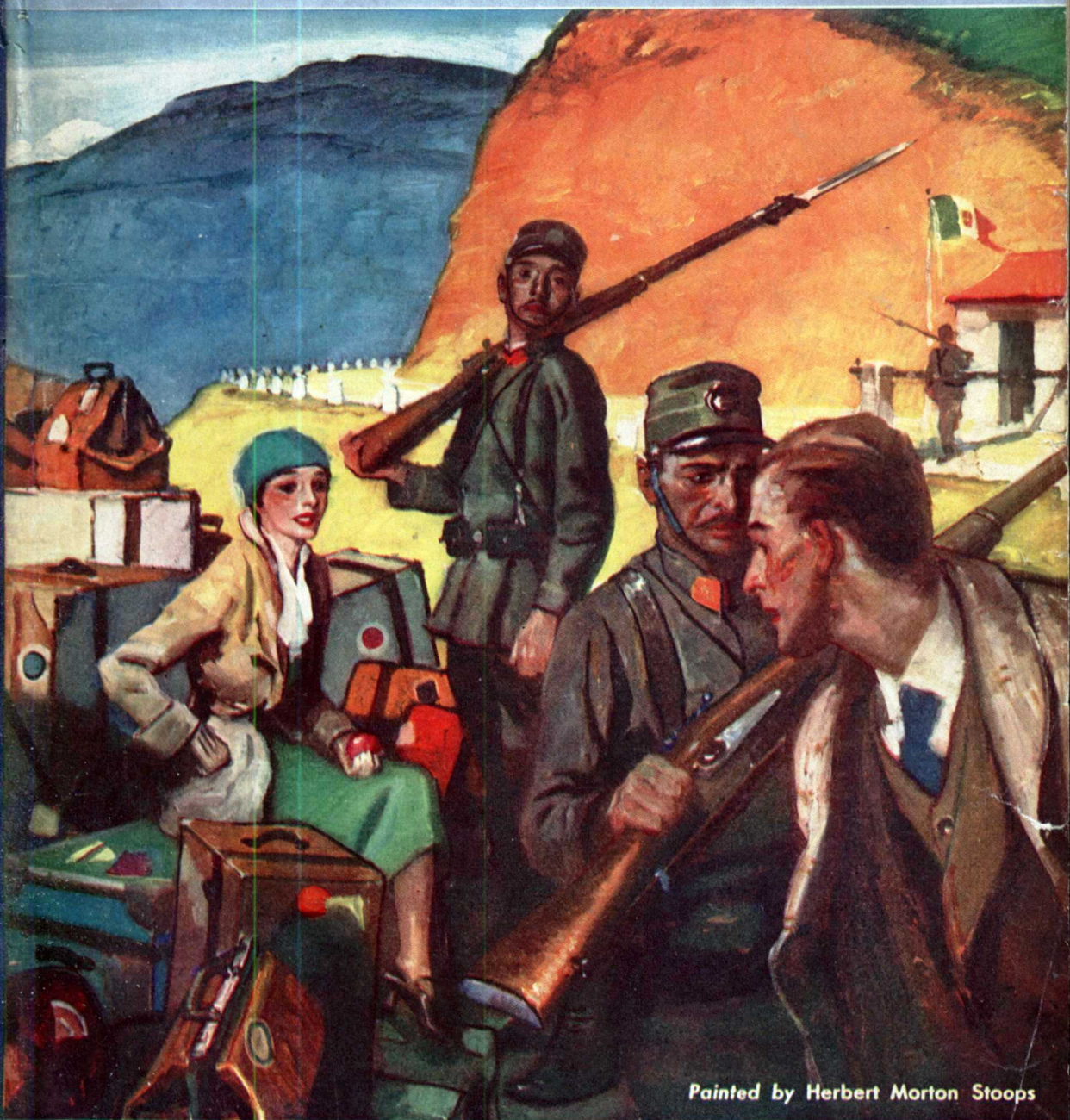


DEATH ON THE DOORSTEP, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

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DORNFORD YATES • GORDON KEYNE • RICHARD H. WATKINS
BARRE LYNDON • HUGH WILEY • H. BEDFORD-JONES

Who's Who in Blue Book

DORNFORD YATES



*Dornford
Yates*

Captain Cecil William Mercer, who writes under the pen-name of Dornford Yates, was educated at Harrow and Oxford, and was for a time a barrister in London. He became a lieutenant in the County of London Yeomanry in 1914, served in Egypt in 1915-'16 and the following year at Salonika. Since 1918, he has largely devoted himself to cultivating his fine literary gifts, and has published many novels—"The Courts of Idleness," "Valerie French," "Jonah and Co.," "And Five Were Foolish," "The Stolen March," "Storm Music," and "Gale Warning" are some of his best-remembered titles. "When the Devil Drives," his latest work, begins on page 4.

