the line. He never got the job. Because of this disappointment and a decreasing attachment to the Fatherland, he readily testified concerning his sabotage work.

Fred Herrmann, a youth of the daredevil type who was born in Brooklyn and worked in England as a German agent in 1916, was next on the list. They found him in Chile, where he was working in a bank. Hilken was sent to persuade him to return to the United States and testify. At first he refused. Later he returned to the United States, testified before the Commission at Washington, and became an important witness for the Americans.

He told of a conference in Berlin a few months before Black Tom went up, when with Dilger and Hilken, he received instructions from Captains Nadolny, and Marguerre of Section III B. Credits were established for Hilken, who was designated as paymaster for the gang. Herrmann was given a supply of the newly contrived "fire pencils." These looked like ordinary lead pencils, but they contained a slender glass tube with two compartments, each filled with a chemical. If the pencil was broken and the two chemicals united, a small, persistent blaze resulted. These were to be used in destroying American munition plants, Nadolny explained.

The three men returned to America. Herrmann went with Dilger to his Washington workshop—"Tony's Lab," the German agents called it. There they filled the pencils, and Dilger looked after his tubes of anthrax and glanders cultures. For Dr. Dilger directed a crew of men who inoculated with these deadly diseases horses and mules being shipped to the Allies, a type of sabotage which was also carried on by Germany in Rumania and Argentina. Then, according to Herrmann's testimony, he went to Baltimore, where he conferred with Hilken and Captain Hinsch. He gave Hinsch some fire pencils, and they made lists of factories and warehouses to be destroyed. Hinsch was to take care of Black Tom, he said, and he was to see to Kingsland. In New York Hinsch introduced him to Wozniak, the Kingsland plant worker, and when Herrmann said he distrusted Wozniak, Hinsch sent for Rodriguez, one of his own men, and Wozniak promised to get him a job at Kingsland, where "he had a pull with the employment agent." Herrmann said that after the fire he paid Rodriguez $500 and got rid of him. There is also evidence that Herrmann sometimes went by the name of Rodriguez.

As for Black Tom, Paul Hilken testified that at a dinner in New York soon after the explosion he had paid Hinsch $2,000 for arranging the job. To cap the story, Herrmann said that Hinsch sometimes went by the name of Graentnor.

At The Hague hearing (1930), Germany assailed Herrmann's credibility. He had testified for both sides, they said, and could not be believed. They brought Captain Marguerre to the stand, and he stated that he had told Herrmann not to commit sabotage unless the United States entered the War. Hinsch admitted that he had conducted sabotage work under Von Rintelen, but denied all connection with Black Tom or Kingsland. And Hilken's story of his payment to Hinsch was raked by legal fire.

The three-man commission, headed by the late Roland Boyden of Boston, dismissed the American claims as unproven.

"In the Kingsland case," the commission ruled, "we find upon the evidence that the fire was not caused by any German agent. In the Black Tom case we are not convinced that the fire was not attributable to Hinsch and Kristoff, although we are convinced that it was not attributable to Witzke or Jahnke. But we are a long way from being convinced that the fire was caused by any German agent."

As for the mysterious Mr. Graentnor who hired Kristoff, there was no assurance, said the Commission, that he was not Hinsch, and they indicated pretty clearly that Hinsch's denials sounded fishy. But the case was not proved.

LED by five tenacious and resourceful men, the American forces redoubled their efforts. The late Robert Bonynge and his counsel, H. H. Martin, represented the government; acting for the claimants were Amos J. Peaslee, Leonard A. Peto of Canadian Car, and John J. McCloy, painless extractor of information from reluctant witnesses.

They were rewarded with several sensational discoveries. Wozniak came out of hiding after thirteen years, and when Peto questioned him at the Hotel Roosevelt—with two stenographers hidden behind a door—he admitted setting the Kingsland fire and associating with German spies. Thorne returned from the "grave" and said that he had gone to work at Kingsland at Hinsch's direction. It was suggested that the Austrian war archives might contain significant material, and it was decided to use a bona fide historian to conduct the search. A contract was actually made between a London publishing house and Dr. Otto Ernst of Hungary, who had access to the files. Dr. Ernst, unaware of the real purpose of his work, was led by suggestion to look for documents about sabotage in the United States. He found several, one a communiqué telling of the Kingsland and Du Pont fires, which concluded: "Still further 'surprises' are said to be impending." Before Ernst had finished his work, this item was filed before the Commission, and the cat was out of the bag. Von Papen, then Ambassador to Austria, barred Ernst from further work.

Paul Hilken, urged to look for more proofs, found the check-book with the stub showing his payment to Hinsch for firing Black Tom, and Hilken's wife found a note of the New York dinner with Hinsch in her husband's diary for 1916.

BUT the most dramatic discovery was a copy of an old magazine [the Blue Book], on which had been written invisibly the famous "Herrmann message," over which the world's star handwriting and paper experts were to wrangle for years. Hilken found it in his attic. He stated that the message was written by Herrmann in Mexico City shortly after America entered the War, and brought to him in Baltimore by Raoul Gerdts, Herrmann's chauffeur and confidential errand-boy. It was an appeal to the paymaster for money. Many spies had fled to Mexico City and they had all gone to Von Eckhardt, the German Ambassador, with tales of their valiant deeds and pleas for support. Eckhardt had not heard of Herrmann and withheld funds pending word from Berlin. Von Eckhardt's query to Nadolny describing Herrmann, and the answer, giving Herrmann Germany's official O.K., were found among the messages intercepted by the British.

The Herrmann message was written in lemon juice across the pages of a copy of the *Blue Book* dated January, 1917. When pressed with a hot iron the pages revealed a skeletonized message interspersed with numbers of four digits each. It was found that by dropping the first digit and reversing the remainder, a page number of the magazine was given, and on this page a name had been spelled out by pinpricks beneath letters. Thus decoded, the message explained Herrmann's plight. He said that Eckhardt was suspicious of him, even though he had told him of his connection with Hinsch, Black Tom, Kingsland, and "Tony's Lab." He said that he did not trust Kristoff to remain silent, and asked "Has Hinsch seen Wozniak? Tell him to fix that up." The sum Herrmann asked for was $25,000, for he needed funds for a job he planned—the firing of the Tampico oil-fields. This ambition of Herrmann's was also mentioned in the official German message decoded by British agents.

IT was quickly realized that if the authenticity of this message could be established the case was proved. The evidence mounted impressively. It was shown beyond doubt that Herrmann had sent Gerdts to Hilken at that date with a request for funds. No one denied that the *Blue Book* message was in Herrmann's handwriting. Herrmann said he wrote it, and a man named Adam Siegel, located in Estonia, said he helped Herrmann write it, although later he told the German representatives he wasn't sure whether a magazine or a bound book was used. Gerdts said he delivered it; a man in New York named Von Emmerik said that he saw it before it was delivered; Hilken said he received it, and Mrs. Hilken said she remembered Gerdts' visit because he messed up the house with his cigarettes.

German lawyers were not idle. They hired batteries of experts, who examined the document and stated that the writing had not been done in 1917, but years later. American lawyers hired their own experts, and thousands of dollars were spent making pinpricks with sewing machines on old and new paper to compare with those in the disputed magazine. A free-for-all resulted, with involved accusations and counter-accusations of slipshod work and unprofessional conduct. Skinner and Sherman, Boston chemical engineers retained by the Ger-

mans, showed places in the margins of the pages where the pen had dug through, and interpreted this to mean that the writing was done after the magazine was old and brittle around the edges. Mr. Skinner recently assured me that he hasn't changed his mind.

Some damaging letters said to have been written by Wozniak were coupled with the Herrmann message. These were also meat for the experts, and the defense pointed to a missing lion's toe in the watermark of a Warsaw paper-maker as proof of their fraudulence. Both sides came to doubt them.

SUDDENLY there was a surprise attack from the German camp. It was observed that beside the title in the table of contents of the disputed magazine there were check marks, which were described as "plus" and "minus" marks. In looking through second-hand bookshops for old copies of *Blue Book* to compare with the Herrmann magazine, they had found, in Abraham's Bookshop on Fourth Avenue, New York, magazines of about the same date which had similar marks on the contents page. They found that in 1930, Horace and John Qualters, brothers who lived in Brooklyn, had sold an accumulation of old *Blue Books* to Abraham's, and that they had been in the habit of checking the stories they had read, Horace with a horizontal mark, and John with a vertical mark which made the "minus" into a "plus." The inference was that the Herrmann magazine had been purchased at Abraham's after 1930, and that Herrmann had faked the message. American experts countered by showing that the vertical marks in the magazine had been made before, not after, the horizontal marks, and for the moment it looked as though the fate of a fortune might hang on the Qualters' reading habits. Then John looked at the Herrmann magazine and said that the marks were not his, and the American lawyers countered the charge of fraud with the suggestion that "someone had been doing some marking." They suggested that an interested person had entered Abraham's Bookshop and without the knowledge of the proprietor had marked up the magazines to conform with marks he had seen in the Herrmann *Blue Book*. Last summer I went to the bookshop, where old *Blue Books* are still sold, and found that it could easily be done. In the end the Qualters theory was discredited, and despite all attacks, the Herrmann message remained important evidence.

It was chiefly due to indications of fraud and collusion on the part of the German defense that the long case was reopened three years ago. The case had outlived three umpires: Day, Parker, and Boyden, and now Justice Roberts sat in the middle. At the final hearing, which began last January, the American claimants presented a devastating and irrefutable exhibit. Carl Ahrendt, Cleveland manager of North German Lloyd, who in 1917 had worked for Hilken's Eastern Forwarding Company, which procured cargoes for the *Deutschland*, had sworn repeatedly before the Commission that he knew nothing of sabotage activities. Now another Baltimore attic yielded a wartime document—a letter from the files of the company. Germany's lawyers had searched these files, but hadn't noticed it. It was a letter from Ahrendt to Hilken, written a few days after the Kingsland and Haskell fires. It bore the following postscript in Ahrendt's handwriting:

"Yours of the 18th just received and am delighted to learn that the von Hindenburg of Roland Park has won another victory. Had a note from March who is still at the McAlpin asks me to advise his brother that he is in urgent need of another set of *glasses*. He would like to see his brother as soon as possible on this account. A."

Hilken lived in Roland Park, Baltimore. "Another victory" might refer to Kingsland, in relation to the Black Tom triumph, or to the Haskell blast, which took place the day after Kingsland. "March" was one of Herrmann's aliases, and the McAlpin was the crowd's rendezvous. "Glasses," significantly underlined in the postscript, was the word used for the incendiary pencils. The "brother" was obviously Herrmann's partner Hinsch, and it is assumed that Herrmann needed new glasses because his stock had been exhausted.

THAT postscript clinched the case. At a crucial point in the hearing the German Commissioner was called home. Umpire Roberts, ruling that the Commission was still competent, found Germany guilty of the two great disasters.

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They LIVED

The Story Thus Far:

"THE African hordes move up the Rhone to bring us fire and sword," lamented the village mayor. "Why is this?"

The exiled Roman Mancinus shrugged. "Why, you ask, this unwanted war? 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 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.

"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 way in—and 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.

By GORDON KEYNE

by the SWORD

Wounded and worn-out, Ramnes 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 also named Mancinus. More, this Mancinus was an evil fellow who possessed the infamous Dagger of Eryx, a weapon poisoned by some subtle drug so that even the smallest wound from it deprived the victim of all will-power. And Mancinus sought to win the Lady Drusilla and join her estates to his.

As captain of slingers, Pelargos bore an important part in Hannibal's great victory at Trebia. Afterward Ramnes and Pelargos and the elephant-trainer Lars Masena (who sought a boyhood sweetheart) obtained leave and rode south for the Villa Veturis to find the Lady Drusilla and the treasure. Aided by the fact that Lars Masena was a member of the Friends of Hercules, a provincial secret society opposed to the domination of Rome, the three won their way. And with the Lady Drusilla, Ramnes and Pelargos found the grotto of the treasure—even found the treasure itself: ancient armor and arms, ancient treasure, the sacred Books of the Cumæan Sibyl; a great treasure, of which they could bear away only a small part. But later evil befell; for in the absence of Ramnes and Pelargos, Mancinus and a squad of Roman bravos descended upon the Villa Veturis, killed part of its defenders and made the Lady Drusilla captive. Ramnes and the slinger returned in time to drive off Mancinus and his crew after a savage fight; but too late to save her from the poison of the Dagger of Eryx, by which Mancinus had tried to subdue her, and which he had left with her.

Persuaded by Pelargos, Ramnes now set out for the coastal city of Eryx, which was hostile to Rome. There they hoped to organize resistance against Mancinus; there Pelargos hoped to find his wife, who had been blinded by the Romans; there too Ramnes hoped to find the secret of the dagger, and a cure for poor dazed Drusilla. *(The story continues in detail:)*

FROM the Friends of Hercules at Reate had come detailed intelligence: A column of cavalry alone, under the

proprætor; three thousand of the Latin allies, with Roman officers. A quick, sharp stroke, aimed to catch Eryx by surprise and take the city at one blow. All heavy-armed troops, and mailed horsemen.

Now, from the temple on the hill, Ramnes looked down across the expanse of marshes and the long bridge. Pelargos was with him, and the elders of the city and the priests. As the glittering column pushed out along the wide causeway that led across the five-mile strip of marshlands, his eyes quickened and his pulses pounded. Here came Rome! The trumpets and the standards of Rome, marching to crush him!

For he was Eryx, now. Made *tyrannos* or leader of the city by popular vote, Eryx was his; and he, Ramnes, was Eryx, to stand or fall together. And here rode Rome, to crush him.

From the city to the bridge that crossed the river, midway of the marshes, was two miles in all. Out there was no indication of resistance. The bridge, that should have been defended, was empty. Here, close to the city, were gathered a thousand men, Sabines who had come in to serve against the conqueror they hated; they waited to be led forth, and with them was Lars and the elephant, the old Getulian bull, now clad in armor of leather and mail.

PELARGOS laughed softly. His phenomenal eyesight pierced the glitter of that advancing column.

"A hundred men in advance," said he. "Half a mile in advance; scouts. Heading the column, a hundred Romans, by their standard. Five hundred archers, bowmen; all the rest, heavy-armed cavalry. They march well."

"Mancinus?" rapped out Ramnes.

Pelargos shook his head.

"Can't tell; no doubt, one of the officers with the cavalry, face hidden by his helmet."

"Can you see the boats?"

"I can, yes; but they can't!"

Now, as that long column with its baggage-carts filed down the causeway, where fifty men could march abreast like some glittering snake, Ramnes turned to the others, and in curt sentences showed them the plan of battle.

Along the sluggish stream, as though moored, lay the fishing-boats and other small craft of the city, on both sides of the long bridge. They were crowded with men; but covered over by tarpaulins, would appear empty. Half hidden by brush, they would not be seen readily, and would cause no alarm when the column discovered them.

"A working party attacks the far end of the bridge; the others attack the column, when I meet the Romans," he concluded. Faces brightened; a hum of applause went up.

Pelargos grunted as he eyed the glittering serpent:

"Make up your mind to lose our monster today, comrade."

"That may be," said Ramnes. "But if he serves his purpose, I'm content. Mancinus was a fool to stick to cavalry! One legion of infantry might have smashed us."

"He didn't know the gods were fighting against him," said Pelargos, grinning. "Time's close. Their vanguard is at the bridge. Better get to our places."

The priest of Athene, stately and serene, beckoned Ramnes to one side and surveyed him with gravely steadfast gaze.

"You asked us for help regarding the Lady Drusilla, who was pricked by that dagger you wear," he said. "Have the gods aided you?"

"No," said Ramnes, his face darkening. "There is no help. The wisest doctors have done her no good."

"So you won't talk, eh? Whenever you make up your mind to talk, call a guard and send for me."

"Perhaps the gods can help, where men fail." The priest smiled slightly. "In the temple archives I've found some information regarding that dagger. I'll sacrifice at once to the gray-eyed Athene, while you fight; if the goddess favors you, bring Drusilla to me tonight."

Ramnes comprehended, and his heart leaped. Face alight, eyes ablaze, he caught the priest by the shoulders.

"I understand. Thanks, thanks a thousandfold! You'll be sure enough of me ere sunset!"

And with a vibrant shout to Pelargos, he was off to the waiting column below.

There they donned armor. All the population of Eryx lined the hills, tense and anxious, awaiting pillage and slaughter and slavery, or the victory that seemed impossible; they were hushed by the sight of the Roman columns, there in the sunlight. Lars stood by the waiting elephant, Rhea with him: Rhea now his wife, a stately splendid woman. Pelargos stooped to kiss his two sons, kissed the blind, smiling mother, and leaped to the shoulder of the kneeling elephant, a shield-bearer at his side, with a long buckler. Ramnes, armed, swung into the saddle and lifted the massive dagger, almost as long as a sword. With a surge and a yell from the waiting men, the elephant started off, and they after it: Footmen, light-armed, light-footed—men used to the treacherous sands and the marshlands. Ramnes headed them, the elephant at slow swing leading the way.

THERE was no haste; Pelargos had judged his time admirably. The long bridge was much narrower than the causeway, and the Roman column could cross but slowly. Mancinus had sent no heralds. With arrogant confidence, he had counted upon riding slap into Eryx, cutting down any opposition, and seizing the city at a blow.

At sight of the elephant and the slender force of infantry behind, the Roman column halted, and Ramnes could see Pelargos laughing with impish glee. The vanguard fell back. The glittering serpent took motion once more, flowing forward, constricting to cross the long bridge, and widening out twelve abreast as the horses clattered over. To all appearance the men of Eryx had neglected their best defense, at the bridge, trust-

ing in the elephant and their infantry alone.

Pelargos leaned over to Ramnes.

"Going to talk? Any parley?"

"Talk with your sling," rejoined Ramnes grimly, and Pelargos laughed anew. He stood at full length as the great beast swung along, accustoming himself to the rolling lurch, his ancient Etruscan helmet increasing his height to superhuman proportions.

TWO heralds spurred forth from the Roman ranks, waving green branches. Two-thirds of that glittering serpent was across the bridge now, the elephant at slow lurch toward them, Ramnes and his crowding ranks at march behind. Discipline would count for nothing here, and he had deliberately ignored it, that Mancinus might have greater assurance.

Pelargos fitted bullet to sling, and his arm swung. He loosed his cast; a long throw, an impossible throw; but one of the two heralds flung out arms and toppled. A shrill, wild yell arose from the men of Eryx. The Roman trumpets shrilled and the squadron of bowmen spurred forward from the massed column, at charge.

The elephant quickened pace; Ramnes spurred; his men broke into a run. Only a few hundred yards now, narrowing each instant. Pelargos was in swift motion, swinging, loosing, swinging again. Men began falling in the Roman ranks. The archers were pouring forth their shafts, and the twanging hum of bowstrings lifted above the shouts and shuffle of feet.

Then suddenly the elephant lifted trunk in air and trumpeted, as his high bulk merged with the enemy. At this sound, at this incredible shape, the horses reared and fell into mad confusion and panic. He bore on and on, straight into the heart of that glittering serpent, and the result was horrible; the horses, breaking from the causeway, floundered in the marshes. Behind the elephant sped the men of Eryx.

And suddenly, from the rear, welled up terrible voices of dismay and death. The ambuscade was loosed; the men from the boats were attacking, and all that glittering serpent writhed in mortal agony.

Behind the elephant, Ramnes spurred hard, was into the clanging battle before he knew it. Shafts rattled and whistled, but not for long; quarters were close; horses were plunging; bows were useless. Ramnes battered into the thick of it. The massy dagger was now a sword, now a club. It ran red with blood, crushing steel cap or breastplate with its weight, piercing with the blade. The men of Eryx stabbed horses, cut down the disorganized riders, sent the beasts to flounder in the treacherous mud alongside the road.

The archers were gone. Here were the Romans with their proud standard; then the standard was down, the little band scattered; Pelargos was swinging away, the elephant roaring with fury and pain. Javelins were in him, his trunk gushed blood; dying men stabbed up at his unarmored belly as he crushed them; but he went on.

Ramnes, enormous in that bronze armor, knew not that he was fighting. Few as they were, those Romans died hard. Repeatedly his armor saved him as he crushed his way on. With a wild scream, his horse reared to a javelin thrust. Luckily, men of Eryx were at hand, came rushing, aided Ramnes as his horse went down, and helped him to the saddle of a Roman horse whose rider was dead.

On, now, on among the Latins, the splendid cavalry trained by Mancinus. The elephant had slowed to a halt, but not before his bursts of trumpeting inspired panic among the crowded horses. Despite themselves, the cavalry were forced to break, to scatter from the road, to go floundering into the marsh—and there the light-footed men of Eryx cut them down almost at will.

And all the while, from the bridge where the glittering column was cut, lifted the tumult of death and destruction. The whole column knew now that it was trapped and doomed. The far end of the bridge swayed and was down under the weight of men and horses, with a splintering crash that rose above the clangor of arms and the shouts of men.

RAMNES raged like a fury through those ranks, seeking the figure of Mancinus, but finding him nowhere. His second horse was killed; he went forward on foot, crushing and stabbing, searching always for that lean cruel face and not finding it. Desperate, whole ranks of the Latins plunged their horses at the deceptive marshy ground. Others dismounted and made resistance. And in among them, from front and rear, tore the men of Eryx.

The elephant was down, a huge bulk sinking prostrate upon the slain. No weeping now for Lars Masena; a wild and terrible figure, he raged along with Pelargos. Ramnes came up with them,

drunk with the battle-madness, smashing down resistance, cleaving the way for the men who stabbed, more drunk even than he with the wine of victory. Victory over Rome! The very thought of it was inconceivable, but here it was.

HERE at last was the bridge, red with slaughter; the whole column was destroyed, armed men sinking in the marshes, horses screaming, the wagons and baggage captured; there beyond the bridge were a few score riders streaming along in flight. A few score; but among them was Mancinus, as was later proven.

Eryx had emptied itself for slaughter and pillage of those scattered in the mud. Ramnes halted this work with stern hand. Some hundreds of horses were saved; a scant two hundred prisoners were lined up. Ramnes, his bronze helm gashed and battered, blood on his face from a scalp-wound, panted breath into his lungs. Lars Masena was gazing at the dead elephant. Pelargos limped up,—for his recent thigh-wound had opened afresh—his flitting eyes dancing from one to the other exultantly.

"Here's news for Rome!" said he.

"But the elephant is dead," Ramnes said. "Weeping, Lars?"

"By the gods, not I!" replied Lars. "He died well; who could ask more?"

"Something to that." Pelargos nodded thanks as Ramnes caught a horse for him. "There's always an elephant, of one sort or another, for the right persons. Next time, if there is such, something else will serve. What now, Ramnes?"

Ramnes glanced at the westering sun. "The greatest triumph of all, I hope," he said, and told them what the priest of Athene had said, about Drusilla. "First, a message to Hannibal from Eryx." He halted one of the city officers. "Look up those dead Romans; most of them will be of knightly rank and will wear gold rings. Collect all those gold rings for me."

"Ho!" said Pelargos admiringly. "An idea! Send them to Hannibal, eh?"

"Yes, with the alliance of this city. Rome passes, Rome passes!" The voice of Ramnes rose exultantly. "This is the beginning, and there shall be more ere the end!"

Together they headed for the city.

"Let me take your message to Hannibal," said Lars suddenly.

"If you like. But why?" asked Ramnes.

"I speak the tongue; I know you; I know him. Besides," added Lars, "Rhea wants to see the world; we'll go together."

Eryx was in a delirium of rejoicing. As Ramnes was met by the council of elders, an officer came hurrying, to inquire what disposition should be made of the prisoners; a few of these were Romans; the others were from Latin tribes.

"Scourge the Romans out of our territory," Ramnes said promptly. "Send the Latins home free, with word that our quarrel lies not with them, but with Rome."

So it was done.

A bath, a bandage for his head, a clean toga, and he wearily joined Drusilla. The sun was down; the evening meal was ready; Pelargos and Lars would be along presently. They too had a vivid interest in that evening's work.

Drusilla had heard the news of victory, but it brought no flush to her cheek. She could not be stirred to life; nothing mattered particularly to her. When the four presently walked up the hill to the temple of Athene, the riotous celebration on all sides left her unmoved.

"I understand," Pelargos said to Ramnes, "that they're giving you the old palace of the former kings, as soon as it can be fixed up a bit. Apparently they're satisfied that you're no friend of Rome seeking to betray them."

"You'll move in with me, in that case," Ramnes rejoined. "What I have, I owe to you. Better use some of that treasure, too; send men down the coast to other cities at once. We must raise a force of mercenaries. We need bowmen, slingers, munitions. Lars says we'll have plenty of fighters from the Umbrian tribes, when this news spreads. Also, we want ships."

"Oh!" said Pelargos. "Right. A dozen Roman galleys would bring the city to terms in no time. Plenty to do, eh?"

AT the temple entrance the stalwart priest met them. He was the titular head of the temple, which had business interests in the city; the temple itself, and the worship of Athene, was entirely in the hands of priestesses. He led them into his own luxurious chambers, and slaves brought in cups and an amphora of excellent Cretan wine.

"Something of a rarity," said the priest, lifting his cup. "A pity to mix it with water. . . . Well, well, here's congratulations!"

"Did you invite us here for that?" said Ramnes impatiently.

"No, my friend. The sacrifices were auspicious; the magic power which the gods gave to this dagger of yours—"

"Suppose we drop all that talk," Ramnes broke in. "We aren't fools; we know the secret of the dagger. It's not magic power I want, but practical help."

The priest regarded him gravely.

"My friend, the conventions of religion conceal much that is practical; let us, for the moment, accept such conventions, as we do those of society. In the temple archives, I've unearthed an old formula of sacrifice and devotions, which appears to be a cure for the evil of the dagger." He lifted a hand to check a threatened outburst from Ramnes. "Wait! This requires certain herbs, which we have; the treatment and the devotions of the priestesses require a full six days. Leave the Lady Drusilla here with us for this length of time, and let us see what can be done."

Ramnes relaxed. It came to him that behind these words lay many unspoken things; this priest was not revealing all his secrets, by a good deal. He turned to Drusilla.

"Will you remain a week here in the temple, and let these good women try to cure you?"

"Certainly, if you wish it." She laughed softly. "But how can they cure me, when nothing is wrong with me?"

Ramnes did not answer this. He rose, touched his lips to her brow, and pressed the hand of the priest.

"Cure her, bring her to herself, and ask what you will of me."

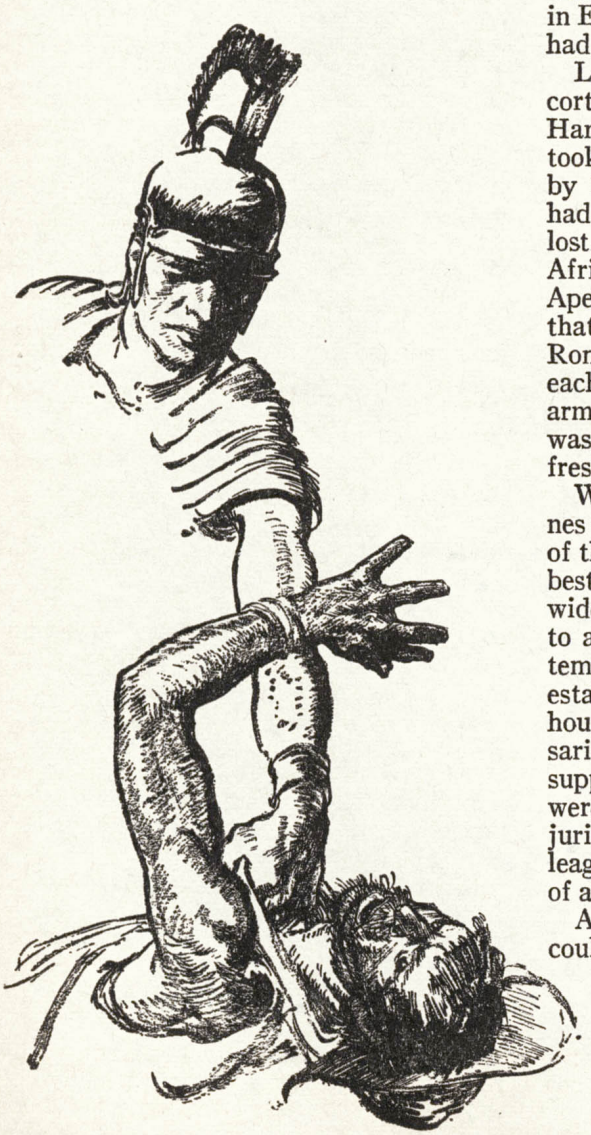
"I'll send for you when the time comes," replied the grave priest, promising nothing.

HERE began a week of work into which Ramnes plunged head and ears; now that the Romans were not only crushed but destroyed, and his own power in Eryx was absolute, a host of things that had been pending were in need of action.

Lars and his wife, with an armed escort, departed in style to make search for Hannibal; and along with his message took close to a hundred gold rings worn by Roman knights; some of the bodies had sunk in the marsh, and the rings were lost. Rumors filtered through that the Africans were wintering north of the Apennines. Some of the prisoners said that two new consuls had been elected in Rome, Flaminius and Servilius, and that each of them was to be provided with an army before spring arrived; the republic was making agonies of effort to raise fresh legions.

With Pelargos ever at his elbow, Ramnes went at everything, from the defenses of the city, to the naval possibilities. The best defense on the land side, was the wide marsh; by water, the city was open to any attack. With the bridge repaired temporarily, with an outpost of guards established in the hills beyond, storehouses for grain were prepared and emissaries sent forth to start a flood of food-supplies moving toward Eryx. Envoys were sent to other cities beyond Roman jurisdiction, inviting them to join in a league against aggression. The nucleus of a fleet was prepared.

All of this, and a thousandfold more, could only be started under way in a



Mancinus pitched headlong, and Ramnes scraped his sandal over the beard-blurred face, in open contempt.

week's time. Men from the Sabine tribes were flocking in to join the armed force. As the news spread, refugees from Rome began to dribble in from near and far. For many years Eryx had grown fat in peace; both the state and the people were wealthy, and there were vast resources of all kinds upon which to draw.

So, in those days, the work began—work of defense, of construction, of forward-looking to more evil times. Rome defied, Rome repulsed, was not Rome beaten, by a good deal, as all men knew; but in the background was ever the gigantic shape of Hannibal, and Rome must perish, or Hannibal must die. A good gamble, said Eryx, with freedom the stake! On every side Ramnes met with hearty, eager help and coöperation.

Before the end of the week the old palace, a rambling structure built in Cretan style, was turned over to him. Pelargos moved in, with his family; the two boys lent life to the ancient place; the mother was a quiet, kindly, simple soul, over whom Pelargos hovered with an unending care and affection. Slaves abounded and were cheap, but Ramnes was too busy to pay even superficial attention to the running of the palace.

ON the sixth day, Ramnes was down at the harbor most of the afternoon, inspecting two galleys that were outfitting for naval work. He came back weary and anxious, to find that no word had come from the temple on the hill.

"They've been hard at it all day, with sacrifices and parties of women going up there," Pelargos said cynically, forcing him to relax over a beaker of chilled wine in the garden. "Be patient, comrade; that old priest is a sly fox, and he'll get somewhere. They tell me he's been back of many a miracle in his time, and I don't doubt it. By the way, we've made a grand haul of arms and weapons, in the spoil from the fight. I'm getting two complete legions, Roman style, whipped into shape."

"Two legions? Why, that's an army!" exclaimed Ramnes. "I had no idea we had such a force."

"Gold to soldiers, honey to flies," Pelargos said. "We'll need an army before we get through. We need a few Carthaginians, too, who understand fighting-ships. Well, we have two months ahead, before spring arrives. A merchant came in from Ariminium today; he says that all the northern Gauls are solidly behind Hannibal, and that spring will see a march on Rome. The only trouble, to my mind, is that Rome will be ready."

"Two armies," said Ramnes. "Good wine! Where'd you get it?"

"Temple of Hercules; always tap the temples for the choicest wine and women, as they say in the army. Hello! Here's news."

Ramnes started up. A slave was coming to him, bearing a scroll left at the entrance by a messenger. He opened it, stared at it with a puzzled frown. Below one another were written four Greek letters; at the bottom of the sheet, the words: *"Come at sunset."*

"What is it?" demanded Pelargos.

Ramnes told him.

"Evidently from our priest. But what those letters mean, I don't know."

"No hurry; we have half an hour to sunset. What are the letters?"

"Zeta, Eta, Theta, Iota."

Pelargos slapped his long thigh with a burst of laughter, then sobered.

"Now, if that isn't like a priest—to hide behind allusions, avoid saying a thing in downright words. . . . Hm! I'm not so sure, after all. That man is wise. This may be his way of conveying a still greater idea, which he fears to put into words—"

Pelargos stared at the ground and muttered. Ramnes loosed an impatient oath.

"Well, speak up! Does this message make sense?"

"Oh!" With a quick smile, Pelargos came out of his brown study. "Comrade, if you were a Greek by birth, instead of a Roman with uncommonly good Greek tutors, you'd know. Those are the letters which on a Greek sundial represent the seventh to the tenth hour of the day, the four hours given to amusement and recreation. Put the four letters together, and you have the Greek word *'Live!'* In other terms, during those four hours of the day, live!"

"AH! A hint that all goes well with her!" The face of Ramnes cleared. Joy, and the apprehension of joy, leaped in his heart. "She's responding to his treatment—he didn't want to raise false hopes—"

"No." Pelargos frowned at him. "Those three words at the bottom relate to her, comrade. "The other is for you. In the devious way of such fellows—liking you, yet unwilling to commit himself, our friend gives you a riddle of advice; a prophecy for the future, he'd probably call it. Live! It may be a greeting, an

admonition, or a warning. Four hours of the day—four years of a lifetime—"

Ramnes broke into a laugh, tossed the parchment to the other, and sprang up.

"Hell swallow your croakings! Keep it, if it interests you."

"Thanks; it does." Pelargos caught it up. "Perhaps, after all, it's merely a hint to be yourself, to find other things in life than battle and power, to live more fully, to seek the deeper, simpler life of the soul."

Ramnes regarded the other curiously. "What! Philosophy again? Now that heart's desire is won, aren't you content to enjoy the winning?"

Tucking away the missive, the Stork came to his feet.

"Heart's desire won? It's never won, comrade. Gain one milepost, another looms beyond. Lars is gone, to show his wife the world; he'll come back with some new horizon, depend upon it! Now I have my family again, I think of my two sons. And you? That remains to be seen. There's more to you than the mere makings of a battling and brutal warrior —much more, and this priest knows it."

"Bah! Rome dies; I live!" said Ramnes.

"You've not begun to live yet. Well, forget all this, forget it!" Pelargos, with a laugh, threw off his sober air, caught up his winecup, and emptied it. "Drusilla awaits us—let's go! And here's luck, up above."

They tramped up the hill to the marble fane, faintly golden in the sunset glow; a sound of women's voices chanting a hymn came from the temple. The priest, evidently awaiting them, appeared. He merely smiled at the eager questions of Ramnes, and led them in to the central court, where stood an ivory and gold statue of the goddess. And there beside the statue was Drusilla, grave and starry-eyed—Drusilla once more herself, suddenly radiant at sight of them.

EVEN in this instant of bursting joy and incredulity, Ramnes could but wonder at the odd depths of his companion, the queerly stifled affections of that devious and scoffing heart. For Pelargos, with a low cry, flung himself forward ahead of Ramnes, dropped to the stones, and caught Drusilla about the knees, in the Greek fashion of a suppliant—caught her and bowed his bald head, with a broken sob.

Above his figure, her hands went out to Ramnes, and her blue eyes greeted him. But he, taking her hands, stood silent and unmoving, his hungry gaze devouring her.

"They've told me everything," she said in her old rich voice, a trace of color rising in her cheeks. "Ah, Ramnes—all the evil dream and the shadows are past—"

His lips trembled; then as Pelargos drew away, Ramnes took her in his arms, and stood silent, her head against his chest, his tears of joy and thanksgiving and heart's desire sparkling on the knotted masses of her hair. Until, presently, her face lifted to him.

CHAPTER XIV

TO Ramnes, life was suddenly rich with new glory; now there was a reason for everything, a pulsing heart in everything. Drusilla was herself again, but herself as he had never seen her, for her grave dignity was all transfigured by the high excitement of their adventure here, and her cool gray eyes were radiant with laughter and eagerness of life and love. For this she did not deny.

"Marriage?" she said to Ramnes. "Yes, my dear, yes; when Rome comes and goes again, it shall be that same day."

"When Rome comes?" he echoed, perplexed. Her eyes danced.

"Yes. Do you think Rome will see her army destroyed here, and do nothing? She may be busy with Hannibal, in desperate straits—but you'll see envoys from the senate here. And don't forget the little bronze casket and the letter, of which you told me."

"Then," said he quickly, "is it a promise? The day Rome goes?"

"If you please me," she rejoined, and went into a peal of laughter at his expression.

Merry she might be, and turning back to girlhood as the days passed; but she supplied the sound practical wisdom that Ramnes most needed now. In no time at all the domestic life of the palace was organized and running smoothly as the household slaves were fitted into place. Her advice on most problems, whether of public policy or private, was sound and wholesome; and when it came to dealing with men, that gray gaze of hers could unmask a rascal unerringly.

Drusilla never referred to the past but once, when Ramnes brought her the ivory-and-gold casket containing the books of the Cumæan Sibyl; then her

eyes lit up, and she touched the casket with reverent fingers.

"I'm glad," she said. "One day we'll have need of this."

Ramnes laughed. "How so? Can you open the box if you need to look at the prophecies?"

"Better luck to keep the seals unbroken," said she, and put it carefully away.

From other cities came no pledges of help. They were all hanging upon events, afraid to provoke Roman enmity, and the agents of Rome were everywhere. Men came in, and a few ships, and great store of corn and supplies; and ever the men of Eryx stood stoutly behind all that Ramnes did, but it seemed that the whole world was now waiting for the thunderbolt of Africa to strike a death-blow at Rome, or himself to perish by the Roman arms. The Greek colonies and cities along this coast, the hill states, the Latin tribes allied with Rome—all were waiting, breathless. Upon the spring, when the African army would move, trembled the scales of destiny. Capua, the second city in Italy, was rumored to be ready to fling off the yoke and declare for Hannibal, if he were victorious. Meantime, all waited to see whether vengeance would strike Eryx, which had not waited.

RAMNES was at the city wharf the morning the galley came in from the north. With him were Drusilla and Pelargos, who had evolved a scheme of harbor defense: From the wharf to the island midway of the harbor was only a few hundred yards. If a causeway could be built and war-engines installed on the island, enemy ships would find Eryx a hard nut to crack. As they were talking, the big trading-galley came sweeping in for anchorage, and was seen to be crowded with armed men.

Boats swarmed about her. The first put in for the city wharf.

Pelargos cried out:

"I know that man! Look, Ramnes! It's Giscon, one of Hannibal's engineers —remember the fellow who froze water in the rocks and blasted them apart, there in the Alps? And those are troops in the galley; I see the scarlet of the Spanish infantry, the Berber robes, and the Numidian uniforms. . . . Ha, here's word from Lars! But Lars isn't in the boat."

The news spread, and all Eryx began tumbling out to see and welcome the Africans. The boat came straight to the city wharf, and Ramnes clasped hands with the dark, bearded Giscon, who wore the purple and gold of Carthaginian nobility.

When he had met and saluted Drusilla, Giscon turned to the others, laughing.

"So this is why you deserted us, Pelargos! Well met, Ramnes. All's well; Hannibal sends you greetings and congratulations. I've letters here from him. Lars Masena is well, and remaining with the army for the present. Here are two hundred men, a mixed contingent, and my humble self at your service. By Moloch! Your city is buzzing!"

PEOPLE massed at the waterfront, riotous with delight. Here was token at last of aid and support; the mere presence of a handful of Africans was a tremendous thing, a visible indication of the forces that were tearing Rome asunder. Ramnes sent off an aide to summon an immediate meeting of the council in the public square.

"An open gesture to all Italy," said Giscon. "I've a nice little speech ready; and for your ears, private words. They'll keep."

His speech, delivered to the council amid the massed thousands, and the drawn-up ranks of African troops, was simple enough—congratulations on being rid of the Roman yoke, full assurances of support and help, and an invitation to formal alliance. Ramnes welcomed him and his men to Eryx, then got his guest away to the palace gardens.

There he and Drusilla and Pelargos glanced over the letter from Hannibal, and Pelargos made the dry comment:

"Two hundred men—ha! Trust a Carthaginian not to spend them unless he gets a thousand in return!"

Giscon broke into laughter. "Precisely; a thousand is what the chief wants, and you with them. In a month, he's breaking winter quarters and smashing directly through the Apennines toward Rome."

"By what route?" Ramnes asked.

"Straight through; one that's never been trodden by man."

"That's an impossibility!"

Giscon smiled. "So the Romans think. Hannibal, his brother Mago, Maharbal and I alone know the plan; there's token of his trust in you! The Romans are exerting every effort, draining every colony and city, to raise men. They're putting two armies in the field, and Hannibal expects to destroy one or both, then march straight on Rome. For these two hundred men, he wants a thousand—and

Septimus swallowed hard. "You could not do that, Drusilla!" he said hoarsely. "You, a Roman!"

you. The Gauls of northern Italy are with us, and your example will start a revolt among the other cities of Italy."

"He must need allies badly," Pelargos observed with a shrewd thrust.

Giscon nodded. "We do. No help has come from Carthage; Roman tactics in Spain have prevented help coming from there. We don't expect much from Carthage, in fact, as political factions there are against us. It's a one-man war, until we smash a way into Rome itself. I must know whether you'll leave, one month from now, and take a thousand men to meet Hannibal; if not, I must send back word."

"Count it done," said Ramnes, and Pelargos nodded assent.

IT was three days later that Drusilla caught the spy.

The whole city was possessed by a flaming enthusiasm; for Giscon, taking charge of the defenses, announced that the place could be made impregnable. On the land side, the vast marshes could be made into an impassable bulwark. On the water side, the island in the harbor could be the basis for an engineer's dream, if it were sufficiently provided with military engines. These had to be built, and a causeway had to be built to the island; Giscon was at work from dawn till dark with assistants and plans, while Ramnes got the labor started. Pelargos was occupied with the troops alone.

Ramnes had established headquarters on the long city wharf. He was at work there, late in the morning, making a chart of the harbor depths that Giscon wanted, when Drusilla came hurriedly, accompanied by two of the palace slaves.

"Hello!" Ramnes leaped up from his work, at sight of her white face. "What's wrong?"

"A man," she said, breathless. "I saw him in the market as we were buying provisions. He has a stall there—one of the country folk from the hills."

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

Ramnes smiled. "Anything wrong about that? The folk come flocking in each market day."

"This is a freedman of Mancinus. He was with Mancinus before—before you came. He used to come to the villa on errands for Mancinus."

Ramnes whistled. He perceived instantly the perilous possibilities in allowing these country people to come flocking into the city. He beckoned two of the guard officers.

"Close the gates, Achillas, and check up on every stranger in the marketplace; no folk from outside are to come in after this except with passes. See to it. You, Criton, come along with six men. Now, Drusilla, show us this fellow."

THE big public market was swarming with city folk, fishermen, farmers, soldiers, seamen. Drusilla described the stall in question, one where milk and cheese products were sold by a long, lean fellow in peasant garb. Criton and his men worked quietly around, and with no commotion nabbed their man. . . .

The prison chambers of the old palace were gayly gruesome, artists of old having decorated them in the antique Cretan style with the frescoed monsters, bull-fight figures, and fantastic shapes of the island mythology, but here with a turn for the horrible. One of the cells in particular was given over to monsters of the sea, and here Ramnes chose to receive the prisoner, Drusilla at his side.

Chained, the man was led in. One glance at Drusilla, and a spasm of fear shot through his eyes, and Ramnes saw it.

"Well, Aulus, you see we recognize you. Mancinus sent you?"

Aulus squared his shoulders, and his jaw set stubbornly.

Ramnes smiled.

"So you won't talk, eh? Ready for torture, no doubt. Perhaps you recognize this?" He took the dagger of Eryx from its sheath, and saw a flitting horror come and go in the hard brown face. "You realize, then, that I've only to scratch you with the point, and you'll talk, eh? Well, time enough for that.

Now think it all over. Talk, and you'll be set free, with gold in your pocket and protection against Mancinus if you want it. Whenever you make up your mind to talk, call a guard and send for me—that is, unless I decide to give you a touch of the dagger, make you talk, and then send you to Mancinus."

He gestured to Drusilla, and walked out. The guards followed. The door of the cell clanged shut. Out in the gardens, Drusilla turned swiftly to him.

"Why did you do that? What will you do—torture him?"

Ramnes shook his head. "Chances are, it wouldn't break him down; he's ready for it in his own mind. But he's not ready for—nothing. He knows the dagger, and fears it horribly. He knows he'll get rewards and protection if he talks. By tomorrow night, he'll talk."

"Why?" Her gray eyes searched him, and he laughed.

"Hunger and thirst, the pictures on the walls, the uselessness of being stubborn! But chiefly, thirst. A man who knows what to expect, can face it. He doesn't know."

That day a dozen men in the marketplace were clapped under restraint—men who could give no account of themselves. Four of the dozen were guiltless enough, as was proven by the following night, when Aulus talked, broken by thirst.

Eight men and himself, planted here in Eryx. Mancinus was coming with an embassy from Rome, in another three days, coming in disguise, as a slave, bearded and unsuspected. Once in Eryx, he meant to act. How? This, Aulus did not know.

THREE days! Ramnes sat that evening with Drusilla and Pelargos, his brain burning.

"Three days!" he said. "Then I have him trapped. Let him come!"

"Why?" said Drusilla.

"Why? By the gods, you ask why?" exploded Ramnes violently, irritated by the silence and the flitting birdlike looks of Pelargos. "For what he did to you. For what he is. For what he comes here to do—assassination, at least. With nine men who know the ins and outs of the city, he no doubt plans to kill me, perhaps carry you off. What do you expect me to do—forget everything and do nothing?"

There was a little silence, while Drusilla sat frowning at her lap.

Pelargos nodded.

"I understand, comrade. I used to lie awake nights thinking of what I'd do to the executioner who blinded my wife, if I ever caught him. Cost me quite a bit to find out just what man it was. Then he came up with a detachment to join the army in Gaul."

Drusilla glanced up quickly. "And—"

"I caught him," said Pelargos. "Got him outside the camp one night, built a fire, and had a pot-hook at white heat, ready for his eyes." He shook his head and sighed. "No go; the rascal whined and blatted like a squealing pig. I decided I wasn't petty enough to get down to his level; I let him go. All I got out of it was three days confined to barracks for being absent without leave."

Ramnes rose and stalked away with a growl of oaths.

DURING two days, he fumed and exulted at thought of Mancinus walking into the trap, and avoided the eyes of Drusilla when they questioned him. On the third day, he rode out of the city with the fifty Numidians of Giscon's party, giving no word to anyone.