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Richard Howells Watkins was born in New York. As a newspaper man on the old *Morning Sun* he covered everything from flower shows to shipwrecks, served as aviation and radio editor and wound up in the navy during the war—the land navy, as it turned out.

A magazine bought a story from him—and the editor gave him a job. But after three years he decided that writing them was easier than reading them. He has lived in Cornwall and in southern France but usually drifts back to his present home in Connecticut before a year elapses. Lately, however, he's joined the winter colony of writers in Florida.

He is married and has one daughter going on thirteen. In Connecticut he is an enthusiastic gardener during early spring, but when the bugs and the weeds get tough, according to his wife, he escapes to his boat on the Sound.



*Richard
Howells
Watkins*


BARRÉ LYNDON

He served through World War I with 12th Battalion, London Regiment, and has been writing ever since. He has written three books of motor-racing history, and has driven over the majority of the European road-racing circuits. He has had five plays produced in London during the past three years, including "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse." His ambition, at the moment, he writes, is "to be in Indianapolis on Memorial Day and see the five-hundred-mile race." His novelette "The Smoky Road," begins on page 104.



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BLUE BOOK



JULY 1940

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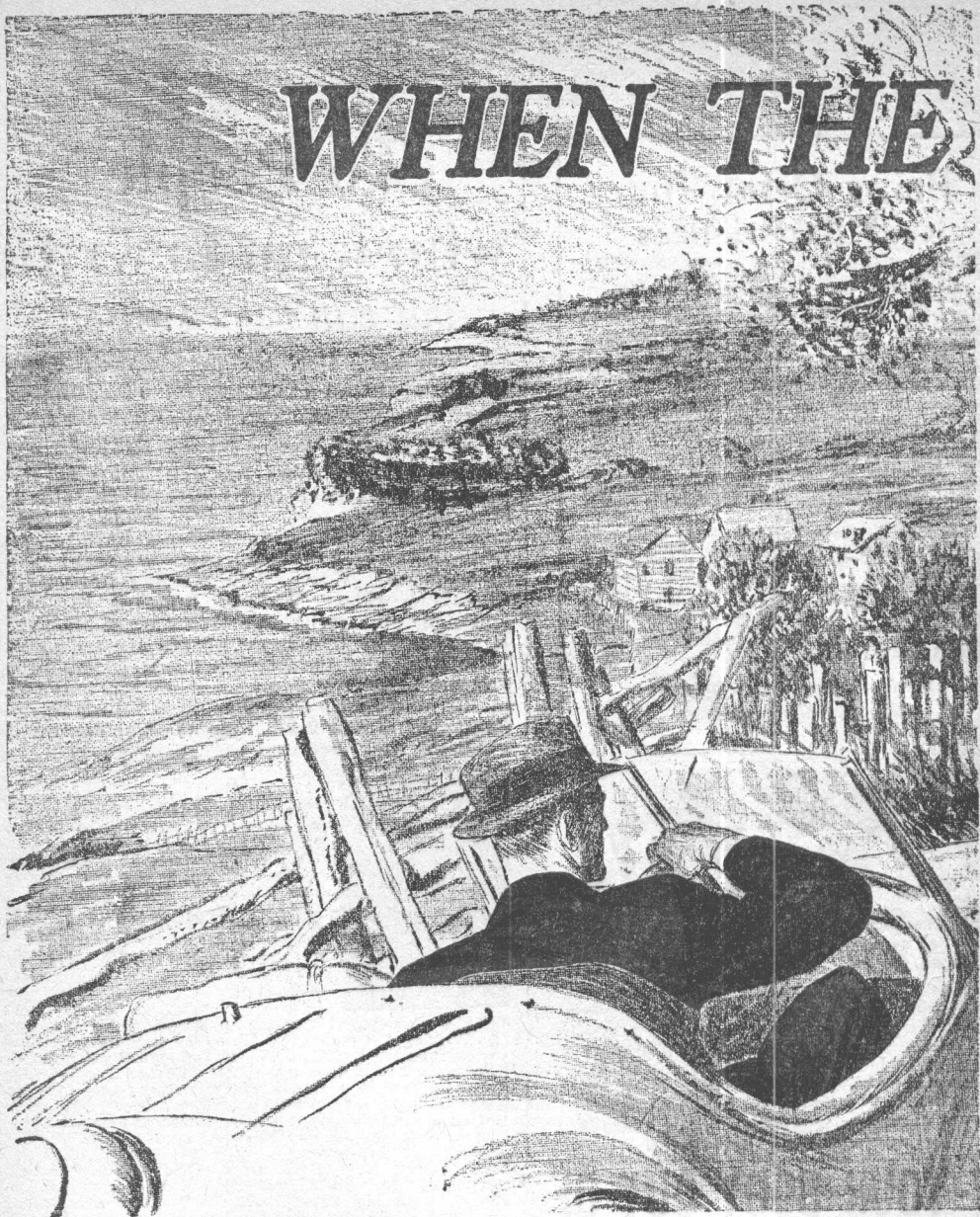
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WHEN THE



Now it can be told. Not a war novel; yet only the death of a British officer and his wife makes public this story of a great adventure, written by the distinguished author of "The Stolen March" and "Storm Music."

WHEN I came down from Oxford in 1936, to enter the family business in Crutched Friars, my uncles let me see that, though they were bound to make me their junior partner, they did so against their will.

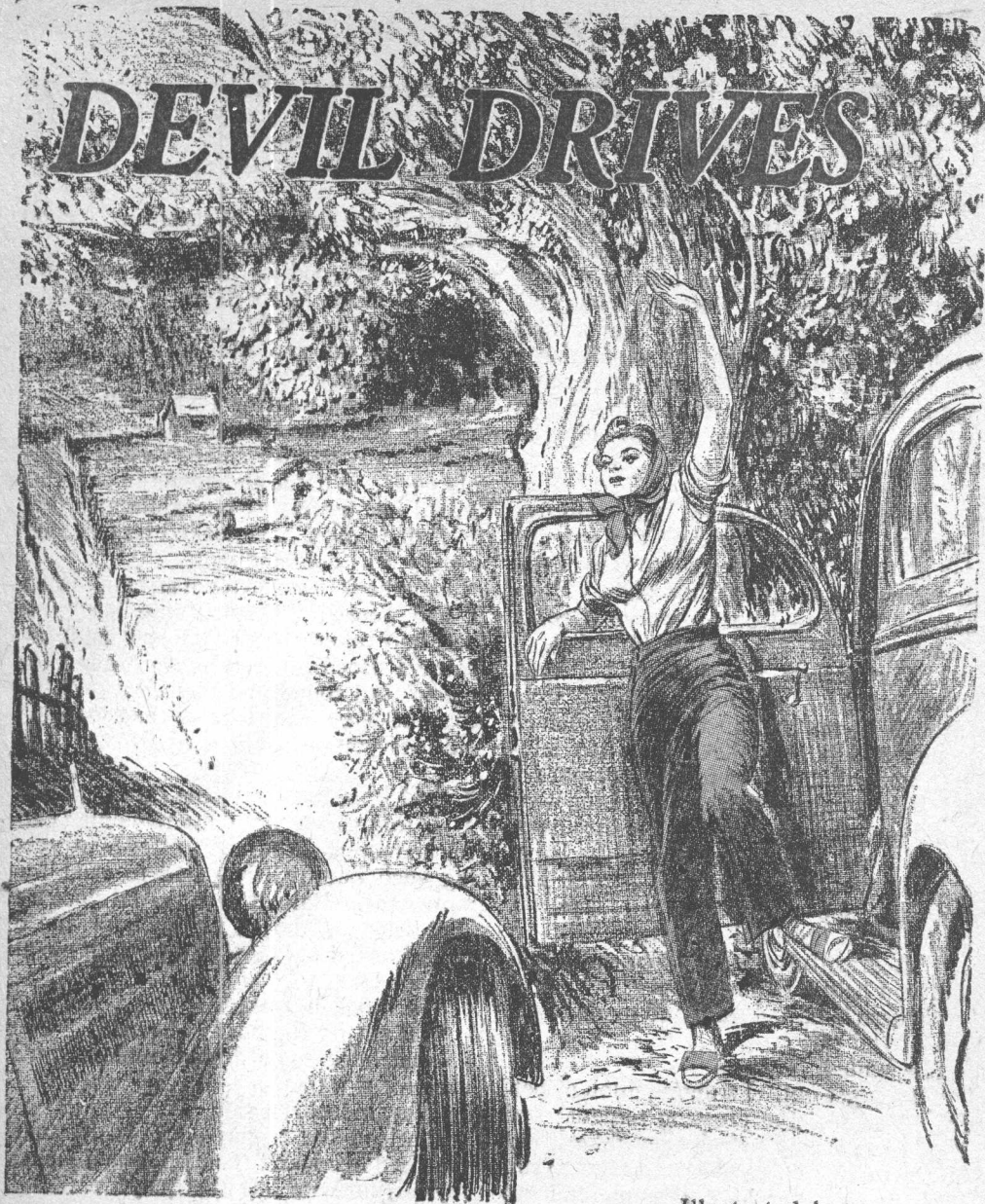
I do not blame them at all. They were grave, elderly men, to whom business was a religion, and the service of Solan and Solan the article of their faith. Since I was twenty-two and had nothing to

show for my costly education,—unless you count six oars and one very good friend,—they naturally looked askance at a colleague so young and so unpromising.