They crossed the marsh, wound up the river-gorge beyond, and so came at last to the outpost of guards and the highway. A messenger from the Friends of Hercules at Asculum had arrived with warning that Romans were on the way.

"I know it," said Ramnes. "Take on word to the city, and say that envoys of Rome are here. Tell the city fathers to be assembled in the square, in two hours."

It was nearly noon when the party came riding up to the defile. An escort of fifty troopers from the Reate camp, two stern-jawed Romans of senatorial rank with slaves and servants and baggage-animals, and a long-faced but pleasant man of fifty with twinkling eyes and an air of keen intelligence, whom Ramnes recognized instantly from boyhood days. One Septimus, a priest of the Capitoline Jove, a man of family and influence even then, and now no doubt of great importance in Rome.

At sight of the guards and the Numidians, the party halted in evident dismay. Ramnes, who wore no armor, rode out to meet them, and the priest hailed him.

"Greeting! You don't remember me?"

"Quite well, Septimus, as I see you remember me," rejoined Ramnes.

"Here are the noble senators Quintus Rufus and Publius Stentor, envoys from Rome to Eryx and its lord."

"They're welcome. I'm the lord of Eryx. Apparently you're in bad company." Ramnes dismounted, and strode forward. "Better keep those troopers of yours very quiet; my Numidians are so used to killing Romans on sight that it would be a pity to provoke them."

The astonished party stared at him. Ignoring the leaders, he boldly broke in among the horses and looked at the slaves. There was the man he sought, new-bearded but unmistakable, hat pulled over eyes. Ramnes came up to him and put out a hand to the horse's bridle.

"Why, here's a queer thing!" said he, mockingly. "A man among your slaves, who used to be a great fellow at Reate! Careful, slave, careful! Put hand to weapon, and I'll tear you apart with my bare hands—and like the job!"

His voice rolled in unuttered fury.

The whole party had fallen into dismayed consternation. The troopers were far outnumbered by the guards and Numidians—those famed African horses, whose very name spelled terror to Rome. Also, the perfect assurance of Ramnes in going straight to the disguised prætor revealed amazing knowledge.

"What, no answer?" His gaze drove up at Mancinus. "Good cousin, no voice? The Lady Drusilla was speaking of you only yesterday. So were others. In fact, there is some argument as to whether you'd be better impaled before the city gates, or crucified in your slave's garb. Personally, I don't think you worthy of so much trouble—"

MANCINUS' desperate eyes flickered warning, and barely in time. His hand slipped out and a dagger lunged for the throat of Ramnes—who caught the wrist and stepped back sharply.

Mancinus, jerked from the saddle, pitched headlong and lay quiet, stunned by the fall. So swiftly did it all pass, that before anyone knew what was happening, Ramnes had scraped his sandal across the beard-blurred visage in the dust, with open contempt.

Then he walked out of the group and looked at the two senators.

"Romans, you're welcome; bring your message to the men of Eryx. Send back your escort with that rascal who disgraces the name he bears; no Roman soldiers are allowed on the soil of Eryx, though there's room beneath it for plenty of them."

Rufus, whose reddish hair proclaimed the name, found tongue.

"Are you the son of Marcus Gaius Mancinus, the traitor?"

Ramnes met the cold, hostile eyes with gaze equally cold and hostile.

"Envoys who lend themselves to treachery would do well to choose their words with care. I am Ramnes, the lord of Eryx. Send back your escort; you've nothing to fear except your own dishonest hearts."

The two senators were livid with futile rage, but the priest Septimus was smiling thinly as he listened.

So Ramnes, at the head of half the Numidians, rode back along the causeway. After him came the Romans and their servants, the rest of the Numidians bringing up the rear. To the crowding thousands who massed to watch the entry into the city, and who greeted the cold-eyed envoys with silence or occasional jeers, Rome rode with the bearing of slaves rather than of conquerors.

IT was a Roman message, however, that Quintus Rufus delivered in the public square, where the city elders sat in their chairs and the sea of people thronged every foot of space back to the housewalls. Disdaining Ramnes and Drusilla, who sat before the fathers, with Pelargos and Giscon standing beside them, Rufus addressed the council.

"City fathers, you have lifted the sword against Rome. I see that you have also welcomed the enemies of Rome, although the senate knew nothing of this when we started. Mindful of ancient friendship with Eryx, the senate and the Roman people are willing to avert the doom into which the gods seem ready to plunge you. They offer you the choice between peace and alliance with Rome, or utter destruction of your city and its very name. Choose."

"Peace and alliance?" quavered one of the city fathers, in the silence. "Upon what terms?"

"That the traitor to Rome who rules you be sent in chains, together with five hundred of your maidens and five hundred of your young men, to the senate; that you hand over your walls and strong places to a Roman garrison, and pay such tribute as may be imposed upon you."

These words did not at once reach the people, who understood Greek better than Latin, but enough comprehended so that a growl rose ominous and deadly through the crowds. Then Ramnes broke out into sudden laughter, and turned to the African beside him.

"Hear that, Giscon? There's Roman peace and alliance for you! I have a better name for it. Slavery!"

A yell, fierce and savage, pealed up and up from the vast crowd. But the chief of the council rose and held up his arms, and gained quiet again.

"I thank you for the message, Roman," said he. "For this night you are the guests of Eryx, while we deliberate upon our answer. Tomorrow morning, you shall have it."

Rufus assented, which was a bit strange; Rome usually brooked no delay. But, as the visitors were marched away under strong escort, one of their slaves found his way to the side of Ramnes and spoke softly.

"Lord, Septimus the priest desires private word with you."

"I shall send for him tonight," said Ramnes, nodding.

Pelargos chuckled when the slave departed, and winked significantly.

"Here's the result of your little casket sent to Rome, comrade! Now we'll get the real gist of things. It's always the same with these rascals; a big play for publicity and underneath it a secret arrangement with those on the inside!"

Drusilla spoke up quietly. "Ramnes! I want to hear what Septimus has to say tonight. He's actually the greatest influence in all Rome."

Ramnes looked at her, with a quick springing smile.

"You shall not only hear, but have the whole say, my dear! And don't forget your promise—today Rome has come, tomorrow Rome goes!"

She touched his arm gently.

"But today, dear Ramnes, you have the answer. I heard what happened—with Mancinus. And now I'm really proud of you."

Whereupon Ramnes leaned forward and kissed her—in sight of the whole city council and the massed population of Eryx. And at this, all Eryx fell to cheering madly, for the Greeks loved lovers.

CHAPTER XV

SEPTIMUS the priest was affable, urbane, polished; in a word, the finer type of Roman whose education and broad culture differentiated him from the harsh, rude, primitive type of hard-bitten yokel that had founded Rome.

He could not take his eyes from the table, and Drusilla watched him with a trace of amusement in her face. Ramnes and Pelargos sipped their wine and waited, not quite comprehending the tremendous effect Drusilla had produced on the visitor. For, when she laid on the table the ivory-and-gold casket brought by her from the Sibyl's cave, the effect was instant. No words were needed. Septimus, trained in all priestly mysteries, knew at one glance what this casket was, and what its presence told by implication.

With an effort, he collected himself.

"Someone sent a certain bronze box to Rome," he said. "No need now to ask who sent it."

"You mistake," Ramnes said dryly. "I sent it."

Septimus lifted his head and looked at Ramnes.

"I was sent to ask why," he said gently.

RAMNES uttered a harsh laugh; a cynical smile touched the lips of Pelargos; for those words revealed much, as they were meant to do. To the priests and the wise men at Rome, the little bronze casket must have come with staggering import.

For it showed them that the vanished treasures of their ancestors, the sacred things of religion and history gone since the Gauls sacked Rome, whose very loss had been so carefully concealed from the people—that these things were no longer lost. It was no question of treasure alone, but of things more valuable to Rome than any treasure.

And the sight of this ivory-and-gold casket, containing the Sibylline books which were the very essence of Roman veneration and superstition, confirmed the belief.

"Your priests," said Ramnes, "hid away the most sacred things of Rome; and whoever hid them, died. How they became lost, I don't know or care. And what did Rome do? Condemned to infamy and exile one of its truest sons and best soldiers—my father. Why? Because he chose to save Roman lives rather than destroy them in useless combat. One of its best soldiers, Veturis, died from his wounds in Gaul. What happened to his daughter? Rome betrayed her: the senators of Rome tricked her, mocked her, handed her over to the lust and outrage of the vindictive scoundrel who inherited my father's name and place. Rome honors him. This morning I wiped my sandals on his face. And the daughter of Veturis sits here in Eryx,

Fleeing folk scattered in terror at sight of the armed men.

with the secret of all your lost treasures in her heart. I, too, know that secret."

Septimus nodded with an air of regret.

"And I've come to you, begging, as you knew someone would come."

"Precisely," said Ramnes. "You can return and tell Rome—or the colleagues who run the religious affairs of Rome—that the son of Marcus Mancinus has all they lack."

"You were a boy in Rome," said Septimus thoughtfully. "In your heart you must have some veneration for all these things represent."

"To me, they represent Rome," Ramnes answered. "I saw my father's life wrecked, his heart broken, because of Rome's cruelty. I give cruelty for cruelty, hatred for injustice, enmity for tyranny. That's my message to Rome."

"Were your father sitting here tonight," Septimus said softly, "what would he say?"

A shrewd query, and it was his closest bid for success. It did move Ramnes for an instant; then his eyes hardened, as only Roman eyes could do.

"He's not here—which is Rome's fault. I am—which is Rome's misfortune!"

"I believe you," said the priest, and gestured as though to brush aside light talk. "We're practical people, all of us; and practical persons, Lord Ramnes, seldom find it profitable to indulge rancor and animosity. I must admit that I scarcely blame you or the Lady Drusilla for cherishing this resentment; however, what's past is past. There are larger aspects of the whole matter to consider. I should inform you that I have practically unlimited authority to make whatever engagements seem best to me."

HE paused and sipped his wine appreciatively, to let these words sink in.

"Lucius Mancinus, your relative," he went on, "is not a particularly valuable asset to Rome; in fact, he is being ordered to join the armies in the field at once, where he'll command the cavalry. You, on the contrary, might be a highly valuable asset. It should not be difficult, for example, to re-open the old charges against your father; to wipe them out and clear his name, to grant him posthumous honors and to confirm you in those honors. An election to the rank of military tribune, by way of example, would be an excellent way of showing public appreciation."

"For what?" said Ramnes derisively.

"For, shall we say, justice?"

"I am justice. In Eryx."

"Ah, you damned Roman!" Septimus laughed and shook his head. "Have you no price?"

"Hatred," said Ramnes, looking at him fixedly. "To the death."

Septimus turned, with a whimsical gesture. "Can't you persuade him, Drusilla?"

"I agree with him," she said quietly. "Do you think for a minute I'd trust Rome—ever? My future lies here in Eryx."

"So?" And Septimus pursed his lips. "Not, perhaps, such an indefinite future as you think, Drusilla. After all, there's a good deal of truth in what Rufus said this afternoon; making due allowance for publicity, I'm afraid Rome must move to destroy Eryx."

Drusilla smiled. "Indeed! That's why I brought out this casket. No doubt you're already aware that it contains the Sibylline books. The seals, you see, are intact."

LIGHT drops of sweat bedewed the forehead of Septimus.

"I'm glad you venerate the holy relics—"

"Venerate them? Nonsense," broke in Drusilla. "This is a beautiful box, and I love it. I shall take good care of it, and only I myself will know where it's hidden, so there'll be no chance of anyone getting at it. And on the day a Roman army appears, I'll break the seals, Septimus; when the first Roman soldier sets foot in Eryx, I'll destroy the contents of this coffer. Tell that to Rome!"

Septimus swallowed hard. The beads of perspiration increased on his brow.

"You could not do that, Drusilla!" he said hoarsely. "You, a Roman!"

"I'm no Roman," she declared. "Tomorrow, when you're gone, Ramnes and I are to be married. I think Eryx is safe from Rome—for a little while."

Pelargos was grinning with admiration. Ramnes, now seeing what Drusilla must have planned from the first, regarding this casket, chuckled softly. The expression of Septimus was eloquent.

Drusilla went on quietly:

"Out of all the treasure that Rome hid, this was the greatest and holiest thing. There were many other ancient things and symbols of the gods; some we left hidden, some we gave to the priests of Hercules here. There's much of the treasure left untouched."

"Oh!" Septimus gave her one rapid glance. "You gave some away, eh? Then it's no secret that these things exist."

"No secret. Ramnes wears the armor of Porsena of Clusium, for example."

Ramnes, about to speak, checked himself and relaxed. This affair had been resolved, he perceived, into an encounter between Drusilla and the Roman.

"The books of the Cumæan Sibyl!" murmured the priest, his eyes on the casket, the pupils distended, his breath coming fast. He could not dissemble the agitation that gripped him. "The sacred books—the key to Rome's fortunes! Now is when Rome needs them most, now in this hour of crisis!"

"I think she'll need them worse before another year," said Drusilla.

Septimus reached for his wine, sipped it, and mopped his brow.

"The things still untouched," he said in a thick voice. "Tell me—what do you want? I have full authority. I can promise you anything, anything!"

"Dear Septimus, you'll have to trust me to keep this casket and its contents in my own hands," Drusilla said sweetly. "You can trust me, you know. But do you think that anyone on earth would trust you—or the promises of Rome?"

He was slow, in his agitation, to get the finality of her words.

"But I can perform them, carry them out!" he exclaimed. "I tell you, I have full power to act! The College of Augurs, the chief priests in council—"

He checked himself.

DRUSILLA smiled. "They have given you full powers—precisely! Very well. Go back to Rome and restore Marcus Gaius Mancinus to his name and rank, with posthumous honors."

"At once! At once!" the priest exclaimed. "And then?"

"Then come back; and I'll make a bargain with you for the balance of the sacred relics. Not this casket, mind. Not the treasure; that goes to Eryx, or elsewhere." Her eyes lifted to Pelargos and to Ramnes. "Do you agree or not?"

"Your game," said Pelargos in delight.

Ramnes assented with a gesture. She looked at Septimus, and his head came up.

"Very well," he said, and sighed. "You drive a hard bargain."

"A harder one, dear Septimus, before you get anything. I want to see the decree of the senate clearing the name of Marcus Mancinus before we even begin to talk terms. That is all."

And it was all.

"He'll be back," declared Pelargos, with his peculiar impish glee. "Oh, he'll be back! Spite of war and battle, politics

and earthquake, he'll be back to bargain for even the least of those sacred things! Drusilla, I salute you. It was admirable. Now we can leave you and Eryx in perfect safety. Rome would never risk the destruction of what's in this casket; you've got those superstitious rascals by the neck! But, may I inquire what you propose to gain by bartering anything at all?"

She looked at Ramnes. "You're not angry? I know you swore that Rome should never have anything from that treasure—"

"My dear, it's yours, and whatever you do with it suits me!" broke out Ramnes, laughing. "But I admit I'm curious, too."

"Well, I've practically got your father's name cleared of dishonor," said she. "And you and Giscon were saying yesterday that if you had certain war-engines which only experts could make, and ten really good two-banked war-galleys, we'd be impregnable by sea—"

Ramnes caught his breath. "Girl! By the gods, it'd be magnificent! But they'd never do it. They'd never give up what would be used against them."

"Bah! She's right, comrade," Pelargos exclaimed. "Take a bully like this Roman, or like some of those blasted thick-headed Germans up on the other side of Gaul, and there's only one way to gain his respect; by kicking him. That goes for any uncultured barbarian. The more you kick him, the more he'll do for you. He understands nothing else; he was raised on it at home. Give up their ships? Of course they will. Won't they gain the favor of the gods by doing so?"

IN the late sunlit morning, all Eryx crowded the public square and the houses and roofs around it. Flowers were everywhere, for these gardens by the warm Adriatic held flowers at all seasons. Word had spread abroad that when Rome left, the shrine of Diana was to witness a ceremony that spelled fiesta for the whole city, and Eryx loved festival.

The city fathers were in their seats. Drusilla and Ramnes, amid roaring plaudits and showering blossoms, took their places, and the two senators of Rome came with grimly solemn tread. The senators saluted the fathers; Rufus asked if the reply to Rome were ready.

"It is ready, noble Rufus," said the chief of the council. "It will be given you by our lord Ramnes."

Rufus, thus forced to acknowledge the master of Eryx, turned to Ramnes, who beckoned an attendant to bring forward a packet wrapped in leather.

"The reply of Eryx," Ramnes said, "to the senate and to the Roman people."

Rufus opened the leather wrapping, while all the ranks around craned to see what this sort of reply might be. Two naked swords were revealed—Roman swords, relics of those Romans who had fallen in the attack on the city. Rufus started back, livid with fury, while laughter and cheers swept through the jammed sea of people, in a roar of voices.

So Rome came, and went again. . . .

That evening in the sunset Pelargos stood on the sandy beach of the harbor, with his blind wife and the two boys, who were stripping for their evening swim. He gazed seaward, and presently, as the swell of hymeneal chants came from the temple of Diana above, he fell to staring at the horizon. The two boys questioned eagerly what he saw there, and he smiled.

"What do I see there? Why, my sons, that's a hard thing to answer. It looks to be a man, in the likeness of a god, who has gained all of heart's desire—only to find that instead of the road coming to an end, it is barely beginning."

CHAPTER XVI

THE thousand were filing out of Eryx —some city men, but mostly Sabines, eager to be in at the death of Rome—a thousand cavalry, splendidly equipped and mounted. And, with them, certain others who were to return ere long.

These last weeks had seen feverish activity in the city. Now the mole out to the harbor island was nearing completion; in the workshops men were laboring on various parts for war-engines; and other squads were completing Giscon's plans for the marsh defenses.

"We can well leave Eryx," said Pelargos, as he and Ramnes waved farewell to the white figure of Drusilla, and set their horses to the road. "She's safe. The city loves her, Giscon has a shrewd head, and that ivory casket of hers will prevent any Roman raid for the present. Trust her!"

"Aye, even at the worst," assented Ramnes. "Even if Hannibal is now destroyed, even if the weight of Rome crushes him and us."

Pelargos chuckled. "Gloomy heart at leaving wife? Think of fame ahead! Fame and glory and the plunder of Rome —not to mention the remainder of that treasure we'll send back."

Suddenly the ambuscade was loosed; the men from the boats were attacking, and all that glittering serpent writhed in mortal agony.

"Fame and glory be damned," said Ramnes. "I've had my fill. But Rome? Aye!"

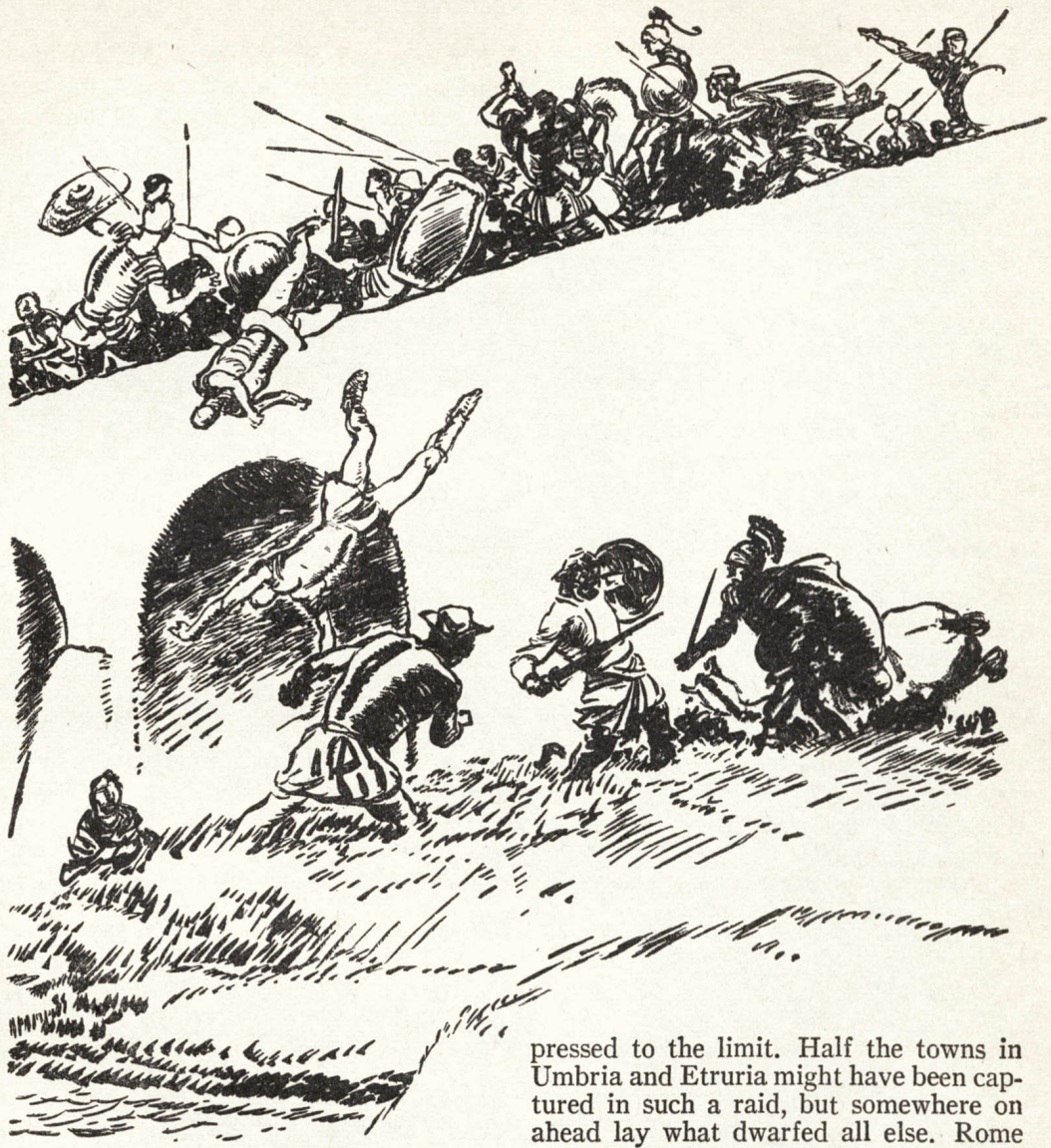
To empty that cavern of treasure and send it back, to ride with a thousand men through the heart of Umbria, was by no means so mad as might appear. Of late, news had come in from all quarters, and a very carefully phrased letter had arrived from Lars Masena.

NOW, this spring, was the death-grapple; Rome knew it, Hannibal knew it, all Italy knew it. Africa must be destroyed on the Tuscan plains, or Rome must go down to ruin. To put armies in the field, refusing to call back her legions from Spain, Rome had stripped her Latin allies and the hill states of every available man. The huge training-camp at Reate was empty, every city and town was empty. The suspense everywhere had become intolerable; all business, commerce, political activity, hung upon the issue with bated breath.

The letter from Lars, so couched as to do no damage if the courier fell into Roman hands, gave explicit instructions. Ramnes was to bring his thousand back to Reate, then on to the Cassian Way and north to Clusium, below Lake Trasimene; there, Lars would meet him. Hard riding would do it handily, and the hill cities would have no warning, no time to levy men to stop him.

Also, hinted Lars Masena, any gold that could be spared would be welcomed by the chief.

"So the armor of Porsena returns to Clusium, where it originated!" Pelargos laughed thinly. His own heavy armor, and that of Ramnes, was packed on one of the few baggage animals. "That's fate for you, comrade."



They poured through the hills to Asculum, unhindered. The squadron in advance was equipped with Roman armor, giving out word that those following were riding to join the armies of Rome; they clattered on day and night, each man supplied with a week's emergency rations.

Asculum was past now, and the first task lay ahead. The advance squadron posted on to Reate, gathered carts and horses, and came back to the Villa Veturis, now all desolate and empty. There outside the grotto of Lamnia the force made night camp, and was off at sunrise; the escorting squadron and the carts back to Eryx with treasure and relics, Ramnes and his thousand, each man loaded with gold for Hannibal, off toward the Via Cassia, with Pelargos heading the advance squadron.

It was a hard, swift push through the hills, day and night in the saddle, horses pressed to the limit. Half the towns in Umbria and Etruria might have been captured in such a raid, but somewhere on ahead lay what dwarfed all else. Rome or Africa, and the scales of destiny at balance—there was the driving, compelling force that bound Ramnes and his men; they passed by every town, unheeding.

THEY were on the wide-paved Cassian Way at last, pounding northward. All Roman country here, rich and thickly settled. But a trickle upon the wide road became a stream and then a flood—refugees, by horse and cart and on foot, with wild tales of the Punic terror driving down at Rome. Not too late, then!

Clusium in sight at last, refugees in torrents, the smoke of burning farms on the horizon; and, in the afternoon sunlight, a squadron of Numidian horse meeting Pelargos and pealing exultant shouts to the blue sky. Pelargos came back on the gallop and drew rein, his eyes glittering.

"On! Lars is here, in the town! Come along, let the men follow with the Numidians!"

Ramnes gave the squadron leaders orders to follow and halt in Clusium to rest men and horses, then was off at a gallop with Pelargos and the Numidian captain. They pounded into the old Etruscan capital, and amid wild Berber yells from African throats, slid from the saddle and stiffly flung themselves upon Lars Masena.

IT was a new Lars who took them into the crumbling palace of King Porsena, and ordered wine and food in haste. A Lars breathless with excitement, glittering with gold and gems, great with authority—a man like a sword, at keen high tension.

"Just in time, just in time!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I was afraid you'd not get here. We've not an hour to lose. Hannibal and the army stop at Cortona tonight, come on past Lake Trasimene tomorrow. The consul Flaminius is hard after him, and Hannibal means to trap him and destroy him. I don't know just how or where—it may be happening now. We'll ride back and meet the army."

"Where's Rhea?" demanded Pelargos.

"With the baggage and the other women. By the gods, she's seen a few things, let me tell you! It was terrible. Worse than the Alps, far worse."

"What was?" demanded Ramnes, gulping at his wine.

"The push across the Apennines. Marshes swollen by the winter rains. We were six days and nights in water up to our waists—can you realize what that means, you two? Men died like flies in the first frost."

Pelargos laughed harshly. "What does that matter, to a god?"

Lars snarled at him. "No mockery! I tell you, Hannibal's no less than a god himself! He's been laid out with fever. He's lost an eye—infected. He's worn to skin and bone, but he's never faltered! The last of the elephants died—all except one; it carried Hannibal when he was at his worst, and I drove the beast. Death? We've left a trail of the dead through those mountains! But we got through, and we're here."

"How many left?" queried Pelargos with skeptic air.

"Somewhere over thirty thousand. Flaminius has between thirty and forty thousand. Our drive at Rome was too fast for them. The other consul's somewhere up in the northeast and out of it. If we destroy Flaminius, Rome's open—open to us!"

Lars choked on his own excitement, then demanded the news from Eryx. He could scarcely hear it, however, or put his mind upon it; he was in a perfect flame, and not he alone. Everyone was the same. Ramnes caught the infection. Today, tomorrow at this time—Rome or Africa, and the fate of the world!

"To be frank about it, the army isn't in too good condition," admitted Lars. "You know what shape it was in when we got out of the Alps; now it's worse. And we're clean out of supplies. The country's pretty bare at this time of year."

"Ha! There's ice for the sherbet!" exclaimed Pelargos with caustic asperity. "In plain words, the army's on its last legs; Hannibal has fever and one eye gone—and you talk of sacking Rome! The truth is, you're all on the dead run with Flaminius chasing you!"

LARS looked up, a fervid glow in his eyes.

"And Flaminius," he admitted slowly, "knows it. Some of our men have deserted to him with the news. He knows it. He knows we're driving straight on Rome, plundering and burning the Roman countryside as we go. He's determined to stop us."

Pelargos blinked. "Ah!" he said in a different voice. "So that's how the wind blows! A good thing for Rome that Hannibal hasn't lost both eyes; then he'd be master of the Seven Hills in a fortnight! No use sitting here swilling wine. Let's be going!"

For the Stork had kindled to the infectious fever of it all. Now he flung his cynic caution to the winds and went flaming forth with them, and the three rode north with the squadrons of Eryx somewhere behind, and ruddy sunset gilding all Etruria. . . .

Pelargos was in a fury of wild exhilaration. All the way, into the night, they breasted a continuous flood of fugitives and fleeing folk, who scattered in panicked terror at the sight of armed men. Country people, peasants and nobles alike, laden with burdens of family wealth, pushing barrows, old men and women hitched to carts, girls and children flushing away like frightened quail.

Some were out of their heads with fear. One stalwart graybeard maniac, a veteran of the first Punic war, strode along shouting that the world was at an end, that the gods had turned against Rome, that fire and blood would consume all things. Groups of priests scurried, laden

with sacred temple gear. Women carried babes; peddlers and merchants from the city, wounded soldiers in flight—all of them with hysteric voices of pillage and death and slavery. A sudden roar of laughter escaped Pelargos, as he waved an arm at the fleeing multitudes.

"Make way, make way for the gods! There are your fine Roman folk, comrade, Etruscans of the ancient stock, fleeing like leaves before the tempest! When the gods ride forth, the people of earth are broken and cast adrift on the whirlwind. Husbands like you, fathers like me, wives and children like ours—loosed upon a sea of blood and rapine and pillage, dying, their corpses strewing the fields and the roads!"

"Are you mad?" cried Ramnes at him. Pelargos laughed again, shrilly.

"Aye, mad, drunk with glory of the gods! And tomorrow night we may be like these, scattered afar in wild flight with death at our shoulder. Here's war, comrade, brute passion unleashed, mankind chased down and speared like running deer in the forest—blood, blood, blood! And all the doings of the immortals, of the gods, of men in the likeness of gods! Rome perishes, and we put the sword to her throat. Well done!"

For a bit Ramnes thought this was rank insanity, though he was too weary to think much about anything; but presently Pelargos fell silent, and afterward made no mention of his wild words. They were, all of them, a little short of madness, what with the bursting tension and the hard riding, and the world won or lost on the morrow.

ABOUT midnight, it was, they came upon the one man who seemed oblivious to the mounting storm of human fury, and untouched, unmoved by the tremendous strain of tension all around. A man whose giant frame was haggard and worn, thinned by fever and suffering, wasted to a mockery of what it had been, with a bandage around his head, closing one eye. And with him the boy who was now aged into manhood: Hannibal and his brother Mago.

Without rising from the campfire, he stretched out his hands to them, greeted Lars and Pelargos warmly, made Ramnes come and sit beside him. All their words fell away suddenly, before his tranquillity, his unhurried, commanding presence, his quiet voice. He beckoned two of his staff officers, and ordered Lars and Pelargos away with them.

"The Balearic slingers are awaiting you, Pelargos; go and command them, and learn the dispositions as you go. . . . Your wife, Lars," he said, smiling, "is with the baggage; go to her. A remarkable woman, that; give her, I pray you, my warmest regards."

Their figures faded away. This was in the valley of Trasimene, and from the lake a heavy night-mist had arisen that blotted out the stars. Wine was brought, and Ramnes was thankful for it.

HANNIBAL turned to him.

"Well, my friend, I know your story from Lars. You served me well, there in the Alps; the gods have served you well. Or, indeed, did you serve me at all?"

"I think my hatred of Rome was the thing I served," said Ramnes slowly. "I've brought you gold, and a thousand horse, the squadrons of Eryx; they're close behind."

"Ah, good, good!" Hannibal beckoned another aide. "When they come, bring them past us here, and feed up the fire a bit, then take them to camp beyond my bodyguard. Ramnes leads them tomorrow, with me."

"Whither?" asked Ramnes. Hannibal drew his purple cloak about his shoulders against the mist, and leaning forward, traced with his finger in the dust.

"Here's the highway that comes down beside the lake, yonder—the water on one side, the steep hills on the other. At the north end is Maharbal; here at the south end am I, with the heavy-armed troops; along the hills are the slingers and light-armed men—all hidden. I am not hidden. I have men posted on the hill up above, who'll be seen above the mist. Flaminius will march for me—the trap will close on him. It is all very simple."

No exultation, no fiery words; the man seemed unutterably weary.

"Then he must surrender—but a consul of Rome does not surrender," exclaimed Ramnes.

"I fear not, my friend. In that case, not one man of his whole army escapes. Now tell me about your city. Is it an offshoot of Eryx in Sicily—a Greek colony? Tell me."

Ramnes obeyed, seeing that the other wanted mental diversion. Hannibal listened carefully, questioning now and then.

"The alliance of your city means everything to me," he said at length. "Not for itself, but for what it will mean; Eryx

starts what the rest of Italy will follow. The yoke of Rome is ended. Well, well, I envy you Pelargos! I see clearly that he's for you, not for me; a remarkable man. Have you armor?"

"Coming, with my men. I must thank you for sending Giscon to Eryx; he's being of immense help to us."

"We must do what we can," said the other musingly. "A good motto, that; we must do what we can—for ourselves, for others, for the world! Chiefly, I fear, for ourselves."

He glanced up as an officer rode up, dismounted, saluted, and spoke swiftly.

"Ah! Your squadrons." Hannibal rose. An aide brought him helmet and sword; the bandage was concealed. He stood beside Ramnes, in the firelight, as the shadowy shapes of weary men and horses appeared.

At an order from Ramnes, the squadron leaders fell out; the files of men wended past, and in passing, each man flung down before Hannibal the package of treasure he had brought. The pile grew and grew. From the staff, from the African officers crowding about, came cries of amazement.

The worn and haggard man had vanished. In his place stood a Hannibal aglow with the old eager vitality, the astonishing personal charm which made him unique in his age. He stood beside Ramnes, a somber and gigantic figure radiating strength and power.

THE last squadron filed past. Hannibal turned to the squadron leaders, greeting them with a grip of the hand here, a few words there. From all sides officers and men came running, to stare at the immense loose heap of golden coins as they crowded about, and to welcome the officers of Eryx. More than one greeted Ramnes with eager recollection, and the warmth of friendship banished the chill misty night.

"I thank you, Ramnes, and you his officers," Hannibal said. "We welcome you, we're proud of you and of Eryx. Eh?" He turned, as one of the Numidian captains spoke a few words. A laugh broke from him, and he flung out his hand at the pile of gold.

"Oh, that! Leave it where it is; a guard, of course. Leave it there. Either we shall have great use for it by this time tomorrow—or we shall not. To rest, friends, to rest, and remember that he who sleeps soundest, is surest to have the gods on his side tomorrow."

Which, reflected Ramnes, sounded uncommonly like an echo of Pelargos.

CHAPTER XVII

JUST before the dawn came a rapid drumming of hooves. A courier flung himself from the saddle and panted out swift tidings. Ramnes, awakened, gathered that it was word from Maharbal, at the upper end of the lake.

"Very well," said Hannibal, rubbing his one eye. "So the consul and two Roman legions and the pick of their cavalry, are in the van! Excellent. Send me Pelargos; I want him with me, and half the slingers as well. No other change. Serve out food and wine at once, what there's left of it. The staff with me. Ramnes!"

"Here," said Ramnes.

"Come along. We're going part way up the hill. They're in the trap."

Under the mist, which continued thick and heavy, was a stir of movement as the ranks of heavy-armed Spanish and Carthaginians, which closed this end of the trap, wakened and fed. The horses were brought up. Hannibal spoke rapidly, as he ate and armed.

"I've posted your squadrons under the hill to the left, Ramnes; when I give the word, take them into the Roman horse. Until then, with me."

They mounted and rode blindly through the fog, for Ramnes; but for the others, who knew the ground perfectly, it was only a little way to a shoulder of the high hill. Here they dismounted again and waited, resting, relaxed. The first grayness was lifting through the world; soon the spears of dawn would strike up across the sky.

Silence, and the heaviness of mist, cloaked everything. Impossible to realize that men by the thousand waited. Impossible to realize that through this dark and fog were coming thirty thousand and more Romans, stretched out in column, doubtless, for a couple of miles. Here with the hilltop above barely visible,—since it was above the mist,—all was stillness and waiting.

Then, upon this heaviness of suspense, lifted a single voice in Greek. Perhaps one of the men from Eryx, perhaps not; no telling. It quavered up in a song, a snatch of plaintive simple words, perchance caught from some Greek poet. One of the staff officers moved quickly as though to have the voice checked, but Hannibal lifted a hand in restraint; he

Sword to sword, shield to shield, eye to eye, the two men struggled—until the blade of Ramnes crashed down on helm and skull—and life.

was listening, his face thoughtful, to those oddly incongruous, careless words.

Am I not with thee in the time of trouble,
Dread specter of thy youth, companion of thine age?
I am neither evil destiny nor guardian angel,
Although I am so named by men.

Where thou art, shall I be alway
As a brother inseparable,
Even unto the end of thy days
When I shall be seated on thy gravestone!

In sadness, seek my solace freely,
But in joyous days avoid me warily.
Ever must I follow thy path
Yet never may I touch thy hand—
For I am Solitude.

The voice died away abruptly, as though checked by some officer. The staff and aides looked one at another, most of the Africans speaking Greek fluently. Then a new voice, lusty, bold, energetic, broke from the mist.

"Ha, comrades! You heard that fellow singing? There's an omen for you, Chief!"

Hannibal looked up, smiling, as Pelargos loomed above them.

"I thought you had no use for omens, worthy Stork?"

"Oh, I never avoid any good thing," Pelargos said cheerfully, with a wave of the hand to Ramnes. "Of course an omen can be read any way you want to read it; I read this to mean luck! You sent for me?"

"I want your eyes," said Hannibal, "when the mist rises. Your slingers?"

"Half of them at hand, as ordered."

"Good. I understand the consul is in the van, with two legions and the cavalry

—that will be ten to fifteen thousand men. You'll have first honor here, as at the Trebia. I want the officers picked off; if the cavalry charge you, retreat to cover of my ranks."

DAWN showed—a rosy streak growing from the eastern sky. The ranks on the hill, above the mist, broke into motion; they had seen the Roman approach coming, through the swirls and eddies of fog below. A silence fell, dread and ominous with tension.

The mist began to thin. Out below, closing off the way southward, Ramnes began to see the ranks of heavy-armed Spanish and Carthaginians, with Hannibal's bodyguard. Slowly, slowly came a measured cadence, at first almost imperceptible, then growing in force; the marching tread of unseen feet in unison, thousands of them.

"Ah! It's time Mago attacked!" muttered Hannibal, frowning anxiously. His brother was in charge of the light-armed troops stationed along the hills in hiding, on the Roman flank.

A trumpet rang out, unseen but startling in its nearness. As though this were a signal, the mist eddied and thinned, the sun was lifting. The golden rays struck down through the vapor and there was a dull glinting like the glint of water: the spears and mail of the Roman column. The mist became clearer; another trumpet blew with sudden urgent voice.

Rome had seen her prey awaiting her.

For a moment, nothing moved. The serried Roman ranks were halted; then horsemen began to work forward.

Pelargos said, peering at the masses of men:

"The consul, Hannibal! I see him, there in the group of cavalry! He's staring at our lines, at the hill, at us. Those are the Latin horse raised by Mancinus. There's Mancinus himself, comrade! Ah —what's that?"

From the invisible north, where the lake and valley were still clad in mist, came a rending tumult, a clangor of arms mingled with voices.

"That's Mago!" exclaimed Hannibal, his face lighting up. "To your slingers, Pelargos! The officers, remember!"

Thinner grew the mist. More and more of the Roman column became visible. Flaminius knew that he was attacked from the high hills in flank; he did not know that Maharbal and the Numidians had closed in behind him and were slaughtering his rearguard. This, in fact, was something he would never know—for, in the rising tumult and confusion, came the shrill voice of Pelargos:

"For you, Hannibal! Flaminius down —for you!"

The slingers were almost invisible. Ramnes could scarcely see those figures stealing over the ground, afoot; but a hail of death was striking the ranks of Rome. The mist now was blowing away.

Hannibal turned.

"Ramnes! Those horse will be charging in a moment. To your squadrons! Cut up those cavalry yonder, then strike in on the left flank of the legions."

Ramnes swung into the saddle and was gone. His gigantic figure, clad now in the bronze armor of Porsena, seemed unnatural and superhuman. To his voice, the squadrons of Eryx seemed to spring out of the ground, as the Latin horse began to move. The first squadron, the second, the third, swept past, struck into a gallop, and went rushing like the wind for those gleaming ranks. Heading the last two squadrons, Ramnes followed; he carried no dagger of Eryx today, but sword and javelin.

A CRASH; the first squadron was swallowed up. The second followed and was lost in the Roman ranks. The third plunged on headlong. Now all those ranks were in wild confusion. The serried legions were moving forward, and Ramnes with his last two squadrons hammered home the blow that broke the Latin cavalry.

Broke it, scattered it, sent it in wild flight, then wheeled and struck at the flank of the legions. Here was Rome itself; here were the citizens of Rome, the old blood and stock of Rome, facing about as though on parade, taking the shock, dissipating it. The charge was scattered, but had served its purpose. Momentarily halted, the Roman ranks were now met by the storming infantry of Spain and Africa. . . .

And here the world stopped, for them and for Ramnes as well. He, plunging through the wildest of the fight, saw the face of Mancinus rising before him; sword to sword, shield to shield, eye to eye, the two men struggled, until the blade of Ramnes crashed down on helm and skull—and life. The dead figure pitched out of the saddle, and Ramnes, suddenly conscious of the stoppage of everything, drew out of the struggle to rally his squadrons.

There was the queer thing, as the mist bore away and the long valley was disclosed—everything had stopped. From the north, the Roman rear had rolled up, what was left of it, until the ranks of legions now ran along in one solid line. The cavalry had completely vanished. Hannibal and his bodyguard still occupied the lower slope of the hill; all the other Punic forces had moved in upon the Roman mass, on three sides. The lake itself formed the fourth side. And movement had ceased.

Yet the clangor of iron upon iron dinned up from front and rear. Only in the mass had motion halted; the ranks were fighting, breast to breast, stubbornly and terribly. Ramnes was awed by the scene as its meaning stood revealed. Here was no trickery of surprise or advantage. It was man to man, Rome against Africa, and those who slew best and quickest, would win. But killing—that was the business of the legions! They were trained to it!

Ramnes gathered the squadrons of Eryx, dismounted them, and hurled them into the stubborn battle, led them against those ghastly pale set faces. The Romans gave no ground, but rank succeeded rank as they died and fought on and died. They were overmatched, man for man, ferocity for ferocity.

Suddenly Ramnes felt himself shaken from his feet; he reeled, recovered, saw the men around him staggering as they fought. In the air, from the ground, reverberated a dull and grinding roar, and the earth shook and trembled.

No one heeded; javelins flashed, swords drove down, the serried ranks struggled on in a blind and mad ferocity. And presently Ramnes was amazed to realize that the Africans, not the Romans, were doing the slaughtering. On to the northward along the lake, that mighty column was breaking asunder, splitting into smaller divisions; thirty thousand men were dying. Here and there, parties of the Latin allies were flinging down their arms, but not the Romans. The legions fought on—and slowly, slowly perished.

The world was lost, and won.

RAMNES sheathed his sword. Excitement held him; furious exultation seized him and shook him, as he made his way toward the general and the staff. Couriers had foamed in from the north. Hannibal's features were blazing, as he put out a hand to Ramnes.

"Not a man of them, not a man of them!" he exclaimed. "Some cut a way out; Maharbal has them surrounded. Not a man will escape! The whole army, do you understand! From the consul down—the whole army! Do you know what it means?"

Ramnes gripped his hand, swung him around, pointed southward.

"That's what it means, Hannibal! Look—through the dust, above those trees, over the horizon—see them? Do you see those seven gleaming hills? The road's open to them, the road to Rome! The end of tyranny and injustice and treachery is there; now to take freedom to those seven hills. To Rome! On to Rome!"

The staff officers echoed his words fiercely: "On to Rome, Hannibal!"

There was a laugh. Ramnes turned, Hannibal turned.

A long, incredibly tall figure, bald pate shining in the sunlight, blood spattering armor and arms; it was Pelargos, striding toward them, juggling a Roman sword, flinging it high in air and catching it again, and singing.

"Ha!" he cried out, and saluted. "A sword for you, Hannibal! The sword of the consul, Flaminius—a gift for you! Plunge it into the throat of Rome!"

HANNIBAL took the sword, and held it up. His gaze lifted to the horizon, and widened, as though the vision of those seven hills came to him, also.

"The end of the road—right!" he exclaimed. "Right, Ramnes! Right, my friends! This day, Rome has perished!"

Pelargos came to Ramnes and gripped his hand.

"All that I promised you in Gaul has come true, comrade. Content?"

Ramnes nodded, voiceless, as the thunderous rolling cheers of victory swept down the bloody ranks. His heart swelled to it, his breath came quickly, his eyes glinted with exultation; here was triumph such as few men had ever known, or would know again—Rome, gasping out her life under the bright Etruscan sunlight!

"It's finished," he said slowly, as the last reeling clumps of legionaries went down. "Finished."

Pelargos rubbed his long nose. His lips moved, as though to say that nothing was ever finished—but the clamorous acclaim of voices drowned his words; and with a slight shrug, he turned away.

THE END.

"DARKEN ship! All lights out! Tell that misbegotten Arab to make me another cup of coffee."

Captain Kormakiti, his sallow face as greasy as the plate he pushed aside, gave his excited orders to the crew of the Greek steamer *Paphos*. Then he unbuttoned his dirty tunic and lit a cigarette that scented the air of the cabin like burning brown paper.

Ten o'clock on the evening of September 2, 1939. Europe had been at war for some hours. The *Paphos,* lurching north toward the Bay of Biscay, had slipped past Gibraltar exactly an hour before Britain had officially declared war. For which fact Captain Kormakiti was devoutly thankful, for he had no desire to have a British destroyer or any naval officers making inconvenient inquiries about the cargo he was carrying from Beyrouth.