It was this overt suspicion as much as anything else which made me determined to show them that I could be worth my salt, and no man ever worked harder than I did for nearly two years. And then one evening in June I opened the following note:

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DEVIL DRIVES



Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

By Dornford Yates

My dear Jeremy,

If I may say so, my brother and I have been very favourably impressed by the devotion to duty which you have shown for nearly two years. At the same time we cannot lose sight of the fact that "Youth's a stuff will not endure," and we feel that this year you should take a considerable holiday. Since the summer is, as you know, the season in which we are least busy, we suggest—and indeed desire—that you should absent yourself for the next three months. The rest and

change will do you a deal of good. I enclose a cheque for six hundred pounds, which we hope will enable you to take some friend away with you and to spend a really enjoyable time. Let us say from the first of July to the thirtieth of September.

Your affectionate uncle,
John Solan.

To this very handsome treatment, I owe the fact that I have a tale to tell; for that night I made up my mind to

wander abroad, and a few days later I purchased a secondhand car. This was a "guaranteed" Lowland—a swift, all-weather two-seater, with a huge boot: she proved as good a bargain as ever a driver made. Since the car was built to seat two, I did my best to persuade my friend George Laking to bear me company. But he was at work in Paris, and could not join me for more than a long week-end. Still, he said he would meet me at Rouen, if I could go by that way; and since I very much wanted to see him again, I made arrangements to ship the car to Dieppe.

SO it came I drove out of London at five o'clock on a Thursday, the seventh day of July, taking the road to Newhaven and meaning to cross that night. Newhaven—Dieppe—Rouen, where George was due to meet me the following day.

The afternoon was hot, and I took things easily. Just after seven I stole through Lewes and on to the Newhaven Road; and it must have been ten minutes later that I saw full in my path a black coupé ahead by the side of the way, and a girl who was wearing blue trousers.

As I set a foot on the brake, she lifted a hand, and when she was sure I was stopping, she stepped to one side. I brought the Lowland to rest.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," she said, "but will you help a damned fool?"

"Where is he?" I said, and made to get out of the car.

She smiled. Then—

"Don't get out. I want a gallon of petrol. You see, I'm crossing tonight: and if you've got any petrol, they take it out on the quay. So an old hand tries to run it as fine as ever he can—and fetch up with a teaspoonful. But this time I've been too clever, and now I'm stuck."

I looked at my petrol-gauge. This showed that more than nine gallons were still in my tank. And Newhaven was three miles off. Of course, I was not an "old hand."

In silence I showed her the gauge, and she covered her mouth.

I sighed. "D'you mean to say they just take it—and give you nothing at all?"

"It's an old Channel custom," she said. "And then they expect you to tip them for pumping it out."

As soon as I could speak—

"But *we* have no pump," said I. "So, though we've nine gallons between us, we'd better buy some more. We could drain some of mine into a thermos and

put it into your tank about a dozen times but it would be a messy job."

She nodded cheerfully. "Without delay, too," she said, "if I'm to be there by eight."

I let in my clutch. "I promise," I said, "to be as quick as I can."

I was as good as my word—for my sake, as much as for hers. I wished to see more of my lady.

She was tall and slim, and she moved and stood very well. With her well-cut slacks she was wearing a white silk shirt; and to keep her hair in place, she had bound a gay handkerchief over her chestnut curls. Wimple and gorget in one, this suited her perfectly: but while any face so framed must have looked its best, her beauty was outstanding.

I was back in a quarter of an hour; when I had poured the spirit into her tank and had taken the price I had paid, because I dared not refuse, she waited for me to turn round and then drove off before me—"because I know the ropes and I'll lead you on to the quay."

HALF an hour later the cars were tied to their trays and my remaining petrol had been withdrawn. (Never expecting such bounty, they had to send for more cans, to take it away.) And since we could not go aboard for an hour and a half, I asked my lady to dine with me at the hotel.

She shook her head.

"I'll eat on the boat," she said. "You go and have some dinner—unless you'd care for a walk."

"Yes, indeed," I said.

I helped her to put on a woolly that matched her scarf: then I put on a jacket myself, and we left the quay.

As we crossed the railway lines—

"My name's Solan," I said; "and I'm trying to be a merchant in Crutched Friars."

My companion looked at me. "That sounds all wrong," she said.

"I'm not sure it isn't," said I. "But so many better men would be thankful to have my job."

"Of course. But you're young and fit. And you don't look as if you had more than one mouth to feed."

"I haven't," said I. "But—damn it, the job was there. A junior partnership. There's nothing the matter with that."

"There never is—with a mess of potage," she said. "But you have to pay for it—Esau. Rank heresy, of course. And damned impertinence. But that's

your fault. "Trying to be a merchant got me under the ribs."

"May I ask why?"

She regarded the heaven, aglow with the setting sun.

"Well, I think one tries *not* to be a merchant. If there's nothing for it—yes. But I'd rather lie out as a shepherd, than fatten in Crutched Friars."

"Am I fat?" said I.

"Not yet."

She was leading me into the country which lay to the north and east, and everything looked so peaceful and seemed to offer so much that I was quite sorry I was going abroad.

WHEN I told her as much, she nodded.

"I know," she said. "I always feel just the same. However, my father lives in France. He's—not very strong; and I go to see him a lot. And now tell me where you're going and what you're going to do."

I told her as much as I knew.

"I should go south," she said. "I shouldn't waste time at Rouen, but pick up your man and get on. It's glorious down there now—wherever you like to go, south of Angoulême."

"But he can't stay on," said I.

"Then send him back from Bordeaux and go on alone. Wander down to the frontier and then turn east. And when you can smell Marseilles, turn west by north."

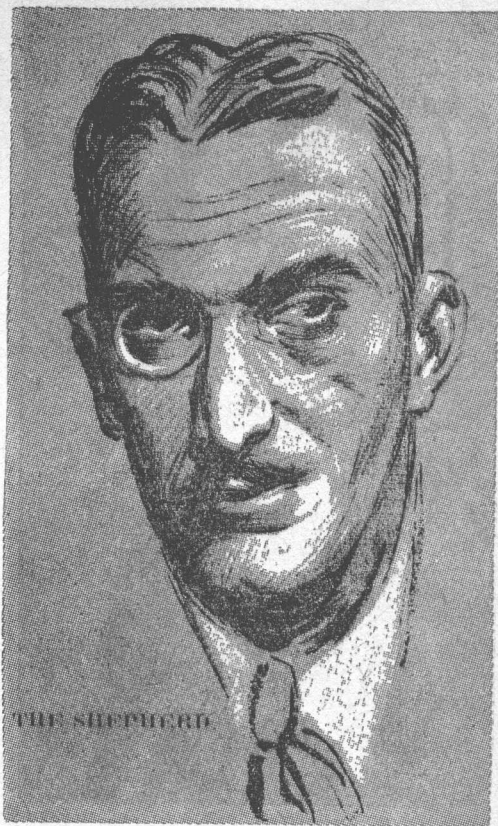
It was clear that she knew France well, and I led her on to speak of routes and places and all the things that a wayfarer ought to know. But though she seemed glad to be with me, and talked so naturally, she never gave me her name or told me where she was going or where her father lived.

Dusk had come in before we got back to the quay; and when we had shown our passports, we went aboard. And there we sat down to an excellent simple meal of cold meat, cheese and beer, which suited me better than any elaborate repast. I gave her a cigarette and took one myself.

"I've three months," I said, "in which to improve my mind. May I send you a letter to say how I'm getting on?"

She put up a hand to push back her shining hair.

"I have no address to give you. I'll be at Bordeaux tomorrow—I'm joining a party there. But after that—who knows? I've no idea of their plans."



It was clear that she meant our acquaintance to end at Dieppe. I had served her a turn for an evening—because there was nobody else. But I must not know where to find her or who she was.

I had not believed she would treat me like that. I would have sworn that she was above such things. . . . But so would any fool—who was trying to be a merchant in Crutched Frairs.

I laughed shortly. "Perhaps you're right," I said, and called for the bill.

When we left the table, she led the way to the deck; but though we strolled, I did not feel like speaking; and she, I suppose, thought it best to leave me alone. It was dark now, and we had the place to ourselves, for ours were the only cars, and the boat-train was not yet due. Time and place, in a word, would have favored the making of love: but no man wants to make love when he has been kicked in the face.

And then, to my great surprise, the girl slid an arm under mine.

"Try not to hate me, Esau."

"I could never hate you," I rejoined.

"I'm glad of that," she said quietly. "I—I couldn't bear you to hate me. I'm not as tough as you think."



BRIGHT BOY

"That's all right," I said somehow. "After all, it's up to you. But you've done enough damage today to make me upset to think that I'm not going to see you again."

I heard her draw in her breath. Then her arm slipped away and she put out a little hand.

"Goodnight, Esau," she said. "I'm going to bed. Sleep well, my dear, and—thank you so very much."

"Won't you give me a name," I said, "to remember you by?"

She looked away over the water, swaying black under the stars.

"I will—tomorrow," she said.

My heart leaped up at that, for it showed that she was relenting, and might go further still the following day. Indeed, I forgot my resentment, which now seemed unfair to her, and after a moment I put her hand to my lips.

As I kissed her fingers, I felt them close upon mine.

"Breakfast at eight?" I said, smiling.

"And don't be late," she said gravely. "By half-past eight, you'll have to be off the ship."

With that, she was gone.

As she reached the companion, she turned, and the light of some lamp fell on her face. She smiled and lifted a hand. Then she turned again and passed out of my sight.

I suppose I must have been tired, for I slept that night like a log. When the steward called me at seven, he brought me some tea—and there, on the tray, was a note, to which the man drew my attention, because I was half-asleep.

"I was to give you this note, sir, directly you waked. Those were the lady's last words, before she went off."