"I hardly expected to bag so many scoundrels in one evening." Rodgers chuckled

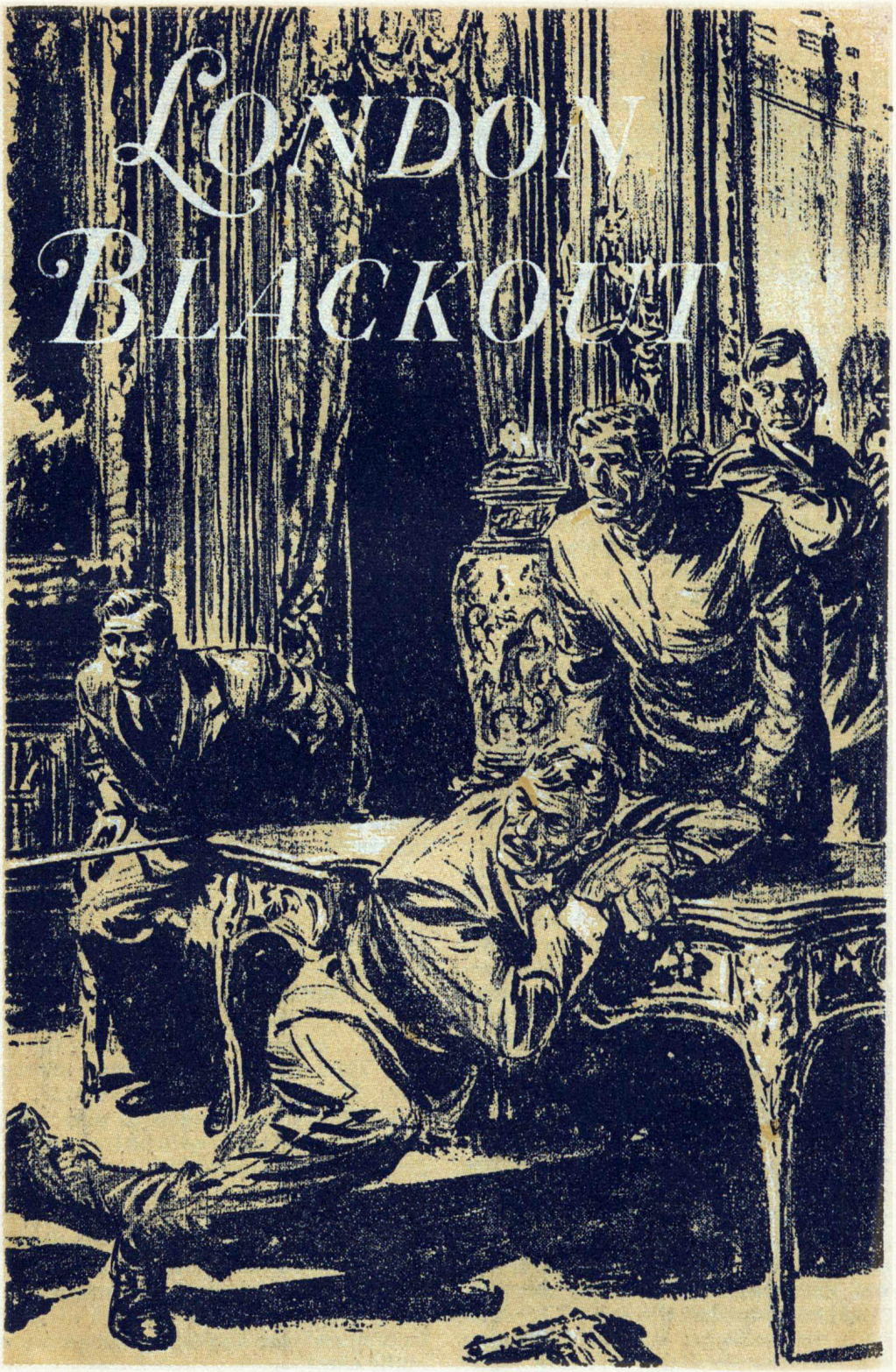
Illustrated by Austin Briggs

"Coffee! D'you hear, you spawn of a camel?"

Captain Kormakiti opened wide his mouth. It was as though a mastiff had been chewing a bone of gold. Into the range of his raisinlike eyes came the disheveled figure of an Arab who humbly placed before him a cup of the treacly Turkish coffee that he loved.

Captain Kormakiti smacked his lips over the sweetness.

"Not bad," he declared. "For a rat of a stowaway, you've proved less useless than most. Maybe at the end of this voyage I shall sign you on as a regular



The Intelligence officer known as the Red Wolf of Arabia follows a desperate Mediterranean adventure to its climax in war-time London.

By WILLIAM MAKIN

member of the crew. What d'you think of that, Azul?"

The thin, lithe Arab raised his head. He had been discovered sprawled among the oranges and barrels of olive oil three hours after leaving Beyrouth. Kicked out into the sunlight, and confronted by the wrathful Captain Kormakiti, he had proved grateful for the menial tasks flung at him. It was in the art of coffee-making he excelled. Even Captain Kormakiti grudgingly admitted that it was nearly as good as that served in his favorite cafe on the waterfront of Piræus.

"D'you hear what I said, Azul? I'll make you a member of my crew."

"Allah is bountiful in all his goodness. Allah is great!" muttered the Arab.

"Never mind Allah. Put your trust in Captain Kormakiti and the good ship *Paphos*. They'll bring piasters to your pocket, my man."

And the Greek displayed his expensive mouth of gold again.

Captain Kormakiti had every reason for his satisfaction. The *Paphos* was his golden argosy, disreputable freighter of twenty-five hundred tons though she was. Good money had been made running munitions into Spain during the civil war. The sudden termination of that conflict had forced the wily Greek into the dubious business of smuggling Jewish immigrants into Palestine. Now another and bigger war had begun. A fortune was to be made, provided one remained a roaming internationalist, with no scruples about neutrality. Captain Kormakiti had loaded a heavy cargo at Beyrouth a few hours after a talk with a German-speaking individual in a Syrian eating-house. A bargain was struck. Within the next few hours the Greek would be keeping his bargain. He drained his cup of coffee and nodded to the Arab.

"Okay! *Imshi!*"

THE Arab stepped softly out of the cabin. Outside the door, he hesitated for some moments. A swath of dirty rag about his head served as a turban. His hair was red. Alert gray eyes peered from the sun-tanned face along the deck. Blackness shrouded the sea. The Arab saw a yellow flicker fall like a shooting star. It was the light from the masthead, the last light of the ship being lowered. As the Captain had commanded, the *Paphos* was now rolling northward without a glimmer showing.

A curtain shrouded the light in the Captain's cabin. The Arab stowaway stood there listening. Captain Kormakiti was indulging in a strange form of entertainment that had been an obsession with him for the past three nights. He had switched on a radio set, and was listening to the broadcasting of advertisements from the Continental stations. When the sales-talk for Portuguese wines, Italian pianos, Scandinavian soaps, Spanish medicines and the like were superseded by music or news, the Captain impatiently switched to some other station. It was now the Madrid station which was announcing in persuasive Spanish that sufferers from eye-trouble should try the lotion *"Madre de Dios."*

GENTLY the watching Arab twitched back the curtain; Captain Kormakiti was bent over the table, head cocked in a listening attitude to the radio, and his big rough hand writing down a phrase on the paper before him.

"Allo—allo!" rattled on the irrepressible voice in Madrid. "Have you suffered from sea-sickness, train-sickness or air-sickness? You need never again, if you take that certain remedy, *Buenamer*. Don't forget the name—*Buenamer.*"

Apparently Captain Kormakiti was determined not to forget it. He was writing it down, religiously. Why should this Greek, who had sailed the Mediterranean in all weathers since he was a boy, be so interested in a remedy for sea-sickness?

"Buenamer will cure all your ills when traveling," went on the persuasive voice. "It is sold in different packets of special strength. Ask your chemist for these numbers—"

The Captain's pencil was busy.

"Diez y ocho . . . . eighteen . . . . forty-one . . . . fifteen . . . . twelve . . . . thirty-six. That is all. Don't forget: *Buenamer. Muchas gracias. . . . Adios!"*

A military band began to play. Impatiently the Greek switched off the radio. He drew toward him a chart of the Spanish coast, and with compass and dividers began to plot a position. The watching Arab saw his lips soundlessly repeating those numbers, "Eighteen . . . . forty-one . . . . fifteen . . . . twelve . . . . thirty-six." There came a sigh of satisfaction and the Captain stabbed a pin in the chart.

"Azul!" he called. "Where is that pariah of the desert?" The ragged figure stood before him. "Tell the mate I wish to see him at once."

Two minutes later the mate was standing in front of Captain Kormakiti.

"You'll make for this position, Mister. Eighteen degrees north, forty-one west. Steer north by northeast. You ought to make it by three o'clock in the morning. I'll get the engineer to force an extra couple of knots out of the ship."

"And when we get to the position, what then?" asked the mate.

Captain Kormakiti was blunt.

"Heave to, and await my orders."

"Very good, sir."

The mate made his way back to the bridge. Captain Kormakiti descended into the hot bowels of the engine-room. Nobody bothered about the ragged Arab. He had gone for'ard, crawled into a bunk, and lay with his face against an open porthole. From his rags he produced an electric torch. He began to flick the light against the black sea surging and hissing past.

Within half a minute there came a flickering light from the distant darkness. Then the Arab began to signal rapidly. He too was sending forth that series of numbers which had been broadcast in a radio advertisement from Madrid. An answering flash showed that his signals had been received.

"There was a light for a moment on the port bow," said the mate, as Captain Kormakiti came up to the bridge from the engine-room.

The Greek chuckled.

"It's of no account, Mister. Whoever it was couldn't spot us in this darkness. We haven't a light showing, eh?"

"No sir."

Back in the galley, crouched over a charcoal fire, the Arab was busy preparing another cup of coffee. It was for his own delectation. He sipped it appreciatively, and then lit a cigarette. On his clear-cut features was a grim smile.

IT was three o'clock in the morning. The engines of the *Paphos* were silent. The freighter lifted and flopped into the black swell of the sea a few miles from the Spanish coast.

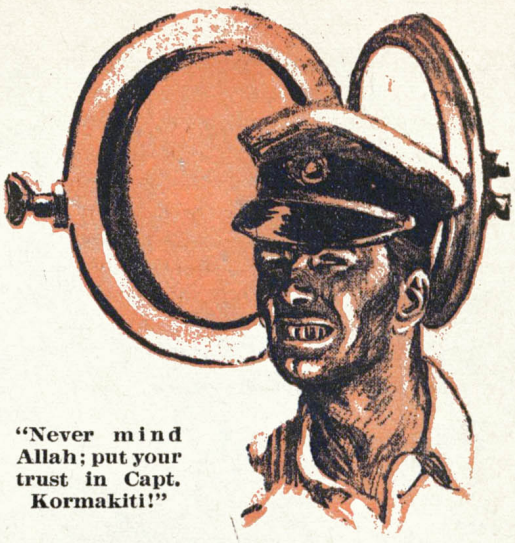
"See anything, Mister?"

Captain Kormakiti, leaning from the little bridge, addressed himself to the mate.

"Not a thing, sir," was the reply.

The Greek lifted an electric lamp into the darkness. He clicked it softly. It sent a signal across the blackness of waters. Still there was no response. He waited anxiously.

Suddenly there came the sound of swirling waters. It was as though some



"Never mind Allah; put your trust in Capt. Kormakiti!"

mammoth beast were lifting itself from the sea. There were strange gurglings. Then a long black shape loomed alongside the *Paphos*. The keen eyes of the Greek discerned a conning-tower and the streaming steel decks of a submarine. An officer, the pallor of whose face was almost hidden by the upturned collar of his naval uniform, stood there, a megaphone in his hand.

"*Guten Morgen,*" came a harsh voice. "Is that the *Paphos?*"

"*Ja,*" replied the Greek.

"This is Untersee Boat Fifty-six. You have the oil and provisions?"

"*Ja, mein Herr.*"

"Good! Get ready to fill our tanks. Stand by for the pipe-line!"

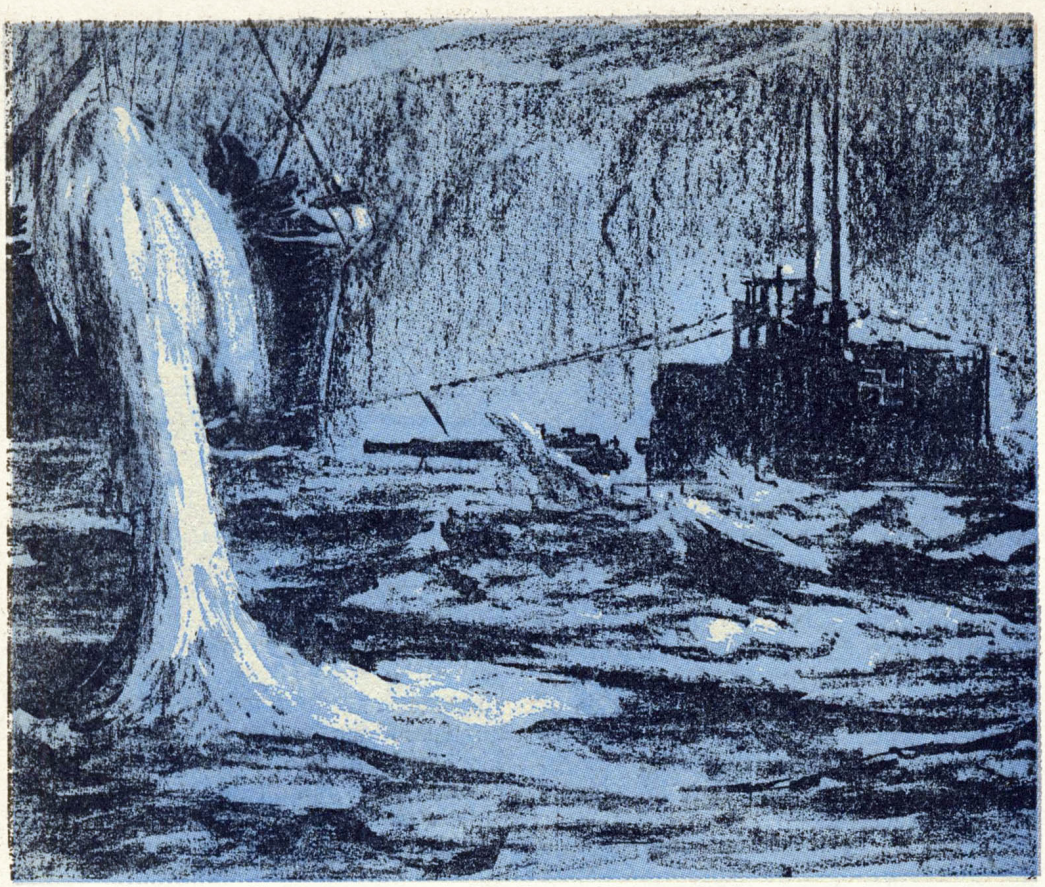
A rope came whizzing through the air. It was caught deftly by a waiting group aboard the *Paphos*. They tugged smartly at it, and a pipe of flexible steel came slithering aboard. This was run toward one of the open holds, at the bottom of which more men screwed it into what appeared to be the bilge-tank.

"Start the pump!" ordered Captain Kormakiti.

"Send me a man to help with the pipe here!" ordered the German commander of the submarine, which was now alongside the *Paphos* and lifting gently in the swell.

"Here, you!" shouted the Greek to the slim, shadowy form of the Arab who was watching the proceedings. "Get aboard there and help with the pipe."

The Arab flung a rope overboard and clambered to the steel deck of the submarine. It was wet and greasy. His bare feet, however, held him to the deck. He found himself with a group of German sailors all moving swiftly at the sharp, whispered commands of the officer.



"Ahoy there!" came a voice in English. "This is the British cruiser *Durbar*. I

The Arab worked feverishly, screwing the flexible steel pipe tightly. Already the snakelike object was alive. Gallons of oil, secretly stowed away in the hold of the *Paphos* at Beyrouth, were now pouring into the tanks of U-boat 56.

"Send aboard bread, butter and water!" commanded the U-boat officer. "Hurry! I don't want to be here in the dawn."

Food supplies in cases were being lowered from the *Paphos*. Sailors scurried over the steel decks, flinging provisions into the bowels of the steel monster. The Arab, crouched by the gurgling oil-pipe, stared anxiously in the darkness about him. His gray eyes were watchful.

"Three minutes late!" he muttered to himself.

SUDDENLY the darkness was split by a blinding beam of light. It swung across the water and rested upon the *Paphos* and the heaving U-boat. Everything was revealed with stark clarity. For a moment the sailors stood there, frozen by the blinding light into immobility. The commander of the U-boat was shown, his pale face and blue eyes lit with startled anxiety. At the same time a megaphoned voice in English came from behind the light: "Ahoy, there! This is the British cruiser *Durbar*. I order you to surrender!"

The voice jerked the U-boat commander into action.

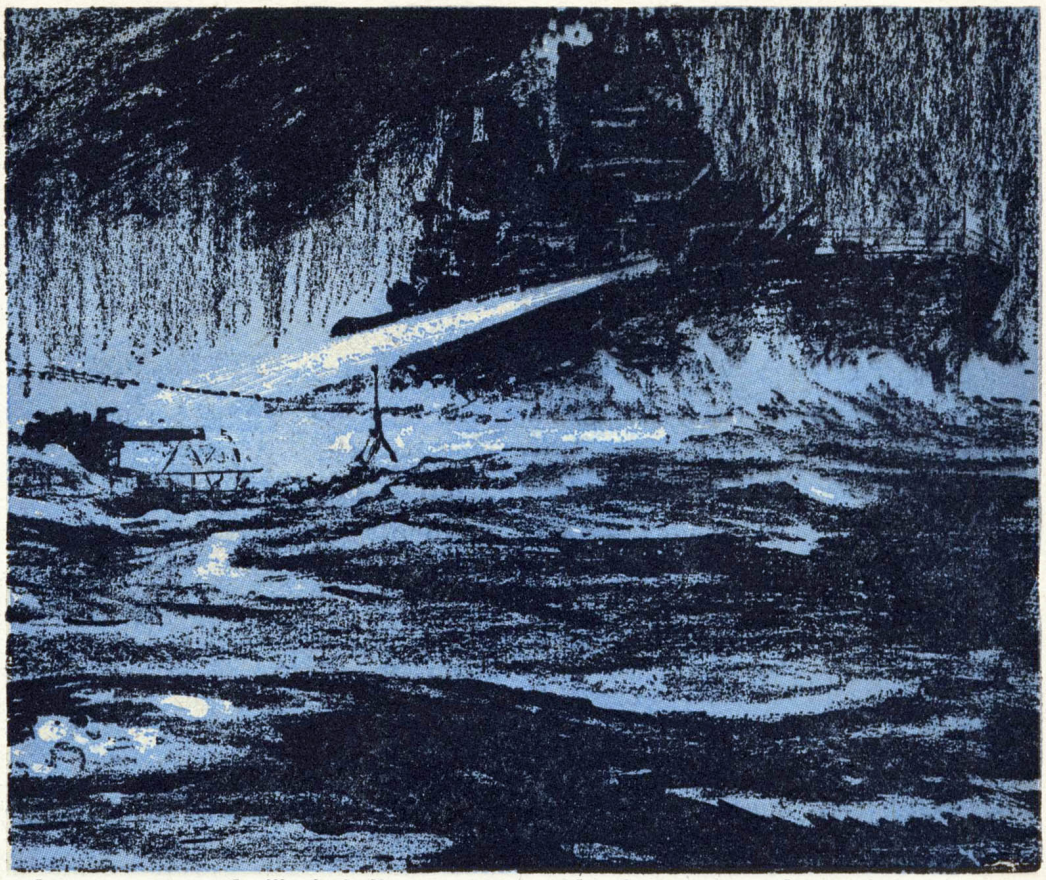
"Cast off, there!" he yelled. The Greek sailors needed no encouragement. Already the *Paphos* was lifting away, and Captain Kormakiti was shouting instructions to his engine-room. "Crew, action stations!" yelled the German commander. "Get that pipe-line away!"

On the steel deck of the submarine the Arab was struggling with the still gurgling pipe. German sailors were scurrying past him. The British cruiser saw all the movements in the blinding glare of the searchlight. There was an explosion. A shell came screeching overhead and sent up a column of water, drenching the now terrified Captain Kormakiti.

"Run up the white flag and order full speed to the engine-room!" he shouted to the mate. "Cast off from the U-boat!"

"That Arab is still below there!" shouted back the mate.

"Leave him! We can't be bothered with stowaways."



order you to surrender!" A shell, screeching overhead, sent up a column of water.

Already the *Paphos* was moving away from the submarine. The Arab, raising himself from his desperate struggle with the pipe, suddenly realized his retreat was cut off. At the same moment he discovered that the U-boat was submerging. The last sailor had clambered into the conning-tower, and the clang of the steel door as it closed had a finality for the solitary figure on the steel deck. He saw the sea swirling toward him. Again there came the explosive sound of the cruiser's gun, and the scream of a shell.

The Arab leaped into the sea. Simultaneously the shell hit the disappearing U-boat and tore a hole in the conning-tower. At full speed the cruiser came racing to the scene. It steamed over the swirling sea mixed with oil, released a depth-charge from the stern, passed on and cleared just as the sea erupted with the force of an explosion. Watchers on the deck of the cruiser saw the bow of the submarine lift and point toward the graying sky. Then it slid slowly into the depths.

"Stand by, to pick up survivors!" ordered the young commander from the bridge.

"Doesn't look as though there are any, sir," said his lieutenant, peering at the wrack of oil-smeared sea which told of the end of U-boat 56.

"Afraid not," said the commander. "Give orders full speed ahead. We'll pick up that Greek steamer now."

"I THINK I should forget the Greek steamer," said a voice behind them.

The two officers swung round in astonishment. Standing there was the dripping, ragged figure of the Arab. He had lost his turban in the sea, and a dank lock of red hair dangled in his gray eyes.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded the lieutenant.

But the Arab ignored him. He had gone up to the commander.

"Permit me to introduce myself—Paul Rodgers, an unwanted passenger in the Greek steamer. I'm glad you picked up my orders in time for this rendezvous."

"So you're the mysterious fellow we've got to thank!" said the commander, regarding this strange, dripping figure.

Rodgers nodded, with an ironic smile.

"Yes, even though I was left to pick myself up out of the sea. So my telegram

from Beyrouth was received in Gibraltar and acted upon?"

The commander nodded. There was a growing respect in his voice.

"I was ordered to intercept the Greek steamer, take you aboard, and hold myself at your orders," he said. "I saw your flashlight signals and came to the rendezvous as arranged. I didn't expect to bag a U-boat. We've got to thank you, Rodgers, for that. But in the meantime that Greek steamer is getting clear away."

"Let it!" Rodgers was his dominant self again. "I have reasons for wanting that ship to reach its English port safely. And now, if you would kindly provide me with a change of clothes and—"

"Of course, Rodgers—my apologies," hastened the commander. "By the way, are your orders that we return to Gibraltar?"

"No. You'll steam direct for England."

The commander's eyebrows lifted in astonishment. But there was something in the voice of the bedraggled figure that would not be denied.

"Very good, sir," said the commander quietly.

"Lifts 'isself out of the blarsted sea and calmly orders the ship to take 'im to England," grinned one of the sailors later, as he swung himself into a hammock in the throbbing hull of the cruiser. "Takes a meal as civilized-like as if he was in the bloomin' Savoy Hotel itself, and only grumbles about the coffee—which, mind you, I made myself."

"And then he asked you to tuck him into his bunk, eh?" grunted a voice from the next hammock.

"Not on your life. He just asks, quite cool-like, if we've got such a thing as a piano aboard. I ask you! A piano! Thinks he's aboard a ruddy P. and O. liner. Gorblimey, a piano!"

And with a laugh that croaked into a snore, the sailor fell asleep.

"I NEED hardly emphasize the importance of this area," said the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs as he indicated a map of the Mediterranean with a well-manicured finger. Lord Helston sat in his red-carpeted room at the Foreign Office, the windows of which overlooked the autumn tinting of the trees in St. James' Park.

An autumn-tinted head, that of Paul Rodgers, known because of his many strange adventures as the Red Wolf of Arabia, nodded approval.

"Now that we are at war," went on the tired voice of the Foreign Secretary, "the Mediterranean is more than ever our lifeline. Three continents close in on that inland sea—Asia, Africa and Europe. With the exception of France, all the countries bordering on this sea profess to be neutral. Absolute neutrality is a difficult affair, as our American friends have discovered. Let me say at once that there is no real neutrality in the Mediterranean today."

"I have already had experience of that," said Rodgers, a grim smile crossing his intellectual face.

Lord Helston, who had recently passed through days and nights of the world diplomatic crisis, took a sip at a glass of water.

"It is essential that the Allies shall have full freedom of the Mediterranean," he went on. "The mechanized forces of France depend largely upon the safe arrival of tankers with oil from Syria and the Persian Gulf. France also has her reservoir of men in North Africa, and the safe transport of these troops is vital for her security. Again, Britain has considerable forces in the Middle East. We have to protect Egypt, the Suez Canal, the Arabian states and, of course, India. Supplies for these forces have to go by way of the Mediterranean. There must be no break in the lifeline. Above all, we must be careful not to infringe the declared neutrality of those nations who border upon the Mediterranean. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"At the same time," continued the Foreign Secretary, "the enemy is straining every nerve to obtain supplies by way of the Mediterranean—oil, copper-ore, food, textiles, everything that she cannot

obtain by way of the Atlantic and the North Sea. To some extent these efforts must be successful. There are many individuals of the declared neutral nations who will not hesitate, when big money is at stake, to ignore neutrality. These individuals are at work now; they violate the Hague Convention daily. As to the extent which they are successful in the future will depend a good deal on yourself. It is a tremendous responsibility we are placing upon your shoulders."

"I appreciate that, sir."

The tired eyes of the Foreign Secretary took on a gleam of pleasure.

"Your work in Palestine and Arabia has not gone unnoticed, Rodgers. I can tell you that your past achievements highly commend you for this important task which I now offer you. I need hardly say that the delicate nature of the work necessitates that you have no official status. If you get into trouble, you must get yourself out. You are not entitled to appeal to any official representatives of His Majesty's Government abroad. If I myself should meet you at any time, I shall not be aware of having had the pleasure of your acquaintance. You will be left entirely to your own resources. It only remains for me to ask whether you will undertake this task on behalf of Britain?"

"I came here at your request, sir," said Rodgers quietly. "And I do accept, unconditionally."

LORD HELSTON stretched forth a hand and shook that of Rodgers with surprising vigor.

"It is a pleasure to shake hands with a brave man, Rodgers," he said. "At the same time, I do not ask you to accept unconditionally. I need hardly say that when this war has been brought to a successful conclusion,—as I know it will,—you have only to return here and you will not find us ungrateful."

The Red Wolf rose. His clean-cut features were set, and there was a stubborn angle to his jaw.

"I demand only from myself, sir, the satisfaction of knowing that I've done my job as well as I was able."

The Foreign Secretary nodded.

"That is worth more than all the honors and rewards," he said. "Well, good luck, Rodgers. The Mediterranean is your stage. I know you will play a brave rôle. And may God be with you."

Lord Helston was a severely religious man. He meant what he said. . . .

Four days after Paul Rodgers had arrived in England, he watched the *Paphos* discharge her legitimate cargo of olive oil and oranges at the East India Dock in the Thames. In his discreet lounge suit and indolently swinging a cane, Rodgers was unlikely to be recognized as the Arab stowaway from Beyrouth. In fact, when Captain Kormakiti came strolling down the gangway to go ashore, he gave only an indifferent glance at the loitering figure. The Greek hailed a taxi. As he drove off, Rodgers followed his example.

THE trail led into the darkened West End of London. Luckily the twilight still held. It was a gray and somber London, grimly determined on war. Barricades of sandbags mounted against the buildings. Windows were strip-papered against the splintering of glass. Against this background moved the men in uniform—the khaki of the Army, the light blue of the Air Force, and the dark blue of the policemen with their shrapnel helmets and gas-masks slung from shoulders. Even the pedestrians carried their gas-masks. There was the unusual sight of a formally dressed couple entering the Ritz with gas-masks hanging from their shoulders. They were saluted with respect by the porter, who was belted with a tin canister containing his own mask. Everywhere flared the notices: *"To the Trenches,"* or *"Air Raid Shelter."*

The raisin eyes of the Greek peered nervously on this London at war. He had no liking for the interview which awaited him in this grim city. The taxi swung him into Soho. With a sigh he descended outside an odorous shop window filled with bottles of wines, dried figs and scrawny vegetables. It declared itself as the Café Orient.

When Rodgers strolled inside, Captain Kormakiti had already seated himself facing a compatriot at one of the small tables. And judging by the golden scowl which the mouth of the Captain revealed, the conversation was not a pleasant one. Rodgers, who looked an ordinary West End lounger, seated himself at a table and ordered a Turkish coffee. He made a wry face as he tasted it. At the next table, Captain Kormakiti was more explicit.

"Filthy coffee!" declared the Greek. "Now I had a scoundrel of an Arab aboard the *Paphos,* who knew the right strength and sweetness of Turkish coffee. A pity I lost him in that unfortunate affair at sea."

"It is indeed unfortunate that you encountered that cruiser at all," said the other Greek darkly. "In fact, Kormakiti, you've got to explain a lot. The boss wants to hear your story. Better think fast. He won't take any excuse."

"But did I not get clear away with my ship?" protested Kormakiti.

"*You* may have got clear away; the U-boat didn't," was the reply.

"It was every man for himself."

"You won't persuade the boss with that talk. He pays well, but only when the results are successful. When anyone fails—" There was a significant shrug. "Swallow your coffee and come along."

Obviously Captain Kormakiti was a troubled man as he left the Orient Café in company with the other Greek. Once again a taxi was hailed, and Rodgers took up the trail in another taxi. This time the hunt was difficult. Darkness, the complete darkness of the nightly blackout, had descended upon London. Only a few pin-points of light told of the moving traffic; an occasional flash from the torch of a bewildered pedestrian. The main streets of London were, to Rodgers, as black as the chasms of the Taurus mountains—and much more difficult to negotiate.

"I'll do my best to follow, guv'nor, but what you really need in this blackout is a blind man to lead you," grinned the taxi-driver.

LUCKILY, the drive was short. The taxi with the two Greeks drew up by a pretentious house overlooking Regent's Park. For a moment a searchlight among the trees flickered toward the sky and was masked again. It had caught the silver belly of a balloon trailing the mists of cloud.

Rodgers saw the two men entering the doorway of one of the darkened houses. He gave a coin to his taxi-driver, and when that cheerful individual had driven away, he surveyed the stone mass before him. The pretentious pillars and balustrades of the Victorian façade merely affronted his esthetic tastes. Ironically enough, these monstrosities were heavily protected. Even the sandbags had a fat, bourgeois appearance. He decided to have a look at the back of the house.

There he found a wall, a dank, untended garden, and some twisted ivy by a drain-pipe. These obstacles he agilely surmounted, and thereby reached a balcony which seemed about to fall despairingly into the garden. A few moments' work on an old-fashioned window, and he stepped inside a room. He stood for a moment in the darkness. He could hear voices down below. He fingered the heavy black cloth that blinded the window. A chuckle escaped him as his hand moved across the wall toward the door.

He tiptoed softly down the stairs, then stood motionless a moment, taking his bearings in a luxuriously furnished hall. Some ghostly shapes revealed themselves as pieces of Italian sculpture—pre-Mussolini period.

"Deplorably bad and expensive taste," decided Rodgers, but he hesitated a moment by a grand piano which flanked a corner of the hall. Then he moved quietly toward a doorway across the hall, where a chink of light and the sound of

It was a London grimly determined on war. . . . Against this background moved the men in uniform.

voices were revealed. He bent an eye to the keyhole.

"I'm not concerned with excuses, only the facts," a cold, unemotional voice was saying. The speaker was a thin, stoop-shouldered figure who sat at the end of the table facing the gaze of Rodgers. The man was in evening-dress; his lips were bloodless, and he sipped a glass of milk at intervals.

"I did my part. I ask only to be paid," was the defiant answer of Captain Kormakiti, whose back was toward the door.

A laugh without a smile escaped from the stoop-shouldered man. He turned to the other three seated at the table.

"This chaffering Greek thinks only in terms of drachmas," he said coldly. "I am spending thousands in building up an organization here to help our brave submarine crews to victory. I want to see this detestable nation of Britishers brought to their knees. I will pay well for that privilege. But I demand absolute obedience and duty to the death. And this Greek asks for drachmas!"

The others made no reply to this contemptuous statement. The silence became uncomfortable. Captain Kormakiti opened his gold mouth and closed it again without speaking. That cold, unemotional voice had resumed:

"Who was the spy aboard your ship, the traitor who gave away to the British the time and position of that rendezvous?"

"Spy! There was no spy aboard my ship," protested Captain Kormakiti.

At the back of the house he found a wall and some twisted ivy by a drainpipe.

"Don't quibble, you Greek fool! There must have been. Maybe you gave away the rendezvous to the British yourself! They are always generous with their gold. To a Greek who would sell his soul for five drachmas, gold would buy any information."

"A lie!" shouted the Greek. "I went to the rendezvous as ordered. Even my mate was unaware that the *Paphos* was steaming toward a U-boat. I give you my oath on that, Mr. Mallescu. The sudden arrival of the British cruiser was a great surprise to me. They even fired a shell at me and nearly sunk the *Paphos.*"

"What do I care for the *Paphos* and your filthy skin," snarled the strange figure at the end of the table. "I only know that a U-boat was sunk from information given by someone aboard your ship. That is certain. What I must know, for the safety and continuance of my work here in London, is the name of the man who gave that information to the British."

"If I knew, I would tell you, Mr. Mallescu," said the Greek wildly.

Calmly the man called Mallescu took a watch from his waistcoat pocket and laid it on the table before him. He took another sip at the glass of milk. Then, in the same quiet manner, he produced a revolver and leveled it at the startled Greek.

"I shall give you exactly two minutes to think seriously and name that spy, Captain Kormakiti. I am not a man to swallow any sort of nonsense. And believe me, I won't hesitate to shoot you where you sit. No sound will be heard outside. These walls are very thick. And maybe you noticed the piles of sandbags outside the house? They have a useful deadening effect. I will also mention that I have a convenient cellar for the disposal of your remains. . . . One minute has passed. There remains one minute in which to tell me the name of the spy aboard the *Paphos.*"

THE perspiration of fear was trickling down the face of the Greek. Again he opened his mouth to speak, and failed. He looked at the relentless face, the bloodless lips of the man confronting him. He realized that whatever name he babbled would not carry conviction. There was the lust for murder in those cold and fishlike eyes.

"I—I—"

"Thirty seconds remain!"

The faces of the other three men at the table seemed to be counting, mentally, those seconds.

Then, quietly, the door swung open and a slim man, dressed in a lounge suit and carrying a cane, sauntered in. He stood there gazing upon the group as though contemplating a waxworks scene at Madame Tussaud's.

"Good evening, gentlemen!"

Two of the men started to their feet. Only the man with the leveled pistol did not move. His gaze lifted for a second.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"The spy aboard the *Paphos,*" declared Rodgers, cheerfully. "I gather from the determined fashion with which you were questioning Captain Kormakiti that you are anxious to make my acquaintance."

"Was this man aboard the *Paphos?*" demanded the man called Mallescu from the Greek.

"I—I—" The Greek was almost fainting. "I never saw him in my life before," he bravely declared.

"Come, Captain," said Rodgers with a smile. "Surely you haven't forgotten the Arab who made such excellent coffee for you?"

"Azul—the stowaway?"

"Exactly. I made it my business when I saw that oil being taken aboard at Beyrouth, to find out just where it was going. I could only find out by voyaging with you. I traveled as an Arab stowaway. Very clever of someone to think of radio advertisements as a cipher code of instructions for ships to refuel U-boats. In fact, it so intrigued me that I was anxious to meet the gentleman who had arranged the system. When I had signaled to a British cruiser to appear on the scene and sink the submarine, I also arranged for Captain Kormakiti and the *Paphos* to escape. I felt sure they would lead me to the man who had arranged these matters in London. May I say therefore, Mr. Mallescu, that this meeting—innocently arranged by the Captain—is a mutual pleasure."

"And one that ends here and now, you cursed spy!" said Mallescu, swiveling the pistol toward Rodgers and jerking at the trigger.

But the shots splayed into the ceiling. For Rodgers, with a flick of his wrist, had brought forth a thin blade of steel from the cane he carried, and had made a lightning lunge at the arm holding the pistol.

There was a yell of pain, and the man's pistol dropped to the ground. And the Red Wolf, his dueling sword flicking in and out with the speed of a snake's tongue, drove the group of men into a corner of the room.

"I HARDLY expected to bag so many scoundrels in one evening," Rodgers chuckled. "You will all be much safer in an internment camp. Particularly this financier, Mr. Mallescu, whose affairs are much too dangerous and dubious to be allowed at large in London."

"Shoot the man down, you fools!" groaned Mallescu. "Don't you realize that he's alone? He has walked into a trap and is trying to bluff his way out."

The men glanced at each other. Was it true?

Paul Rodgers realized that now they were looking beyond him into the deserted hall. The moment was desperate. He saw their bodies go tense. Then suddenly there was a loud knocking at the front door. It was repeated; the thuds resounded throughout the silent house. There followed the loud ringing of the electric bell.

"It appears someone else is anxious to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," said Rodgers quietly. "Captain, you'll oblige me by opening that front door at once. Any attempt at treachery, and I'll spit you against this expensive but detestable wood paneling."

The Greek, who had aged considerably in the past ten minutes, needed no further threats. He hurried to the front door and swung it open.

Two uniformed policemen, their shrapnel-helmets and gas masks giving them an unfamiliar appearance, strode into the hall.

"WHERE'S the owner of this house?" demanded the sergeant sharply. "There's a room upstairs brilliantly lit, and no curtains across the window. Don't you realize that there's a blackout in London, and that you're liable to a penalty of—"

"Come in, Sergeant," called the voice of Paul Rodgers. "I'm the person who switched on those lights and left the window bare. But here is the owner of the house, and a very dangerous fellow indeed.

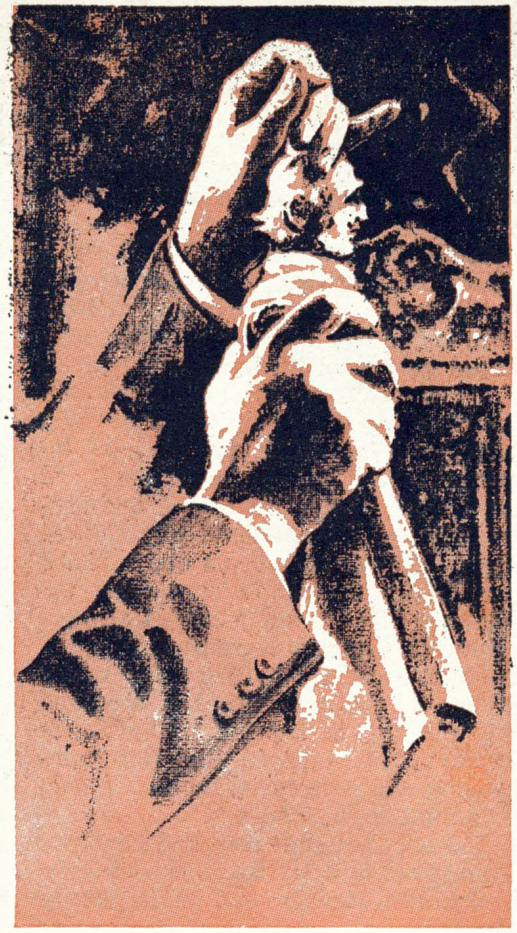
"Yes, Mr. Mallescu, you were right—I came here alone. But I also realized that no London policeman would miss the signal of that lighted room in a blackout."

The sergeant of police stared for a moment uncomprehendingly at the scene—a lithe individual holding a group of men at the end of a drawn rapier. But only a scant moment did he hesitate—for Rodgers was snapping out instructions to him, and comprehension came swiftly. The sergeant brought forth steel bracelets and advanced upon the group.

"Come on, Alf," he said over his shoulder to his companion. "We've caught a whole bloomin' nestful of spies. This is our night out." Within a minute he had triumphantly secured his captives. "A good job of work, sir," he concluded, turning to Rodgers as the prisoners were marched out of the door.

But that individual had lit a cigarette and was seated at the piano in the hall, playing a Chopin nocturne with an air of complete absorption.

Another story of the Red Wolf's exploits will appear in an early issue.



A murder mystery with a new angle.

By FULTON GRANT

AS far as the Curlan case goes and the crime-wave up our way, you saw plenty about it in the newspapers when it broke last summer. What you didn't see is the really extraordinary story behind it, and for plenty of good reasons, not the least of which is that some bigwig up in Albany had sense enough to put the hush on it. Nor do I blame him.

What I mean is the business about that faker Scarlat and old Judge Talmuth and how my friend John Quick took a busman's holiday and exploded the finger-print legend. They had to put the quietus on that part, because if the press had spread the news, they would have shaken public confidence in the whole structure of police operations, for people are always making generalizations out of specific cases.

I happen to know about the quietus part of it because the very night I was setting type on the Curlan trial, which was due next day, somebody whose name I won't mention called me on the phone. "Now, in the matter of the Scarlat case, Mr. Pardon," they said, "we must insist that you drop the whole thing as far as your paper goes. This is official."

So as far as the Epsilon *Herald* is concerned, I dropped it.

But that was a year ago now, and public sentiment isn't going to be affected much by old news, and I think the inside dope ought to come out now so that the blame will fall in the right places.

YOU see, I'm Ben Pardon, owner and editor of the Epsilon County *Herald.* I like that title "editor." It doesn't tell you that I'm also printer, typesetter, pressman, proofreader and general cleaner-upper, as well as reporter with a total salary of about nine dollars a week (whenever I dare pay myself a salary at all), and that our total circulation is about eleven hundred copies a week, half of which are complimentaries and political give-aways. But *"Editor"* sounds swell.

The name of our town is Spruce Falls —not that it's *my* town. I'm just a tired-out newspaper man who had a chance to do what every other newspaper man in the world has dreamed about and never gets to do—own a small-town paper and run it the way I like. . . . I'll revise that. I own it, but I don't like the way I run it. We have politics up here too.

I bought this sheet three years ago when old Mr. Bueliver died and his widow had to liquidate the debts he left. John Quick told me about the chance to snap up the *Herald,* and I had the price asked.

Likely you never heard of Spruce Falls; but ten to one the milk you feed your babies comes from up our way, because we're in the N. Y. "milkshed" in Epsilon County, about a hundred miles from the big city and thirty from Connecticut.

Population isn't much, of course—479 "souls," counting and including John and Milly Quick, who only come up for two weeks every summer, but who like to call it home.

The Falls is a rich little burg, though, when the price of milk is good, and re-

Devil's Fingers

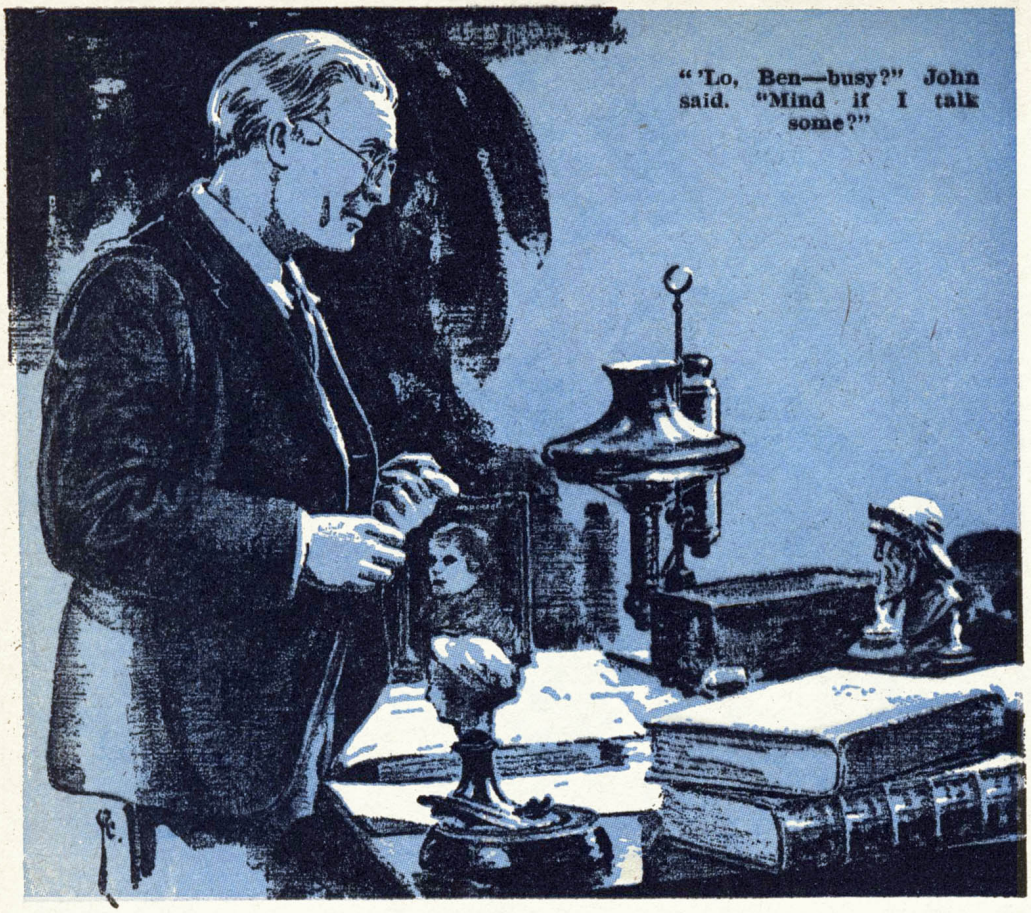
cently there has grown up a sort of "society" which we laughingly call the "polo set," made up of local gentry who like being big frogs in a small puddle. They have a little money, and they spend it buying polo ponies, changing good farms into snooty "estates" and getting portraits and busts of themselves put up in the Chamber of Commerce. Very *nouveau-riche,* they are, too—running to foxhounds, red coats and being scornful of the hired man.

People like J. B. Curlan, I mean.

Curlan was one of our "leading citizens," before the scandal, and one of the county's prominent men, politically. He was president of the National Bank, donor of a small library building (but no books), promoter of the Polo Club—not a place where you play polo at all—and founder of the Chamber of Commerce.

THERE'S no use giving all the details of old Curlan's crack-up, because the papers have handled that thoroughly. I'll just recall for you that the cashier over at the bank discovered, one morning, that ten thousand dollars in bills was missing from the safe, and that everything pointed to the probability that Curlan himself had taken the money. Which was plenty scandalous for our region.

Curlan had a little fishing-camp up in the Adirondacks, where he went every summer. He flew up there in a small chartered plane early that morning after



"'Lo, Ben—busy?" John said. "Mind if I talk some?"

having spent some late hours in the bank. When the cashier opened up and found the money missing, he called the State police, because we don't have any regular police force in Spruce Falls, and because that money was to cover the Milk & Dairy Association's cash payments to the local farmers for fifty thousand quarts of raw milk, due next month. And when the cops found Curlan's own fingerprints *inside* the vault, and especially on the electric controls that govern the time-lock, they sent a plane to Curlan's camp to bring the banker in. It looked like one of those cases where a banker has "borrowed" money from his own bank to cover some personal debt—a practice not in high repute in banking circles.

Naturally, Curlan denied everything. He even shouted that he was "framed." But the State cops had heard that word before; they weren't impressed. And so when the case came before the grand jury of farmers, Curlan was indicted and slapped in the county jail.

I COVERED that investigation for the *Herald,* and there was one thing that gave me a swell human-interest story which is not exactly a part of the business in hand, but which was nice to see. Our local prosecutor was Judge Clarence A. Talmuth, a big political factor, a large landowner in the county, the horsiest of the horsey set, and a mighty smart man. Some years ago, before my time, the Judge had tried to get himself nominated for the office of State senator, and he had had a run-in with J. B. Curlan, who had enough influence to get him voted down. I wouldn't say there was "bad blood" between them, but everybody knew the Judge had been pretty sore about that.

But when Curlan was set before the grand jury, Talmuth refused to preside, on the grounds that public sentiment made him seem prejudiced. Not only that, he offered his services to Curlan as lawyer and went out of his way to help the banker out of his spot. A lot of people said that was just good politics, but I thought it was about as decent a gesture as I had ever seen, and I made a point of it in my *Herald* story.

But Judge or no Judge, Curlan was indicted. By his own admission he had been in the bank that night. Not only that, but a local fellow named Scarlat, an

artist who had been dining with the Curlans, testified that he had ridden to town in Curlan's car and had seen the banker go into the building at nine o'clock. That testimony and the fingerprints got the indictment.

Quote Captain Freese of the State police: "You can't just laugh off fingerprints. They're better than a signed confession."

So Curlan went to the county jail, pending trial.

THAT very night the Quicks came up for the summer. Now, that isn't news; just a fact. John and Milly Quick come up every summer for two weeks when John gets a vacation, and they always take Mrs. Blodgett's old house.

What was a little unusual was that John Quick should come to see me around seven o'clock, although he had just made a long hard drive out of the city and needed some rest. I like John, and we were friends, but we weren't that good friends; and when he dropped in on me like that, I was a little surprised.

Let me tell you about John Quick: If I just went on and gave him to you without a proper preamble, you'd call me a liar. Get the picture: he has an innocent face. He is short and thick and plods along on stumpy legs and wears an old faded mackintosh and carries an umbrella, rain or shine. He looks like just about anything in the world except what he really is—Sergeant John J. Quick of the homicide bureau of New York City police, one of the smartest, foxiest, mangettingest dicks in the business.

BEHIND John Quick, there's quite a story. Actually he was an Epsilon County boy—born right here in Spruce Falls. When his father and mother died, John was only ten years old, and he was sent to live with his uncle in the city.

Now, that uncle was quite a guy. He was the famous (or is it notorious?) Harry J. (Hurry Harry) Quick, boss and dictator of the Thirteenth Ward back in the days when two gents named Crocker and Tweed were running things in the Empire State. And the upshot of all this was that when John grew up, his political uncle got him a job on the cops.

John was just an ordinary flatfoot when I first met him. I used to cover the police courts for the old *Globe,* and we used to kid John Quick, calling him "hayseed cop" and "cornfed flatfoot," because that's the way he looked and acted. But John made himself a record, even in those days, which was the envy of a darned good police force and which got him promoted to detective sergeant long after Hurry Harry Quick was dead and his political influence forgotten.

And yet John Quick was a farmer at heart. Every summer when he got his vacation he would come back home up to Spruce Falls for two weeks, and do nothing but play checkers with the boys. He met Milly Branting up here, and they got married and kept on coming home every year; and at the age of fifty-something they are the happiest pair you ever saw.

Plain John Quick, they call him in Spruce Falls; and I doubt if anybody besides myself ever guessed that John, the local checkers champ, is the same Sergeant Quick who smacked down Elie Petresco in that Hudson Street fracas, or the one who picked up Sleepy Clopke, the bindle king, and slapped him into the jug while three carloads of coked-up thugs were spraying Washington Square with tommy-guns. . . . Modest—that's John Quick.

But, to get back to our yarn: John came up that night.

"'Lo, Ben—busy?" he said, just as though he hadn't been away for a year. "Mind if I talk some?"

"Hi!" I said, not too pleased. "Sure I'm busy. We've got a crime-wave up here, in case you didn't know. But go ahead and talk. I don't have to listen. How's Milly and the kids?"

"Crime-wave?" The words seemed to startle him. "Land sakes, what makes you say that, Ben? —Milly's fine."

I told him.

"If," I said, "you would subscribe to my tottering newspaper and give me your three bucks a year, you'd know that we've had our favorite banker put in the jug—J. B. Curlan, I mean. And not only that, John, but we've had three more crimes in Spruce Falls this same year. That's a lot for a burg like this. I've got an editorial to write about it—crime-wave, see?"

John didn't answer just then. He sat down and looked dumber than usual, which is a sign he's thinking. Then he said:

"Mebbe, Ben mebbe. Mebbe you got somethin' there."

"Huh?" I said. "Got what?"

"I do read your paper, Ben—can get it on the stands some places in N. Y. I noticed about those other cases. That's what I come here for—to ask if you noticed. Queer thing how small-town folks get ideas too big for 'em, huh? Well, I'll be seein' yuh, Ben." But he didn't really go.

HE had me thinking, though. For all day I had been checking back files of the *Herald* to see if my memory was right about those "crimes," and it was. It began in January when Mr. Morsden was arrested. Then in April there was Miss Amy Falwell and that poison-pen scandal. And now we had our big banker, J. B. Curlan, jailed for a theft that seemed too stupid to be real. Take any or all of them, they'd be the last persons anybody would ever suspect of having a crime in their make-up—really respectable citizens, all three.

But you can never tell.

Not that the cases had much in common, of course. The Morsden case was not even local, because it happened downstate, and Amy Falwell's case turned out to be cheap blackmail after all. But there was one *motif* that ran through all three of them—fingerprints. There were plenty of other bits of evidence, but it was fingerprints that got the conviction for Morsden and the Falwell dame, and it looked as if fingerprints would convict J. B. Curlan, too.

Devil's fingers, eh?

Bratton Morsden—yes, I mean *the* Bratton Morsden, the noted philatelist—was a hermit and a nut and possibly the richest man in Epsilon County, which is no news. You read about him in the papers whenever he "lends" his stamp collection to some museum, and you hear that the mess of old stamps he owns is worth five hundred thousand dollars or so. Maybe it is, too.

But to Spruce Falls, Morsden is just a crabby old crackpot who lives in a salt-box house on a big farm which Handy Andy Haik tenant-farms for him. He used to be something of a legend up our way until the day the cops pinched him in Poughkeepsie.

What happened was this: There is another collector living in the river city named Bolles—Dr. Ellison Bolles, the brain surgeon, if you please. According to the press, Bolles and Morsden own, between them, about half the valuable stamps in the world. But there seems to have been one set of stamps which Bolles had that Morsden wanted, and Bolles wouldn't sell.

I don't know much about stamps, thank God, but I remember that the Bolles collection had a set from New Zealand worth thousands, and that Morsden had been trying to buy them for years. It came out in the trial that Morsden had been pretty mad when the Doctor refused him and that they had had "high words," insults and nasty letters.

Now, Morsden's sister lives in Poughkeepsie and he went to see her one day. That night somebody broke into the Bolles place when the Doctor was away on a case, slugged the caretaker and snitched the stamps out of the Doctor's safe—leaving fingerprints which were identified unmistakably as Morsden's.

Morsden denied it, and there was a long-dragged-out trial, but Judge Talmuth clinched the evidence. The Judge

was in Poughkeepsie that very day, sitting in on some political meeting or other. They summoned him to the trial, and he "regretfully" testified that he had actually seen Morsden in a restaurant in the city's south end near the Bolles estate. To top that, Morsden admitted going out to dinner, and his sister confirmed it. And so the rest was simple.

AS to the Falwell case, that brought Judge Talmuth into things in another rôle. Amy was our "most respectable" spinster and a sort of Mrs. Grundy of the county. She was a churchwoman with a hankering to arrange everybody's morals for them, and a militant shouter-down of Sunday movies. But that didn't keep a grand jury from indicting her as a blackmailer when the thing came to a head.

Judge Talmuth's son Jack was a wild lad and a no-good, and a lot of trouble to the old Judge, but he's not quite dumb enough to make a fool-play in his own back yard, so to speak. And when he began getting anonymous letters accusing him of being mixed up in a local scandal in which a baby figures without a papa, and demanding hush-money, he went right to the cops.

Captain Freese of the State troopers handled that case neatly. He couldn't trace the stationery nor the writing, but he did find fingerprints on the letters and recorded them. And when the anonymous writer demanded that Jack Talmuth leave five thousand dollars in bills in a flower vase on his mother's grave at the Spruce Falls cemetery, Freese and one of his men lurked around the spook-farm and picked up Amy Falwell at midnight.

It wasn't pretty, the rest of it. Amy screamed and insisted she came to the cemetery every night to pray at her mother's grave. And when they checked her fingerprints with those on the poison-pen letters, they were hers and nobody else's. That was that.

Crime-wave! Three decent upstanding citizens going off the deep end in less than twelve months. That was going to make me a swell editorial. . . .

John Quick hadn't gone. He was just sitting there. Pretty soon he said:

"Ben, I aint a cop up here, and this aint none of my never-mind—only, Milly, she says I must do somepin' about J. B. Curlan. She says I just got to, and she's that fussed up, Milly is."

For a minute I couldn't see any angle for Milly Quick in the Curlan case, so I said: "Why?"

"On account of Sadie—Sadie Curlan."

"Oh!" I remembered, then. Mrs. Sadie Curlan was formerly Sadie Branting, Milly's younger sister. After she got married and got rich, she hadn't bothered much with Milly, but that wouldn't trouble Milly Quick when any relative of hers was in trouble. I could just see her laying down the law to John and telling him to stick his nose in this case which was none of his business.

"Sadie's over at our house now, havin' hysterics," John said.

"So," I said, "what? You going to have a busman's holiday and play city dick up here in the sticks? I bet the State cops won't like it."

"I know," said John placidly. "But Milly, she says I got to do it. And I got a hunch, Ben—just a hunch, but I got one."

"Give," I said. He did, and it was screwy.

"Fingerprints," said John. "Too many fingerprints. It aint like that in real life, Ben. Crooks don't go and leave fingerprints around for us cops to play with. Smart ones don't, anyhow. And J. B. Curlan is a pretty smart feller."

"Which means?"

"I dunno. It don't seem possible somebody could frame fingerprints, does it?"

"Gosh, no," I said.

"Still," he said, talking to himself now and not to me at all, "if somebody could frame 'em, and if that somebody had a motive for putting up a job of crime on somebody, and if he could collect a lot of fingerprints, then—"

"Get out," I told him. "Get out of here. You're off your nut. Whoever heard of faked fingerprints? I'm too busy to listen to a lot of chatter about such rot. Better tell Milly to forget it and take a chance on the trial."

John turned around and went slowly clumping down the stairs.

That spoiled my night's work. I kept thinking: "Fingerprints—you can't fake fingerprints! Or—can you?"

I've mentioned this fellow Nigel Scarlat a couple of times. He telephoned me that night and said he was tossing one of his dinners, and would I come and report it. Did that lad like publicity? He ate it up.

Nigel Scarlat was an Englishman, a social climber and the worst four-flusher in our neighborhood; but he has a social rating with the "polo set" which keeps him in the money.

Let me explain: Scarlat is an artist. Not much of an artist, maybe, but the best we can show up in Epsilon County, and he works hard at it.

He came to Spruce Falls somewhat before my time, and the story goes that he was broke, seedy, ratty and looked like a scarecrow. But he started by camping out in Auntie Matilda Frost's tea-room, where our local dames collect for bridge. He stood in corners and made sketches of the old girls, which he then sold to them for two bits a mug. Not much on art, these daubs, but they flattered outrageously. The net result of that was that the ladies took him up.

Sure, they loved him. They loved the Byronic face of him, and his wistful ethereal eyes and his Oxford drawl and his improbable reminiscences of service with the Seaforth Highlanders, in which he claimed to have held a commission.

He managed to create an impression that he was a nobleman or the second son of an earl or something equally vague, and it wasn't long before he became a kind of social leader with the polo set, doing full-length portraits of anybody who is anybody and having one-man shows, where people came and bought about everything he could paint.

And he also sculped.

According to Scarlat, sculpture was only his hobby, while painting was his true profession. Personally, I think he was pretty bad at both. Which didn't stop him from getting a commission to do the frieze around the new courthouse at Massaic, a ten-foot statue of Alexander Hamilton, who is one of our local heroes, and twenty huge murals for different public buildings.

And when he bought and remodeled an old farmhouse into a pretty decent little studio, he had entirely arrived.

He went around in velvet jackets and flowing ties, and "society" began practically to camp out in his studio. He was a born publicity-man—for himself.

One gag he worked was an annual blow-out which he called a "talent dinner." One of his lines was that everybody has artistic talent if they only have a chance to show it; and these dinners, so he said, were to "bring out" the artist in all of his guests. It was a swell gag. The dinners themselves were well done; and when the champagne course was over and everybody feeling a little high, Scarlat would serve packages of modeling clay to everybody, and have each one at the table make a miniature bust of his next-door neighbor. Discovering "latent talent," see?

And he offered a prize for the best bust—the prize being a quick portrait-sketch of the winner, Scarlat being the only judge. And invariably he saw to it that the prize went to somebody who was (a) susceptible to flattery in paint, and (b) able to give him a commission to do a full-length portrait for a thousand bucks a canvas. Smart? Nobody smarter!

I told you Scarlat called me and gave me the preview of his annual dinner with a list of the invited guests; and it was that blurb I was writing when John Quick came over and said:

"Ben, I hear this here, now, Scarlat is having a dinner. Say, can you fix it so's Milly and I can go? Milly aint seen no real society; she'd be tickled to death."

I STARED at him as if he were crazy, but I said:

"Sure—okay. I'll fix it." And I did. I could get anything out of Scarlat, because he needed my paper, but I couldn't quite figure Milly Quick and Plain John, the cop, wanting anything to do with that bootlicking faker. Milly would be just about as much at home in that crowd of stuffed shirts as a mouse in a cat-show. However, it was none of my business, and I liked Milly enough to try. So I did. I called Scarlat:

"Oh, I say, now," he chirruped, "just who are these Quicks, what? Something new up here? Do they belong? Have they any money?"

"No," I growled. "They aren't rich, and they aren't new. They're just plain, honest, decent folks, you damned gigolo."

"How dull!" he said. "How positively dull! Oh, well, bring them along, Pardon. Any friends of yours, and all that sort of rot."

So I brought the Quicks....

It was a pretty good party, all in all. As usual the dinner was a banquet, the wines copious and perfectly matched, Scarlat the perfect host. Give the boy credit, he hovered like a mother hen,

"Oh, I say, what brings us this great honor?" he drawled. "No honor, just business," I cracked back.

holding chairs, kissing hands and drooling absurdities until I could have smacked him. I think even Milly Quick was having herself a good time. And when the champagne-glasses were empty, Scarlat brought out his clay, and we had that modeling party. Some fun, I admit. Me, personally, I took a delight in cartooning old Judge Talmuth, who sat next to me, making his long eagle beak and curving chin look like *Punch* in a peep-show, and making everybody laugh—except the Judge, who didn't think it was funny.

It was Mrs. Crummidge of the Beverly Crummidges who won the prize; and so flattered was she at the pretty-pretty portrait Scarlat gave her, that she ordered portraits of her whole family, including Fluff—her toy Pom—then and there.

BUT I noticed a peculiar thing: John Quick managed to be next to Scarlat while the rest of us chatted, and he was having a pretty serious conversation with that young man, and it struck me that Scarlat wasn't happy about it. Maybe it was just my imagination, but when we went home in John's car, I said to him:

"It didn't look like a very funny story you were telling our host. What was it, John?"

He didn't answer directly. But after we dropped Milly at home, John went back to the office with me.

"Listen, Ben," he said. "I got me a hunch—just a hunch, see? I been thinkin' about them there fingerprints."

"So," I said, "what?"

"Well," he said slowly, "if somebody was able to fake fingerprints, they would have to have a lot of fingerprints of a lot of people, wouldn't they? And who'd be the logical guy to collect a lot of fingerprints?"

"You tell me."

"Sure I will. This here, now, Scarlat."

That knocked me down.

"The devil you say!" I blurted.

He pulled something out of his pocket, rolled up in a napkin; and when the light got on it, I saw it was his queer, lumpy, unbelievable bust of old Peter Crummidge, who had sat next to him at table.

"I sorta swiped this," he said. "I want you should take a look at the stuff Scarlat give us to model with. It aint ordinary

clay and it aint ordinary plastic wax. What is it?"

I looked. He was right about that. I had never noticed before, but while most sculptors use plasticine or some such compound, Scarlat had given us all a funny-looking whitish stuff that smelled like chemicals; and now that it was drying a little in John Quick's pocket, it was getting a brittle crust. Still I said:

"Which proves what?"

"Maybe nothing," he admitted. "But look at this."

"This" was a paper clipping from a magazine page. By the title-page it must have been one of those semi-official magazines that list recent patents, month to month, the kind that are printed and sold by mail from Washington for suckers to read. Halfway down the page was a pencil-check against a small paragraph which read:

> Patent 000546 granted to N. Scarlat: a self-hardening plastic with a urea-casein base applicable to sculpture and small-parts modeling where heat and pressure impossible. Trade-name DUROPLAST registered with application February 11, 1936. Material claimed to obviate preliminary models and casting, permits working directly to finish, the original material hardening to equal and imitate marble.

FOR a minute I didn't quite get it. Then I said profanely:

"I'll be damned!"

"Don't swear," cautioned John Quick, who never does. "We got to think backward, Ben. We got to make believe it's possible to fake fingerprints, and then go on from there. We've got to get us a hypothesis, and play like it's real. See what I mean?"

I saw, well enough; but already I was beginning to laugh.

"Suppose this Scarlat has some stuff which would harden so's you could cast fingerprints from it, and suppose that he does have everybody's fingerprints. What then, John?" I asked him. "You've got to have a motive; and this Scarlat number is maybe a four-flusher and a sissy and other things I don't like, but he's sittin' pretty as it is, and he won't want to bite the hand that feeds him. Take Curlan, for instance: everybody knows he was trying to squeeze a commission to do a statue of Curlan to go in the library. Why would he want the banker in jail? It don't make sense."

"Maybe not," said John, "maybe not." And then, after a bit he said: "But I was talkin' to Scarlat tonight about the And-So-Forth-Highlanders."

"Seaforth," I corrected.

"All right, Seaforth. Anyhow, I don't think he's tellin' the truth when he says he was in that outfit. Me, I was in the war makin' the world safe for Democrats, and I seen some of those boys in and around St. Quentin when things was going pretty bad. They was tough. They seen a lot of blood. Well, I was tryin' to make Scarlat talk war-talk tonight, Ben, and he didn't like it one bit. Now, aint that sort of queer?"

"Maybe," I said, "he was just embarrassed. Some people don't like war-talk." But I had seen that worried look on Scarlat's face, and I didn't really mean it.

"Uh-huh," said John. "Say, I got to go back to the city for a couple days. I want you should take dinner with Milly and see that she's happy while I'm away, will yuh, Ben?"

I would. I promised. . . .

It was four days, not two, before John came back to Spruce Falls, and he came straight to the *Herald* Office, looking like the cat with a canary inside.

"Ben," he said, "if a feller is an officer in the So Forth Highlanders, then there ought to be some record of it—aint that so?"

"Probably," I said, not too interested. He pulled out a cable form full of type and said:

"Take a look at that, Ben. While I was in the city, I asked the chief would he contact Scotland Yard for me like it was official. He cabled them, and this is what we got back this morning, Ben."

I grabbed the cable and read. It said:

> UNABLE LOCATE RECORD SCARLAT NIGEL SEAFORTH OR ANY OTHER BRITISH REGIMENT SUBSEQUENT 1900 STOP SUGGEST POSSIBLE ALIAS ONE SCARLATTI PETER NIGEL BRITISH BORN MALTESE WHO HELD ENSIGN RANK WITH QUEEN'S ENGINEERS TYPOGRAPHICAL SERVICE UNTIL HIS DESERTION 1916 STOP SCARLATTI LATER ARRESTED IN LONDON 1925 AS PLATE ENGRAVER NOTORIOUS COUNTERFEIT RING STOP SENTENCED DARTMOOR SERVED TWO YEARS THEN PAROLED STOP ELUDED ARMY AUTHORITIES WHEN RELEASED UNHEARD OF SINCE STOP.

That was as far as I got. I was dizzy. Those boys in Scotland Yard are no fools. A plate-engraver—even for phony money—is something of an artist. *Peter Nigel Scarlatti* is pretty close to *Nigel Scarlat*. And Scarlat wasn't very clear about the

Seaforth Highlanders when John pumped him. But all that was circumstantial and maybe just coincidental. I couldn't quite see this Scarlat with a gang of counterfeiters, even if I didn't like him much. But John was saying:

"Better read all of it, Ben." So I did.

RESPECTFULLY POINT OUT SOME HIATUS YOUR POLICE RECORDS SINCE YOUR REQUEST IS SECOND CONCERNING THIS SAME SCARLAT SINCE 1936 THE FORMER EMANATING FROM STATE DEPARTMENT STOP PLEASE ENDEAVOR LOCATE ORIGINAL AND ADVISE IF CRIMINAL ACTION PENDING SCARLAT CASE SINCE YARD WILL CLAIM EXTRADITION IN BEHALF OF ARMY.

And it was signed by a Scotland Yard inspector of the identification section.

I was a little bewildered. "What in blazes does it mean, 'second request'?" I asked John. He hesitated, then said:

"Can't say, Ben. Looks like somebody else has been curious about your friend. Maybe that's just what we want to know."

I GOT stubborn, which was bad, and sarcastic, which was worse. I said:

"Oh, yeah? Just like that, hey? John Hayseed Quick, the city dick, just snaps his fingers and proves the State cops and everybody up here are wrong!" It didn't make any sense to me at all, now. Suppose there was a Scarlatti who was a phony-passer and a deserter. Suppose, even, he was Nigel Scarlat. Suppose all the screwy hypotheses John had worked himself into a sweat over were true. Did that make Scarlat the man who not only planned three separate and entirely different crimes, but also framed it so the cops would pick up somebody else's fingerprints and send somebody else to jail for them? Me, I didn't have any use for Scarlat, but I just couldn't see him having the sand to pull anything like that. Not his style. Besides, what motive could he have? His was a society racket. All these people were prospective clients of his. Why would he want to do them dirty?

So I sneered, and it was a distinctly derisive sneer.

John Quick never changed a line of his innocent face.

"Nobody," he said as he walked out the door, "ever said Scarlat did all these things, Ben."

And that left me hanging.

Once a newspaper reporter, always a snoop. I guess that's a pretty true statement. Anyhow, it applies to me. Because when I had a nice hot mystery story breaking right here in the otherwise dull little community where I published the Epsilon County *Herald*, I simply had to do something about it. Even if I didn't believe it—which is how and why I stuck my nose into the Curlan case.

So I sat up late that night, pushing type around, and in the morning I had some nice wet galley proofs of a headline, and a story that I had no intention of ever printing, unless—

It was a good story, if I do say so myself. It had a nice juicy headline that would have been good for the sale of a thousand extra copies of the *Herald* if I ever printed it—only, printing it wasn't exactly my idea. And the story itself was a masterpiece of the kind of thing a good rewrite man can do when he takes a small amount of fact, a lot of fiction and a little malice out of his soul, mixes them together and writes a lot of something out of practically nothing. All in all, I was very pleased with it—and with yours very truly, Dr. Benjamin Pardon, the well-known psychologist. Sure I was—why not?

The headline read:

NIGEL SCARLAT, SOCIETY PORTRAITIST,
MAY BE EX-CONVICT AND DESERTER?
WANTED IN ENGLAND.

Now, was that a bomb-shell to toss into a small town paper, I ask you? That's what I thought.

So at about ten o'clock in the morning I drove out to Scarlat's studio with that galley-proof in my pocket. The Englishman was there. So was Mrs. Beverly Calliwell Crummidge. The old gal was sitting on a model stand on the glass-enclosed porch while Scarlat, in a red smock, was daubing at a big canvas and chattering at the Crummidge dame while he painted her.

He hardly glanced at me as I came up.

"Oh, I say, what brings us this great honor, Pardon?" he drawled out of the corner of his mouth, just turning his head. We didn't like each other much, and we never tried to hide it.

"No honor," I cracked back at him. "Just business—sort of a personal business, Scarlat. I wonder if I could ask Mrs. Crummidge to let me talk with you alone for a moment?"

"My dear fellow," he said, "you can do nothing of the kind. Sorry and all that sort of thing, but really, the lovely ladies have a prior claim. And the light is so perfect that I am jealous of every

Scarlat got up on his elbow and fired point-blank at Talmuth.

instant. Besides, I don't remember any unfinished business with the *Herald*—or has my subscription expired?"

Mrs. Crummidge was glaring at me. I was about as popular as a polecat in a ballroom. But I stuck my ground.

"You have business, all right, Scarlat," I said, getting a little mad. "Or aren't you interested in a report that I've got here which concerns your army life in England? I'd hate to print anything so —ah—personal unless you saw it first."

THAT did the trick. He turned around, and I thought I saw a slight paleness creep over his face. But Nigel Scarlat was a smooth number, and now he kept his head.

"Oh—" he said. "In that case—" And turning to Mrs. Crummidge, he cracked: "You'll pardon me, dear lady? One must be so careful with these journalists, you know—not that one keeps one's past a secret, eh? But slight misstatements can be so provoking. . . . You understand, of course."

The old dame apparently did, but she was hating me definitely when she said: "Why, of course, Nigel. . . . Do hurry, though."

So we went back inside the house to his inner studio.

Scarlat handed me a decanter and a glass as we sat down, saying:

"Now, what the devil are you up to, Pardon? You're being a damned pest, you know."

"Yes," I said, "I know." Then I handed him those galley-proofs. "Here's a little story, Scarlat," I said. "The stuff we call human interest. And since you're the hero of it, I thought you'd ought to see it before it appears."

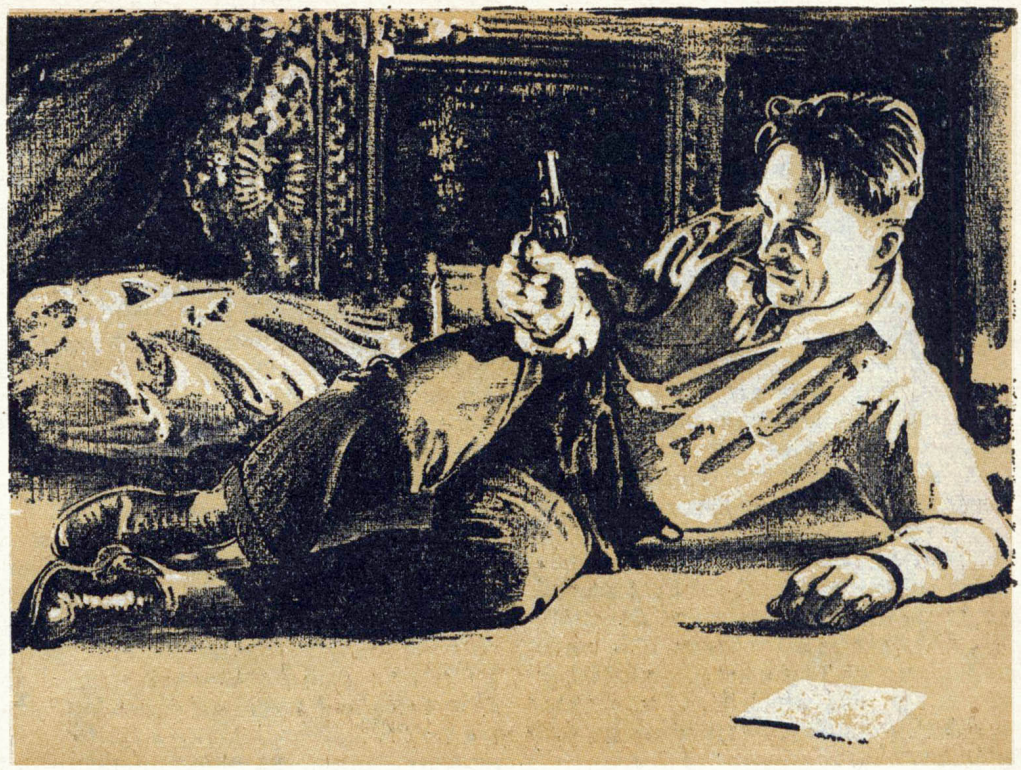
Give him credit, he took that story and read it without turning a hair. He should have been an actor, not an artist. And then he handed it back to me, saying: "This isn't a very good joke, Pardon. Or is this some kind of blackmail? I warn you, you can't get away with it."

So I had to let him have it.

"You know it's no joke," I said. "Besides, I might mention that I'm not the only man around here who has these facts —straight from the horse's mouth, Scarlat. Don't try to kid me."

That crack about somebody else knowing got him, although I didn't know why just then. He didn't shout, and he didn't emote. He just looked at the sky a million light-years away and said:

"Oh—so *that's* the way it is. He talked, did he?" And then he was silent for a minute or two before he said slowly and a little wistfully: "Look here, Pardon, just why do you want to print that? What have I done to you? I know you don't like me, but what queer cruelty



makes you want to hurt a man that much? Do you want me to admit I'm Scarlatti? All right, I will. I made some mistakes, but haven't I paid for them, God knows? People like me here, Pardon. I've been honest and decent. I've grown to be Nigel Scarlat. I've buried the rest. Why not let it stay buried? If you have anything human in you, Pardon, you won't do this to me. You really can't, you know."

I OUGHT to have felt pretty mean, then. That ought to have made me pretty sick inside. I wasn't prepared for anything like that.

But for some queer reason, mostly psychological and having to do with my very real surprise in discovering that John Quick had been right in part of his hunch, anyway, I just didn't get that way. Maybe there was some vanity in it, too. Maybe I was playing detective on my own hook, just a little, and maybe I fancied myself in the rôle. But let's skip that. The fact is that I went hard-boiled on the poor devil. I laughed, not very nicely. I said:

"Don't flatter yourself, Scarlat. Personally, I dislike you, and you know it, but you don't amount to enough to work up any hate over. I'm just a newspaper man, see? I print news. All of it and any of it when it comes. Since you're here under an alias, and have a dingy past, you're news, see? Real news, and a lot more news than you are when you throw your phony social dinners to drum up portrait trade. So now that you've confirmed my story, why shouldn't I print it? It's the truth. And even if I didn't, it would come out sometimes. A judge would—"

Something that flashed in his eyes stopped me there. For a second I thought he was going to hit me—not that I was much worried, because I could have taken him apart if he started that, but I sensed that I had reached a climax with him, and that something I said had made him just a little bit crazy. Besides, I never did mean really to print that story.

So I left him. I just turned and walked out, stuffing that galley-proof back into my pocket, and got into my car.

Just then it all hit me right. I was ashamed. I felt like a swine. What did I care whether he had been a counterfeit-engraver or an army deserter? As he said, he never did any real harm in Spruce Falls. Why did I want to go and push him around like that?

I drove on about a mile; then I decided to turn back and tell him it was all off and that I wouldn't print it. I turned around, all right, but I didn't get far. I saw Scarlat's big Rolls-Bentley roadster come tearing out of his driveway, hell-

bent toward me; and for some reason I drove off the road into the cover of some weeping willows while he tore past.

What bothered me was that Mrs. Crummidge must still be there waiting for her portrait, and here Scarlat came dashing out on some wild ride in his own car, while her big limousine was still at his studio. Now why? No answer.

So I decided to follow Scarlat.

It was quite a chase. My flivver was new and plenty fast, but it wasn't built for speed like a Rolls-Bentley, and the nearest I could ever get to Scarlet was about half a mile going seventy, after which he just crawled away from me.

And he didn't go to Spruce Falls.

Instead, he took the side-road that connects with the Albany highway, U. S. 20, at Nassau, and he was burning it up when I finally nosed into it. Luckily I was on high ground and he was going downhill, so I could see him all the way. He made another turn on two wheels, and flashed back to the road which leads into Massaic. I still couldn't figure what he was doing, but I was curious. I hung on.

Finally I lost sight of Scarlat's car altogether in the trees, but I knew he had gone into or through the county seat, and I was wondering why and what for.

I got to Massaic pretty fast myself, and I saw old Jeb Salzer in his station-wagon and yelled out to ask him if Scarlat had just gone by. He sure had, like a bat out of Hades, and Jeb said he had gone down Mercury Road after pretty near killing half a dozen citizens as he ripped through town.

THEN, like a glimmer of light in a blackout, I caught on. Mercury Road, was it? Well, down at the southeast end of Mercury is where Judge Talmuth's house is, and I bet myself ten to one that Scarlat had gone straight there.

Because it made good sense. Scarlat and the old Judge were pretty thick, anyhow, and the Judge was the kind of politician who knew his social onions and would recognize a good thing in Scarlat's influence with the voting ladies. And reciprocally, I figured if Scarlat found himself in a jam (which he was now), he would be likely to go running to Talmuth, because the Judge could handle practically any situation short of murder, being public prosecutor.

So I drove to Talmuth's.

Scarlat's car was there, all right, and the radiator was steaming. I got out and went up onto the big colonial veranda and thumbed the doorbell. It's a relic of the days when people went in for grandeur, that house. It must have twenty-five or thirty rooms in the master's quarters, not to mention a dozen or so in the service wing. And just as I rang, I heard a dull plop or a bang deep inside somewhere, as though somebody had broken a light bulb.

But it wasn't a bulb; I knew that too.

And all hell broke loose right then.

Somebody screamed. Somebody yelled. Somebody was running and thumping downstairs. A man's voice shouted out something almost inarticulate, but that was highly profane. And a woman's voice shrieked:

"Oh, my God, don't do that—don't—*don't!*"

And then it sounded as if a regiment were running loose inside.

So I pushed open the door and ran in.

IT was a weird tableau I saw. The screams and screeches came from the big central hall or living-room where Minerva Talmuth, the Judge's daughter-in-law, and wife of the drunken no-good Jack, was frantically waving her arms and still screaming at two men who were struggling with each other. They were Nigel Scarlat and Jack Talmuth; and if ever I saw murder going on, it was right there.

Jack Talmuth is big and husky, although soft, and he was just about tearing Scarlat apart. Apparently they had clinched upstairs and had tumbled down the great central stairway together, and Scarlat had clouted young Talmuth with the butt of a revolver, because Jack's face was a welter of blood. But Jack had his hands around Scarlat's lean neck, and he was slowly squeezing the life out of the artist, who was kicking weakly at him with his toes.

I lit in. I socked Talmuth and knocked him loose, but did Scarlat fall apart? He did not. He got up on his elbow from the floor, and fired his gun point-blank at young Talmuth—missing him, though. I kicked the gun out of Scarlat's hands and planted one where it stopped the Englishman.

And then I saw it—on the stairs.

The body of old Judge Talmuth was draped across one stair-rail and only kept from falling by the angle of his arm hooked in the banister. His white hair was red with blood. And it didn't need the second look I gave him to know that he was as dead as Prohibition.

Minerva was still screaming. A black manservant was staring round-eyed in a doorway. Young Talmuth was just coming up from where I had knocked him. And suddenly a voice behind me said:

"My land sakes, it looks like we're too late, Captain."

And I turned around and saw John Quick standing in the doorway, with Captain Freese and some State cops.

Then everything happened fast, the way it does when trained policemen take over. Freese snapped the cuffs on Scarlat and arrested him for the murder of Judge Talmuth—only I doubt if Nigel knew it, because he was unconscious at the time. As for Jack Talmuth and his wife, the troopers took them away. Just about time for Talmuth, too, because that gash in his head was bleeding pretty bad, and he was getting weaker by the minute. As for me, I didn't do much besides look on and wonder how-come and what it was all about, which is the reason John Quick came over and tapped me on the arm and led me into a corner.

"I ought to have let you know, Ben," he said. "Might've guessed you'd be stickin' your newspaper man's nose in this mess. What was it you did? What was it made Scarlat go off the handle and shoot him?"

I told him about the fake news-story, but I admitted I didn't know just what I had done with it. I saw things happen, but I didn't know why.

"Too many detectives is like too many cooks, Ben," John said. "If you hadn't tried to play those psychology tricks, maybe we could've taken Judge Talmuth and put him where he oughta go."

"The Judge?" I was startled. "You —you mean arrest the old Judge—the prosecutor of Epsilon County?"

HE nodded. "Sure thing," he said. "Not the first time on record a judge had him a criminal streak, Ben, and it won't be the last. Trouble with Talmuth is—was—his political ambition and the way he could hate. He was like the elephant, Ben. He never forgot and he never forgave anybody he thought did him wrong. He was smart, too. Had to be, I reckon, to get to be a judge. Maybe he had seen so many crimes and criminals, he got to thinkin' wrong. I wouldn't know about that, but I know he sure could work up a hate."

I still didn't get it, and I asked for details. John was still blaming himself for Talmuth's murder. He said:

"Like I said, I ought to've told you, Ben. When we got that cable, the Chief he was sore because somebody had got in touch with Scotland Yard and there wasn't any record of it in the regular police case-histories. Well, the Chief he's a humdinger. He gets action, the Chief does. It didn't take him long to find out about that other inquiry. It came from the State Department in Washington, all right, and they had a record of it. You know Senator Buxby, the feller who sponsors Talmuth for the legislature? Well, it was that Buxby who put the inquiry through the department for Talmuth back in 1936. I guess the Senator figured Talmuth would make a record of it, but he didn't. Anyhow, there wasn't any except in Washington. And so Talmuth knew all the time Scarlat was this here, now, Scarlatti."

"BUT I don't see—" I began, and John told me the rest.

"I held that bit out on you, Ben," he said. "Because it had to be something like that. The Judge held that record over Scarlat's head, and made him take casts of the fingerprints of all the people who came to his dinners. Duroplast, see? And with a cast, you can make fingers out of rubber or gelatine that will leave fingerprints. So the Judge, he pulled all those crimes and wore special gloves to make it look like somebody else had done it—people he wanted to get even with. Maybe Scarlat didn't know just what was going on, but he suspected something bad. And when you handed him that fake story, he naturally figured it was the Judge who had spilled the beans and broken his word in spite of all the things Scarlat was doin' for him. Criminal things, see? So Scarlat, he couldn't take it. I guess he really wanted to be nice people over here. I guess he was goin' straight as he could, except for bein' a party to what the Judge was doin'. And when he thought Talmuth had spoiled everything, he just saw red and went gunnin'. Don't blame him much, myself. Still, killin's killin', and he'll burn for it —if he lives."

All this was working into a clearer pattern now, but I didn't see the motives behind Talmuth's double-crossing, and I said so. "But how come the Judge would want to frame folks like poor old Amy Falwell and Mr. Morsden?" I asked.

"You aint lived here all your life, Ben," John said. "The old folks here know that the Judge was a-courtin' Amy years ago

when they was both young, and Amy she wouldn't have him. There's some pretty scandalous stories about Judge Talmuth in his wild-oats days—he was a heller, just like Jack is now. And Amy was engaged to him, but she busted it off when he got into a mess with some woman, and Talmuth never forgave her for it. He could sure hate, that feller."

"But Morsden?"

"That's easy, when you think of how the Judge wanted to be Senator. Same as Curlan's case—he never forgave Curlan for voting him out of a nomination. And awhile back when he thought maybe he could get himself elected by favoring the county promoting a new highway, he had a run-in with old Morsden over a right-of-way through Morsden's land. The old grouch wouldn't sell an option, and Talmuth couldn't wangle his road. So the Judge waited till he got a chance to catch Morsden off-guard. Smart, he was. That stamp gag was perfect. The police know that collectors are nuts, anyhow, and they'll steal you blind if you have some trinket they want and you won't sell. That's a classic. Talmuth traded on that, and it worked."

"You mean that *Talmuth* stole those stamps?"

"Sure. He admitted being in Poughkeepsie that day, didn't he? We checked all that again, Freese and me, knowing what we know now; and it had to be Talmuth wearing Morsden's fingerprints! Another thing; we found Amy Falwell did know about Jack Talmuth being in a jam with that girl, on account the girl was a maid at Amy's place, and she did write the Judge about it. That gave him the idea of those poison-pen letters. He had Scarlat forge her handwriting. That was another of the artist's accomplishments in the English days. Gosh, I wisht I'd told you all this before you stuck your nose in, Ben."

He was genuinely conscience-stricken, John was. But in some queer way I was glad it all happened. A crooked judge for prosecutor is bad business in a community. . . .

Well, that's the story, and that's how the old fingerprint legend was exploded, and why somebody upstate didn't want it to come out in the papers. . . . What happened to Scarlat-Scarlatti? Did he burn for murder? Not quite, he didn't. At least, not in this world. Because when he rolled down those stairs fighting with Jack Talmuth, he hit his head and got a clot on his brain, and he died of it before they could bring him to trial.

FUNNY thing about that. I had a call from Massaic one day—one of the lawyers handling Scarlat's case was saying Nigel was pretty sick and asking for me. Scarlat asking for *me,* mind you! Well, I went down and saw him in the prison hospital. He looked like death warmed up, but he managed to give me one of his best grins.

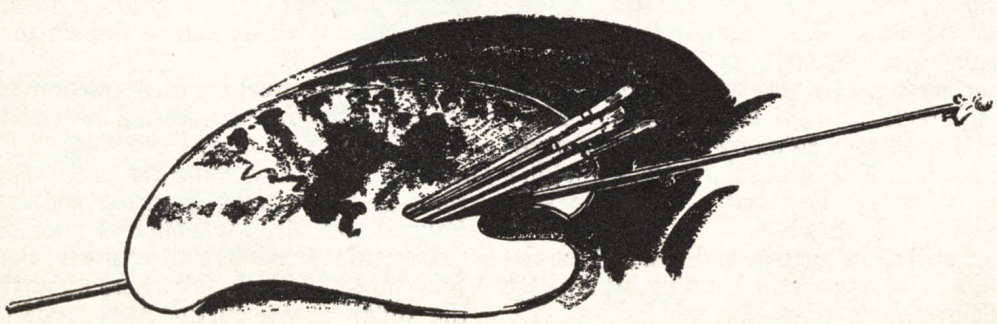
"I say, Pardon, old thing," he said in a weak, hoarse whisper, "here's a real news-story for you—human interest and all that sort of thing, eh? Can say you're in at the *mort,* what? Scarlat's finished, you know. Scarlatti died a long time ago, and now it's poor old Scarlat's turn. You know me, old snooper—always chasing publicity, what? Well, you can say Scarlat died like a character out of Dickens. Noble, eh? Always the gallery-player, what?"

I didn't like that. It was too darned morbid.

"Forget that, Scarlat," I said. "I never liked you much, but I wouldn't rub it in when you're down."

"Tush and pish, old newsy-nose," he said, and his voice was fading fast. "Don't go soft, Pardon. The story's the thing. Write 'em even if it hurts, eh? Tell 'em Scarlat died quoting the novelist: *'It's a better thing that I do now than I ever have done.'* . . . That's—the—way it goes, Pardon. *'And a better rest—I go to—than—I—ever—"*

He never finished it, poor devil.



A COMPLETE NOVEL

DEEP SEA RENDEZVOUS

By Michael Gallister

Who wrote "Doghouse Blues" and "Harbor Hazard"

AN AMERICAN CAPTAIN FINDS HIS SHIP TAKEN OVER BY GERMAN NAVAL MEN DETERMINED TO CONVERT THE VESSEL INTO A COMMERCE RAIDER. . . . BATTLE, MURDER AND SUDDEN DEATH FOLLOW IN SWIFT AND STRANGE SUCCESSION.

This novel is somewhat shorter than the book-length story we customarily offer you here, but it is so timely—and so exciting!—that it seemed a "must" in this issue. The space saved has been devoted to an additional story.

Garlin straightened—drew his automatic. "Hands up—quick!"

DEEP-SEA RENDEZVOUS

By MICHAEL GALLISTER

Who wrote the "Men in the Air" series, and "Doghouse Blues."

GARLIN'S first intimation of the amazing new destiny of the *Balsfjord* came when he was standing on the wharf, eying her disgustedly as she swung at her anchorage up the bay, while he talked with Asbury, who had just come ashore. Asbury was the second officer.

"Aint it hell, Cap'n?" said Asbury gloomily. "All ready to go, and here we sit eating our hearts out! That's the trouble with wars. Always hits the neutrals like us Americans. No news?"

Garlin shook his head.

"Nothing stirring. Yet you can't blame the men," he said, puffing at his pipe. "With submarine sinkings everywhere, you can't blame them for demanding bigger wages and heavy insurance. And you can't blame the owners for refusing. It'd eat into their profits."

Asbury swore heartily and hopelessly, as he looked out at the ship.

She was not alone in her misery. The seamen's union had struck for war-risk wages; the owners had refused. Half a dozen more vessels lay idle in San Francisco harbor, and others in other ports. Ships under American registry were at the mercy of the law. Meantime, freights were rocketing up, and war swept the world into hysteria.

"Where's the Chief?" Garlin asked.

"He's aboard, Cap'n; he's grousing, as usual. —Hello! Aint that our office nurse?"

Garlin swung around. Striding out along the wharf was the local agent of the line, and very brisk he was. He came up to them with a cheerful greeting.

"Hello, Cap'n Garlin! Morning, Mr. Asbury. Well, I've news for you!"

"Is the deadlock broken?"

"Not a chance," the agent rejoined. "But the *Balsfjord* has been sold."

Garlin's jaw fell. "Sold?"

"Yes. How soon can you get to sea?"

"As quick as we can get up steam and have all officers aboard."

"Get started, then. You'll drive back to the office with me. The new owner's waiting in my car."

Garlin turned to the gawking, amazed second mate.

"Phone Mr. Blunt at his hotel to get here on the jump, get out to the ship and advise the Chief that we're off, see that everyone's aboard."

"Going to sail without a crew?" demanded Asbury.

The agent grinned. "The crew's waiting for Cap'n Garlin to sign 'em on."

Asbury moved away toward the dock shed and the telephone.

"YOU'RE not, by any chance, stark crazy?" asked Garlin.

The agent chuckled. "I've been asking myself the same thing, Cap'n. No, I guess everything's okay. I'll give you the low-down, but don't talk about it; something might bob up to spoil the game. You know there are a lot of foreigners here in the city?"

"Naturally," said Garlin dryly. "There usually are, in San Francisco."

"We've got thirty men up at the office waiting for you—men crazy to get home to Europe and take part in the doings. British, Poles, Germans, and a couple of Czechs. All seamen—"

"Why, they'd fight like terriers!" broke in Garlin.

"Not they. All combined, Cap'n, in the common ambition to get back; they're all pals together."

"You're an optimist," Garlin grunted skeptically. "This thing won't be permitted."

"We've got permission. All's clear. Ship's been purchased outright by a Norwegian firm; you were bound for Oslo anyhow. No change in officers or anything else; full salaries guaranteed back to New York. The eight passenger-cabins will be occupied by Scandinavians going home. Suit you?"

"What does it matter?" snapped Garlin—and pocketed his pipe. "Come on, let's go."

IN the car he met the Norwegian agent, a pleasant swarthy man. Everything, to Garlin's notion, was too pleasant altogether. This thing had seemed sudden, but it was no sudden matter. It was all too smooth, the machinery was too well oiled.

Garlin found himself flung into a sour and suspicious mood. The *Balsfjord* was his first command; he had brought her around to San Francisco from the East Coast, loading chiefly with copra and foodstuffs for Norway. To find himself facing the loss of his berth after one voyage, was food for dismay. However, the war and the enormous increase in shipping promised to provide berths in plenty—even for a man holding his first command at twenty-six.