I sat up and stared at the man.

"Went off?" I said slowly. "D'you mean to say that she's gone?"

"That's right sir. You can get off, if you like, at half-past five. She got off then, an' her car was cleared before six."

"I see," I said, and put a hand to my head.

"You'll be taking breakfast, sir?"

I nodded. "Yes, I suppose so," I said. "I'll come in about eight."

"Very good, sir."

The man withdrew, and after a little while I opened the note.

Esau dear:

You've made it so very hard for me to do the right thing. Good-bye. And the best of luck always, wherever you are.

Katharine.

I remember that the first thing I did was to look at my watch. Five minutes past seven. I had to rise and dress and to clear the car. I might, I reckoned, be on the road by eight. But Katharine had been on the road by six. That meant she had two hours' start—on roads that she knew. All the same—

And there I remembered George Laking. George was to meet me at Rouen at half-past two.

I put my letter away and began to get up. . . .

It occurred to me that she had bade me go south—to send George back from Bordeaux and go on alone. *Bordeaux*. That was where she was going. "Wander down to the frontier and then turn east." A thousand to one that was what she was going to do. Oh, of course. The thing was clear: And if I slipped down to the country south of Bordeaux, and kept an eye on the road which led to the south, one day I should see a black coupé rounding a bend—and a flash of chestnut curls, as it went by.

By eight o'clock my appetite had returned.

There was now no need for haste, so I took things easily. It was nearly ten before I ran out of Dieppe, and past eleven before I had come to Rouen and found the hotel at which George and I were to meet.

NOW, if we were to drive to Bordeaux and to waste no time by the way, to take some food in the car seemed the wisest plan; so when I had had a drink, I set about buying provisions from which we could make a good meal by the side of the road. Then I berthed the car, and visited the cathedral, and strolled the ancient streets until it was time to lunch—and perceived how wise I had been to wait for George. For one thing only, the fact that I could not speak French would have been enough to weight me out of the race. But George spoke excellent French.

I finished my lunch by two and took my seat in the lounge, to glance at an English paper and keep an eye on the door. But I need not have been so zealous, for more than an hour went by, but George never appeared. I was out on the pavement by now, because I could not sit still; but I should have done better to go to the porter's desk.

I saw the telegram there at a quarter past four. It had been there since ten o'clock, but it had not been given to me, although I had given my name.

TERRIBLY SORRY DETAINED TILL THIS
EVENING COMING BY TRAIN REACHING
ROUEN ELEVEN O'CLOCK.

I could have shoved the hall-porter's face through the back of his head!

At seven o'clock I picked up my food and beer and stowed them away in the Lowland. The idea of further delay sent me almost out of my mind, and yet I knew it was better than its alternative.

In this winter of discontent I ordered and later sat down to dinner at eight o'clock, but at half-past eight I was once again walking the streets, because to sit still inactive was more than I could endure.

The night was breathless—more oppressive, in fact, than the day had been; and it must have been ten o'clock when I made up my mind that I must have a long, cold drink before I went down to the station to meet George's train. I therefore turned my steps toward the hotel, near which the Lowland was waiting—had waited most of that day.

I knew the direction to take, though I did not know the way; but I had not

far to go and had plenty of time. This was as well, for I took a narrow, paved street, where the houses were very high and seemed very old; but when, after two or three minutes, I came to its end, I found that it was a blind alley, or rather, did no more than run into a very small square.

I was looking round this, to be sure there was no way out, when I saw a discreet-looking café in one of its sides. There were no tables outside, and its blinds were drawn, but a slant of very good music was stealing out of its doors, and as I stood listening, I heard the pop of a cork.

At once I saw no reason to wait for my drink, and since I was sick of the sight of the lounge of the hotel, I determined to enter the café and then go straight to the car. With that, I crossed the square and walked into the place.

For a moment I thought I had entered a private club, for all looked up as I entered and watched me choose a table and take my seat. But when a waiter came up, he took my order and never asked my name, so I lighted a cigarette and began to look around.

There was a dancing-floor, but the band was playing "Tosca," and playing it very well—playing very quietly, so that to listen or not was a matter for you. And everyone seemed to speak quietly; no voice was raised. There must have been thirty customers, sitting alone or together—nearly all men; but most surprising of all, with one or two exceptions, they did not seem to be French.

As they were looking at me, I looked at them. English faces I saw, and clear American—to be quite honest, some of them not too good. Some were well turned out, and some were shabbily dressed; the girls—

And there I saw Katharine—whom I had supposed to be three hundred and fifty miles off—sitting staring before her, with a frozen look on her face!