It was no secret to him that he faced jealousy and envy in his own ship. His work in the fruit-boats had shoved him up ahead fast, luck had aided him, and others resented this. Blunt, a morose and bitter man, hated him savagely. Blunt, at forty, with a master's ticket these ten years, had never known better than mate's berth. Asbury, the second officer, was older than Garlin, but was rather ineffectual and resented nothing.

The Naval Reserve—just now, this was Garlin's ambition. His examination-papers were long since in. If the United States got into the war, he would step over as lieutenant-commander. The past five years, he had slogged for this goal in every hour of his off time. It had driven him like a mania. It took work, concentration, tremendous effort—and he was certain he had passed for the rank. At present he was a mere lieutenant. This ambition had occupied him to the exclusion of play, women, anything else. Now he was free to do what he would, and await the event.

In this quest, he had lost some of his youth. His brown, hard features showed it. They were somber; he had had no time for laughter. They were hard-boned, and his eyes were hard, as he sat facing the thirty men jam-packed into the shipping-office room.

"Do you men all speak English?" he inquired, running his eyes over the unshaven, brutal, young or old faces. All faces were intent, earnest, brooding.

"Aye sir." One man saluted smartly. "Three of us are quartermasters, sir."

"Very well. You men want to pull together now, in order to get home and take up arms against one another. If you're fools enough to think it possible, I'm not. You can do it here; you can't do it aboard ship. Every mile closer to Europe will change you. The minute you're outside the Golden Gate, you'll change. . . . Well, I give you fair warning. I'll have no mercy. Any bickering will bring irons and the brig. And our chain-locker isn't a pleasant brig. The first blow will bring hard punishment. I'll not have my ship made into a battleground. Any of you men who get feeling too nationally conscious, will have it taken out of you. All hands remain on a friendly basis, and we'll have no trouble. Understand?"

There were mutters of assent, earnest mutters.

"What's more, you men didn't just drift into this surprising situation," went on Garlin. "Somebody framed up this scheme. Whoever did, step for'ard! Who are the leaders?"

THERE was no hesitation. Two men stepped out—a rawboned, angular German named Schmidt, and the same brisk, ruddy-faced Englishman who had first spoken—Hilary by name.

"Can you answer for your men, Schmidt? Will they keep the peace?"

Schmidt flung his stark blue-eyed gaze at the group of twelve Germans. "*Ja!* You bet, sir," he rejoined, with a salute.

Garlin looked at Hilary. "Can you speak for the others?"

"For my eight Englishmen, sir, yes." Hilary turned to the others, the Czechs and the Poles. "What about it, lads?"

They assented vociferously and earnestly. With a shrug, Garlin assented, appointed Hilary and Schmidt quartermasters, and went ahead with the signing-on. This done, he turned to the Norwegian agent, who had sat by without a word.

"When are your passengers coming aboard?"

"In an hour, Captain. I'll bring them, all in one lot, as soon as we clear customs and immigration."

MR. BLUNT showed up, unexpectedly; and he was furious at the news. One look at the dark, powerful features, and Garlin forestalled him abruptly.

"Did Mr. Asbury tell you to get aboard, Mister?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what are you doing here at the shipping-office? Get aboard and no talk."

The sultry eyes of Blunt flashed. "We're not aboard ship, Cap'n—"

"Right," cut in Garlin. "*Get* aboard! One more word, and you're discharged for disobeying direct orders. Take it or leave it."

Blunt, trembling with fury, looked him in the eyes for one moment, then touched his cap, turned and strode out.

The shipping agent whistled softly. "Now I understand what they mean by talking about murder in a man's eyes, Cap'n Garlin. You'll have trouble with him."

"Not a bit," said Garlin. "Blunt's a fine seaman in a pinch. . . . Oh! That you, Lovejoy? What are you doing ashore?"

Lovejoy was steward of the ship, a rotund, apple-cheeked little man with eyes like shoe-buttons, an appalling lack of all grammar, and a "blessed aunt" who intruded into most of his conversations. He was an efficient steward, but Garlin vaguely suspected Lovejoy was not above a bit of graft on the side, or even cargo-thieving.

"Why, sir, Mr. Asbury sent me to find you and ask was we to have passengers."

"Oh! That's right." Garlin turned, found the Norwegian agent, and introduced the steward. "We'll need more cabin stores—we hadn't figured on passengers."

The agent nodded, and fell into talk with Lovejoy. Garlin went his ways, and the farther he went, the less he liked this entire business. A more bizarre, fantastic and thoroughly insane proceeding, he had never known. But then, the whole world seemed going insane these days.

When he returned to the wharf, the guard at the gates was talking with two women in a large car, and hailed him.

"Hey, Cap'n Garlin! These ladies want you."

Garlin stepped up and touched his cap. He was aware of the vibrant personality of one woman, and scarcely noticed the other.

"You're Captain Garlin?" said the one excitedly. "I want to go on your ship. We hear she's sailing today, and she takes passengers—"

"Full up, Miss," said Garlin. "Anyway, I've nothing to do with it. You'd have to see the owner's agent, and—"

"Who is he? Where?" she broke in.

Garlin shook his head, smiling, for he liked those blazing dark eyes, and the vivid eager face.

"I warn you it's no use, Miss, but if you want to reach him—"

He gave the instructions. Before he had finished, the car was moving, turning, off with a clash and roar of gears.

The dock guard shook his head. "Don't it beat all, Cap'n? Them as is in Europe is crazy to get away, and here's some nuts just as crazy to get there! English, she talked like. Like she had a potato in her mouth."

Garlin laughed and went on to the waiting boat. Still, the memory of her lingered with him, not unpleasantly.

WHEN he got aboard, the men had just arrived. To a landsman's eye, the creaky *Balsfjord* was a welter of confusion and tumultuous voices; to Garlin, everything was going with remarkable precision. Both mates knew their business; Blunt had forgotten his wrath in the rush of work, and all promised well. Going below, Garlin found the chief engineer sitting over a whisky-bottle.

"Well, Mr. McCann, how go the engines?" said he.

The lean, sandy-haired Chief gave him a look and a nod. "Well enough, Cap'n. Have a drink?"

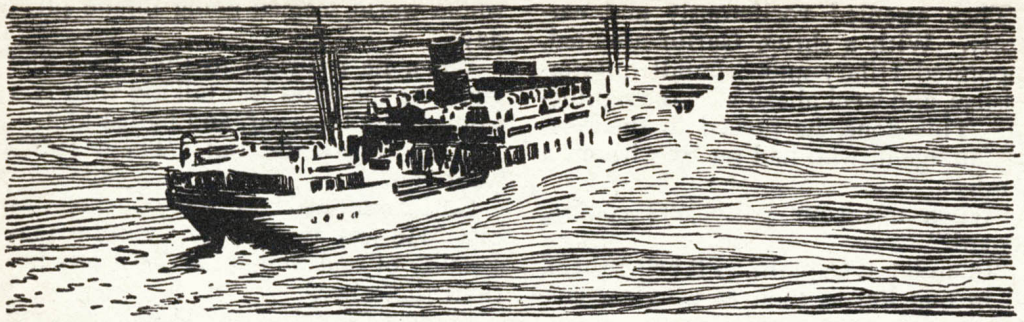
"Thanks, no. Nothing else on your mind?"

"Aye." McCann was a man of fifty-odd, taciturn and sardonic. "That's why I was waitin' here. My department's taken care of, but what about your own?"

Garlin got out pipe and pouch.

"Spit it out. What's wrong?"

"I've had words wi' Lovejoy. I dinna trust that man. Ye know verry well I



insist on havin' porridge of mornings, and he tells me there's been no provision made in the cabin stores for oatmeal. He was impudent about it."

Garlin chuckled. "The fact is that you're burning with curiosity to know about this sudden departure."

"I ha' no curiosity in my nature," McCann declared. "I'm the least curious man alive, Cap'n Garlin."

So Garlin told him, and in the midst came in Sparks, otherwise Mr. Glenn, a young spindleshanks who had a wireless operator's license and was otherwise good for very little, in the general opinion, which Garlin shared.

"Are we sailing soon, sir?" he piped.

"As soon as Mr. McCann has steam up."

"It's up," said the Chief.

"Then, as soon as our passengers come aboard."

"Thank you, sir. There's a launch coming now," said Sparks, and was gone.

"I dinna trust that jackanapes," said the Chief darkly, and corked his bottle.

GARLIN was still smiling when he stepped on deck and watched the passengers come aboard. Lovejoy came with them, took charge of them efficiently, and Garlin found himself engaged by the Norwegian agent, who handed him a large envelope and a small satchel.

"Will you put the bag in the safe, Captain? For the owner in Oslo. And here are all papers regarding the passengers—passports and so forth. You may be searched, and I thought best to have everything shipshape. They can be returned to the passengers at Oslo."

"Thanks," said Garlin, and shook hands.

Five minutes later, as he turned to the bridge ladder, he saw a woman standing by the rail, looking out at Treasure Island and Alcatraz. Not till he was past, and halfway to the bridge, did he recall her face. She was the woman who had spoken to him at the dock gates.

CHAPTER II

HE looked her up that evening among the passports, as the *Balsfjord* wallowed southward toward the Canal. Margaret Ashley, aged twenty-six, born in New Zealand—British subject. She was alone. The other seven passengers had Scandinavian names; five men, two women. Norwegian passports. How she had managed to do somebody out of a place and get aboard, remained a mystery; but she had done it.

Before midnight they ran into a southeaster, bringing enough of a sea to keep the old hooker rolling and pitching, and with morning not a passenger was stirring and half the crew were staggering about like greenish ghosts. Blunt came into the mess-cabin while Garlin was breakfasting, and nodded amiably. A bit of weather always improved his disposition, as though fighting the sea gave him a needed outlet.

"Sorry I roiled you yesterday, Cap'n," he said.

"So am I," rejoined Garlin. "You don't like me, and needn't pretend you do, Mister; but if you can choke it down, we'll pull together for the good of the ship, this voyage. We may get sent back from Oslo; I don't know yet. I suppose you know the details?"

Blunt, who was blinking at him, astonished by this frank speech, nodded.

"I guess so. Things get around. It's a queer layout, but the men are willing. Finest fo'c'stle we've ever had. Not a malingerer in either watch. It's a caution how these foreigners take to shining up the brasses!"

"They're born to it." Garlin looked up as Sparks entered. "Hello! Messages?"

The wireless-man handed him a weather report. "We're running into a subtropical blow, sir—storm warnings for the California coast. And here's a message for one of the passengers, a Mr. Opfells."

"Well? Why not send it to him?"

Sparks hesitated. "I—I thought, sir, you'd better take a look at it first."

Garlin took the message from its unsealed envelope and spread it before him.

BIORN OPFELLS,
SS. BALSFJORD
ADVISE CAUTION REGARDING PLANS SAN LUCAS MAY NOT BE READY
SEECHT.

"Well, what's wrong with that?" demanded Garlin.

Sparks shuffled awkwardly. "Nothing, sir. I just thought it looked queer."

"Deliver it. Opfells is in Number Four," Garlin said curtly, and Sparks departed.

Blunt was eating rapidly. "Won't be any noon sights taken," he observed. "Asbury's nursing his bad tooth again. I told him three days ago to get it jerked out, but he wouldn't. McCann's growling about the quality of oil, as usual. Where's Lovejoy?"

The mess-boy, a Filipino, stated that the steward was attending the passengers.

Garlin lit his pipe and smiled at the mate.

"You don't seem happy about the voyage, Mister."

"I'm not, if you ask me," said Blunt promptly. "It looks crazy, all of it. A fine mess of us aboard here—wait till we're heading up toward Europe!"

"I think so too," agreed Garlin. "We'll bear well north, however. Even so, submarines seem to be sinking Norwegian ships haphazard. If we can keep any trouble down inside the ship, we may avoid any from outside."

NOON came and went, the weather thickening, seas beginning to sweep the forward well-deck of the *Balsfjord*. Garlin was in the main cabin writing a letter to be posted at Panama, when Lovejoy approached. He glanced up.

"Looking for me, steward?"

"Yes sir." Lovejoy puffed out his rotund apple-cheeks; his little shiny black eyes glittered. "As my sainted aunt Victoria used to say, sir, this is a hell of a crowd we got aft. Number Four aint no more sick than I be; workin' over a chart, he is."

"Number Four? That's Mr. Opfells," said Garlin. "Not sick, eh?"

"Ate his lunch hearty, sir. His luggage is plastered with Norway hotel-tags, but one piece has got the name Schultz on it. And Number Two calls hisself Thorstein, but the initials on his blasted brushes are A. G. and a woman's photo is addressed to *'Lieber Anton,'* which aint Norwegian nohow, but German."

"Hello!" Garlin smiled. "You seem to have been investigating the passengers."

"Yes sir. And the lady in Number Eight, Miss Ashley she is, says would you step aft and have a word with her? Most particular to get you, she was."

"I'll go now. Is she ill?"

"Squeamish-like, but not what you'd call ill, sir."

"I see. And—Lovejoy! I don't suppose that by any chance you had a glance at the chart Mr. Opfells was working over?"

Lovejoy grinned. "Well, sir, my sainted aunt used to say that damned if there aint more'n one way to kill a cat. Covered it up with a book, he had, but he forgot to cover up the number, and I had a squint at it, and it was 1681, w'atever that is."

"Plenty," said Garlin, with a nod. "Seems to be a funny crowd. Don't hesitate to keep your eyes open."

THE steward touched his forehead and departed. Garlin turned to the Hydrographic List of Mariners' Charts, and looked up the number Lovejoy had given him. He frowned over it; impossible! Number 1681 was entirely devoted to a small island off the coast of Lower California—Guadeloupe Island, barren and uninhabited, and lying west of the steamer route down the coast.

Dismissing the matter as some error, Garlin made his way to the group of cabins abaft the superstructure, tapped at the door of Number Eight, and opened at the bidding of Miss Ashley.

"Come in, Captain," she said brightly. "It was very good of you to show up. You see, I did get aboard after all."

"Yes. I saw you at the rail yesterday," said Garlin, "and looked up your passport, Miss Ashley."

"Close the door, please," she rejoined. "I want to speak with you privately."

He complied, conscious again of her vivid quality; it seemed to fill the little cabin like a burst of light. Save for an untouched tray, she betrayed no indication of *mal de mer,* being fully dressed and apparently at work on an account-book. Her tan sharkskin suit, relieved by a clasp of New Zealand jade at her throat, made vivid contrast with her dark hair and ruddy coloring. Her eyes, Garlin noted, were of a deep brown and very alive.

"I want you to put in at San Diego, please," she said, producing cigarettes and lighting one.

Garlin shook his head at the request. "Sorry, Miss Ashley. No stop till we come to the Canal."

"But you must!" she replied.

"No," he said, smiling. "We'll pass San Diego during the night. What you ask is quite impossible."

Her eyes searched him. "You carry a cargo of foodstuffs for Norway. Has it struck you as odd that this ship was suddenly bought by interests in Norway?"

"Very odd," admitted Garlin frankly. "How do you know so much about it, Miss Ashley?"

"That's my business. This ship won't get to Norway at all, unless you'll stop in at San Diego."

Garlin frowned. "Please stop beating about the bush. I don't know what you're driving at. If you think this ship won't go to Norway, why are you aboard her? And you're very much mistaken about it. I'm ordered to take her to Oslo, and I obey my orders."

"Don't you know there's a war going on?" she asked brusquely.

"If you've anything to say, stop hinting and say it."

A spot of color grew in her cheeks.

"Very well. I've reason to think certain Nazi agents are aboard this ship. Two of them were involved in anti-neutrality endeavors at San Diego; they got to San Francisco and embarked aboard here. But if we put in at San Diego, they'll be picked up there by the United States authorities."

GARLIN accepted one of the cigarettes and lit it.

"Now we're getting somewhere," he rejoined easily. "Well, Miss Ashley, I'm not the least bit interested in your private warfare. These gents can be picked up at Panama just as well, if the Government wants 'em."

"Oh, you're exasperating!" she said angrily. "I tell you, this ship won't reach Panama!"

Garlin smiled. "If you want to bet on that, I'll oblige. The wireless is open to you. Use it. Get the San Diego authorities to request that I stop in there, and I'll do it."

"They're not concerned in this. I'd have to reach Federal authorities; I could only do that through friends of mine."

"Sorry; you're not convincing. If you can convince me this ship's in any danger, then my duty is to take her into San Diego, Miss Ashley. What's your evidence?"

"I don't think you want to be convinced," she said slowly.

"I don't want to fly with the wild geese," Garlin rejoined. "Because Mr. Opfells is really named Schultz, because Mr. Thorstein is Anton Somebody in Germany—should I act like a hysterical woman?"

ANGER and amazement struggled in her gaze.

"Then—you know?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Garlin, exasperated. "My entire crew is made up of men who want to get back to their home countries to serve in the war. They've abandoned private enmities, banding together in the common cause. Should I throw a fit because our passengers turn out to be German or English? Don't be absurd. What concrete evidence have you, if any?"

"None, I fear, that would convince you," she made reply. "I'm not a mere hysterical woman, as you imply. I have a certain status, Captain, as an investigator."

"Then permit me to say that you're a damned poor investigator, but a most charming young woman." Garlin smiled again. "An investigator gets definite results. Have you any?"

"None to convince anyone who doesn't want to be convinced. What do you expect? Photographs and charts? I can tell you that this ship is to be turned into a commerce-raider, that plans have been carefully laid to this end, that international law and private agreements will be defied."

Garlin shook his head. "Suspicion? No go. Now, I'll be definite, Miss Ashley. Commerce raiders must have guns; this ship has none. The cargo contains none. It's been examined by Federal agents. Answer me that, young lady."

She threw out her hands. "I can't, of course."

"Further," persisted Garlin inexorably, "if all were as you say, if the clever Nazis were so damned clever, how did you manage to get aboard here at the last minute?"

She flushed. "Not by fooling them, certainly. I told the Norwegian agent quite openly that I was in British Government service and needed to get home *via* Panama in order to get in contact with friends there. I didn't know until

after we left San Francisco about these other passengers, who they are and so forth. Since you know that Mr. Opfells is really named Schultz, I suppose you know he's an important Nazi agent? And that Thorstein is really Anton Gemuth, a captain in the Nazi naval forces?"

"All right. Go ahead. What else?"

"Nothing." She relaxed, with a deep breath. "Nothing. You're hopeless."

"No. The evidence is hopeless." Garlin, who was nothing if not honest, felt a twinge of concern at sight of her dismayed eyes. "Look, Miss Ashley: I'm responsible for this ship and cargo. In view of your warning, I shall take fullest measures to forestall any happening such as you fear; that's my duty. I'll welcome any concrete evidence and act upon it. But I'm not justified in changing course and acting upon chimerical fears. I'm sorry to be so abrupt. Forgive me."

She stood up and extended her hand, looking into his face with a slight smile as she said:

"Thank you, Captain. Honestly said, honestly meant, honestly accepted. I don't think you have any woman in your family?"

Garlin was astonished. "Eh? No, I haven't. My father's a shipbuilder back in Maine. My mother died when I was a child. I had— Well, I was in love a couple of years ago, but she married a better man. I've been too busy to study women. Why do you ask?"

IF he had flattered himself that she asked because of interest in him, he was speedily disillusioned.

"Because," she said quietly, "you seem so utterly blind to the fact that when a woman knows she is right, when she is desperate enough to make a hopeless appeal, she never bases her appeal upon concrete evidence. She can't. Good-by, Captain. Thank you for coming."

Garlin, perplexed, found himself out in the passage with the distinct feeling that she had dismissed him in cold but seething anger, despite her pleasant manner and words.

"Now, what the devil did she mean by that last speech?" he queried. "Lord! She's a grand woman! But she wants the impossible. British agent, eh? Well, it's none of my affair. Too bad she's in that business. Just the same, I'll take precautions."

He went up to the bridge, where Mr. Blunt was in charge. The quartermaster, Hilary, was also there. Garlin, after an exchange of comments with the mate, turned to Hilary.

"How are things working out among the men?"

"Quite all right, sir," Hilary rejoined. "All hands friendly and will stay so."

"That's good. If you notice any of the passengers in communication with the crew, come to me at once."

"Very good, sir." Hilary was obviously surprised, and Garlin turned off the matter with a jest. But when he left the bridge-house, Blunt followed him and stopped him.

"One minute, Cap'n! You didn't ask that limey about things for nothing. Huh?"

"Right," said Garlin, nodding. "I've had a tip to look out for queer doings before we reach the Canal. It may be all nonsense. But Mr. Blunt, I think it might be a good idea to keep a gun handy at all times."

Blunt grinned, and slapped his armpit.

"Thank you, sir. I've had that notion my own self, without any tip-off."

Lovejoy and his Filipino assistant had more work this evening, as several of the passengers showed up for mess—Miss Ashley, Mr. Opfells, Mr. Thorstein, and Mrs. Carnstad, another of the women passengers. The meal was a pleasant one. Opfells was a crop-headed, massive, dominant but amiable man who spoke fluent English. Thorstein was a thin-faced, keen, laughing man of thirty, very merry over his mistakes in English; it was not hard to credit that he might be a naval officer, for he had the indefinable something that marks the seaman. Mrs. Carnstad, who also spoke perfect English, was the widow of a Norwegian manufacturer of Seattle, going home on a visit to the old home in Norway after twenty years in America.

TO Garlin, the fears of Miss Ashley became rather absurd, even when Lovejoy sought him out later that evening with a long face.

"You said, sir, to come to you—"

"Right, steward! With anything at all. Neglect nothing. What is it?"

"Well, sir, Mrs. Carnstad's been in Mr. Opfells' cabin a lot. He says she's his seketary. She aint no chicken, but my sainted aunt Victoria used to say you got to look out for a woman that age—she aint got many chances and she'll do the best she can."

Garlin laughed. "Well, we're not concerned with the morals of our passengers,

steward. Don't let it worry you. More than likely, Opfells needs a secretary. He's a man of affairs, by his own say-so; and a little romance may do the lady good. Are the other passengers getting over their seasickness?"

"Yes sir. That Miss Fiord, she's a holy terror with her tongue; but she aint no miss. She wears a wedding-ring, and she's got the married look, if you take her on the beam. Them other three men are funny. Aint gentlemen, if you get w'at I mean, sir. They don't talk English, but we gets on."

Garlin found it all rather amusing. Common sense told him to do nothing; even if these passengers were Nazis, what of it? They were pleasant, quiet people, and he turned in with the conviction that he had done well to refuse Miss Ashley's request.

IN the morning, he made the inspection rounds in company with Asbury and Lovejoy. The routine offered little of interest; the men were neat, did their work with a will, and the fo'c'stle was positively shining with neatness. The decks glistened; the boats were trimly in order, the brasswork marvelous to behold. Bidding Asbury log the gratifying condition of the ship, Garlin dismissed Lovejoy and looked into the wireless cubby.

"Well, Sparks, got over your uneasiness?"

The wireless-man gave him a resentful look.

"No sir, but you cut me short, and I don't want to bother you."

"Nonsense, man!" said Garlin heartily. "If anything worries you, let me have it."

"Nothing much, sir. Miss Ashley has sent some messages and got answers, from San Diego. Nothing of account. And this has come for Mr. Opfells, from Guaymas."

Garlin looked at the message.

"Depend on you. San Lucas failed completely. —Heinrich."

"That name aint Norwegian," said Sparks. "It would be Hendrick or Henrik. That's German."

"So it is." Garlin nodded and handed back the message. "Well, cheer up!"

Two messages mentioning San Lucas, he thought. That was odd. Cape San Lucas lay at the lower tip of Southern California. And the chart of Guadeloupe—an island practically unknown to the world, like other islands off this coast. Odd, certainly, that Opfells should be interested in this island, unless Lovejoy had made a mistake in the chart's number. . . .

Garlin and Blunt both shot the sun at noon. Half an hour later, at mess, the entire passenger-list was assembled for the first time. Miss Fiord, a buxom flaxen-haired woman of thirty, wore a frown and an air of stern vigilance. The three men noted by Lovejoy as not being gentlemen, struck Garlin as being, perhaps, technicians of some sort. Indeed, it rather seemed to him that all eight of the passengers might be old acquaintances, instead of strangers meeting for the first time. That they were all German, he did not doubt; nor did he care. It was a genial crowd; the day was fair and everything promised well.

"Where is the island of Guadeloupe, Captain?" Opfells inquired, during a lull in the talk. "Somewhere near here, is it not?"

Garlin gave him a glance of surprise. He should know, if he had a chart.

"Yes. We pass it sometime tonight—within a few miles, in fact," Garlin rejoined. "I'm keeping a bit farther offshore than usual. Odd thing about that island. It's about twenty miles long, can be seen for nearly sixty miles—and yet it's practically unknown, I suppose the least known island of its size, on the face of the earth."

"Just why is that?" asked Miss Ashley. She had become very pale—was feeling the boat's motion, perhaps.

"It's a hundred and forty miles off the coast—not far enough to interest explorers," Garlin replied. "Too far to interest settlers. Hilly, rocky backbone nearly five thousand feet high. A bit off the ship routes; sailing-vessels go to the westward of it, because of the prevailing winds, and steamers well to the eastward. Lastly, nothing to go there for."

"Don't fishing-boats go there?" someone asked.

"Yes, but I don't imagine any of them ever land on the island."

THORSTEIN made some merry quip, and the subject was turned. When Garlin left the cabin, however, he found Miss Ashley waiting for him outside.

"It might interest you to know," she said distantly, "that you're not the only person taking observations aboard here. Thorstein was taking noon sights today. Why? Guess!"

And with this, she departed. Garlin, despite himself, was startled. The posi-

tion of the ship was no secret; why was Thorstein shooting the sun? Not to keep his hand in, certainly. Perhaps he did not want to ask the position, wanted to know for himself—but why?

"Begins to look queer, for a fact," thought Garlin. "Or am I letting little things take hold of me, distorting them? Why should everyone at table be interested in Guadeloupe? Absurd! Passengers are always interested in any island close to a ship's lane. Come, you fool, get a grip on yourself!"

HE forced forgetfulness of the whole affair. That afternoon, indeed, the ship settled into its wonted routine, as the passengers drifted about the decks and the men got shaken down into orderly work. The better to avoid friction among the crew, most of the German seamen were in Asbury's watch under their quartermaster, Schmidt; the Poles and the English seamen were in Blunt's watch, Mr. McCann's black-gang being fattened from both sides.

Another answer to the hysterical fancies of a woman, as he termed them, was the *Balsfjord* herself. Sturdy, breasting the seas, driving ever southward, her bulk and prosaic thudding engines gave the lie to yeasty possibilities and kept a man down to common-sense levels. Make her into a commerce-raider, indeed! The idea was a joke. Without guns, a commerce-raider would be worse than useless. It was a pity that Miss Ashley took her wild notion so seriously. She was really a stunning young woman, reflected Garlin, not without a sigh.

He was not alone in this reflection. Mr. McCann sought the bridge that evening for a good-night pipe under the stars, and delivered a homily anent the evils of war.

"To think o' good men being stacked in corpses like railroad ties in Europe," said he, "fair gi'es one the shivers! There are better things in life. Ye did not observe, I suppose, the bonny lassie at mess? Ashley, the name is; a young woman with unco' good sense, and looks to match."

"She seems quite nice," replied Garlin.

The old Chief snorted. "Quite nice! Man, have ye a heart o' granite? I note Mr. Asbury makin' sheep's eyes at her already. And the braw lassie wi' the yellow hair—Miss Fiord, is it? She has a fierce way and a sharp tongue. Look out for her. I dinna trust yellow-haired women. Especially these Europeans! Killing comes too easy to 'em."

Garlin smiled at thought of the Chief's words, when he turned in that night. There were few people whom Mr. McCann did trust, it seemed. Therefore, his approval of Miss Ashley sounded the more emphatic. . . .

Guadeloupe! "Well," reflected Garlin, "morning will see that barren island behind us, and we'll be reaching down for Panama. I suppose she'll be croaking until we're actually in the Canal and through it! Funny how a woman can convince herself of anything she wants to believe, isn't it? Thorstein—that chap strikes me as a good sort. Taking observations, was he? I'll have to get acquainted with him."

Midnight, eight bells. . . . Garlin wakened, and switching on his light, slipped into his clothes; he liked to show up at odd times, to keep his authority alive, as it were. He went up to the bridge and found everything as it should be. Asbury had the deck; the German quartermaster Schmidt was watching the binnacle; the ship was snoring southward comfortably. When Garlin left, Asbury followed him out to the ladder, talking.

"Good man, that Schmidt," said Garlin. "Knows his business."

"Aye, sir," the second officer agreed. . . . "Well, good night to you!"

Garlin responded, and went back to bed.

Later he wakened, and wondered why. No reason; the engines were thudding regularly. He switched on his light and happened to glance up at the telltale compass on the ceiling. His jaw dropped. He stared at it, amazed.

"Good Lord! Three points off the course, and holding—it can't be possible! What the devil's the meaning of this?"

He jumped for his clothes, jumped for the door—and checked himself. The door was locked. On the outside.

CHAPTER III

LOOKING at the time, he saw it was after four in the morning, and nearly daylight. At first tempted to attack the door, he refrained upon catching a voice from the passage outside. It was a loud

voice, gutteral; Garlin knew some German, and recognized the words at once.

"Everything quiet, Herr Captain."

In his bewilderment, Garlin at first thought himself addressed. Then he perceived his mistake. Another voice replied; it was that of Thorstein,—or Gemuth,—a crisp, decisive voice.

"Very good. The mate?"

"He was put in the forecastle with the crew. Also the chief engineer. The Captain has not wakened."

"When he does so, bring him to the bridge. No shooting unless necessary. And send up the Doctor. That fool wireless-man put up a fight; he's hurt. Otherwise, all went off perfectly. Keep the guards alert."

That was all, and more than enough.

GARLIN switched off his light, conquered the wild impulse to burst down the door and go to work, and instead sat down on the edge of his bunk in the darkness. It was a bitter moment.

He, as master, was utterly responsible for this ship, or had been. Now it was taken out of his hands. Miss Ashley had been right. That telltale showed the new course, westward of the one he had set; it was no mistake about Guadeloupe. Thorstein—hard to think of him as Gemuth—was heading now for that lonely, unvisited island. The ship had been seized with hardly a blow, then. Think of Sparks putting up a fight! The last person to be suspected of such a thing. Seized during Asbury's watch, sometime after midnight; all the German seamen were in his watch, of course. That made it easy. Blunt had been crowded into the fo'c'stle with the others.

"And whenever I show up, I'm to be taken to the bridge. That means I haven't a chance, so far," thought Garlin desperately. "Guards, eh? She was right, she was right! Even so, it doesn't make sense. What can they do with a ship like this? Not a thing."

As he sat there, all sorts of queer flashes came flitting through his brain. Those wireless messages for Opfells—they must have intended pulling off this scheme near Cape San Lucas, at the tip of Lower California, but for some reason that had been impracticable. Then, about Margaret Ashley: The mystery of how she had got aboard, was explained. She had attempted no secrecy. They had let her come in order to shut her mouth. Probably she was locked in her cabin now.

The light of dawn was seeping into the cabin. Garlin rose and looked around quickly. Momentarily, he was helpless; to attempt any action, would be madness. But this moment would pass. Their one concern would of course be weapons. The passengers must have brought arms aboard. If he could save himself a weapon, one of his two automatic pistols, he would no longer be helpless when the chance for action showed itself.

He moved rapidly. Cord from his locker, one end tied to the automatic; the pistol lowered outside from the port, the cord tied to the brass screw, the port closed. It was safe; no one would notice it even in a search. Assured of this, he went to the door, tried it, rattled it, banged on it.

Outside, a voice made response. The key was turned; the door was flung open. Garlin found himself faced by two of his own seamen, but his no longer. Now they wore navy uniforms, and each one held a pistol, covering him.

"I'll have to ask for your automatic, sir," said one. "We've taken over the ship. Captain Gemuth wants you on the bridge."

"Gun's in my pocket," grunted Garlin. He asked no questions, made no pretence of ignorance, but let them take the weapon and then accompanied them up to the bridge. Here he found Quartermaster Schmidt, and Thorstein; the guards remained close, guns menacing. Thorstein dismissed them, then turned to Garlin.

"Sorry, Cap'n," he said, no longer speaking broken English. "We've had to take your ship over. I'm Captain Gemuth of the Reich navy. Sit down; breakfast will be— Ah, one moment."

He stepped to the open starboard door with an eager question, in German.

"Well, Doctor? How is the boy?"

MISS FIORD came into sight, from aft. So she was the doctor! This explained her hard eyes, thought Garlin.

"He has just died," she said without emotion. "His skull was broken."

"Oh! I'm sorry," said Gemuth—as he now was. His words rang genuine.

"His own fault," the woman rejoined curtly, and went her way.

Gemuth came back to where Garlin stood, and motioned to the locker.

"Sit down, sit down. Poor Sparks resisted; he's dead. Schultz struck too hard. It's most unfortunate. I had hoped to shed no blood at all."

"Most unfortunate for Schultz," said Garlin, sitting down on the locker. "At least, when I get a chance at him. I suppose you know what all this amounts to?"

"Not piracy," the other said earnestly. "It is quite legal. The vessel was bought in Norway, and immediately transferred to German owners."

"These days," said Garlin, "there's a distinction between German and Nazi."

CURIOUSLY, searchingly, Gemuth looked at him, then glanced around as one of the seamen entered with a tray, which he placed on the locker between the two men.

"The steward?" questioned Gemuth.

The seaman saluted.

"Buttoned up, Captain."

Gemuth chuckled, and turned again to Garlin.

"Come along, pitch in," he said heartily. "You don't seem astonished by all this."

"I heard you talking outside my door, earlier."

Gemuth burst out laughing. "Ha! So that explains it! Then you know everything."

"Except your intentions, or what good this ship can be to you."

"A schooner from Mexico meets us at Guadeloupe, with an armament. Our intentions are obvious. You and your men, Captain, will receive full wages as for the entire voyage. We'll put you all ashore on Guadeloupe, and wireless the facts to San Diego. You'll be picked up within a few days."

"Oh!" said Garlin, and swigged some coffee. "You forget something."

"What?"

"You've killed one of us. Now look out for yourselves, Nazi! The swastika brand is a stench in the nostrils of honest men the world over." Garlin spoke calmly and quietly, but a blaze had kindled in his eyes. "Legal? Don't kid yourself! You'll be hunted like wild beasts. I suppose your friend Schultz, or Opfells, managed all this."

Gemuth nodded. "He is a Junker, a member of the higher Nazi organization. The woman you know as Mrs. Carnstad is his wife. They are both highly efficient."

"They'll need to be," Garlin rapped out. "I suppose you'll shoot Miss Ashley?"

"We do not war on women. Why do you take this attitude?" Gemuth looked distressed. "We do not wish to hurt anyone, Captain. She will be put ashore with the rest of you."

The quartermaster spoke briefly. Gemuth sprang up. Daylight had broadened on the ocean; the sun was at the horizon, and dead ahead showed a blur: Guadeloupe.

"After all," said Garlin, "I don't want to see the ship lost. You'd better let me take her to the anchorage for you."

"Thanks. I am quite capable. We have charts," Gemuth rejoined stiffly, squinting at the peaks breaking the horizon.

A figure entered the pilot-house. It was Schultz, beaming, dominant, harsh, flinging Garlin a nod, then addressing the new Captain.

"Franck has taken over the wireless. He is calling Guaymas."

"Good. There's Guadeloupe. Everything safe below?"

"Everything." Schultz swung around. "Captain Garlin, if you'll give your parole, you shall be left at liberty."

"Thanks," said Garlin. "I don't deal with fellows like you—except, that is, in one way."

The massive features of Schultz reddened angrily. "Then get to your cabin, fool. Take him down, quartermaster. Keep your pistol ready."

THE quartermaster complied. Garlin went along without protest. Up forward, he saw the forecastle hood closed, locked, another uniformed man on guard outside it. He gave Schmidt a bitter glance and more bitter word.

"I suppose you're proud of yourself? You tricked Hilary and the rest very nicely."

"All is fair in war, sir," replied Schmidt stolidly.

"I hope you'll have reason to remember the motto later. How do you expect to run this ship with a dozen men?"

"More will come with the schooner from Guaymas. She is on the way now."

Garlin grunted. The whole thing had been long and carefully planned, he perceived. If the ship had left San Francisco in Nazi hands, she might have been lengthily detained and searched, or otherwise stopped; this little trick of various nationalities joining together in one common objective, had appealed to the sympathy and imagination, without bringing down any ravening enemies.

"Better not give those fellows below any chance to get at you," Garlin said, as he

was turned into his own cabin. "They'd cut your hearts out! And I'd help 'em."

The quartermaster, without reply, closed and locked the door.

Garlin looked for the cord tied to the port. It was there. With a breath of relief, he glanced around the cabin, saw it had been searched, and sat down to light his pipe and make the best of a bad bargain.

Now what? Nothing, of course; he was quite impotent to do anything. Not that he was minded to see his ship grabbed and look idly on with hands in his pockets while his men were killed. Poor little Sparks! He had scented something wrong all the while.

This was what rankled—the boy's death. After all, these Nazis were working for their own cause and country; it was the way they worked that mattered, that brought the blood to boiling-point, that made Garlin clench his fists as he sat there waiting. All of a kind, he reflected, men and women alike—the callous Miss Fiord, the stolid and indomitable Mrs. Schultz, even Captain Gemuth, with his gleams of human feeling.

A rattle at his door. It was opened, a man brought in a tray and went out. Breakfast again—something solid this time. Garlin, nothing loath, promptly attacked the food. Put him ashore with the rest, would they? He did not intend to go tamely, if he had half a chance to act. Behind him were years of work and training, all gone to pot if he lost this ship and did nothing. Yet with everyone else stuffed into the fo'c'stle, what could he do? Exactly nothing. The realization burned in his brain.

Sunlight flooded into his cabin; the morning was fair and lovely. The regular thud and thrum of the engines lessened. Half speed. She must be nearing the island. Quite capable, Gemuth had said; the calm efficiency of the man was maddening to Garlin. He had a vague memory that Guadeloupe was tricky, like few other islands on earth. He could not place it. None of his books were here; he had never been to Guadeloupe himself. Tricky? How? He could not remember at all. Just something he had heard.

SUDDENLY Garlin went to the door, tried it, listened. No sound from the passage outside. He found a pipe-cleaner and fumbled with it at the key, which was in the lock. The key, presently, twisted around as the wire pecked, and came flush; a push, and it fell from the lock. Still no sound from outside. Ten to one, they had left no guard in the passage.

Luckily there was no water-sill; under the door he saw the key. He made a hook in the pipe-cleaner, and fished for it. Repeated failures; then it came, inching closer, under the door. He could touch it, but he could not get it, until a final effort with the padded wire brought it through.

He stood up, exultant, the blood hammering through his veins. The pistol? No, not yet. That was for last resources. Take it slowly, now; first make sure the passage was clear, then get the pistol, make a try to reach the forward well-deck. If he could open the fo'c'stle hood and let out the men, things would be different. He could not, would not, shape his mind to the loss of the ship so tamely.

Putting the key in the lock, he turned it, grasped the knob, and silently drew the door open. He looked into the faces of Quartermaster Schmidt and another man, both of them widely grinning and vastly amused.

"Sorry, sir." Schmidt took a step forward, reaching for the key on the inside of the door. "Orders are to—"

IN his dismay and fury, Garlin lost his head. He caught the reaching hand, jerked Schmidt forward in a headlong sprawl, and leaped at the second man. The latter was whipping up his automatic when Garlin struck him. They both went down in a heap. The pistol exploded. The bullet went wild, though the blast of it seared Garlin's cheek. He tried to wrest the weapon away, failed, was conscious of Schmidt rushing back upon them, and upreared to give the quartermaster both fists, one after the other, in the stomach, with his rising weight behind the blows. That finished Schmidt, who doubled up.

Garlin was on his feet, making a dive for the fallen pistol, when something struck him from behind—a terrific blow that knocked him against the wall, gasping. There was Schultz, pad-padding at him on silent feet, striking again, again.

Garlin took the blows, unable to move, unable to fight. That first crack had all but knocked him out on his feet. Schultz hit him mercilessly and repeatedly, until he crumpled in a daze; then kicked him heavily enough to roll him back into the cabin. Another kick in the face stretched him out.

When, sick and hurt, he pulled himself up on his hands and knees, the door was closed and locked.

He fell half across the bunk and stayed there, until the swirling dizziness and pain ebbed a little; it must have been a long while before he was able to get himself up and stagger to the washbasin.

WATER on his head revived him momentarily, but he sank down again and lay half-conscious. Those terrific smashing blows had hurt. The kicks had left his face raw and bleeding, his lip split, one eye closed.

It was the first time in long years that Hank Garlin had gone under to bare knuckles. The realization was bitter medicine. He had lost his head, paying dearly for it; he had accomplished nothing, actually throwing away what chance he might have had. Futile—the senseless fury of a boy!

The dull rattle of a winch, the cessation of the engines, the banging of cable going through hawse-holes, brought him out of his daze. The ship had come to rest. Feet were pounding the decks, voices were ringing. Through the open port, he caught the orders. A boat was being lowered.

He tried to stand erect, and groaned, but made it. Plunging at the port, he groped; it was open, open! Yet he had left it shut. Schultz must have opened it after kicking him into the cabin. His fingers fumbled at the brass screw. Yes, the cord was still there. It had escaped observation. He drew in the automatic, unfastened it, and shoved it under his clothes, against his skin.

Stumbling to the locker, he got out a brandy-flask and swallowed a drink neat. This pulled him around. He looked into the mirror, and recoiled from the blood-smeared visage that met his gaze. A wash, and he felt better; he went back to the bed and dropped on it. The life had gone out of him. Even with the kick of the brandy, he had no strength, no energy. But hatred rose like a flame in his heart.

"Score two for Herr Schultz!" he muttered. His left eye was puffed and blackened, and one leg dragged. "Too damned bad he showed up then, instead of a moment later! Well, I'll pay him out for poor Sparks, if it's the last thing I do! Maroon us ashore without any boat, will he? Dealing with Gemuth would be one thing; he's a seaman. But that swine Schultz—*arrgh!*"

The door was flung open. Quartermaster Schmidt, looking pale and grim, came in with another man. Lovejoy was shoved in. The rotund steward had a livid bruise across his face.

"Get together the Captain's personal effects," snapped the quartermaster to Lovejoy. "Take 'em along. He'll follow when the rest of you are ashore."

Lovejoy moved about briskly. Garlin sat up, groaned, and gave him some directions. They went out and the door was locked again. When it once more opened, Schultz strode in with a barked demand, two men following him.

"You will open the safe, Captain Garlin. To defy me will do you no good; we can blow it open. You would only delay the payment of your men."

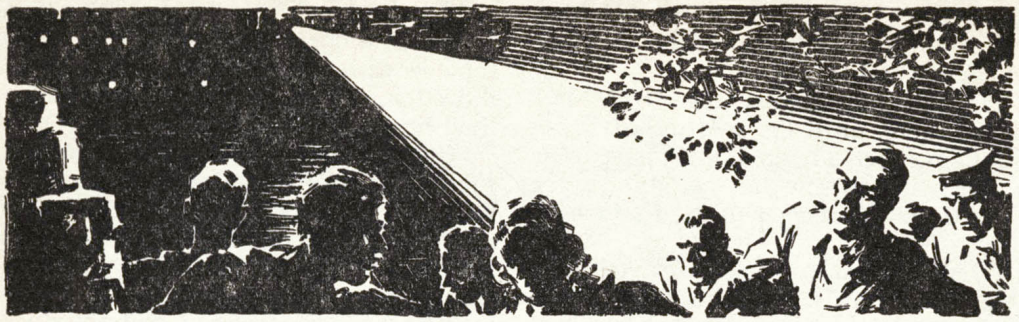
True, reflected Garlin. Defiance would be rather silly. The safe was built in his cabin wall, and was an old, outdated affair, put into this ship from some older vessel. Without protest, therefore, Garlin went to the safe and opened it.

He had completely forgotten about the little handbag given him for the owners in Oslo. Upon this Schultz seized with guttural satisfaction, demanded the ship's papers, then strode out, telling the two men to bring Garlin along to the ladder.

The deck, the open air, the sunlight, the gangway and ladder that had been put out—this before him, and Guadeloupe. There it stretched, barren volcanic rock lifting into the sky. The ship was anchored within the cove at the northeast tip, where a succession of coves broke the shoreline. No time had been lost landing the men. Because of the tremendous surf that came thundering in, to reach the beach was impossible, but a group of rocks at the sound end of the cove afforded landing. Here most of the men and their dunnage were already grouped, and the boat was on its way with the final load. The shore was only a hundred yards distant.

GARLIN leaned on the rail, drinking in the scene. Kelp was thick in the water. Above, rocky summits seemed to stretch straight up to the peaks. Ashore some verdure showed itself: a valley nestling under the cliff with sparse greenery and a clump of trees with two long, half-ruined structures near by. Barracks, thought Garlin. He had a vague memory of hearing that once Mexico had established a post of soldiery here.

A tricky island, this Guadeloupe. The words once more reëchoed dimly in his



consciousness; he had heard them somewhere in the past. Tricky? Why? He frowned uneasily, vainly trying to explain them. No solution offered. The surf was bad, of course, but by its color the water was extremely deep, and there seemed to be no particular current. In fact, two of the German seamen watching him were talking, and one of them mentioned forty fathom as the depth here.

A BURST of angry yells came from ashore. The boat had landed. A group of the men had started to rush it; they broke in hasty retreat as the oarsmen whipped out pistols. Garlin saw Margaret Ashley amid the group, obviously trying to restrain them. The last of the men and their effects were tumbled ashore. Lovejoy had gone with this party. The boat pushed off and started back.

"You'll find it hot ashore, Captain." Schultz approached, carrying the small handbag. "We've landed some water-breakers, and by the chart you'll find a well near the old barracks yonder. Some of the other valleys may have water too. They're said to be fertile in spots, and inhabitants were seen here, many years ago. Will you go down the ladder?"

Garlin managed to claw his way down as the boat came back, four men at the oars. They, like the others, were all in uniform.

Schultz was going now too; he came down after Garlin, the satchel in his hand. He wore a brown shirt now, with a Sam Browne belt and holster.

At a curt order, Garlin got himself into the bow and collapsed on the thwart; he was extremely stiff and sore. Schultz sat in the stern. The boat pushed off and made for the point of rocks. As it neared the landing, Schultz gave rapid orders. Two of the men laid in their oars, took out their pistols, and sat waiting. The other two rowed. Ashore, the group of men clumped together, watching.

Schultz motioned to Garlin.

"Captain, tell your men to retire, and come down one by one as I call the names, to receive their wages. You can then receive your own, sign the papers to attest payment, and go ashore. Any man who approaches the boat without being called, will be shot."

The words carried, but Garlin repeated the orders. He saw Blunt, scowling blackly, his head bandaged. Two or three other men showed signs of hurts. The boat swung and backed in. One of the rowers got out, holding the gunwale, and the other did the same on the other side. The two men with their pistols remained alert. Schultz twisted around and began calling out the names.

Garlin, hunched in the bow, slipped a hand under his shirt, slowly. This passion for the appearance of legality, this attention to detail, amused him; it was typical of the race, of the man. So that little satchel had contained money! American money, too! The men were so astonished, at thus receiving payment, that they accepted mechanically, coming forward one by one as Schultz read their names.

Hilary! That was what Garlin awaited. He could be certain of this man, this bluff, hearty Briton. Hilary came down to the boat, but instead of taking the money, cursed Schultz.

"Damned Judas!" he cried, shaking his fist. "I'll have none of your blood-money!"

GARLIN straightened up, drew his automatic, and threw off the safety.

"You men!" his voice cracked out. "Hands up—quick!"

The two with pistols glanced around. Dismay, astonishment, filled their faces in the hot sunlight.

"Hands up, Schultz!" went on Garlin. "Take his gun, Hilary—"

But Hilary had no chance to do so; Schultz dropped the money in his hand, reached for his holster. Garlin's pistol exploded, and the bullet knocked Schultz

overboard, rocking the boat violently. This was lucky. One of the two seamen chanced a pointblank shot at Garlin, spoiled as the boat careened. Garlin shot the man through the head. The second man was flung sprawling.

Then Hilary was on the two who were out of the boat, and Blunt was pounding up with the others behind him. There was a flurry of figures. The three German seamen were down, were disarmed and tied up. The dead man was disarmed and slid over into the water. Schultz was pulled ashore, dying.

As Garlin straightened up and painfully dragged himself ashore, the scream of a woman came from the ship—a scream terrible and wild. Garlin paused, amid the uproarious group of men, and looked back at the ship.

"I suppose poor Sparks had a mother, maybe a girl too," he said grimly. "You should have thought of that before, Mrs. Schultz! Too late now."

CHAPTER IV

TOO late, indeed! Schultz breathed his last while the woman's scream was still echoing from the high rocks.

A pistol exploded aboard the ship, and another. The bullets came close. The men scattered instantly; luckily, the boat had been seized and drawn up.

"Mr. Blunt!" Garlin handed the mate his own automatic. "We've five pistols. Pick men who can use 'em and take charge. I'm done up. Save the ammunition. Post the men among the rocks and if they try to come ashore, let 'em have it. Everyone else, get back to those barracks and the trees! Somebody give me a hand."

The three prisoners were lined up, and this halted the shooting from the ship. Except in expert hands, pistols could not be certain at that distance. For the moment, the game stood at checkmate.

With Lovejoy helping him and babbling incoherently, Garlin made his way toward the trees and the ruined structures. Long before he got there, he was in a fog of pain, and collapsed. He heard Miss Ashley's voice, felt her hand on his forehead, felt himself lifted and carried, to be set down at last in shade and grateful coolness. Utterly relaxed, a wet cloth over his eyes, he was conscious of being examined and bandaged. The wet cloth remained in place, but he had no immediate need of vision.

"You got a pretty nasty overhauling, Captain," said Miss Ashley's voice, "but a day or two of rest will fix you up. Hold still, while I use the iodine. One or two bad cuts—"

The burn of the iodine wakened Garlin's brain.

"Mr. Asbury, are you there? Mr. McCann?" he said. The replies were instant, and he went on quickly: "Mr. Blunt's in charge till I get on my feet. Meantime, we'll have to move out of here. A schooner is coming from Guaymas with arms and men, and if we stay here, some of them will come ashore to take payment for Schultz' death. He's the swine who murdered young Sparks, by the way. Did I see a path through these trees?"

"Aye," said McCann's voice. "Yon's a bit path windin' up the gully."

"Then send two men to follow it. Some of the other valleys are fertile and must have water. If we can locate fresh water, we can move tonight."

There was a stir and a buzz of voices. Suddenly Asbury spoke up.

"Cap'n Garlin! They're getting out another boat. A man's waving a white flag. What shall we do with the prisoners?"

"Get rid of 'em," said Garlin. "Tell Mr. Blunt to make a bargain. Exchange them for some ammunition for our pistols, for cabin stores, for anything! They'll probably want Schultz, to bury him from the ship. Good riddance. The rest of the men, scatter."

COOL, deft hands were working on him, and the raw scent of liniment was in the air.

"You can take off this bandage," he exclaimed. "I want to see."

"Leave it alone," came Miss Ashley's voice. "One eye's closed; the other is badly bloodshot and puffed. No argument, please; I'm a competent nurse."

He sighed. "Okay. Well, we've got a boat, and we've got their cash, for what that's worth. If their friends don't come, we may get aboard tonight with the boat, and get the ship back. A long chance, of course—"

"An utter impossibility, as you very well know," she broke in with asperity. "They'd shoot the boat full of holes, and the men in it. What on earth made you start this war?"

He sighed.

"I didn't. Schultz started it when he killed poor Sparks."

"Oh!" Her voice changed. "We didn't know he was dead. No one told us. How did you get this fearful set of bruises?"

"That was my own fault. Lost my head, they got me down, and Schultz gave me some concentration-camp gravy. That woman, that Mrs. Carnstad, was his wife, it seems. Did you hear her scream?"

"Don't mention it again, please. There! The boat's coming in."

The voice of Blunt countered that of Gemuth, who had come with his boat's crew, unarmed. He wanted the body of Schultz, and the three captive seamen. Presently the oars creaked and rattled; there was a crunch of footsteps, and Blunt strode up to report.

"He'll hand over what I asked, sir. I wouldn't take his word for anything; he'll fetch the stuff. He says he had intended to bury Sparks ashore here, but Schultz got rid of the young chap early this morning."

"Gemuth isn't a bad sort, in his way," said Garlin. "Very good, Mister. I've sent out men to explore a bit; we'll have to move out of here."

"I don't see why," said Blunt. "The buildings aren't fit for humans, but we've got shelter and a boat. There's a well here, but the water's a bit brackish."

"You'll see soon enough," Garlin rejoined. "I'm too done up to argue. What's that I smell? Smoke?"

"Yes," said Miss Ashley. "Lovejoy's at work getting some food ready. Leave that cloth over your eyes a little longer; then you can sit up and enjoy life a bit. How long do you think we'll be ashore here?"

"Long enough. Gemuth promised to radio our situation, but he'll not do that till he's all ready to clear out with the ship. Days away. Are you there, Blunt?"

"Yes sir."

"How did he seem?"

"Bitter, sir. Said we'd pay dear for this shooting. I'll get back to the rocks."

GARLIN lay quiet for a little. "I suppose," he reflected aloud, "Blunt and the rest of you blame me for starting this war, as you phrased it."

"Do you care?" came her voice.

"For Blunt and the rest, not a damned bit. I'll do what seems best to me. But for your opinion, yes."

"I don't blame you for anything," she made answer gently, "after seeing what they did to you."

"And you're not saying, 'I told you so!' either, I notice."

Her fingertips touched his cheek lightly, for a moment.

"Poor man! You're hurt in body and mind both. No, I'm not doing any crowing, Captain. Life's too short. The boat's coming back now; and here's a cigarette for you. Open your lips."

Garlin would have preferred his pipe, but voiced no objection.

The boat left its load, took Schultz and the three captives, and departed—after an exchange of compliments in which Hilary and one of the Poles got much the better of the wordy war. Garlin gathered that the general feeling was bitter and intense, and that the death of Schultz was welcomed by most of the men.

WHEN Lovejoy came with coffee and an appetizing stew, Garlin took the bandage from his head, to find both eyes in bad shape but the worst pain departed. The cook and the Filipino messboy had been detained aboard ship, as had the assistant engineer—though not against their will, for Schultz had been liberal with his cash. McCann and six men were gone exploring, in two directions. The rest, leaving guards at the point of rocks to watch the ship, assembled about the well under the sprawling trees. Hot words rose fast, until Garlin put an end to them.

"Save your breath for work, men; we've plenty to do, for we can't be caught napping here," he said, and went on to tell them of the Nazi plans. "We can look for trouble when that schooner arrives. So far as I'm concerned, that whole crowd is a bunch of pirates, and I'll treat 'em as such. If any of you want to make friends,"—and his gaze touched on Blunt,—"you're at liberty to do so."

A growling storm of suppressed oaths was answer enough.

"Mr. Asbury, see to it this afternoon that the stores and personal effects are made into packs for carrying," went on Garlin. "I don't see that the boat will do us any good. We can't hope to get aboard the ship against their pistols—"

"The boat," cut in Blunt, "has mast and sail stowed under the thwarts, and all else according to Board of Trade regulations. She could carry a couple o' dozen men to San Diego in jig time."

"True," said Garlin. "Want to go and leave us here?"

"No, blast you! I didn't mean that!" Blunt snapped angrily.

"Sounded like it. We're not shipwrecked, you know. I'm staying till I

see some chance of getting my ship back. We can't hide the boat, unfortunately; we must lose her, or else break her up."

"Why not let me take her out, after dark?" suggested Asbury, speaking thickly by reason of his swollen jaw. His bad tooth was acting up. "We could get out of this cove to the north'ard, well away from the ship, without being seen. Either we could find some cove where we might lay her up, or at worst row clear around the island."

"It's twenty miles long, and seven thick," said Garlin dryly. "However, that's a good idea. The weather's calm and clear; do it by all means. Six volunteers to go with Mr. Asbury! Better get off before full dark. The phosphorescent water would give you away—though, even if they see you, I doubt if they'll bother to open fire."

It was so arranged, and the six men were selected.

THE afternoon wore along; the ship was silent, though guards were in sight. The heat ashore was infernal, for those naked volcanic rocks gathered and held the torrid sun's rays to an incredible extent. Blunt lent Asbury a hand, getting the stores and duffel-bags arranged in packs; then he came strolling over to Garlin; Miss Ashley was still there.

"Regardless of what you think, Cap'n," he said sullenly, "I'm against letting the boat go this fool trip. If she goes at all, she ought to head out for San Diego to bring help. She could get Miss Ashley out o' this mess, too."

"Thanks; I'm seeing it through," said Margaret Ashley briefly.

"Gemuth's a smart seaman, Mister," Garlin said. "He'd never let that boat get away."

"If she can get away to coast the island, she can go farther."

"Right. The more I think about it, the less I think she'll get off tonight. Wait and see. If Asbury can get off at all, I'll send him to San Diego."

Somewhat astonished by this compliance, Blunt had no more to say. Garlin admitted to himself that the mate was right, but upon reflection he could not suppose that Gemuth would be fool enough to let that boat get away.

The sun had dropped behind the backbone peaks of the island, to the unutterable relief of everyone, when voices rang out in hails and replies. McCann and his six men appeared, exhausted by heat and hard travel, garments ripped to ribbons. They had taken no food along, and made a simultaneous descent upon Lovejoy, who had already begun the supper preparations. Pannikin in hand, the Chief stretched out beside Garlin, and made his report between mouthfuls.

Three of his men, in one party, had drawn a complete blank. He himself, with the other two men, had lost the trail in the next valley; it was, he said, a hell of sage and flat ground-cactus, but they had struggled through to reach the height beyond. From there, he had discerned a green valley, and the three of them gained it. Water? Yes, a tiny stream of excellent water. More, the valley, a small affair at best, descended to the sea, and within a barrier of outer rocks there was an unsuspected strip of sandy beach.

"Scrub liveoaks like these," said he, sweeping his hand around. "A grand place for a camp, but the road there is aye plain hell, Garlin. The leddy could not make it. The thorns are bad enough, but the lava rock underfoot is worse, and the heat past bearing."

"Won't be hot at sunrise," said Garlin. "Wait and see, Chief. Unless the boat can get away, we'll have to take a go at it. See anything of inhabitants?"

"No, unless you count wild goats," McCann chuckled. "This is a Crusoe's isle, and no mistake!"

SUNLIGHT died; the shadows deepened, and all hands responded eagerly to mess-call from Lovejoy. Garlin limbered up his stiffened frame, and found himself able to get about, though not rapidly; having the ship's papers recovered from Schultz, he checked over the party. Hilary and the eight Britons, eight Poles, two Czechs, Miss Ashley, Blunt, Asbury, McCann and Lovejoy—twenty-four in all besides himself.

Having become resigned to the inevitable, and adjusted to shore conditions, the gathering was less morose now. McCann ribbed Garlin about his handsome trimming, and when Garlin broke into a laugh and a jest, restraint was cast off.

In the midst of the joking and high spirits, a sudden call came from the two men on guard; next instant a beam of light swept the shore, touched on the boat lying there, and then crept up to reach its pallid radiance across the main party by the trees.

"So they've got the searchlight going!" said Garlin. "Well, Mister, I guess that's the answer to everything. Gemuth is too smart for us. He knows that if the boat

got away and reached San Diego before his guns and men came aboard, his goose would be cooked. No need of your stirring tonight, Mr. Asbury. Their pistols would spoil your departure."

"Why are they keeping the light on us?" demanded Miss Ashley. "It's blinding."

"Going to make sure the boat stays put, no doubt," Garlin rejoined.

The searchlight beam did not remain motionless, however. It flitted to the shore and the two guards, jumped along the edge of the cove, came again to play its dazzling brilliance on the encampment, even touched the steep mountainsides with ghostly glare. To anyone facing it, that beam was indeed blinding.

GARLIN suspected nothing, however. Down at the shore, the two guards could be heard cursing the brilliance as it played steadily upon them. Then it switched away. Almost at once, their voices lifted in startled alarm. A shot sounded; another exploded, then four or five at once. As everyone came erect, the searchlight beam struck full upon them all with blinding force. From the ship came a burst of shots, and bullets whined close. The party scattered, Blunt and half a dozen more making for the shore. The searchlight beam followed them.

"They're makin' off with the boat!" rose a yell, amid the chorus of startled voices.

Then everything was quiet again, while that dazzling radiance played upon them with blinding beam. Cursing wildly, Blunt emptied his automatic at the focal point; and with a sizzle and a crash, distinctly audible, the searchlight abruptly fell dark.

The cheer that arose was hushed almost at once. Under cover of that dazzling light, another boat had crept in, making away with the first and getting off swiftly. The two guards, both of them Poles, had been shot. One was dead, the other down with a slight head wound. Another Pole in the main group had been winged in the arm.

The ship bulked against the stars—ominous, silent, as the dead man was buried in the sand. Whether any of Gemuth's men had been hit, remained unknown.

There was no use of the old barracks buildings, which were mere heaps of rubble and refuse; everyone preferred the open, despite a chill creeping down from the rocky crests above. Miss Ashley made herself comfortable in a nook by the shore. Blunt arranged the night guard, although as Mr. McCann observed, it was a bit late to be locking the stable; and Garlin stretched out in a sandy hollow, with a blanket over him.

He was oppressed by what had happened. Gemuth fully realized the danger to his plans from that boat, and had regained it promptly and smartly. Probably had hauled it off with a grapnel and line, thought Garlin. The future looked dark, darker than the clear and starry night. All the men would have preferred seeing the ship sunk, to seeing her go out as a raider in Nazi hands, but Garlin did not share this feeling. She was his ship; the full responsibility was his. He was thinking only of how he might win her back. As he dropped off to sleep, a gusty chill breeze was stirring the liveoaks, but he thought nothing of it except to welcome the cooler air.

He wakened with a start. Lovejoy was shaking him.

"Mr. Garlin! Cap'n!" The steward's voice was urgent. "Look alive, sir! My sainted aunt! It aint natural—w'at is it, sir?"

Garlin threw off his blanket and sat up, wakening to terror.

CHAPTER V

TERROR indeed, in the starry obscurity. Men's voices were rising in alarmed questions, in exclamations, and outcries.

It was all due to that most common yet strangest of natural phenomena—wind. For a wind had come out of the night, but it was not like other winds. These seamen who spent their lives under wind and sky, sensed the difference without realizing where it lay, sensed the strange and eerie terror of it. Garlin, as he gained his feet, was conscious of all this, of the rushing wind itself, yet could not grasp what was wrong.

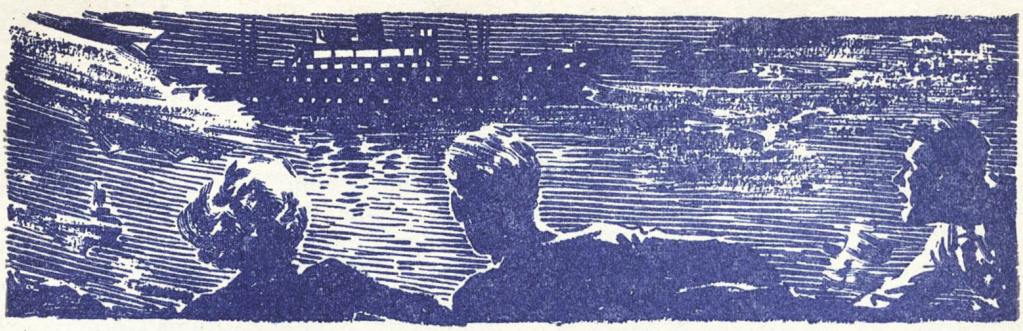
Suddenly the wind was gone. In the momentary lull, a cry from Miss Ashley rang out.

"Help! Somebody help me! It's blowing everything into the sea!"

Garlin stumbled to answer the cry, found Blunt at his side in the starlight.

"Damned queer!" exclaimed Blunt. "Not a cloud in the sky—"

In a split second, his words were blown away. With a banshee howl, the wind descended and came near to blowing



them off their feet. They gained the niche where Miss Ashley had couched, just in time to see her blankets go sailing out into the cove; she might have followed them, had not the two men caught her, and all three sunk down among the rocks.

"Damn!" gasped Blunt. In that terrific hurricane blast, speech came hard. "I fetched my own barometer along—looked at it at sunset—take my mortal oath it hadn't budged—"

"It—it's coming down!" cried Miss Ashley.

Then, impossible though it seemed, the wind redoubled its force. Unearthly howls ran along shore and mountains. Sticks flew through the air; clothes, blankets, odds and ends from the camp, hurtled overhead. Garlin had not felt such terrific wind, even in a typhoon. Even here among the rocks, they had to hug the earth desperately.

It was coming down. Those words wakened Garlin's brain. *Down!* Not like ordinary wind blowing across the face of the earth—but down at it from the sky! There was the strange and incredible thing, apparently contrary to nature itself.

The gust died abruptly. There was an instant of complete silence. Garlin could have sworn that he caught cries from the water—then everything was lost in a diabolic howl like a thousand sirens, and the wind struck. This time it held, it continued, it grew to an intolerable height as the minutes passed. Garlin glanced at the cove; this had vanished in the starlight. The water was whipped and frothed up into a wall of spray that was driven into the sky like a veil, hiding everything beyond; it was beaten back from the shore, exposing the bare and glittering rocks that had lain under the surface.

Memory burst upon Garlin—memory of a conversation heard years ago. Something about what was not down on the charts, here at treacherous Guadeloupe. It was this that had been eluding him; a mere chance word, an allusion, now given fearful force and meaning.

"A treacherous cove—like nowhere else on earth.... Wind comes down at night from the high peaks, straight down, in terrific gusts.... Just this one place.... sweep a ship from her moorings, by gad! No ship's safe there."

One of those curious things that the air or the sea can do, apparently without reason, yet with the deadliest of reason, could one perceive the truth. Like the bore at Moncton or at Passamaquoddy, like the curious rush of air to leeward of certain islands—one of the Canaries, Garlin remembered, as he hugged the sand.

This cleft, this little valley, caught the descending wind like a funnel and compressed it to incredible fury. Not on the charts. Gemuth, then, would not know about it, had not prepared for it. Was the ship safe? No telling.

ON the wind rushed, until the senses reeled under its terrific sweep. This valley and the naked rock above formed a scoop that drew it remorselessly. Not once in a long time, but continually, every night, probably at varying pressures and force.

Blunt came close, shouting something about the camp, and went crawling away. The starlight made the scene grotesque and unnatural. Garlin looked again at the cove. The wall of spray mounted high, ever swept away, ever maintained as fresh water was caught up and driven into tiny particles, by that awful force of whistling air. It was roaring, now, with the roar of a hurricane.

Miss Ashley was beside him, gasping. Garlin caught her in his arms, got his back to the wind and the stinging sand, and shielded her in the lee of his body. She clung to him, relaxed. In this chill sweep of wind, the mutual warmth was grateful; he could feel her body tight against his, could feel her gasping sobs for breath.

Suddenly the ground under them was shaking, as though from some tremendous concussion.

Garlin's first thought was earthquake; yet there had been no roar, or if there had, the roaring scream of the wind had drowned it. The wind drove on; the spray was whipped in air; the stars were incredibly calm above. No shouts from the men came down that blast of wind. Imagination? No. Margaret Ashley was quivering; she too had felt it.

"What was it?" she screamed at his ear.

"Don't know," he rejoined. "Surf, maybe. Tidal wave. Earthquake."

But it was none of these things, nor imagination.

HE was suddenly conscious that the force of the wind was lessening. The wind kept on, but certainly its fury had lessened. A dark shape appeared. It was Blunt, borne on the wind, scarcely able to stop himself; with a grunted oath, he flung himself down beside them.

"Wind's blowing itself out, looks like," he shouted.

"What time is it?" demanded Garlin. Miss Ashley drew away from him a little.

"Past three. Hey, that's funny!" Surprise, alarm, incredulity, leaped in the mate's voice. He drew himself up, staring. "Where is she? Hey, Cap'n! She's gone! The ship—"

Garlin sat up, twisting to look at the cove. The wind was definitely going down. The far-flung wall of spray had lessened, was disappearing; the water was back along the shore-line again. But the ship was not there. In the starlight, the cove was plain to see, empty.

Blunt gasped. "Look—look! Is that her? Them rocks to the south'ard—"

As though in reply to his words, lights suddenly blazed; the whole ship was lighted up, fixing her position with tragic certainty. She was not in the cove. She was on the rocks off the south point, or had been on them.

Garlin knew now what had caused that tremendous concussion, and the knowledge sickened him.

"By the Lord, that's her! And movin' too!" cried Blunt. "Thought I felt the earth shake awhile back—that was her when she hit them rocks! Dragged her anchor, or the chain parted. That blasted German only had out one hook. She couldn't stand the wind, and small blame to her."

The alarm had spread. Other men came running, shouting, crowding down to the shore. The wind had died into mere gusts that came and went. Garlin stared across the starlight, and his heart sank. The ship had been caught without steam up, of course—caught and hurled through the water, probably ripping her whole bottom out on those rocks. Now, too late, she had dropped another bower. They could hear the noise of the chain running out.

"Forty fathom in that cove," said somebody. "One o' them Germans we caught told me so. Now she's done for. No steam up, no pumps, no nothin'—jeeze!"

Nothing to be done, nothing they could do; the same thought was in every mind. Garlin, recoiling under the blow, scrambled to his feet.

"Mr. Blunt! Kindly give me back that gun; you won't need it now, and I may. Thanks. You here, Chief?"

The voice of McCann made response. Garlin went on with calm orders:

"The men who have guns, remain here with me. The others will get the packs shouldered and be off. Mr. McCann! Show Mr. Blunt the way. You take charge of the march, Mister. We want to be out of here before those Nazis come ashore. They're not going to pitch in with us, by a long shot! Mr. Asbury! You remain here, also the six men you had picked for the boat. I'll make a bargain with Gemuth for a boat, before I let him ashore here. If we get one, Asbury, you'll leave immediately."

There was a cheery growl of assent and approval, even Blunt joining in.

"Better let them swine stay off the island altogether!" cried a voice.

"They wouldn't do that; they have friends coming," said Garlin. "Besides, there'll be a couple of women, remember."

"Maybe you call 'em women," said someone. "I don't."

"All right, men, get started," snapped Garlin. "Miss Ashley, will you go with them?"

"I'd sooner wait here and go when you do, if you don't mind," she said quietly.

ASBURY and his six, and the four with pistols, waited. The others drifted off, Blunt and McCann taking charge promptly. By the time the trail up the valley petered out, and the men got to the bad going, the daylight would be at hand; and that climb would be more easily accomplished early than under the later sun.

"I think you'd find it better going now," said Garlin, touching Miss Ashley on the arm. "It may be pretty tough work, after the sun comes up."

"I can take it," she rejoined. "I'm sorry for you, Captain; I know how you must feel what's happened. Is the ship sinking?"

"Can't tell yet. Afraid so. If they've got the bulkhead doors closed, she may swim for a while. Why the devil didn't the fools keep steam up! Well, no use grousing."

NO use, indeed. With a wrench, he made himself face ahead, not back. He must accept the situation and prepare beyond it; the responsibility was still his. The ship's lights remained stationary, though imagination made one and another declare they were lower in the water.

"Will you go in the boat, if we get one off?" Garlin asked quietly, of the woman at his side. "He'll have to give us a boat; nothing will matter to him now. No doubt the two they had out are crushed or swept away. The four others will be plenty for all. Will you go? Asbury will be picked up long before reaching San Diego."

"I'm safer here, thanks," she answered, and touched his hand with a quick, momentary grip. He brought her fingers to his lips, and for an instant his heart sang.

"Looks like a boat comin' in, sir," spoke up one of the men.

A dark spot on the water, a swirling play of phosphorescent light, grew upon them. A voice reached them—the voice of Gemuth.

"Ahoy, there! Cap'n Garlin!"

"What do you want?" replied Garlin. "Come any closer, and we'll fire."

"For God's sake, don't do that!" The other's voice broke. "We're not armed. I want to talk with you. The ship's sinking."

"Come ahead. You land by yourself; keep your men in the boat." Garlin turned to his own men. "Spread out, and you four with the pistols, don't shoot unless I give the word."

The boat came in. Four men were at the oars; Gemuth was in the sternsheets. The boat turned, backed in, and Gemuth climbed out. He came to where Garlin stood, with Miss Ashley just behind him.

"That wind, that wind!" he exclaimed in a hopeless, despairing voice. *"Ach, Gott,* it was terrible! We had no steam up. The cable broke. Now she is finished, finished!" He trailed off in a mutter of broken English and German. Even in the starlight, to those who bore him bitter enmity, the man's heartbreak was poignant and frightful to witness.

"Your own fault," said Garlin coldly. "Well, what do you want?"

The other started. "Oh! We must come ashore. We are loading the four boats. The two we had outboard are lost. Yes, we must come ashore. We have two women with us."

"Not women—Nazis," said Garlin, his voice like ice. "You made your own bed. Lie in it, Gemuth! We've no pity for you or yours. When you murdered poor Sparks, you started a train of retribution that will swallow you."

"Sparks? The wireless-man?" protested Gemuth. "You know well it was an accident! I wanted no killing—"

"Accident, hell!" cut in Garlin. "Now you're taking the consequences. You wanted war; you got war; you'll get war—you damned war-crazy Nazis! Swim out to sea and be damned to you! You've got the ship. Now stay with her!"

Gemuth threw out his hands. "You cannot do that. There are two women. You must let us come ashore. The ship will not last an hour."

"Row back. Bring us one of the boats—just as she is, complete with sail and stores. Then we'll talk business."

Gemuth hesitated a moment, looked around frantically, then turned and got into his boat. The men pushed out; the oars swirled, and she headed away.

No one spoke for a little space. Miss Ashley caught her breath.

"Oh! Well said, well said! Did you see how broken he was?"

"He may well be," said Garlin bitterly. "All his hopes crushed, all the careful plans gone to glory—why? Because the gods sent a wind from the mountains."

"Rather, God," she corrected softly.

GARLIN turned away. "Mr. Asbury! You and your men be ready. Have you the course for San Diego?"

"Yes sir, and a compass. Mr. Blunt and I arranged all that yesterday."

"Then you've nothing to do but go—and God bless you!" Garlin spoke wearily. "I don't need to give you any instructions, Asbury. The ship's papers stay with me. You should get a good wind, once away from the island."

Miss Ashley produced cigarettes and the tension was broken.

They stood waiting, watching, silent for the most part. With Garlin, the blow had been confirmed; his bitterness was acute. The ship could not float, she was lost. His ship. . . . Damn the Nazis! They would get off soon enough, when their schooner came.

"Had you thought about disarming them?" asked Asbury suddenly. Miss Ashley uttered a low word. Garlin smiled; that very thought had jumped into his mind.

"It wouldn't matter," he said slowly. "We'll withdraw to the other valley and leave them this cove—and the wind, blast them! Five men with pistols can keep them from coming after us, on those rocky trails; but they'll hardly want to do that. They've had enough. When their schooner comes, they'll pile off in a hurry, to reach Mexico and safety."

They waited, again. A slow dark blotch grew upon the water; two boats were coming in, one towing the other. Gemuth's voice leaped at them.

"We've brought the No. 4 boat. We're not armed."

"Very well," said Garlin.

The two craft crept in. The towed boat was sent ashore. Asbury and his men prepared to pile in.

Gemuth spoke again.

"Is it all right, Garlin? We can come ashore?"

"When daylight comes, yes. We'll leave you the cove and the whole place here, and wish you joy of it. If you try to follow us, you'll know what to expect. We don't want any further dealings with you and yours."

Gemuth made no response; his boat pulled out toward the ship's lights. The gray dawn was just coming up. Asbury's men had settled on the thwarts. He shook hands with Garlin and Miss Ashley, stepped in, and the boat was shoved out.

A chorus of farewells, and he was gone in the dimming starlight.

"All right," said Garlin. "Let's go."

He led the way, walking well enough now. The camp was deserted, the packs gone; the four men who remained with him and Margaret Ashley had nothing to carry except their own effects.

THE daylight was growing rapidly—fortunately, since the trail was none too easily followed. It struck back up the cañon and then mounted to the left, over the shoulder of the naked rock. When he had gained this eminence, Garlin halted and looked back, out over the cove.

The ship's lights had gone. She herself was visible now against the dawn, but very low in the water. The boats were hovering around her; suddenly all three began to come shoreward together.

Garlin knew what this meant, and turned.

"Come along," he said roughly, and struck out over the shoulder and down into the gray gloom ahead. The others exchanged a look and a word, and trailed after. Garlin took out his pipe, stuffed it from his pouch, and paused to strike a match.

He paused a long while, the flame in his cupped hands, the yellow flare lighting the strongly carven lines of his face. Then it came, as he had known it was coming—a low, distant sound, faintly jarring the air. Her decks must have blown with the air-pressure as she plunged. Garlin moved, dropped the match as it burned his fingers, and started on.

"You didn't get a light," said Miss Ashley, behind. "Have another match?"

"No, thanks," replied Garlin, and headed on.

It was hard, in this moment, to look forward at the future and plan for it.

CHAPTER VI

ONE of the Polish men was dead; two had gone with Asbury, and four Britons. Seventeen people remained, two of them slightly wounded. Garlin himself reached this promised land a staggering, haggard wreck, for his leg had gone bad again, and the final climb over the jagged ridge of lava had been a nightmare.

Now, as he lay in the warm sand beside the shore, the morning sunlight changed everything. The night was gone, with its terror and loss; this was like a new little world. A small place, this *cañoncito,* with rugged lava walls rising to right and left, narrowing to naked rock a scant quarter-mile from the sea; yet the tiny stream of water was sweet and cold; there was no cactus, and the live-oaks were old and huge in size. Thirty feet out from the strip of sandy shore, broken masses of rock closed off the sea approach, yet gave view of the sea, opening southward.

Lovejoy and his helpers were hard at work. Mr. Blunt, temporarily in full command, was enjoying himself, and for

the first time since Garlin had known him, was really cheerful. He had posted guards on the lava ridge over which the party had come; from this point, they had the cactus-strewn hell below at their mercy, and the terrific upward climb to the ridge. On a higher point behind and above the ravine was a lookout post which had a view of the sea and the former cove. A man sent up here reported that the three boats from the ship had come in and made landing. Of Asbury's boat, nothing was seen. He had apparently got over the horizon before daylight arrived.

McCANN, exhausted by his second trip here, was sound asleep. Blunt and Hilary, the bluff British quartermaster, came to where Garlin lay, and stretched a blanket for shade.

"What about the camp?" demanded Blunt. "We're ready to get at the quarters."

Garlin's gaze roved about. "Better keep this strip of sand for officers' use, and for bathing at certain hours, Mister. Having a woman along complicates matters, but can't be helped. Miss Ashley's somewhere over among those rocks, bathing in the pool; see that she's not disturbed. Fo'c'stle crowd can berth anywhere up the ravine. Arrange for latrines at your own judgment. Sorry I'm done up."

"If I may say so, sir, you look like hell," Hilary observed gravely. Garlin laughed, and glanced down at himself—bandaged, disarranged, unshaven. He rubbed a hand over his jaw.

"When Miss Ashley's through with the ocean, I'll have a good soak and get rid of these bandages; you come and lend me a hand, Hilary, when you see her about. I've no razor. We must all pool resources on soap and so forth. We'd better plan for three days of this, possibly longer."

Mr. Blunt looked skeptical. "If Asbury runs into a fishing-craft, we'll be taken off today. Hope so. Lovejoy's rationing what stores we have. It'll be short commons."

Garlin lay smoking, until the steward brought him a cup of coffee and a biscuit; this heartened him greatly. Lovejoy's rotund features were pricked out with stubbly beard and looked droll in the extreme. Excitement glittered in his shoe-button eyes. He was, indeed, so bursting with vivid emotion that Garlin questioned him.

"There's a lot o' feelin' among the men, sir," he rejoined almost breathlessly. "We're a-hoping for a dark night, all of us. As my sainted aunt—"

"Damn your sainted aunt! What are you driving at?"

"Them Nazis, sir! We'll visit them tonight and do it proper."

"You fool, stop that sort of talk!" Garlin exclaimed angrily. "Are you stirring up trouble?"

"Who, me? No sir!" Lovejoy's demeanor changed instantly. "It aint me w'at's planning it, sir. It's that bloke Hilary. I thought as you'd be leading us over there."

"There'll be no such nonsense, so forget the whole matter. There's Miss Ashley coming—bring some coffee for her."

"Right off, sir."

STARTLED as he was by this information, Garlin said nothing of it, but greeted Margaret Ashley with a smile. Freshened by her dip, her black tresses knotted in braids about her head, she was alive with life and energy.

"Hard night or not, you look blooming as a rose!" exclaimed Garlin.

She laughed, and pointed to the rents in her sharkskin garments.

"I'm famished, at least, but see what the thorns did to me! And the rocks made sad havoc of my shoes. How are you feeling?"

"I'll be fit as soon as I have a dip myself and get rid of these bandages, thanks. Lovejoy's bringing you a bite."

"Good! Then I'll take you down the shore to a little cove I found, private as can be, and see that you get fixed up—"

"You'll what? None of that, young lady! Nurse or not, you'll respect my privacy!"

She laughed heartily. "You silly! This is no place for prudery. You really have some very bad contusions."

"And I'll keep 'em to myself, thanks," retorted Garlin.

She frowned. "Why be absurd, Captain? If you were in a hospital—"

"But I'm not," he broke in, smiling. "And you're altogether too charming to be viewed with impersonal detachment. Tell me, please: why aren't you married?"

The abrupt question brought a touch of color to her cheeks. Garlin's eyes softened and warmed upon her; he spoke again, quickly:

"Forgive me. I had no right to ask such a thing, except—well, it's been in my mind. Seems rather incredible that a woman so splendid, so made for—damn it, I can't express myself—"

He broke off, floundering. He could not very well say that since holding her in his arms last night, his thoughts had been much upon her.

She uttered a light peal of laughter. "Why, you're actually blushing! No, you've no right to ask such a thing; but heaven knows, we shouldn't suffer from the conventions here! The fact is that I was once in love, or thought I was, but the man in the case didn't prove up to the required standard."

Garlin looked into her eyes and nodded slowly. "I see. Yes, I fancy the standard would have to be high. Too high for most men, I'm afraid. Well, here's your coffee, and here's Hilary come to lend a hand, so I'm off."

He turned quickly to join Hilary; and they passed on down to the sandy strip of beach.

Within the outer circle of rocks was an excellent bathing spot, too shallow for any sharks; but off to the right, and clear beyond sight of the cove, was another even more sheltered spot in a curve of the shore rocks.

HERE Garlin basked for an hour between sun and water, while Hilary kneaded his aching muscles. It was Garlin's first intimate acquaintance with the big Englishman, and he found Hilary an exceptional person, massive in mind as in body, slow-spoken and capable.

Feeling a hundred per cent more like himself, Garlin drew on his clothes at last, and turned with a quiet word.

"Hilary, I'll depend on you to see that none of the men make any attempt to molest those Nazis. If any one leaves camp without permission, it means punishment. Gemuth and his crowd will be gone as soon as their schooner arrives, thank the Lord! To attack them before then would be mad folly. It would cause them to come after us without mercy. Remember, we have only five pistols."

Hilary was taken aback. Perceiving the force of the argument, however, he rallied and touched his forehead.

"Very good, sir; you may rely on me. There's been some talk about it, but I'll put a stop to all that. Your eyes are looking remarkably better, sir."

"Thanks. It's high time they were."

AND high time, he reflected, that he took active charge again! Regaining the little cañon, he passed to the trees along the upper portion, inspected Lovejoy's arrangement of the stores, and called the men together. Blunt had done an excellent job of getting the makeshift camp laid out, and he said so.

"Now knock off," he went on. "The heat of the day's coming on; take it easy till later. Use the water as much as possible; you'll find a private little cove just to the south of this one. No wandering to the north'ard; leave the Nazis to themselves. No one's to leave camp without permission. And stay out of the water outside the coves—remember, sharks are plentiful hereabouts. Better arrange to relieve the two lookouts every hour, Mr. Blunt. The job's no pleasant one during the day's heat."

Blunt, it proved, had already made arrangements to this effect. He shook his head at Garlin when the men had dispersed, flocking shoreward.

"Won't do to let the hands get too idle, sir."

"We're not aboard ship, Blunt; and these men aren't ordinary scum, but picked seamen," Garlin rejoined. "You'd better take charge of the automatics, leaving one with each lookout. Here, take over mine—I'm tired of carrying the damned thing. As for being idle, it won't hurt any of us, yourself included. Get into the water and rest yourself; you look fagged."

Before Blunt could protest, McCann came up to them, rubbing his eyes.

"Losh! I've been asleep!" he observed. "I trust, Cap'n Garlin, the steward has not neglected oatmeal among the stores? Withoot my porridge—"

"You'll be withoot mair than porr-r-ridge, my braw Scot!" said Garlin with a grin. "In this hot climate, no porridge. Instead, perch yourself among the rocks out yonder and engineer some fish into the pan. You've done a lot of prating about what a hell of a fisherman you are, so now prove it, and we'll all benefit thereby."

Blunt went off rumbling with laughter. McCann stared huffily, then chuckled to himself and went his way.

Garlin stretched out in the blanket-shade among the rocks where Margaret Ashley sat, and they talked together, in lazy peace. A fitful breeze drifted down the *cañoncito* to the sea; all was hot and listless, ablaze with sunlight, and there was no longer hurry, nor anything that had to get done. There was no pretense. Loneliness hung upon the sea and sky. Inhibitions fell away. Garlin found himself speaking freely, as she spoke freely, of the past and the future.

The day was like a dream, all the world gone, the bitter hurt of the dawn now merged in strange surroundings and new interests; strange, what difference a few hours could make! Garlin heard of her life in New Zealand, of her visit with friends in San Francisco, of her sudden call to Intelligence work with the breaking of war.

"NOW that's ended, for the moment," she said. "I'm here; I failed—if I'd made you put into San Diego, it would have been different. We would have nabbed them all."

"And I'd still have my ship," he added. "Yes. We learn by mistakes."

"What is Lovejoy?" she demanded. He glanced at her in surprise.

"Eh? A steward, of course."

"Don't be absurd." She lit a cigarette. They were rationed too—one to an hour. She had a tin of them, luckily, and Garlin kept to his pipe. "You've told so much; your father, your life at sea, your work, work, work, for this Naval Reserve commission. War? You'll have it, perhaps. You may get edged into this war. Your own navy expects war with Japan within a few months. And you, with all this background—you can't see that Lovejoy's eyes are the eyes of someone more than a mere steward? Those glittering little black eyes?"

Garlin smiled, amused by her earnest words. "What do you take him for? A villain?"

"Anything," she rejoined curtly and shrugged. "He's not English, though he affects an accent. I think—well, I'd like to see him stripped naked."

"Good Lord! I didn't know you had that kind of a mind!" said Garlin, laughing.

She bent a quick, intent look upon him.

"Silly! I didn't mean physically. I mean, stripped of his airs and pretense and his secrecy—and suppose you did strip off his clothes? You might find him tattooed with the symbol of the devil, of an angel! Who knows? You needn't laugh at me. The man inspires me with this fancy, and I can't help it."

"I've felt that way about people," said Garlin. "It turns out wrong every time."

FROM the seaward rocks came a yell, followed by voices in an outburst of cheers and laughter. Something had happened. Some skylarking among the men, thought Garlin idly. He was still reflecting on her words about Lovejoy. Oddly enough, he began to believe she might be right, as he cast back in memory over the voyage out. The rotund little man, prying into everything, had been accepted on shipboard for what he seemed; yet now, looking back, Garlin began to wonder how much of Lovejoy might be reality, how much assumed. The man was an admirable steward, certainly.

A group of men came into sight, surrounding McCann. The old chief had contrived a line and hook, and carried a long crooked tree-branch for pole; he had taken Garlin's command literally, and now strutted proudly up to exhibit his burden—a huge five-foot yellowtail that dragged behind him on the ground. Fish were teeming about the island, he said; there would be no lack of fresh fish, with a bit of luck. Excitement was rife; the men were like eager boys, and two of them claimed the pole and line, rushing back out among the rocks to take position and try for new conquest.

"It takes so little to fill their minds!" said Miss Ashley, looking after the joyous group. "What about those two women with the other party, I wonder? And Gemuth? I can't forget how that man had changed this morning, when he talked with us. It was tragic."

Garlin grunted. "I suppose I should weep and wail because my ship's gone!

That's tragic too, so far as I'm concerned. The damned Nazi asked for it, and got it."

"Now you're pretending. You know that you really feel his tragedy."

"Of course I do. And glad of it. In his way, he's a fine fellow; but he gambled and lost, and has no business whining about it."

"He didn't whine. He was broken."

"A man isn't made to go to pieces whenever he gets a jolt under the belt."

"No." She eyed him thoughtfully. "No, that's true. You wouldn't. You'd hit back, somehow. But he had no way of hitting back, at that wind."

"Get this," Garlin said quietly. "Efficiency! That's sea law. Gemuth's a fine chap, but inefficient; that's his crime. Any seaman would have moored the ship properly—he was too excited to think about it. He wanted that boat back, and got it. Later, even after he hit the rocks, he should have put down the other bower instantly. He should have put every soul aboard to feeding the fires and getting up steam for the pumps. Instead of letting the ship fill and go down, he should have run her up ashore or on the rocks—anything!"

"It's easy to look back and see what he should have done, isn't it?" she asked tartly.

"Hell! A real seaman knows at the moment, and does it. I'd have done it. So would Blunt, or even Asbury. But those blasted Nazis were probably running around and bleating."

"I don't like you in your efficiency pose," she said, and rose.

"It's no pose. It's fact. Women never do like fact. There's nothing sympathetic about it. And inefficiency gets no sympathy out of me."

"Therefore I'll look for more congenial company, till the mood passes."

SHE swung away in a lithe step up the cañon. Garlin's eyes followed her, openly admiring. What a woman! She grew upon one. Trim, eager, long-limbed—a woman for action. As for her expressed distaste, he could dismiss this with a shrug; women usually reacted like that to the gospel of efficiency. Possibly he had been a bit brusque about it, too. The mood would pass. This day had brought them close together, had ripened friendliness into intimacy; it was warming to the heart.

Garlin was still looking after her lithe, firm figure when the shot sounded.

Whence it came, was impossible to say; not from the cañon, assuredly. Even as it rang out, Garlin knew it was no pistol-shot. It was the flatter, angrier *spang!* of a rifle. It was taken up and borne a hundredfold by rolling echoes, from the naked rock slopes above. Then silence again, hot empty silence.

The men were dashing into the open, clad and unclad, looking upward. Garlin joined Blunt, who pointed toward the lava ridge on the north. There the figure of the guard who was posted to overlook the approach from the other cove came into sight. He waved down at them; apparently all was well there.

"WHERE'S the lookout posted?" demanded Garlin.

"There, on that shelf back of the cañon," said Blunt. "Don't see him. Three of you men climb up there—it was time to replace him, anyhow. You men who've been up there on lookout, did you see anything looked like danger?"

None had. Three of them went off hurriedly.

"That was a rifle," said Garlin. "Where from?"

"Can't say. We've got no rifles." Blunt scowled in perplexity. "Nor have those blasted Nazis. Sounded like an old Springfield. Funny that lookout don't show up!"

They stared up. The guard, on the north side, waved again as though saying all was right, but the lookout above the upper end of the cañon did not appear.

At last the three men came into sight, high up. They vanished. One of them reappeared and shouted something, but the words were lost upon distance. He began to wigwag with his arms. A cry broke from some of the men.

Hilary turned to the two officers.

"Navy code, sir. Says he's dead."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Blunt. "Feel able to get up there, sir?"

"Of course. Come on. We'd better get to the bottom of this at once."

Garlin struck out with Blunt, who offered to get pistols, but Garlin shook his head. There was no point in carrying the heavy weapons. Even if there were, pistols against a rifle were useless, in these long vistas of sun-hot rock and craggy slopes.

Once at the upper end of the cañon, the climb was short but stiff to a ledge of perfectly bare, blazing hot rock. Jagged clumps of rock at the rear, under

the mountainside, had given opportunity to stretch a blanket for shade. Here the three men were grouped about the body of the lookout, one of the English seamen. They broke into a babble of excited voices, but Garlin ignored them.

From this point a glorious view of the sea could be had, and of the little cove where they had first landed. Nothing of that valley could be seen, but one of the boats, half drawn up on the shore, was visible. This was off to the north. The sea horizon was empty.

To Blunt and Garlin came the same question. The dead man lay untouched by the others. A slug had torn through his head, from behind, but had made no exit. Therefore it must have been fired from some little distance. And it could only have come from those naked blazing slopes to the west and south, where the island peaks stretched away in a bluish heat-flitter.

These were all bare, untenanted, empty of life. There was no trail of any kind to be seen. For any of Gemuth's party, even had they possessed a rifle, to have worked around and over the hills to this point, was quite impossible. And to all of them the notion that even now the mysterious rifleman might be crouching somewhere near, watching them, perhaps ready for more murder, was gruesome and nerve-racking.

"Ah!" A sharp exclamation broke from Garlin, as he stared down at the dead man. "It doesn't seem possible!"

"What doesn't?" demanded Blunt. "He hadn't drawn his pistol. It's still stuck in his belt."

Garlin knelt, and reached for the dead man's clenched hand.

"Believe it or not, here's the explanation. Look at this," he said, and spread open the dead clenched fingers.

CHAPTER VII

FROM the dead hand fluttered a torn remnant of red calico, figured with a white pattern. Garlin smoothed it out. It made quite a fragment.

"That doesn't explain anything, that I can see," said Blunt, scowling.

"I'm afraid it does. We haven't any cloth like that in camp, have we?"

The others agreed that the scrap was entirely strange. There was certainly no such material in camp.