Chapter Two

SHE was sitting sidewise to me, with her back to the wall, at a table laid for three, at which dinner was being served. She was wearing a very smart frock of, I think, black silk, and a small black hat, which suited her lovely hair. On either side of her was seated a man; and when I saw her, both men had their eyes on her face. One had his back to

me; but the other I saw very well. His face was large and pale; his graying hair was sandy; the rims of his eyes were red. He had the grimmest mouth that ever I saw, but worse than this was the sinister light in his eyes. These seemed to be on fire—I can put it no other way. And to see so dreadful a gaze bent upon Katharine released my primitive instincts as nothing else could have done.

HOW she came to be here, I neither knew nor cared. She was in trouble—peril; and I was at hand. The pricks I had kicked against had all the time been goading me up to her side!

I put out my cigarette and walked across to the table at which she sat.

“I’m awfully glad,” I said, “to see you again.”

The man whose back had been toward me was now looking up into my face; but the eyes of the other man were fast upon Katharine.

Very slowly she turned her head. Then she looked me up and down.

“By God,” she said slowly, “I thought I’d got rid of you!”

Her words and her manner of speaking hit me over the heart. Indeed, I was so much dumfounded that I think I should have turned and walked out of the place, if the man looking up at me had not seen fit to laugh.

The snicker made me see red.

“I don’t think you mean that,” I said. “I think—”

The contents of her champagne-glass caught me full in the face. . . .

The man on her right was speaking—the man with the dreadful eyes. His tone was curiously silky.

“Why interrupt him, Formosa? We’ve heard what he doesn’t think: let’s hear what he thinks.”

As I wiped the wine from my face—

“Pray go on, my young friend,” he drawled. “I’m sure in her heart Formosa—”

“Speak for yourself,” snapped Katharine. “God knows—”

“I know He does,” flashed the other. “And I want to know, as well, what *he* thinks—your nice young man.”

The position was intolerable; but nothing on earth would have made me leave Katharine now. She was playing some part, of course; and something was terribly wrong. She was, I was sure, afraid of the man on her right.

I addressed myself to her, as though she were sitting alone.



Confusion broke out, and a dozen

“I’ll go back to my table,” I said. “Perhaps, later on—”

With that, I bowed and turned.

As I passed to the seat I had left, I noticed that the band had stopped playing, that everyone in the café was sitting still as death. I never felt more self-conscious in all my life.

My beer was waiting for me, but I was too shaken to drink. Instead, I took out cigarettes. . . .

I saw Katharine leave her seat, her underlip caught in her teeth. For a moment I thought she was making for me; and so, I think, did her companions, for the man on her left started up, as though in pursuit. As I rose in my turn, he stopped, for instead of coming to me, she turned to an archway which gave to the ladies’ room, and parting the curtains which hung there, passed out of our view.

I sat down again at once, and he returned to his seat, slewing himself round, so he could see the curtains through which my lady must come.

Here, to my great relief, the band began playing again, and I noticed that



men were cursing. Through the kitchens we ran . . . down a passage.

general movement which always means that tension has been relaxed.

As I lighted my cigarette, I saw a man making his way to the table which Katharine had left. Though I had seen no sign given, he had been clearly summoned by the man who had sat on her right, for he stood by his side, as a servant who has been sent for and now awaits the order which he expects to receive. The other spoke over his shoulder; and since, as soon as he spoke, his myrmidon looked at me, there could be no doubt at all that I was the object of his instructions.

That this made me feel uneasy, I must most frankly confess, for the fellow was heavily built and looked a criminal. However, there was nothing to be done; and I watched him leave his master and pass to a seat by the side of the entrance-doors. As he went by, I saw a girl glance at her neighbor and purse her lips.

I think every eye in that café was watching the curtains which shrouded the ladies' room. Sooner or later Katharine was bound to come out; and with

her coming, something was going to happen—and something big. In a word, the scene was set for a first-class row.

I began to wish very much that I was not alone. I know how to use my hands, and I am a powerful man: but I had the definite feeling that everyone there was against me, because they dared not offend the man with the dreadful eyes. And I would have been glad of someone to set his back against mine.

And something else I wished: This was that the little square to which the café belonged was not at the very end of a long, ill-lighted and lonely *cul-de-sac*.

And then, without any warning, the whole of the lights went out.

I SHALL never forget that moment. The *valse* which the band was murmuring died a discordant death: a girl cried out "My God!" and a general rustle suggested that all were up on their feet.

I know I was up on mine, for I at once assumed that this had been done on purpose to give my friends a chance

of coming to grips with me before I could see they were there. And I was just going to move, to try and get my back to the wall, when I felt a hand close on my wrist, and Katharine breathed in my ear:

"Come!"

I could not think how she could see, for I was blind, but she hauled me rather than led me across the dancing-floor and behind the bar.

AS we went, confusion broke out. I heard an ice-pail go crashing, and somebody tripped and fell. This might have been the signal for uproar, for chairs began to go over and oaths to rise, and a pile of metal dishes slid on to the floor. As their hideous racket subsided, a girl cried out again, and a dozen men were cursing and calling for lights. And a voice that I knew was blaring: "Close the doors."