"Looks as if it might have come from a woman's dress," said someone.

"Exactly where it came from, I'm afraid," assented Garlin. "That's why it's so hard to believe. This blanket, this bit of shade, isn't visible to anyone coming to the ledge from behind—someone coming to our little cañon, perhaps to get water. A woman or girl. She wouldn't see this man until she was almost upon him. He grabbed her dress. She broke away. No doubt he tried to catch her. Someone was lying across on the other slope with a rifle, and shot him. Does that answer the facts?"

THERE was excited discussion, for the theory undoubtedly fitted. The man had lain, as he still lay, out a little way from his shelter, his gun untouched.

"Darned funny, anyhow!" said one of the men. "Jack hadn't been away from Frisco so long that he'd get to feelin' rarey-tarey at sight of a skirt."

"Probably he intended no harm at all," Garlin suggested. "He might have been trying to talk with her. Suppose this is what happened—which way would she have gone?"

It was plain enough; she must have retreated to the blaze of rocks beyond, where a succession of empty ridges ran to the south. The naked rock of course would show no footprints here or elsewhere. But Garlin, standing as that seaman must have stood, looking after someone retreating, suddenly realized that his back was now to the adjacent ridge. He whirled.

"Look! Over yonder—that's where the shot came from. If we only had binoculars!"

"Asbury had glasses, but took 'em with him," said Mr. Blunt. "Think we'd better go over there and have a look? Don't seem possible there's people here."

"Might be. Mexicans, perhaps; hermits, outlaws—who knows? It's not only possible; it's a certainty. The rifleman may have thought the woman was in actual danger, that Jack had attacked her. He couldn't be blamed for that. Whoever remains on lookout duty, must keep his eyes open. We don't want to go searching—it would be rank folly. . . . Isn't that a patch of green, down that valley to the south?"

"Looks like it," agreed Blunt. "Hell of a job getting there, though."

One man remained on lookout. The others picked up the corpse and followed Blunt and Garlin back.

The dead man was buried at the head of the cañon, and it was decided to keep a guard at the lookout both day and night, as well as on the lava ridge northward.

"IT can't be for long," Garlin said that evening, as he sat with Miss Ashley, Blunt and McCann under the stars. "Asbury's been picked up by this time; at worst, he'll reach San Diego this time tomorrow. It's odd that the Nazi schooner hasn't showed up. Too bad we haven't a radio along! McCann, I thought you had one of those portable affairs?"

"Aye," said the Chief, morosely. "I had. Sixteen good dollars it cost me. No doot the fishes are harkenin' to it the noo."

"Radio, sir?" Lovejoy, who was hovering about removing the dishes from their fish dinner, paused. "There was two aboard the ship, sir. Mrs. Carnstad, meanin' to say Mrs. Schultz, she had one; and Mr. Thorstein,—or Gemuth,—he had one too. Likely they brought one or both ashore."

"The portable kind?" asked Garlin.

"Aye, sir. Special make, they was. I heard the lady tellin' Schultz she had got Germany."

"So you speak German, eh?"

"Ho, yes sir! A bit. My sainted aunt Victoria used to say as it was da— I mean jolly convenient to have the gift o' tongues, sir."

Lovejoy moved away. Miss Ashley rose and followed him.

"One moment, steward! I'd like to speak with you."

The night swallowed them up. Garlin sucked at his pipe.

"Blast it! Even if they have a radio ashore, they can't send a message with it. And won't do us any good. Their schooner will probably show up tomorrow."

"And we'll have some craft pushing down from San Diego to pick us up," said Blunt. "High time! Mr. McCann, your yellowtail was good. The men had no luck with your pole; you'll have to show 'em the trick tomorrow."

"I'll do that," agreed McCann; then abruptly he paused, as Garlin's head jerked up. Faint, so faint as to be nearly inaudible, yet he could have sworn to them. Three or four shots, almost together; then another burst.

"Did you hear that?" Garlin asked.

"Yes," Blunt made reply. "Shots. Couldn't ha' come from the other cove; they'd ha' sounded louder. Everything's dead still. Likely, from the other side of the island. This bally island may have a whole population over acrost!"

Dead still? Yes, it had been; but now a breeze began to stir the trees. The shots, if shots they were, had no explanation. The breeze became a chill gusty wind. Garlin waited in grim anticipation. That cold breath was pouring down from the mountains again with eerie whistlings; but the experience of the past night was not repeated, though the wind continued. This valley was not a natural scoop like the other, evidently, and the wind did not rise to power.

The guards, as relieved, reported everything quiet. The camp settled down for the night. Garlin was alone among the shore rocks, watching the phosphorescent play of the water, when he heard a step and found Miss Ashley at his elbow.

"Came to say good night, Cap'n," she said cheerfully. "Sorry I got a bit stiff this morning—only goes to prove the truth of what you said about a woman recoiling from the face of efficiency."

"I didn't say it so poetically," said Garlin, and chuckled. "It's good to talk with you, to get close to you mentally. You're an exceptional woman."

"Showing how little you know about woman," said she, laughing. "But I was right about Lovejoy."

"Eh? Right about what?"

"Forgotten, have you? About his secret. Now I've forced it out of him."

"Oh! Let's have it, by all means!"

She laughed again, and turned. "Sorry! Promised him I'd not tell unless necessary. But I'll say this much: If we have anything to do with that other crowd, you'll do well to keep an eye on Mr. Lovejoy. Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

She was gone. Garlin, presently, stretched out beside McCann. He wondered what she meant, but had no response; and, to the music of the chief's steady snoring, he himself fell asleep.

WITH morning Garlin was about early, had another soak and sunbath before Miss Ashley's hour for privacy in the pool; and except for his mouser and lingering bruises, felt nearly as fit as ever. The night had passed without further disturbing incident.

"Strange, how we never think of the right thing at the right moment!" he said to Blunt, as they broke their fast.

The mate eyed him sharply. "Meaning?"

"How soon did you get a man to the lookout place, when you got over here yesterday at dawn?"

"Right off. *Pronto.*"

"Yet he saw nothing of Asbury's boat? That's odd. Asbury got off just before the daylight, and could have gone only a few miles. From that shelf there's a clear view to the east and north. Asbury was heading north by two points east, approximately. . . . Where's the man? We'd better ask him. He probably thought it not worth reporting Asbury's boat."

"You can't," said Blunt. "He's the one was shot yesterday—Jack."

"Oh!" Garlin shrugged and dismissed the matter.

THOSE distant shots of the previous evening remained a mystery; the day wore along in placid, listless heat. The guards reported deadly monotony—the sea horizon empty, the island ridges naked and blazing with white sunlight; except for two wild goats seen afar, there was no indication of life.

This day the men fell to various tasks—fishing out kelp to be plaited into sun-shelters, completing the camp quarters, building a little hut of loose rocks for Margaret Ashley's use. They were jubilant when the makeshift fishing-line brought in another yellowtail and an albacore, sufficient to provide a sizzling feast for all hands. Driftwood lay piled in the coves for the taking; and except for the carefully rationed tobacco, men began to talk with anticipatory regret of the return to regular life.

Yet the horizon remained unbroken.

The afternoon was half gone. Stout Hilary, who had gone up to relieve the guard on the lava ridge, came back on a run, shouting for Garlin.

"Cap'n! He says one of 'em is coming, alone. Cap'n Gemuth, it is. With a white flag."

"Go back and relieve the guard," said Garlin. "Tell him to bring word what the Nazi wants, and halt Gemuth there."

So it was done. They could see the figure of Gemuth on the ridge above, with Hilary; the relieved man brought word, unhurried, with a wolfish grin.

"Dunno w'at he wants, sir. Askin' for you, he is; says it's important. He's alone and unarmed. Seems all broke up, blast him!"

"Blunt, you'd better go with me," said Garlin.

Miss Ashley spoke up.

"Mayn't I come too?"

"No objections," said Garlin briefly.

The three began the climb to the ridge. They were halfway up when a hail came from Hilary, above.

"Cap'n! There's another one comin' along. A woman."

"It's the Doctor," added Gemuth. "I couldn't keep her back."

Garlin made no reply, but gave Miss Ashley a look. "The wolf-woman," he said acidly, "—Miss Fiord. They're up to some game."

The figure of Miss Fiord appeared ahead, joining Gemuth; she was evidently furious about something, for they were having an altercation, which ended as the others drew near. Garlin regarded the woman with amusement. She had discarded skirts and wore khaki shorts and shirt, her flaxen hair braided and knotted, her bleak face sun-reddened.

"Very athletic," commented Miss Ashley under her breath. "You'd call her efficient, I suppose; I'd say a brawny, nervy woman."

Garlin grunted and came on to the ledge. He was astonished at close sight of Gemuth. Despite uniform jacket and cap, the man had lost his trim assurance. His face was sagging and haggard; his eyes were sunken, wild, desperate.

"I had to get in touch with you, Garlin," he broke out. "I followed your trail here. We brought a radio ashore. We got news by it today." He drew a deep breath, straightened his shoulders a trifle, and went on with an almost pathetic dignity: "Our schooner won't be here. She was seized by Mexican authorities, her errand discovered."

SO there it was in a nutshell. What it meant to the man, to those with him, was obvious. Their last hope was gone. More, they were marooned here, desperate. Miss Fiord said nothing; her cold blue eyes regarded the others distantly, without emotion, without appeal, with a savage defiance.

"Indeed!" commented Garlin. "And why run to us?"

Gemuth made a gesture of despair. "We're licked. What I'm asking is only for the sake of the two women—Mrs. Schultz is still prostrated. Let them and the men get off. Take me; I'll deny

nothing. I'll assume the full blame for everything, Garlin."

Despite himself, Garlin felt a grudging admiration for this man, so totally beaten.

"I don't understand," he rejoined. "You have the boats; that's more than we have. Take them and go your ways. We're not stopping you."

"I'm offering to let you share them," said Gemuth. "Complete surrender. You can have what arms we have, everything! But don't go to San Diego. Go first to Cape San Lucas. Let our men go free there, and the two women. I'll remain with you. There's a steamer—you can get it there. In America, it will mean prison for them all."

"And a damn' good thing," said Garlin coldly. "What's behind all this? You could go without us. You could make Mexico safely. What are you after?"

There was a moment of silence. Miss Ashley broke it, calmly.

"What he means, Captain Garlin, is that he wants to make a bargain before Mr. Asbury brings retribution upon him. He's probably picked up more than he's told, by the radio. He knows that help is coming for us; it means retribution for him and his whole command. Is that so, Captain Gemuth?"

"No." Gemuth squared his shoulders and smiled at her, and Garlin felt that the man was telling the truth. "We've picked up nothing more to concern us. But the fact is, Garlin, that we've no water. That well was brackish at best; now it's turned salt. We haven't more than a single water-breaker left, from what was in the boats. We've searched everywhere. We haven't enough water—we daren't start for the Mexican coast in open boats without any!"

Silence, again. And again Garlin felt truth here.

"We have water in plenty," said Garlin slowly. "If I were to give you some, would you get off by yourself?"

"Yes," said Gemuth. "Unless you want the chance to leave, as well."

GARLIN was conscious of the glittering, inexorable regard of Miss Fiord, malignant and vindictive. He became aware of something else—a bandage about her upper left arm.

"You're hurt?" he demanded of her.

"No. A thorn-cut," she said curtly.

Gemuth explained: "She led some of the men searching, yesterday, about the north end of the island. The thorn was poisonous—cactus of some sort. But they found no water."

"You know that Asbury is probably in San Diego by this time?"

"I suppose so," Gemuth said wearily. "There were stores in the boat given him—we had begun to load it. Miss Fiord had some of them taken out; she prepared the boat for turning over to you. There was little time, you know. I was saving some papers and instruments, while it was done."

THOUGH Garlin scarcely heard the words, later he recalled them vividly, with acute emotion. Now he was thinking of something else: This woman, malignant, vindictive, and her bandaged arm, and her search for water around the north end of the island.

"What was the shooting, yesterday evening?" he asked.

Gemuth's brows lifted.

"I didn't hear any. There was none at our place."

Garlin looked at the woman steadily, inquiringly. She returned his gaze as with sullen defiance; her silence was eloquent of hatred.

"Well?" Garlin broke the silence. "You heard the shots?"

"No," she rejoined curtly.

"I'm sorry you're not a man; I'd know how to answer you then," he said, and turned to Gemuth. "About the water: I can't refuse you, of course, but I'll only give it to you on one condition: I want you and your whole crowd off this island. I want to be rid of you. You have empty breakers, no doubt?"

"Yes, half a dozen of them, and a small cask. Do you want a boat? I can spare you one. We don't even need the room in two."

Garlin shook his head. "I don't want a boat. We'll no doubt be picked up tomorrow ourselves. No use trying to pack water-breakers over this trail. Load up your party at dawn and drop down the shore. There's no landing on account of the rocks, but you can lie off them and float the breakers in. We'll fill them. Then be on your way."

The curt, crisp words brought relief into Gemuth's face.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "Thank you, Captain. We'll be there before sunrise. It's very good of you. —Come, Doctor."

He bowed to Miss Ashley, turned, and departed. Miss Fiord swept them once with her look of malignant scorn and fol-

lowed him. When they were threading the cactus maze in the cañon below, she evidently burst into a tirade again, though the words were lost.

Blunt whistled softly.

"There's a woman for you! If she hasn't got snake-blood, then I'm a Dutchman!"

"She lied about not hearing any shots," said Miss Ashley.

Garlin grunted. "Of course she lied. She knows something about that shooting. Thorn-scratch on her arm—sheer nonsense! You don't get thorn-scratches above the elbow. I'll bet a dollar she was hit by a bullet. What happened, anyhow? Gemuth wasn't lying. Could she and the men have got into some row that he knows nothing about?"

"Anything's possible, with that woman," said Margaret Ashley.

LEAVING Hilary on guard, they returned to the green cañon. They were nearly to the trees when a commotion rose among the men, near the beach. One of them came at a run.

"The lookout!" he bawled at them. "The lookout! Something's happened up there!"

All turned. From here, the position of the lookout on the high shelf was visible. The man himself was shouting something lost upon distance, and waving his arm.

"Dammit, now what?" growled Garlin. "Well, come along. Perhaps he's sighted a craft of some kind, come to pick us up."

"I'll stay here," said Miss Ashley.

Blunt halted.

"Hold on! I got what he's yelling. About water. Wants some water. He's pointing at something behind him. Maybe that chap with the rifle has showed up. I'll get some water and follow you, Cap'n."

Garlin nodded and started for the climbing path.

He was nearly up, unhurried, when Blunt caught up with him, and together they reached the ledge. The lookout met them, excitedly.

"You got water, sir? Good. There's something over here—looks like a man. I aint sure about it. Here, come to the back of the ledge and you can see him. Must have come over from the west side of the island. I thought it was an animal, for a while."

They accompanied him, and sighted a queer object across the naked rocky slopes. It seemed a ragged, shapeless thing; presently Garlin made it out to be a man, crawling on hands and knees, nearly naked. The man rose, made a few wavering steps forward, then pitched down and sprawled, only to pick himself up and crawl once more.

"Poor devil!" exclaimed Garlin. "Come along, Blunt. Whoever he is, we'll have to bring him in. Seems to be blind, or nearly so."

"At the last gasp, if you ask me." Blunt clutched his pannikin of water and squinted at the staggering figure. "Say, that's funny! Color of his shirt—green, what's left of it. If I—"

He broke off short, and his jaw dropped.

"What's the matter?" demanded Garlin. "What's hit you, Mister?"

The mate suddenly found tongue.

"By God, if it aint Asbury!" he said amazedly. "Come on!"

CHAPTER VIII

ASBURY? The very idea was grotesque and incredible. Asbury was in San Diego by now.

And yet, as he followed Blunt over the rough and rugged blaze of rock, Garlin was aware of a certain horrible possibility in the idea. Nothing had been seen of the boat, off to seaward. Asbury might, certainly, have gone around the north end of the island; but if so, this involved even more fantastic questions. The second mate could not have thus

disobeyed direct orders; there was no reason for it; even if he had done so, he would have brought the boat back—oh, it was all utterly insane!

Yet the crawling man was Asbury.

Before they reached him, he had fallen prostrate and was lying motionless. The sinking sun by this time was behind the peaks, though the long shadows did not give much relief from the terrific heat of the rocks underfoot. On closer approach, Garlin perceived that Asbury was in pitiful shape. His boots had been cut to leather ribbons by the rocks, and were bound about with strips of trousering. He was nearly naked, and a mass of bloody hurts from head to foot, scratches and cuts and contusions.

They turned him over, and Blunt dropped a trickle of water on his swollen tongue.

"Can't be true, but I guess it is," he observed, wasting none of the precious fluid. "Lord! Look at his skin, what's left of it! Goin' to be a fine case o' sunburn. Eyes swollen about shut, too. Well, I guess we aint due to be picked up, after all."

"That lookout must have passed the word along," said Garlin, glancing back. A number of the men were streaming toward them, over the rock shoulders.

BLUNT poured more water. Asbury groaned and coughed; he swallowed, showed signs of reviving, and a mutter of feeble words came from him:

"Two men . . . back there. Couldn't . . . couldn't keep up . . . hurt."

His voice trailed off, and his head lolled. He was unconscious.

"Proper officer, he is," said Blunt. "Two of his men on the way with him, and fell out. Shall I take some o' the hands and go after them before it gets dark?"

"Yes." Garlin looked up. Six men were trailing along toward them. "Leave two, to carry him in. Take the others. Asbury must have come across from the west side of the island. It's only six or seven miles, but it must be fearfully tough going."

"Six in a straight line, and sixty by foot," said Blunt, and he barked orders at the approaching men. Four of them swung off behind him, staring at the wreck of Asbury in passing. The other two halted.

"Is he dead, sir?"

"No, but badly hurt and sunburned. Be gentle with him. We don't know yet what's happened. Once at the lookout shelf, use the blanket to carry him in. He needs attention at once. I'll go ahead and get things ready."

Blunt and his four were already hitting up a good pace, heading for the savage peaks whence Asbury had come.

THE cañon was full shadowed by the peaks, though the sea still glinted in warm sunlight, when Asbury was brought to one of the shelters among the upper trees. Miss Ashley was ready, with bandages and what unguents the scanty supplies afforded. Asbury was feebly groaning, gulping down what water Garlin allowed him, and Miss Ashley shook her head as she fell to work on the hurt and burned body.

"I think we've got him in time, though we've not much to do with," she said. "Good thing Lovejoy had a tin of olive oil along. He'll have fever later tonight; I'll move my blankets up here and keep an eye on him."

Swathed in bandages, sightless, but somewhat restored to life by the blessed water, Asbury held Garlin's hand and talked. Those remaining of the men gathered close around. Hilary, just relieved of his watch on the lava ridge, stood with anxious face; one of the men who went with Asbury, it proved, had been his brother.

"We got off all right, Cap'n—it was still dark," Asbury began. "We didn't learn the truth till it was too late. There was a stiff current around the end of the island. When one of the oars broke, we thought it was an accident. Then another broke. We were off the high cliffs then—no place to land. No way to get back. All the oars had been cut—sawed nearly through, and the kerf filled up with sawdust and soap. . . . Drink!"

Garlin held water to his lips. A growl passed among the men—a deep and savage mutter. Oars cut!

"One oar held awhile," Asbury went on. "That kept us off the rocks; the current was pretty bad. We got the mast stepped—and it broke off. Sawed like the oars. Over on the nor'west side of the island, we found a place. Rocky landing, and bad, but we made it, and got the boat up. The last oar broke there."

He paused for breath. Garlin met the eyes of Margaret Ashley—eyes of horror, of wild incredulous comprehension. He nodded at her, understanding her thought. That accursed malignant wom-

an! Gemuth had not done this thing. He remembered, now, what Gemuth had said. Miss Fiord had made the boat ready. Probably had insisted.

"We were there all day," Asbury pursued. "We got the mast spliced at last; it was a job. Then we had to do some work on the sail. The canvas had been slashed. We built a fire, with evening, and pitched in on the job, and got that finished too. We were ready to shove off when a boat came along and poked in at us. They never said a word—just let fly with a volley. Killed four of us right then—three dead; one died later. They shoved out and went away, probably thought we were all dead. We had no guns. I heaved a rock, and got one of 'em—heard the screech. They were that close. That's all I know. We started to come acrost the island, me and the two Poles—the others were gone. That was this morning. The Poles couldn't keep it up. It was hell. I don't remember much of it. I knew you were somewhere here. . . . We managed it somehow—"

His voice died out; and with a sigh, he relaxed into unconsciousness.

"Better leave him, now," said Miss Ashley. "He'll be all right until the fever from the sunburn takes hold. That'll be later."

GARLIN glanced around. Hilary had turned away and disappeared in the gathering gloom. The other men were scattering; Lovejoy was calling everyone to supper.

Garlin, alone with Miss Ashley and the unconscious man, found himself wordless, shaken by a gusty, overwhelming fury. Then she was beside him, her hand on his.

"I know how you feel, Captain." Her voice was cool, strong with restraint. "It's hard to believe that such people exist in this world—but remember, Gemuth had nothing to do with it. She did it. She and the men with her. She probably told them it must be done to save themselves."

"I'll hang every damned one of them!" blurted Garlin, with a sudden storm of oaths.

"No. You won't do that." Her fingers pressed his hand. "You're not that kind. And you can't hang her. She's a woman—a maniac, if you like, a venomous reptile—but she's a woman. We can't help it if she's a she-devil as well. You have something better to do."

A low groan escaped Garlin. Torment filled his brain; a fury past bearing.

"Murder! Sheer bloody murder! And you think I'll do nothing about it? By God, when they come for water—"

"You'll give them water and be rid of them," she broke in upon him. "The law will catch up with them, with her. Give them water, take one of their boats, say nothing until we're away from here. Then the law will catch them all, even in Mexico. Remember, we all depend on you, now. The responsibility is yours; we'll have to save ourselves, not seek vengeance and more death."

Garlin was silent, seething yet inwardly attentive to her argument. He heard Lovejoy calling them, but made no reply. The labored breathing of Asbury rose heavily on the silence, and Lovejoy hailed again.

Miss Ashley answered him.

"Coming, steward, coming! Now, Captain, get hold of yourself." She shook his arm slightly; she was close to him in the twilight gloom. "Tomorrow's a new day. You must plan for us all. Now we must get another boat from them, or find that one and bring it around here; our one thought now must be to reach San Diego with word of our situation. Yes?"

Garlin drew a long breath. He put out both hands, took her by the shoulders, and held her close for a moment.

"You're right. Lend me your clear vision, your common sense; I need it."

"You don't need anything. As for those people—well, never meet a woman with her own weapons! If she's wordy, meet her with silence. If she's a ravening fury, meet her with self-control. Perhaps this is part of your gospel of efficiency which you've never learned."

Garlin broke into a laugh. He drew her closer, leaned forward, and kissed her on the lips. Then he loosed her and turned.

"Come along to supper. You're the sort of woman a man needs all his life."

The ruddy firelight flickered high, touched the faces of silent, glowering men; and Garlin's effort to dispel the sullen gloom, though backed up by McCann and Miss Ashley, was futile.

IN the midst, a hail was heard—Blunt and his men, returning. They appeared, a weary, dragging group. They were met with a curious, questing silence. No one spoke, but every eye searched them, looking for the others.

Blunt spoke abruptly:

"No use. We found 'em both. One had gone over a cliff; he was finished proper. The other died on our hands. He had been bit by something—snake, I guess. Said he heard it buzz when it got him. We buried him."

The curt, jerky words were eloquent of inner feeling. Blunt sat down and attacked the plate Lovejoy brought him.

"Did he tell you what happened?" Garlin asked.

The black eyes came up to meet his, and they were flaming.

"Yeah. What you aiming to do about it?"

"That's my business," Garlin said coolly. "You'd better get a grip on yourself."

Blunt snarled. "That so? Giving sailors a boat with sawed oars and mast! And they had no water, either."

"No water? Asbury didn't tell us that."

"Too bad!" Blunt sneered. "The dirtiest deviltry that ever was heard of! Your business, is it? Not by a damned sight. It's mine no less than yours."

Garlin looked up at Lovejoy. "Ask Hilary to come over here."

After a moment the massive quartermaster strode up and touched his forehead. Garlin eyed the bluff, hearty features, and spoke.

"Hilary, I believe your brother was among the men murdered last evening?"

"Yes sir," said Hilary, his face like rock.

"You're a sailor. You've been reared in traditions of the sea," Garlin went on slowly. "Those Nazis are the enemies of your country, and now you have a private grief and hatred as well. I should like to know, Hilary, whether under the circumstances you would consider yourself justified in breaking all discipline, refusing to obey my orders, and devoting yourself to the pursuit of an immediate and bloody revenge—an eye for an eye, so to speak."

SILENCE struck the group. Hilary's hands were clenched; his tight lips worked a little. Lovejoy, his rotund features tensed, little gimlet eyes intent, stood as though breathless. All eyes were on Hilary, all except those of Miss Ashley, who watched Lovejoy. Garlin was subconsciously aware of this, while he in turn watched Blunt.

"No sir," Hilary rejoined at last, his voice difficult. "No sir. If you put it that way, I'd not. But—but it's a hard thing to keep one's grip, sir."

"I find it so myself," said Garlin quietly. "That's all."

Hilary's eyes went to him; then, with a salute, the quartermaster departed.

Blunt was staring hard at Garlin. "You meant that for me, eh?"

"If the cloth fits, wear it, Mister."

"I don't like you and never did." Blunt spoke softly, deliberately. "That was a la-de-da trick, draggin' Hilary into it for my benefit. Don't you *Mister* me! We aint at sea. That's done with. I'd like to blister you; and I'd do it, if those Nazis hadn't beat you up proper and left you half dead. But you needn't try to make out you or Hilary are better men than I am. I'll keep my grip, if that's what you're aimin' at, damn you!"

RECEIVING no answer, the mate rose and walked away into the darkness. Garlin met the sardonic regard of old McCann, and smiled slightly. Lovejoy melted away in the obscurity.

"I ha' my doots o' that man," said McCann.

"Who? Mr. Blunt?"

"No sir. Yon steward. As I told ye before."

"Apparently you and Miss Ashley are in agreement." Garlin gave her a look. "What did you see in his face, that made you look so hard at him?"

"Threatening things," she said.

Garlin jeered: "Indeed? That fat, joking rascal's no threat. Don't be absurd. When Gemuth comes by at sunrise, I'll give him the water he wants and take one of his boats. And now I'm going to have a good-night pipe and then turn in. I'm still pretty stiff and sore."

He went down to the strip of beach, lit his pipe, and sat staring at the starlit rocks and the dim sea beyond. "I find it so myself," he had said. This was true. He was glad now that Margaret Ashley had wakened restraint in him; yet he found it hard. Every impulse bade him take action, fall upon Gemuth's camp, exact bitter payment. He knew now what folly such a course would be. Instead, he must say nothing, get one of the three boats, let the Nazis go their way. His chief responsibility now lay in procuring safety for his own group. Blessed woman! If it had not been for her, he would have lost his head completely. . . .

The men were quiet this evening. No singing, no gamming, no hearty ring of voices. The shadow of tragedy lay on them all. And there was another matter

still unsettled—the man killed on the ledge, the scrap of red calico, the unknown rifleman!

Well, that could wait, thought Garlin. The main thing now was to get off that boat in the morning. They could not all crowd into her, with Asbury as he was. Blunt and a crew had better take her. Blunt! Garlin knocked out his pipe against his palm, anger once more rising in him. He disliked Blunt heartily; it was reciprocal; but he did not deny that the mate was a splendid seaman, a competent and absolutely reliable man for his job.

"He can go; I'll stay here," determined Garlin, and rose. "She'll stay, too. Perhaps we'll take a look for those local inhabitants. They must be off to the south of us, in that green valley we saw a glimpse of from the shelf. Aye, she'll stay, and a good thing too. Asbury needs her. And so do I, as I told her."

He burned at thought of their talk, of his kiss. Sheer impulse, that. She had said nothing. Yet his pulses hammered at thought of it, and were still pounding when he kicked off his shoes and drew a blanket over him, with a weary sigh. The chill wind was beginning to whistle down from the heights again.

A long breath, and he was asleep.

"GARLIN! Garlin! Up with ye!" He wakened to find McCann scrambling over him in the darkness and shaking him. His first thought, with the instinctive reaction of his profession, was that the stars were gone; a haze of cloud was across the sky. The darkness was absolute.

"What's the matter with you, Chief? Gone daft?"

McCann sputtered. "Did ye no hear it?"

"Hear what?" Garlin sat up. "What the devil's wrong?"

As though in answer came a faint sound, then another; the explosive barks of pistols. Then silence again.

"Shooting," said the Chief. "Those two shots are just the finish. I misdoot what's happened. Mr. Blunt's not here, though he lay doon wi' me. It's past two o'clock."

Garlin pulled on his boots and sent a hail up the cañon for Blunt. No reply. He started away through the pitch blackness, cursing as he stumbled over stones. The voice of Miss Ashley came to him.

"Captain! Captain Garlin!"

"Aye!" he called. "Where are you?"

"Up here by the trees. Mr. Blunt's here— Oh! Who's that?"

"It's me, Miss," came Hilary's voice. "What's wrong?"

McCann at his elbow, Garlin strode along. He was alarmed by the silence, by the very lack of alarm. McCann was chattering about the shots; a good many of them, said he, all at once.

BLUNT'S curses reached them and served as guide. A match flared. Garlin hastened up, and found Blunt rubbing his wrists, while Hilary cut away bits of rope that confined his ankles. Apparently no one else remained in camp except Asbury, who was muttering with fever.

"They're gone!" Miss Ashley exclaimed. "Every one of them!"

"I'll wring that damned steward's neck when I get my hands on him!" blared the mate angrily. "He woke me and whispered me up here, and they grabbed me. Knocked me on the head and left me tied and gagged—*arrgh!*" He spat furiously. "They were after the pistols, and got 'em. You heard the shootin', sir?"

"It woke us up." Panic and dismay settled upon Garlin, as he comprehended. The men, all of them—gone to fall upon the Nazi camp! Yet it seemed fantastic. They could not have gone to that bloody work without a leader. "Hilary! What do you know about this?"

"Nothing, sir; my word on it. The shots woke me up."

"It was that damned steward done it all!" exclaimed Blunt savagely. "It was him givin' the orders!"

Miss Ashley touched Garlin's arm.

"Remember? I warned you to keep an eye on him," she said gently. "I had promised him not to tell; but I warned you. I can tell now—but unfortunately, it's too late. I never thought it would come to this."

"Tell what?" demanded Garlin, bewildered. "What's all this cursed mystery about Lovejoy, anyhow?"

"Just that he's a German, or was," she answered. She spoke quietly; yet her words seemed to strike through the darkness like hammers. "The Nazis put him

in a concentration-camp. He escaped. He was a professor, or something. Now he's earning his living as a steward. They killed all his family. All in the world he wants, is revenge—and I think he's got it."

"Good Lord!" Garlin laughed, and checked his laugh. Lovejoy, the rotund little man with his comic turns of speech! "Why, I never dreamed of this—it just doesn't seem possible!"

"They've took the bit in their teeth, all of 'em," said Blunt bitterly. Suddenly his voice sharpened. "Look! Look there—at the sea!"

CHAPTER IX

GARLIN swung around.

Down at the beach, where the sunken rocks and outer fringe prevented any landing, a light was flashing, fingering hither and thither. Then abruptly it disappeared.

"A boat!" exclaimed Miss Ashley. "Listen!"

Up the cañon drifted an indistinct voice in German. Another made reply, a harsher, more strident voice in words plainly heard—a woman's voice:

"That's not the place, you swine-head! Two miles to the south, by the chart. Where's the Captain?"

"He is dying." The reply carried clearly on the silence. Into it joined another voice, that of Gemuth—a mournful, faintly lifting voice that was a mere murmur and then died out, the words inaudible yet filled with an inexpressible sadness. The harsh female voice made response, and it too was cut off.

To Garlin, to all of them, no explanation was necessary. Two boats were out there, rowing down the shore. The Nazi party, or its remnants, had hastily shoved off in flight. They were heading for some landing down the coast, no doubt marked on the chart; Gemuth had stopped a bullet in that insane battle, and was done for. And all bets, most assuredly, were now off.

"Blast it!" said Garlin in dismay. "The fools have spoiled everything! That is, unless they've got hold of the third boat. What about the one Asbury had? At least, it's a boat—"

"I meant to tell you," intervened Miss Ashley. "He woke up, as the fever took hold of him, and talked very sensibly for a little. He said the boat had drifted away after the shooting."

"So that's that." Garlin suppressed an oath. "One thing after another. Blunt, did those men take all the pistols?"

"All five."

"And we've a fine chance of disciplining them now."

"Hell! I'll do it, if you can't."

"I can, Mister, but I sha'n't. Nor you either."

"Why, blast it?" broke out the mate. "D'you mean to say you'll let 'em get away with this?"

"Yes. You started it, with your talk at supper last night; you've probably shot off your mouth more than once about what you'd like to do to me. Well, you'll get the chance one of these days; but right now, we have to think about getting away from here. It's no time to assert our authority, which would only cause further trouble. Besides," Garlin added thoughtfully, "I've an idea that when the men show up, they'll be a pretty sorry lot. Suppose we go slow. Lovejoy's the one to punish, if anyone."

"Go slow!" repeated Blunt. "You've done nothing else but go slow, and see where it's got us!"

"If I'd gone slow in the first place, all this wouldn't have happened," Garlin replied. "And Mister, don't let your tongue run away with you. One of these times you're going to say one word too much. —Hilary, when the men come back, I think we'd better get a beacon piled on that lookout shelf, ready for lighting if any craft is sighted. A smoke would do the job for us. Then, when we get the report from the men, we'll see about a boat. Those Nazis have two at least. If the third's been abandoned, we'll get away in it. Otherwise, we'll see about getting one of the two from them. Better get up to the lookout, Hilary. Daybreak's at hand, and you may be able to see what's become of those boats."

The Briton departed. Blunt went about his own affairs. Garlin sat beside Asbury, who was muttering in uneasy slumber; and Margaret Ashley disappeared to get an early morning dip in the pool. Daylight was lifting in the east.

No sun came with it. The sky remained a gray drift of cloud; the sea was leaden, and a high southeast wind was whistling up over the island.

THE men made their appearance at last, a straggling clump of figures descending the trail from the lava ridge. Blunt showed up and joined Garlin. Together they eyed the approaching group.

Mr. McCann sauntered into sight and lent his cheerless presence.

"They don't look like a very lucky crowd," Blunt observed grimly. "Lovejoy's gone, blast him; serves him right. He took ten men with him. There's only nine coming, now. Must've—"

"Hi!" exclaimed the Chief. "Yon's my assistant, the loon! And the Filipino steward! That means Lovejoy and three of the hands that went over, aren't here."

MOODILY Garlin nodded. The group came trailing up, and they were by no means an exuberant lot. Several bore marks of combat. Two were bandaged bloodily. They shuffled up with sullen, hangdog looks; the Filipino and the assistant engineer appeared frightened. Seeing Blunt about to break forth in fury, Garlin quietly forestalled him.

"Throw down your pistols, men."

They obeyed, lugging out not the five they had taken, but eight in all, and dropping them in the sand.

Garlin went on: "Glad to see you, Mr. Lake. You too, Esteban; suppose you get busy on the commissary. Show him where everything is, Mr. Blunt. Chief, you and Mr. Lake will want to have a gam. Go to it. Now, you men—let's see, where's Lovejoy?"

"We—we don't know, sir!" exclaimed one of the Polish seamen.

Garlin beckoned him. "Stand out. You speak good English, so do the talking for everybody. What do you mean, that you don't know where Lovejoy is? Dead?"

"I don't think so, sir. He just wasn't anywhere in sight after—after daylight came." The Pole, a brawny, hard-eyed man, took courage and forged ahead. "You see, sir, we went after them rats. The wind was blowin' awful hard over there when we hit 'em. We druv 'em out, all right. Made 'em take to the boats. But they fought; that there woman was a fighter. The other one got off in a boat. I dunno how many was dead. Three of us, and we buried 'em, and two of them Nazis, but we shot at the boats and hit some."

"You dirty yellow curs!" said Garlin calmly, quietly. "To be shooting at women—"

He did not lift his voice. He spoke methodically, carefully, and left nothing unsaid. Miss Ashley not being present, there was nothing to hold back his epithets; and he fairly blistered the unhappy group of men before him.

"Worse than all," he concluded, switching from profanity to argument, "you've put us in the soup. If you'd got one of those boats, there'd be some excuse. But where's the third boat? How are we going to get off without it? Speak up! Where is it? And Lovejoy?"

"That's what we don't know, sir," spoke up one of the Britons. "We rushed the boats, and they shot us back. When daylight come, sir, the boats was all gone. Maybe the third one got blown off. Lovejoy was gone, sir. We aint seen him."

"Hm! He'll straggle in, no doubt. Sure he wasn't dead?"

"Not a chance, sir. Not unless he got hit and went into the water."

"So, there's no boat for us, unless we find those Nazis and take a boat. . . . Oh, to hell with the lot of you! One man go up and relieve Hilary on the lookout shelf. The rest of you do what you like. Get out of my sight."

Garlin spoke wearily, but with a rasping snarl in his voice betraying how close to an outbreak he was. The men hastily melted away, leaving the automatics on the ground. He sat there motionless, angrily despondent, brooding over the whole affair. Fires were lit, and the Filipino was bustling about.

NOT until Miss Ashley, fresh from her dip, came up and halted before him, did Garlin stir.

"You needn't glower at me," she said cheerfully. "Much better to be sensible, Captain. Even if you had the boat, you could do nothing with it; a regular gale's blowing, and the sea's beginning to pile up. It might be a lot worse. Do you really want to do something useful and worth while?"

"I don't know that I do," he rejoined sulkily. "What, for instance?"

"Well, there's no sun today, so there's none of the terrific heat," she rejoined. "And I see no reason why two sensible people, like you and me, shouldn't exercise a little good common sense."

"You've got it all," he growled. "Doing what?"

"Taking a little walk," she said, sm[illegible] ing at him. "The damage has been d[illegible] We can't help it. However, we co[illegible] up to that shelf, you and I, ar[illegible] there make our way over int[illegible] valley. It must be the one [illegible] green showed. You heard [illegible] woman said—the landing was [illegible] three miles farther south."

Garlin's jaw fell. "What? You and I go after 'em?"

"Certainly. And make a bargain with them for one of those two boats. There aren't many of them, you know—only a dozen in the beginning. Probably not more than five or six now. They'll listen to reason, be sure of it!"

Garlin came to his feet. "By glory, you've got an idea there.... But no! Not a bit of use. We'd run against that devil of a woman. If Gemuth was in charge, it'd work, but he's out of it. She's a homicidal maniac."

"Admitted," said Miss Ashley, still smiling as though amused by his reaction. "But you can handle such people. And besides, she'd be something else if she's dealing with a woman, you know. With men, she has to show that she's one better than they are. But with a woman, she'll show some sense, I think. Anyhow, suppose we risk it—just you and I?"

GARLIN met her eyes, and suddenly kindled.

"Done with you!" he exclaimed. "Wait till we have a bite to eat— Here's the boy now. Good work, Esteban!"

The Filipino, coming up to them with plates and pannikins, grinned widely. He was glad to be back with his own people once more, and said so; he had not fared too well at Nazi hands, it seemed.

McCann and his assistant, Mr. Blunt, and then Hilary arrived. Hilary reported no sign of the two boats, but an empty one was adrift and afar, floating to the north. Bad news, this, and Blunt cursed the men savagely until Garlin shut him up.

"Leaving you in charge, Mr. Blunt. Keep an eye on Asbury; see that he's fed when he wakes up. You'd better take care of those pistols. I'll take one along, nd you can pitch the others into the sea, all I care; we'll not need them again." in gulped down his coffee.

mate stared. "You're not leaving ere to?"

usiness, Mr. Blunt. Miss Ash- e going calling to see a man —see a woman, rather."

nt over to the litter of pistols, n, and pocketed one whose clip was nearly full. Miss Ashley finished her hasty meal and joined him.

"You don't have to be so snippy to them all," she declared. "They don't know what to make of it! Why on earth don't you tell them where we're going, and why?"

He regarded her with a sour grin. "Because I'm contrary-minded. Blunt's beginning to get on my nerves. Do we go? Then come along."

He stepped out briskly. She swung into step, and they headed up the cañon past the men's camp.

"Two of those fellows are wounded. Didn't you look 'em over?" he asked.

"No. Had I better do it?"

"No. Come on. Sailors are tough."

"You certainly are," she rapped out. "Getting over your hurts, aren't you?"

"More or less. This shiner will linger awhile." Garlin touched his discolored eye and nodded. "Yep. Give me another day or so and I'll be in shape to take Blunt on and give him what he needs. Well, forget your bad disposition and let's travel!"

The cañon fell behind. They came to the high shelf up above, where a man was on lookout, and paused for a word with him. The gray sea was empty, but a heavy surf was pounding the shore rocks; it was no time to be starting for the mainland in a small boat. Hilary and others were bringing up driftwood and brush for a beacon, and Garlin, satisfied that the third ship's boat was clear gone, lingered no longer but struck out with Miss Ashley across the naked rock flanks ahead.

Here, distance was no criterion of progress. The volcanic rock was cruel underfoot, there was no trail to follow, and everything was up and down in a succession of steep little cañon walls. Garlin was cutting straight for what had seemed to be another long valley running down to the sea, the same where a glint of green had appeared.

IT was an hour before this valley opened up ahead and to the right, running off to southward. And there, upon a pinnacle of rock, Garlin halted. Miss Ashley caught up, and they stood silent, staring at the sudden outspread vista. Both of them were flushed and panting; this last climb had been a stiff one, nor were they yet at their goal.

The southward valley was fertile and green, evidencing trees and probably water, but it was largely hidden from

their sight by a rounded, naked ridge of rock which ran up to the spot on which they stood—a ridge studded with huge lava clumps. And, to their left on the northward side of this naked rock shoulder, was visible the mouth of another little cañon, a branch cañon apparently.

AT this little cañon Margaret Ashley pointed.

"You see them?"

"Yes." Garlin fished for his pipe, found his tobacco-pouch empty, and accepted the cigarette she proffered. He inhaled gratefully, studying that little stretch of open cañon far below. Like their own valley mouth, it was studded with rocks that barred any landing, presumably, yet there the Nazis had landed. A little stretch of sand was visible, and there lay the two boats. The intervening rocks cut off any possible view of a camp. Just the surf-white outer rocks, the strip of beach inside, the two boats.

"We've got 'em," said Garlin. "Wonder why they didn't go on to the larger valley? No landing, probably. They must have had one hell of a time getting ashore here! Well, ready? I own I don't like the prospect of facing that woman."

"Then keep your eyes open for the others."

"What others?"

She stooped and picked up something. "We're not the first to come this way, and recently, too." In her palm lay a cigarette-butt, that had been crushed underfoot. "Look. A tailor-made cigarette, Cap'n! And very fresh; not quite dry yet, where it's been held in the mouth. You'd hardly assign this to one of the natives. Have the Nazis been exploring? That's not likely; nothing to draw them up here."

Garlin whistled softly. "Damned odd, for a fact! None of our own people. Yet nothing has moved on this ridge, or we'd have seen it." His gaze searched the descent of rock, with its studding clumps of lava, while she shrugged and dropped the bit of evidence.

"Perhaps. Yet anyone could hide here easily among these rocks. I've thought once or twice I saw something move along this shoulder—imagination, no doubt."

They went on, leaving the longer and greener ravine to their right, with its trees, and making for the little side cañon where the boats lay. Upon this, all Garlin's attention centered After what had happened, he knew the Nazis were apt to open fire without warning; and this must be avoided. He was not looking for battle.

By degrees, as they came down from the shoulder toward the smaller cañon, it opened to full sight. It was little more than a gaunt, bare ravine running back from the cove where lay the two boats. But, some distance from the water and beach, Garlin saw what he was after. Blankets had been stretched, some stores and supplies were piled near by; and on the blankets was outstretched a figure, with another man sitting beside him. Two only.

"Only two!" exclaimed Miss Ashley. "Where are the others?"

"Lord knows. Nowhere here, that's certain. I'll give 'em a hail."

He lifted his voice. The prostrate figure did not move. The other sprang erect and stood looking. Garlin waved, and obtained response. Satisfied, he started down the rocky slope that led into the ravine, with Miss Ashley scrambling after him.

DETAILS sprang to view. The figure on the blankets, he saw, was no other than Gemuth. The other man was one of the German seamen—ah, it was the quartermaster, Schmidt! Seeing that Schmidt had drawn an automatic and stood uncertain, Garlin waved and called out.

"All right, Schmidt! We're not enemies."

The Nazi relaxed, and put away his weapon. "Come along, sir," he rejoined.

At this instant it sounded—twice. The same *"spang!"*—the voice of a rifle, not of a pistol. The sound came over the rounded dividing ridge, but nothing moved up there. It must have come from the green cañon on the other side. Then a pistol barked, with louder report.

Another figure came into view below, coming forth from among the clump of rocks beside the blankets. It was Mrs. Schultz—that indomitable and massy figure. But now she was sadly changed, clothes every which way, hair disheveled, a wild and terrible futility stamped in her features.

"Schmidt! Who's doing that shooting?" called Garlin.

"Don't know, sir." The quartermaster came toward them. "The Doctor went over there with the rest of the men." He waved a hand vaguely toward the height and the valley beyond. He stood eying

the two with a sullen, bewildered hostility. "Was it you who jumped us last night?"

"No," said Garlin. "I had nothing to do with it. Some of the men did that; I'd like to see the lot of you murderers jailed, but I had intended keeping my bargain with you."

"Murderers!" shrilled out Mrs. Schultz. "You damned Englishers! Murderers!"

"Be quiet," commanded a voice. It was that of Gemuth, from the blankets. "Quiet, woman. —Glad to see you, Cap'n. Morning, Miss Ashley."

He smiled faintly up at them He was naked to the waist, a bandage across his chest, a blanket half over him. Miss Ashley dropped to her knees, but he caught her hand.

"No, don't bother me, Miss," he said. "I'm comfortable. Won't last long."

"I'm damned sorry for this," Garlin said, meeting the dying man's gaze.

"I know. The whole thing—well, it's a mess. Best ended this way, for me." Gemuth sighed, and his hand fell. Death was sweating in his face. German words came to his lips. "The wild folk—the wild folk!"

He closed his eyes and lay quiet.

Garlin turned to the quartermaster. "What does he mean? Wild folk?"

"Yes sir. They were here when we managed to get the boats in. Several of them. They skipped out, over the ridge yonder. The Doctor and the other men went after them. Four men besides me —that's all. That damned Doctor!" And Schmidt growled a long German oath. "I think she is crazy, or maybe doped."

Mrs. Schultz was back among the rocks, crouched in a heap, sobbing.

OPENING his eyes, Gemuth spoke, though faintly.

"Morning, Cap'n, morning! A good day for seamen! Too bad the wind's in the wrong quarter. Must have left my cigarettes in my cabin—ah, young lady! Thank you so much!"

Miss Ashley put a cigarette between his lips and held a match. Garlin started to speak, and then checked himself at the look in Gemuth's face. It was suddenly pallid and waxen, and the blue eyes were wandering.

"Coming aboard, sir, coming aboard!" cried out Gemuth, the cigarette falling from his lips. His voice rang gayly: *"Hoch! Hoch der Kaiser—"*

The breath went out of him—his head rolled to one side, and he lay dead.

CHAPTER X

"I'M afraid," Garlin said sadly, "he was too good a man to be a good Nazi."

Miss Ashley covered the dead face with the blanket and rose, tears in her eyes.

"Yes. He had something about him —well, he's gone. May he find peace!"

Schmidt had turned his back, with tears unashamed. Garlin took him by the arm and they moved together toward the beach and the boats there. The big quartermaster got himself in hand after a moment. To Garlin, there was something pathetically appealing about this whole doomed, futile enterprise; he was amazed by his own reaction, yet there it was. These people after all, had been working for a cause. He might detest them, hate them and all they did, his own career might be jeopardized by what had happened—and yet he could not help a feeling of something close to sympathy, at least for Gemuth and these men.

"Come, Schmidt," he said briskly. "We'll have to throw in together now, all of us, and forget enmities. We've three women to think about. Damn that Doctor! If it hadn't been for her damnable work and what she did to our boat, we'd have been picked up by now."

"What she did?" echoed Schmidt. He had known nothing of it. When Garlin told him, the man vented furious oaths.

"We'll arrange to use these two boats," went on Garlin. "They can hold us all—"

His words died. He came to a halt, staring.

"No sir," Schmidt said awkwardly. "I'm afraid not. We had a terrible time landing here; she made us put in. I got the Captain ashore, but Mrs. Schultz nearly drowned. The boats—well, you can see for yourself."

Garlin had seen. He swallowed hard; a staggering rush of dismay smote him. The boats were there, yes, what was left of them. They were stove in, shattered, broken upon the rocks, useless.

Miss Ashley approached. Garlin turned to her, with a despairing gesture.

"No use. We're destined to be Crusoes. Well, Schmidt! What were those wild folk he mentioned? You saw them?"

"Yes sir. I think they were Mexicans or half Indians," said the quartermaster. "I saw several women, and a couple of men. I think they had been fishing among the rocks here. Wild-looking, they were."

"No rifles?"

"No sir. They must be living over somewhere beyond—"

His words stopped. Everything stopped; a gasp broke from Margaret Ashley. From the crouching woman up among the rocks burst a wild scream. Then it too stopped.

Garlin looked up, and against the gray sky saw a picture he would never forget while he lived.

Among the clumps of lava that studded the great rounded flank of rock dividing the two ravines, were moving first one figure and then another. How they came there, could only be conjectured; nor did it matter. That background must have reached across the years, to be consummated here under the gray ocean sky.

In the queer figure of the pursuer, Garlin recognized Lovejoy at once. That grotesque rotund little man, too far now for voice to reach, was running, and crouching as he ran. He paused, flung up an arm, and the report of a shot rolled along the rocky slopes. It missed. He ran on again.

THE shape that fled from him was that of the Doctor—Miss Fiord. But not as Garlin had previously seen that strange creature.

Now, etched against the sky and the lava flow, she was a vital and superb thing in the grip of overmastering terror. Her garments had been largely stripped away; her fair hair was flowing wild—she was like some dryad pursued by a satyr, but a satyr of death.

"Ach, Gott!" babbled Schmidt, round-eyed with horror. "It is he! Last night he shouted at us who he was—he had known her! She was an agent of the Gestapo—"

That was all of the story Garlin ever learned; but it was enough. The Gestapo agent and her former victim, here on this lonely mid-ocean island! Who Lovejoy really was, what he had been, mattered nothing now; for now he was death incarnate.

The Doctor fled. Lovejoy was fast closing the gap. Despite her speed, her desperate efforts, the rotund little man scuttled after her like an imp of vengeance. She halted, stooped, caught up a fragment of rock and hurled it at him. He barely skipped out of its way, and fired again, but she had already dodged behind a lava fragment.

She reappeared, running on along the crest of the ridge, fleeing like a wild thing. Lovejoy held after her like a hound on the scent. She doubled back among the rocks, jumped a crevice with a great flying leap like some dancer on the wings of death. Despite all he knew of her, Garlin found himself yelling wildly, hoarsely, vainly, after Lovejoy, until he realized his own futility and fell silent, hands gripped.

LOVEJOY never faltered nor paused. Once again he tried a shot; then, no doubt aware that a running man cannot aim, held his fire. Now she darted in among the clumps of lava and gained upon him. A moment later she came out into full sight, poised, questing him with frightened gaze before making a dash across an open space to the farther clumps. She stood there for an instant outlined against the sky, a figure of frantic terror and beauty in the perspective of distance. Then she was gone like a deer for the lava clumps higher up the ridge. When Lovejoy came into sight, she was almost at the shelter above. He staggered and failed, then took up his pursuit; but this time another was ahead of him.

Among those rocks for which she was making, a figure appeared—a queer, wild, half-human figure. He appeared, stood motionless, then darted away from sight. The Doctor spun around in mid-career; the sound of the rifle-shot came down to the watchers, with rolling echoes from the hills behind. *"Spang-g-g!"*

Her golden-white shape lay outspread and motionless. Lovejoy halted, stood stock still.

A babble from Schmidt apprised Garlin of the truth. This queer unknown rifleman, this wild hermit of the island peaks, had struck again. She had led her men over into the next valley in search of his people—and now he had struck again and gone. For the last time. Mexican, Indian—what did it matter? A reptile of the naked rocks!

A shout burst from Garlin. Two of the Nazi seamen came into sight behind Lovejoy. The steward saw them and turned, but too late. Their pistols were blasting him as he moved; he sank down, and became a mere blob of sodden clothes against the rock. The two sea-

men came to him and passed on to where the Doctor lay. They leaned over her, then straightened up and stood gazing.

Garlin waved to them, and they began a descent down into the cañon. No need to ask where the other two were. There had been shooting over in that next valley. The unknown rifleman had taken biter toll of those who intruded upon his desolate realm.

Garlin found Miss Ashley clinging to his arm, her breath sobbing, her eyes wide in a white face. The two seamen scrambled down. Schmidt blared an order at them. They moved on to Garlin and said nothing, extending their pistols, a blank helpless bewilderment in their faces. They were sane, now. There was nothing left for them to do.

WITH a deep breath, Garlin turned to the quartermaster.

"Schmidt! Take charge. Bury Gemuth if you can, then bring Mrs. Schultz and follow us. We'll wait for you up there. Throw those pistols away. The war's over."

"Yes sir," said Schmidt, with a brisk salute.

Garlin drew Miss Ashley away, up the descent by which they had come, to the slopes above. Neither of them spoke. When at last they emerged on the upper ridge, it was not far from the spot where the Doctor lay, face down, a blob of scarlet smeared across her white body.

"Good God!" said Garlin unsteadily. "That's the answer to it all—the hideous beauty of death. That's your war—your racial madness—your hatreds. Hatred! A consuming flame that burns the soul to nothing."

She tried to speak and could not. He caught her and held her against him, his arm about her shoulders. She pointed, and he looked up.

Blunt and three of their men were coming, hastening along, shouting something, waving. They saw the dead figures spotting the ridge, paused, then came on again

"Ship!" called Blunt, panting, as he drew nearer. "Big fishing-craft putting in at the first cove, sir—they've got our signals!"

Garlin said nothing. Miss Ashley drew herself up with a catch of breath. Blunt stared at them, stared at the dead woman, and a queer change came into his face.

"Mister!" Garlin took a step toward him. They stood eye to eye. Garlin's voice leaped out harshly. "I don't like you and never did."

"That goes double," rapped out Blunt, stiffening.

"Shall we let it go at that?" Garlin smiled suddenly. A warm light came into his thin, battered features. His hand went out. "I'm done with hatred, shipmate. I meant to lam hell out of you. But I'd sooner shake your hand."

Blunt looked at him for a moment.

"Well," he said, "to tell the truth—by God, I *expected* you to lam hell out of me! I don't like you and never did; but there's nobody I'd sooner shake with than you."

And he gave Garlin a strong, steady grip, a flame of laughter rising in his dark eyes.

"You two blessed fools!" exclaimed Miss Ashley, half laughing, half sobbing for excited breath. "You're both the finest men I ever met!"

"Thanks, Miss," said Blunt. "Now, sir, about that fishing-craft—"

"Oh, we'll get along to her. Bring Schmidt and his crowd, will you? They've got that poor woman to help. The boats were both badly smashed."

Blunt nodded, cocking an eye at the ravine below. Then he glanced at the dead woman.

"And her? Maybe we hadn't ought to leave her—"

"The best thing you can do, Mister, is to obey orders," said Garlin.

"Right, sir."

GARLIN passed the three men, bidding them give Schmidt's party a hand. He strode on along the ridge, with Miss Ashley at his side.

"So we're taken off," he said. "I'm sorry. While we were here, I had you. I need you. A lot. And you couldn't get away from me here. But now it's all ended."

She was silent for a moment. Then gently her hand slipped into his own, and gripped it.

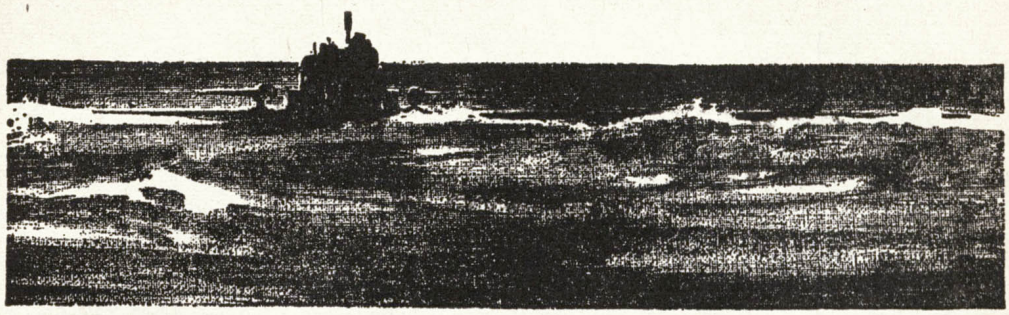
"Just beginning, you mean," she said. He turned, and she smiled a little as their eyes met. "I don't want to get away from you. Maybe—maybe I need you too. It is a bargain?"

He caught her to him, and his lips touched her hair.

THE END

A book-length novel of exceptional interest will be a feature of our forthcoming, April issue.

REAL EXPERIENCES



In this department writers and readers meet to tell of their most exciting hours. Because of wartime censorship, the story below must appear anonymously.

Depth-Bombed

WE had reached enemy waters—the North Sea—in rough weather. But now the gale had blown itself out; and after being on the surface all night observing, with the first hint of dawn we dived. Some hours later, when we were beginning to think about breakfast and were sitting on the bottom, a depth-charge exploded quite close to us. We were below periscope depth, and so our commander decided to come up far enough to have a look around through his periscope.

Well, we started the pump to blow some of the water out of our tanks; and immediately, *bang!* went another depth-charge, this time much closer. It blew some of our fuses.

We were being hunted.

Well, we stopped our machinery—and listened. We were ordered to keep quite still, either sitting or lying down, because the more you move about in a submerged submarine, the more valuable oxygen you consume. During the next hour we counted the detonations of six explosions as the enemy groped about in search of us, using sweep wires, electrically operated bombs and depth-charges. In the circumstances, we could do nothing—could only remain silent and motionless on the bottom. To pass the time we instituted a six-penny sweepstake on the time by the clock that the next bomb would go off; and an able seaman crept about booking bets against the next payday. The situation, in the meantime, was not improving. For the next hour explosions averaged one every two minutes; then they gradually grew more distant, and for a time there was a lull.

Submarines have a wire stretching from the nose, up over the conning tower and down to the tail. The purpose of this wire—it's called a jumping-stay—is to prevent enemy nets and trawl wires and similar counter-measures from catching on the projections—gun, conning tower and so on, outside the submarine.

Well, as we sat motionless on the bottom waiting for the next detonation, we heard the rasping sound of a wire passing over the after jumping-stay. That was unpleasant enough, but it was followed by a series of thuds over our heads, as if a giant were stamping along the hull in hobnailed boots. Then came the explosion. It was utterly shattering. All lights were extinguished; there was the crashing of broken glass everywhere; and in the silence that followed, the sound of water spurting into the interior and the hiss of air escaping from the high-pressure air system.

Portable electric lights gave us a rough idea of what had happened; it was bad enough, in all conscience: Water was squirting in through the hull; one motor and both engines were out of action; the high-pressure air system was hissing in half a dozen places like punctured motor tires.

Well, we did the best we could; we got the lights going again, and more or less

stopped the leaks; but we had been submerged for a long time, and by now the air was getting very foul. It was necessary to move as little as possible to conserve what oxygen there was left. At this juncture one of the officers remembered that he had in his locker a package of sweets, so he passed them around to cheer us up. This reminded several men that they had hidden away somewhere similar refreshment, and from all sorts of hiding-places little paper bags of peppermints and the like were produced, whose owners crept about pressing them on their officers and shipmates. . . .

Our commander had only two alternatives: to stay where we were, meant that we would die like rats in a trap. The other alternative was to rise to the surface and fight to the death—assuming that our ballast tanks had not been so damaged by the explosions that we would be unable to get sufficient buoyancy out of them to lift the submarine! About the time we knew by the clock that darkness had fallen, he mustered officers and men and told them his intention; he added further, that he intended to place a demolition charge under the war-head of one of the torpedoes and blow the ship to pieces, rather than let her fall into the hands of the enemy.

This apparently cheered everybody up enormously. We loaded all our torpedo tubes, stacked ammunition ready for the gun, loaded the Lewis gun and all the rifles; and finally as a pretty grim finishing touch, the gunnery and torpedo lieutenant put the demolition charge in position. Then when everything was ready we blew the ballast tanks—and like a miracle the submarine floundered to the surface.

So far we owed our lives to the nameless craftsmen who built that submarine. If one single riveter had botched his job, we could not have survived.

WELL, in spite of our efforts to stop leaks, enough air had escaped inside from the high-pressure system to raise the pressure to a dangerous point. Our commander, who is rather lightly built, knew that he had to guard against the danger of being blown through the hatch when it was opened, so he got hold of a signalman who weighed about fourteen stone and made him hang onto his legs, as a sort of anchor. Then he threw open the hatch. To give you an idea of what the pressure inside was like, the rush of air through the hatch blew his heavy binoculars, which were hanging by a strap round his neck, vertically above his head. He climbed through the hatchway of the conning tower and looked round. It was a clear night, we were told a bit later, with a moderate swell; and there was nothing in sight!

We had fresh air to breathe again, but all the same, the prospect was grim enough. Our periscope had been blown off; our wireless was smashed; all external communication pipes had been crushed; and our engines were disabled so we couldn't dive again. All we could do was to crawl away through the darkness on our one remaining motor.

In the meantime the engineer down below collected his staff round him and somehow got life into his distorted machinery. Three hours after we had reached the surface, he reported the starboard engine ready, and two hours later the port engine ready; so that now we had a fighting chance of life.

On we went through the darkness, leaking like a basket, and in the dawn the wireless operator reported he had managed to repair the wireless.

The captain, we were told, at once sent out a warning to our sister submarines on patrol, to warn them that there was a small area thereabouts where trouble could be had for less than the asking. Then he sent another message to our base, asking for a helping hand. After daylight, so that we should attract as little attention as possible, we lay on the surface motionless, rather like a wounded duck; and in the afternoon we sighted a flight of enemy bombing-machines approaching. We manned our gun and passed round rifles, and waited for it. But the planes passed a couple of miles to seaward and disappeared. It seemed incredible—like a miracle. An hour later the same planes reappeared; this time we decided we were "for it," and we manned the gun once more; but once more the miracle happened. The enemy disappeared again without seeing us.

At midnight some of our own destroyers showed up; cruisers and an aircraft carrier appeared with the daylight; and a few hours later the Fleet loomed in sight—rather like a lioness coming to the help of a wounded cub. An air attack by enemy bombing-planes was beaten off by anti-aircraft fire from the escorting cruisers and by attacks of fighting formations sent up from the aircraft carrier; and we returned to our base without further molestation.

The First Gun

Sometime history will record the first guns of the present wars. Will they be minor but none the less dramatic episodes like this first shot of the Philippine insurrection?

By COLONEL Henry Page, U.S.A., Ret.

"ALTO!"

I understood just enough Spanish to realize that the little brown fellow blocking my path wished me to halt. But I was not dependent upon the spoken word for my information, for he stood there with blazing eyes poking a bayoneted rifle at my stomach.

In 1898 America, with crusader zeal, had taken up arms for the purpose of putting an end to the atrocities being practiced in Cuba. Not only the Cubans, but the little brown brothers in the far-flung Philippine Islands were our beneficiaries. And so when the little native soldier jabbed at me with his absurd weapon, resentment at his ingratitude mingled with my amazement and alarm.

As a matter of fact, the Filipinos were not at all grateful. They were resentful. Day by day the native lines had drawn closer, until finally they almost touched the outposts of our troops which surrounded the city.

Whence did this menacing native army obtain arms—where did this old chassepôt rifle and its skewer bayonet being poked at me come from? We must pause for a moment to make these points clear.

All old-timers remember that Commodore Dewey sank the Spanish fleet in Cavite Harbor on May 1st, 1898, and thus destroyed forever Spanish power in the Philippines. Immediately after this one-sided battle the American commander was visited by a tiny native named Aguinaldo. General Aguinaldo, leader of the insurrectionary forces which had been feebly operating against the Spaniards for two years prior to Commodore Dewey's arrival, demanded that the control of the captured Spanish arsenal in Cavite be turned over to his command. With these arms, Aguinaldo expressed his intention of routing the small Spanish garrison locked up behind the walls of Manila.

But Commodore Dewey was cautious. This experienced old warrior knew that if a native army should be let loose upon the feeble Spanish garrison, a horrible massacre would ensue which would not only spell the end of the Spanish forces, but would also be the end of all white persons in the city as well. He denied Aguinaldo's demands and counseled patience, awaiting the arrival of General Merritt and the American army which was about to sail for the Orient.

In June Aguinaldo was chosen as President of a newly created Philippine Republic, in addition to being commander of the native armies. Thus, when General Merritt arrived in Manila Bay, his first caller was an even more confident, self-reliant Aguinaldo, who introduced himself as "President and General," ready and willing to permit General Merritt to coöperate in the common purpose of destroying the Spanish and placing the rightful owners of the land in control. Here again the ambition of Aguinaldo was to be frustrated by American prudence and caution. General Merritt opened the arsenal to Aguinaldo and permitted him to advance to the walls of Manila with his army; but beyond this Merritt refused him permission to move.

THIS was a severe shock to the Filipinos, who were crazed with the idea of carnage and loot. They withdrew beyond the suburbs of Manila, and there they remained, nursing their grievance, awaiting the inevitable open rupture with the Americans that they so clearly anticipated, and which the Americans with wishful thinking refused to consider as a possibility. . . . And so, on February 3d, 1899, battle orders were issued.

My orders directed me to prepare for the care and transportation of wounded; and on February 4th I proceeded to scout over all of the roads and trails leading into Manila from the north and east,

where the bulk of the army was entrenched. My companion was Captain Higley, who lived through this and many other adventures, only to perish a year later from typhoid fever. I carried no arms; but from some unknown impulse I fortunately placed in my pocket a pass signed by General Aguinaldo permitting me to pass through his lines. This pass had been given to me before our relations had become badly strained; and it had never been used, because it was rumored that several soldiers and officers who had used similar passes to hunt behind the native lines just north of the city had not returned. It later appeared that every American so held had been arrested and assigned to a military commander as a servant. After the insurrection had been quelled, I saw a group of survivors from this terrible experience. My pity for them was almost submerged by my wonder that a human could survive the starvation, brutal beatings, vermin and disease which they had to endure.

I carried my pass with me as Higley and I rode from outpost to outpost, sketching the roads and noting the location of our troops. All went well until we reached Funston's Kansans. The corporal in charge of their outpost gave me the information I needed concerning his regiment, and directed me toward the Tenth Pennsylvania regimental outpost, which lay "over there"—pointing toward a huge walled structure I knew as the Chinese cemetery. This corporal was entirely correct as to the direction he indicated, but he failed to tell me that the native army occupied the cemetery as a part of a spear-head thrust between the Kansas and the Pennsylvania troops.

Therefore, unsuspecting and unafraid, Higley and I rode toward the east wall of the cemetery, where we expected to find a Pennsylvania outpost. As we reached the wall and were about to turn toward the entrance in the north wall, we heard the challenge *"Alto!"* and saw the fierce little native with his monstrous weapon standing in our path.

WE dismounted and, leading our ponies, were herded into the east entrance, where a surprise awaited us. Not only was the gate occupied by a native guard, but as we glanced into the compound, we saw, standing at attention, a complete regiment of native troops, fully equipped for field service. The impression made upon both Higley and myself was that these troops were preparing to go into action—as future events proved to be the case. This was indeed alarming, and our rather rough handling by the guard did not quiet our apprehensions of danger.

At the head of the regiment I noticed a general officer, apparently a Chinese-mestizo. These Chinese-Filipino half-breeds were well known to me as the brainiest as well as the cruelest part of the Filipino population. I also knew that they were intensely vain and very susceptible to flattery. I therefore played my cards accordingly. Breaking loose from the guard and rushing over to the General, who was not thirty yards distant from the gate, I extended my hand, exclaiming: *"General, comme esta usted?"* —as if we were old friends unexpectedly reunited. My knowledge of Spanish was pitifully limited, but I knew that I must keep up a brisk flow of flattery, and my babbling must have been amusing. The General smiled. I complimented him and his magnificent army, and wound up with my pleasure at seeing him and my regret that I could not stay longer.

I turned to leave, and the General's face became stern. He was evidently about to signal the guard to detain us. His hand was raised—but fortunately for us, his amusement, and perhaps my flattery, overcame him; he laughed and said his first word to me: *"Adios, amigo."*

"Adios, amigo General," I replied as we mounted our ponies and slipped out of the gate, unhindered by the guard, who seemed somewhat bewildered.

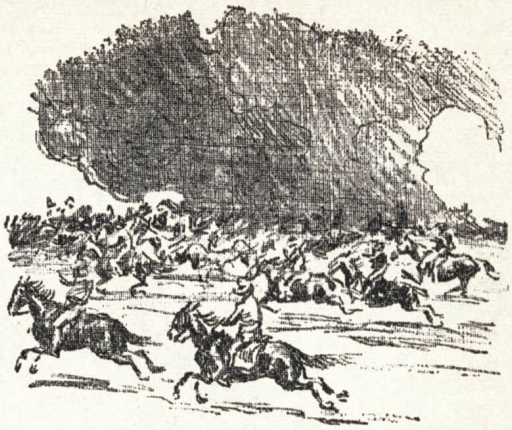
"Ride slowly," I whispered to Higley, who followed my caution until we were about one hundred yards from the gate, when he lashed his pony into a full run, and I raced after him.

Rapidly we continued our journey to the Tenth Pennsylvania lines, and turned south to reënter the city. The streets were empty and deathly still.

"Looks queer to me," said Higley; and as he spoke, the boom of cannon sounded behind us and echoed in the still air until the whole country was filled with its ominous note. "That gun is the first shot of a war," remarked Higley.

We turned and rode back toward the front; and as we approached the lines, we met a group of soldiers carrying a man on a stretcher. "Here comes the first casualty in this new war of ours," I said. Higley and I were both right. The war had begun, and the god Mars had exacted his first toll, a private of the Tenth Pennsylvania infantry.

Pioneer of Africa



The battle which climaxed the campaign against the Germans in Africa.

By PETER RAINIER

THE military situation of the Southwest African campaign, at the time of our occupation of Aus, can best be visualized by imagining the field of war as a parallelogram, standing on one of its shorter sides. At the top left hand, or northwest corner is Swakopmund, where General Botha is facing a strong German force.

Aus is about the middle of the bottom, or south side of the parallelogram; Keetmanshoek at the bottom right hand, or southeast corner. The southern German force, the one which has been opposing us from the beginning of the campaign, is racing to pass Keetmanshoek before General Vanderventer and his fast-riding Boer commandoes can emerge from the western desert beyond and cut them off.

Our only hope of catching the retreating Germans was to cut across country and try to intercept them, a three-hundred-mile ride, most of it over country which was regarded by the Germans as impassable for a military force.

The beginning of a solution came when Piet Uys and I found the Hottentot. We had been sent on a scout along the railway line to feel for the enemy rear. About twenty miles we had ridden, according to the kilometer-posts along the railway, and had seen nothing but an abandoned wagon or two. As we were about to turn back, our horses scented water and pressed forward into a narrow gulley with precipitous sides.

"Paas op," cried Piet suddenly, whipping his rifle from the bucket, as he rounded the bend ahead of me.

There was a figure standing beside a little spurt of water, finger-thick, which leaped from the face of the precipice into a hollow worn in the rock below: a tall Hottentot, unarmed, so we lowered our rifles. He was one of Chief Witbooi's men, he told us in broken guttural Dutch. He had been sent to meet General Mackenzie with a message from his chief, and was now making for our lines.

"It's a question of water," General Mackenzie was remarking to one of his staff as we brought the Hottentot to him, some hours later. "If there is enough water for the horses, we can get through with a sporting chance of cutting off the Germans. But it's a God-awful march to ask troops to make."

His face lit up eagerly when he saw our captive.

"Can men and horses travel across the mountains to Beersheba?" he asked.

"Ja, Baas," assented the Hottentot.

"Describe the road."

The Hottentot squatted on his haunches. He smoothed a patch of sand and sprinkled it with pebbles, evidently indicating a stony plain. In the middle of the patch he punched a small hole with his finger and spat into it. At the farther end of the patch he repeated the process. Then, beyond, he heaped up sand in a miniature ridge, and on the top of the ridge he made a hole, but refrained from spitting into it. Beyond the ridge, on the level, he drew with his finger a wavy groove which meandered like a river.

"Bethany," he explained, pointing to the first hole. "Besondemed!"—pointing to the second. He skipped the hole on the ridge and put his finger down on the meandering line. "Beersheba—Great Fish River."

"Is there water for many men—many horses?" asked the General.

"Bethany—much water, no grass. Besondemed, some water by digging, much grass. Beersheba—plenty water, plenty grass; but too many Germans."

"Is there water in the hole on top of the mountains, the one you skipped?"

"When there has been rain—some water, bad water. My people call place Stinkfontein. When no rain—no water."

"Is there water now?"

The Hottentot shrugged expressively.

"We'll chance it," cried the General, standing up. "Take the blasted 'Tottie with us, and shoot him if he's lied!"

THAT night we moved. There was only one day's rations to be had—all that had come through from Garub as yet: one pound of bully beef and six biscuits per man; nothing at all for the horses.

Hour after hour we plodded over the endless stony plain. Night caught us still plodding at barely three miles an hour.

About midnight the 'Tottie led us through thicker growing thorn-bushes to a big spring-fed pool.

"Bethany, Baas," he croaked with satisfaction, and curled down to sleep beside the trooper to whom he was tied.

At daybreak we marched again, winding between small hills on a sandy road which showed traces of wheel-marks.

The road topped a rise. I pulled my horse aside to look back, and noticed the General riding with his staff, a hundred yards behind or so. He sat his saddle erectly, in spite of over sixty years I straightened my own shoulders; a man like that put heart into one.

About three o'clock next morning the 'Tottie led us between high, looming hills to a dry sandy river course.

"Besondemed," he grunted.

"But there's no water."

"Dig, Baas, dig."

On his knees he started scooping out dirt with his hands like a mongrel dog digging after a mole. When his hole was about two feet deep, he stopped. Water was filtering into it, seeping through the sand. He plunged head-first into the hole and the noise of his drinking floated out.

We followed the 'Tottie's example, and thus, slowly, we watered our horses, filling their canvas nosebags from the bottom of holes with the tin cups from our haversacks.

Grass was growing knee high among the flat-topped thorn-bushes with which the little valley was studded. We turned the horses loose, posting a guard at the end of the valley to keep them from straying. All that day we rested, gaining strength for a push over the mountains.

We left at sundown, climbing upward on a goat track. All night we marched, halting for five minutes each hour to breathe our horses, which were displaying new vigor from the feed they had had. The water froze solid in our water-bottles that night, and we shivered in our ragged clothes.

At daybreak we were on a high upland. The air was still. We rode in a cloud of fine dust of our own raising.

Some time in late afternoon we halted by a rocky depression under a small cliff.

"Stinkfontein, Baas," barked the Hottentot excitedly. "There is water—can smell."

I could certainly smell something foul but could see no water. The hole seemed filled with caked mud. But the horses were pulling at their bits, snorting and pawing in their eagerness.

The Hottentot shuffled stiffly to the edge of the dried-up-looking pool and struck at the surface with a stick. The stick broke through with a liquid plop. Water! But, what water! Through the coating of dried goats' dung which the 'Tottie had broken floated a stench of carrion. Beneath was liquid—cool and green, liquid manure. Three mouthfuls of it were as much as even we could stand; after that it made us gag. But the horses drank it, and were saved.

Weakly we trekked on all that afternoon. Toward evening the high, bleak plain began to slope from us. We had topped the divide. Less than fifty miles before us lay Beersheba—all downhill. Before night we stood on the edge of the plateau. The mountain dropped away at our feet in a series of rocky ledges without sign of a path—what a place to get down in the darkness!

Leading our mounts, we stumbled downwards through the darkness, step by step. One gun broke loose and came crashing down past us, bouncing from ledge to ledge till it broke into fragments.

Over at last. The columns formed on the plain and marched forward. In the gray dawn a little white town lay before us—Beersheba: we had made it! Two hundred and twenty miles in five days—on one day's rations!

Quietly a cordon of mounted men moved round the town till it was encircled. Lights began to show here and there in the windows; early risers were stirring. There were people in those houses. There must be German soldiers

in the town too, but evidently our circle had been too wide-flung and too silent to alarm the German pickets.

A telephone post confronted us, like a long black finger pointing to the paling sky above. Fox shinned up and cut the wire, which fell with a slight jingle.

"Let those fellows call for help now all they want to," he grumbled as he remounted.

We waited quietly for daylight, till we could see to shoot. Then slowly the circle closed. A shot from the other side of town. A picket had spotted us at last. We quickened our pace, pushing our horses to a slow canter. A machine-gun began to sputter off to our right. A quick burst of rifle-fire from the same direction silenced it. Now we were galloping in a confused torrent down the wide street of the village. Half-clad men and women rushed about, holding up their hands.

Beersheba was taken. Not a man had got away to warn the German column which we hoped was riding up the road five miles to the eastward. The prisoners were herded in the marketplace. Fifty men, selected by picking those with the nearest to exhausted horses, were told off to garrison the town and act as prison guard. They moved the rest of us out of town, grumbling. There must be food in those houses! But still they moved us on. The three brigades formed up in as many separate columns and began to move across the plain, the scouts acting as a thin screen half a mile ahead. . . .

From the farther side of the bushy fringe of the river we looked out on another dry plain, similar to the one we had crossed. A mile or so away we could see the railway crossing a gully by a short bridge. Near it a wagon road curved downward toward us over the crest of a hill. The Germans must be on that road somewhere. But no dust-cloud betrayed the movement of troops.

We urged our horses forward, eager to know our fate. We found the dust of the road churned deep with footprints and scored with wheel marks. The Germans had passed, only a few hours before.

ON that same evening General Mackenzie sat his big chestnut charger, on the Gibeon road. A big bare toe protruded from one of his riding-boots. A piece of untanned white goatskin was roughly sewed into the seat of his riding breeches. His face was gaunt, and he seemed to have aged ten years in a week.

His voice was very quiet, even gentle, as he addressed us, in contrast to his usual blustering manner:

"Men, you have just completed a great march. Unfortunately we have arrived too late at this spot, where we hoped to intercept the enemy. The Germans are half a day's march to the northward. If they escape us, they may seriously endanger General Botha's force at Swakopmund. We march tonight. You are hungry. Your only hope of rations is to take them from the enemy. There are signs of game in the bush along the river, but there must be no hunting at our halts. A shot might be heard by some German outpost and serve to ruin all our plans."

All that night we marched northward. At dawn we halted in a small valley between hills, where the dry sandy bed of a tributary of the Great Fish River gave water a foot or so below the surface. Our sensations of hunger had passed, but we were weak. There was sufficient grass to feed the horses, but they looked as if another march would be their finish.

We marched again the next night. Toward morning the air began to smell of dust, like a room which has been dusted and left for some time without airing. At dawn, Piet Uys and I lay on a ridge among the stunted thorn scrub and got our first sight of the Germans, the dust of whose passage we had scented in the night. They were camped on the farther side of a wide flat, some three miles away, under the toe of a ridge some miles long, which lay across their line of march. To the left of the ridge, the silver shimmer of the railway track led to the little white-walled town of Gibeon.

All day we watched the enemy. They made no move till the afternoon. Then a long string of wagons left their camp in the direction of Gibeon. Through our glasses we could see an engine shunting cars into the siding, where gangs of men began to load the contents of the wagons into railway cars.

"I wonder whether the General would try a raid on those cars after dark?" I queried. The thought of all that food made my empty stomach squirm.

"Look on the end of the ridge nearest the station," growled Piet. "There are guns being placed. All along the ridge I can see men building *Schanses* of stone. The Germans have found out that we are following them, and are going to fight. First they move their supplies to the railway, so that if we beat them, those sausages and beer will not fill our bellies.

They are baiting a trap. Those guns would blow us to hell if we tried a raid."

We descended the slope to our horses.

"Give me a push up, Piet," I begged. My knees were weak. After he had pushed me into the saddle, I had to ride round to the off side of his horse and pull him up into his.

"If tomorrow we do not fight, we shall never fight again," he muttered.

AFTER dark that night Colonel Royston, with the Natal Light Horse brigade, moved out of camp with the Hottentot as guide. Royston's instructions were to move wide of the enemy's left flank, swing round behind him and take up a position on a ridge which covered the road by which the Germans must retreat.

Our twenty-odd scouts rode in the opposite direction. Our mission was to march round the town of Gibeon, to find a suitable bridge or culvert on the railway beyond the station, and blow it up, to prevent the enemy from moving his supplies by rail. This done, we were to return and attach ourselves to the Carbineers brigade for tomorrow's action.

The Carbineers and Imperial Light Horse brigades were to make a frontal attack at daybreak. Royston's force was to close in on the enemy's rear when their attention was engaged in front.

It was good tactics, I thought, as our horses plodded slowly through the darkness. Good tactics—if we were strong enough to carry it through.

We struck the railway beyond Gibeon and followed the glimmer of starlight on rails northward till we found a culvert. We set our charge. There was a lurid flash, a report like the thud of a giant hammer against wood. One side of the culvert sank slowly. That job was done!

At that moment hell seemed to break loose along the ridge behind us, which was the German position. Very lights flared skyward. Machine-guns began to stammer, rifle-fire to crackle.

"That firework of ours started something," chuckled Fox. "The Germans must be jumpy. I hope to God they all shoot one another."

But I was worried as I listened. Those rifle-shots were from South African rifles.

When we rejoined the Carbineers an hour before dawn, we found them as puzzled as the rest of us. We finally decided that the noise of our explosion had alarmed a jumpy sentry, that he had given the alarm, and that the Germans had been wasting ammunition on an imaginary enemy. None of us guessed the awful truth—that Colonel Royston had lost his way in the darkness, either by the treachery or carelessness of his Hottentot guide, had blundered into the German camp, and had most of his force killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

As the first gray light came, we moved forward at a walk, the scouts on the extreme left. As the light strengthened, enemy guns began to search our line. We moved forward now at as near a gallop as our weakened horses could go.

At about eight hundred yards' range the German machine-guns began to tap their stuttering code, of which the dots and dashes were nickel and lead. We dismounted, and our Number Threes led off the horses.

We worked our way forward on our bellies to within five hundred yards of the German position. There we stuck, and built little stone forts to hide our heads. Meantime the machine-gun bullets sighed past, or hitting the stony ground in front, richocheted with the shriek of banshees. . . .

The German cannon were silent now. We were beneath their angle of fire. But the machine-guns kept up their steady tapping.

We fired steadily—now at a point below the puff of steam which disclosed the position of an overheated machine-gun, now at a distant head, silhouetted against the skyline, as some German rifleman incautiously exposed himself. We had carried out our part of the plan of attack. We had the enemy heavily engaged, and were waiting for Col. Royston's force to fall on them from behind.

Again the order came down the Carbineers' line to my right, as at Garub—passed from man to man. The Carbineer brigade was to retire.

As we clambered to our saddles at the foot of the hill, the German guns began again. A shell burst near us, and we heard the baleful *zzzzzzzzu* of shrapnel. A column of dust rose near us, and shell-splinters buzzed over our heads. We were out of range of the German machine-guns now, but they were hammering their heads off at the Imperial Light horse, who had remained in position.

General Mackenzie galloped up to us. He was smiling as though he had just taken the salute on the parade-ground and was pleased with the troops.

"Something's gone wrong with Royston," I heard him say to Colonel Mackay, who was commanding the Carbineer

brigade. "I'm afraid we have got to count him out. I want the Carbineers to work out toward the railway line and get on the enemy's left flank. Try to engage the enemy close enough to give the Light Horse a chance to get in with the bayonet."

The horses seemed to have plucked up strength from somewhere as we galloped into a maze of small hills and thorn-grown gullies. My weakness had disappeared, too: the zest of battle and the smile of a gallant sportsman had tuned up our nerves beyond their normal pitch.

After we entered the gullies, we perforce split into small groups, each working independently in the general direction of the position we should have to take up. Behind us, the noise of battle seemed to be waxing higher. The Imperial Light Horse were catching it hot.

We ran into Cope in a little thorn flat where two gullies met. His lot looked as though they had been roughly handled. Several of them were wounded, and he had a lot of missing, he told me, an empty pipe between his teeth, talking quietly. The Scouts had not got off scot free, either. A low-hanging telephone wire had taken four of us under the chin and lifted them from the saddles of their galloping horses as we went into action that dawn. That was the last we had seen of them. Piet had a shell splinter graze on one cheek, and Fox looked shaken.

"Where's Pexton?" I asked, suddenly missing him.

"Back there—took a bullet between the eyes," blubbered Fox.

Cope's lot had caught a stray ammunition mule, one of the Imperial Light Horse mules which must have stampeded when the shell fire caught them in the daybreak. We filled our bandoliers hurriedly while we talked and rode on.

We soon debouched into a wider gulley which allowed us to gallop along its bed. When we judged ourselves as far enough, we climbed the low ridge which bordered it on the German side.

THE moment my head topped the ridge, I saw we had come too far. We had not only outflanked the Germans, but had swung around them until we were on their right rear, about six hundred yards behind their position. We could see the German gunners serving their guns. Their machine-gunners were squatting behind their machine-guns, firing through the loopholes in the *schanses* they had built the day before. German riflemen lay all along the ridge, their feet toward us, firing steadily. Our own artillery was being active, as well.

Then a sudden burst of rifle-fire started on our right, where we should have been if we had not lost our way. The Carbineer brigade had evidently completed their turning movement and was engaging the enemy, who made frantic disposition to meet this new menace.

The Germans were now facing an enemy on both their front and right flank. When we began to fire into their rear from fairly short range, we caused consternation among them. I believe that if we had had two hundred men in our position instead of less than a score, we could have finished the battle right then.

But we were too few, although we fired so rapidly that our rifle-barrels burned our hands, and the oil from the stock bubbled and frizzled like frying bacon. We had it all our own way for some minutes, concentrating on the German right, which was nearest to us.

Fox was calling his shots, chuckling to himself when he thought he had downed his man. Piet was firing as steadily as though on the rifle range—he would not miss many at that distance. We shot the gun-crew from the nearest German gun and silenced at least two machine-guns before Nemesis caught us. The Germans spotted us. Several machine-guns opened on us, and we lay flat while the bullets sighed over us with the noise of a rising breeze. To make matters still more lively, our own guns opened on us—some observer on a high point had reported movement on our ridge, where we were not supposed to be. Three bursts of shrapnel about our ears startled us considerably. Fortunately we had good cover among the boulders, and little damage was done.

"They should move us to another ridge," came Piet's voice in my ear. "When the big guns find our position, it is time to go. We can fight just as well from the next ridge, and there we can stay alive. Our own shrapnel kills just as dead as the enemy's."

Then Fox did a very gallant thing. He stood upright and semaphored with his arms in the general direction of our guns, giving the conventional sign for *"Friends."* The shells stopped, although the machine-gun bullets from the Germans were still coming pretty thick.

About this time we noticed the German left slackening fire. Their guns were limbering up, and machine-gun crews were packing up and loading their guns

on mules. Riflemen began to stream down the slope toward us, to where their horses were tethered at the foot. The wagon-park began to break up, and mule-teams to drag the wagons along the road toward us at the gallop.

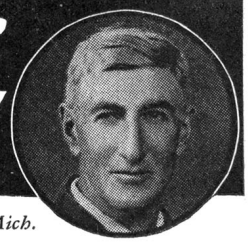
We fired as fast as we could. The road wound round the foot of our ridge, not two hundred yards away. We shot the mule team out of a gun, which lay abandoned thereafter in the road. We peppered the drivers of the enemy wagons till they jumped from their seats and took what cover they could along the roadside. Our adversaries had ceased firing at us now—they were trying only to get away. German troops began to pass in retreat, cantering steadily in orderly columns of four. We had smoked them out of their position, beaten them, taken all their guns and their supplies. The plain was dotted with abandoned wagons and field-guns, the terrified teams of which dragged them about. The wrecked culvert would prevent the train-load of supplies from escaping. But the Germans were still a military force. We could not but admire their discipline as they ran the gantlet of our fire without breaking ranks.

THE rest of that day is a confused memory. We pressed the German retreat until it became a rout. Small parties of Germans began to break away from their column, hunting some place to hide from the unslackening pursuit by wild, tattered, bearded horsemen, who maintained a steady fire from the saddle. Small parties of us broke away also to follow them. We rode them down in the open. We fought little groups in sandy gullies among the thorn-bushes. . . .

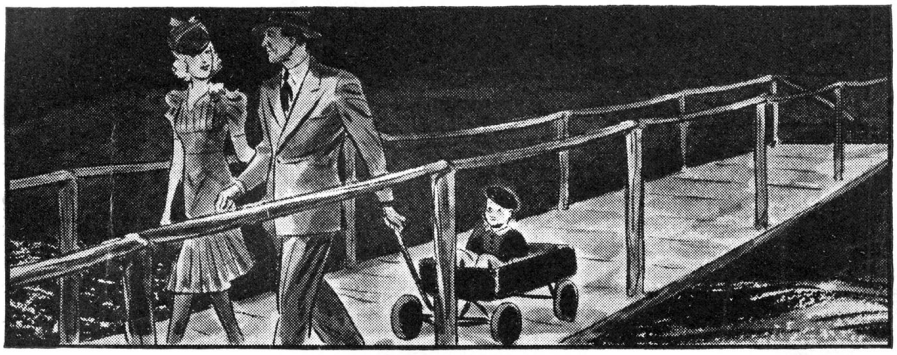
When night fell, I found myself at least twenty miles from the scene of the attack on the German position. With me were Piet Uys and Fox, with a stray trooper of Carbineers. Our saddles were hung with food-filled German haversacks. We dug in a sandy stream-bed until we found water. We made a fire of thorn-branches and smelled once more the unutterable fragrance of coffee. We ate tinned pork, sausages, bread and beans till we were ready to burst. Then we slept.

The German Southwest African campaign was virtually over. There still remained months of mopping up, moving northward, while General Botha cornered the northern Germans in Ovamboland, and forced their surrender. But Gibeon ended our participation in the fighting.

"BLACK, SWIRLING WATERS SWALLOWED OUR BABY!"

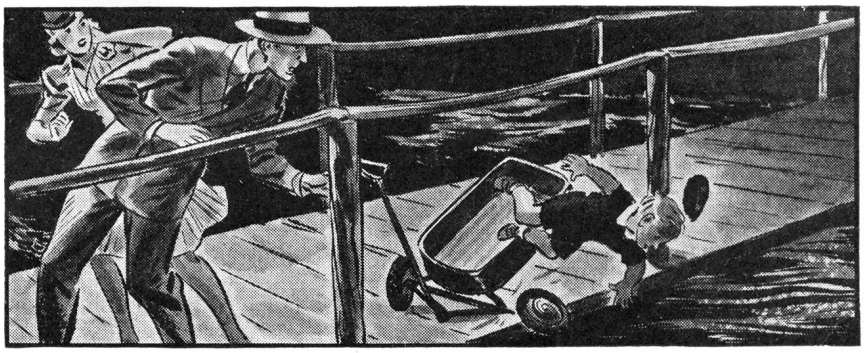


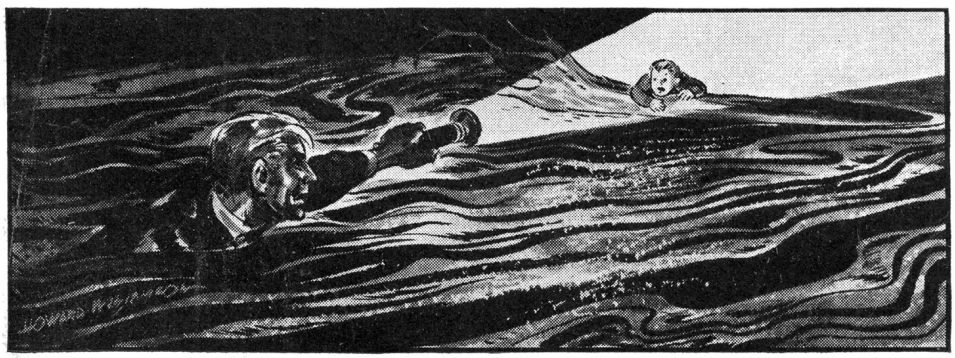
A true experience of GEORGE W. HOYT, *Litchfield, Mich.*



1. "NO FOREBODING of impending danger warned my wife and me as we walked home from town one night, pulling our two-year-old boy in his wagon," writes Mr. Hoyt. "We were in the middle of a narrow footbridge, spanning a stream, when fate struck.

2. "SUDDENLY A WHEEL came off the wagon, hurling our baby into the black, swirling waters of the river. Luckily I had my flashlight with me. I switched it on as I jumped over the railing. Despite a thorough soaking, that light did not fail me.





3. "ITS BRIGHT, faithful beam disclosed my boy clinging to the branches of a floating tree! Those dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries helped save our little boy's life. I will never be without them in my flashlight!

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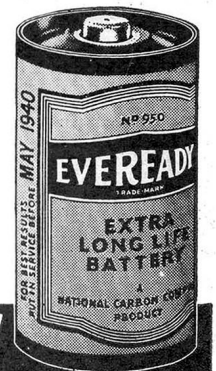
(Signed) George W. Hoyt"



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