As we rounded some screen, the pallid beam of a torch leaped out of the dark behind.

We were in a passage now, and a waiter collided with Katharine and drove her back on to me. At once he began to abuse her; but she thrust on. The fellow sought to detain her—without success, for I hit him under the jaw, and I heard him fall. Through the kitchens we went, where a scullion was lighting a candle, and a chef, his back toward us, was raving like a madman over the fate of some dish. So down another passage and into a broad courtyard, at the end of which a shaft of light from some lamp which I could not see was shining onto the cobbles, silhouetting some man.

We came to gigantic doors which were keeping a porte-cochere: in these a wicket was open and a negro in uniform was speaking with someone outside. As we came up, he turned; but before he could close the wicket I hurled him aside, and Katharine stumbled out, with me on her heels.

Somebody shouted behind us, and the negro gave tongue in reply; but we were out in a street—a street that I knew.

There was next to no one about, and I saw no policeman; but the Lowland was standing silent some sixty yards off.

I put my arm under Katharine's and ran her up to its door.

"Inside," I panted. And as I flung in behind her: "Where shall I go?"

"Anywhere. Quick. Straight on. You've no time to turn."

This was the truth.

As I fitted the key to the switch, I saw a man running toward us, and two or three standing by the wicket through which we had come.

To go straight ahead was to meet him and pass by them; but because the devil was driving, we had no choice. If only the car had been facing the opposite way—

My faithful engine started like any highwayman's mare, but the man was but five paces off when I let in my clutch. I recognized him as the tough with the criminal face.

As he sprang for the running-board, I put down my foot. . . .

He had, of course, aimed for the door; but because the Lowland leaped forward, he met the side of the boot and the off hind wheel—a very disagreeable encounter, to judge from the bump on the car and the screech which he gave.

I changed into second—third.

As we tore past the wicket, the light fell full on a big, pale face. It might have been a mask, the eyes of which were lighted by some supernatural means.

"Which way now?" I breathed.

"Straight on, for the moment. I'll tell you. Put on your lights." I did as she said. "Turn to the left at the bottom, and then go straight."

We streaked down the empty street and swung to the left. I remember I heard some clock chiming, and saw the masts of ships standing up on my right.

"Let her right out," breathed Katharine. "They've got a racing Merk. And Judas has gone to get it. I saw him go."

Although her voice was steady, the flood of light from an arc-lamp showed me the fear in her face. This was turned toward me. Her eyes were fast on the window in the back of the hood.

"Judas be damned!" said I. "He hasn't a hope."

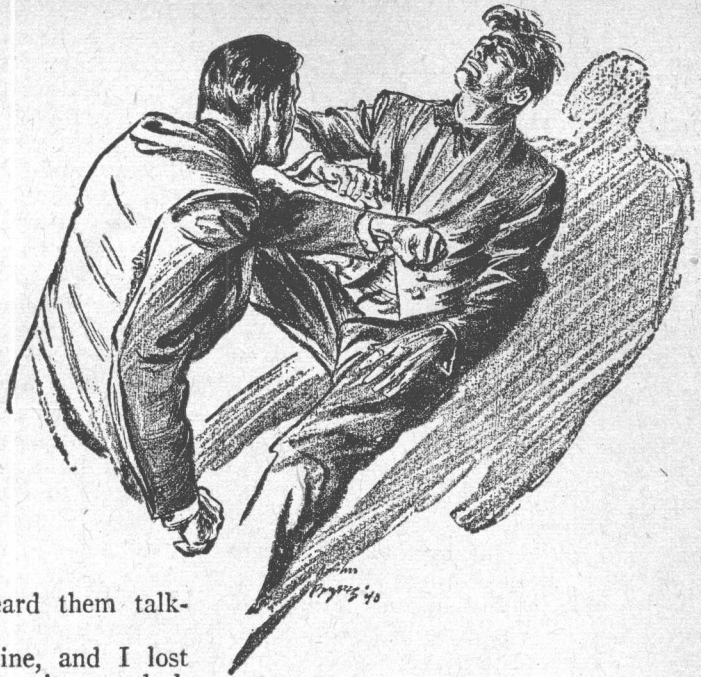
But I did not like the sound of the words, "a racing Merk."

WE flashed the length of the quay, then, by her direction, bore to the right, fell down a cobbled cutting and whipped up a broad highway. Bend was succeeding bend, but the Lowland knew how to sit down, and I never lifted my foot.

"Left, in a minute," said Katharine; "and up a steep hill. We must get over the river, before we play any tricks."

"Are you sure we hadn't better turn off—and let them go by?"

The fellow sought to detain her—without success, for I hit him under the jaw.



"No, no. I—I've heard them talking. I know I'm right."

The hill was serpentine, and I lost time badly there, because it was dark and I did not know the road. And then we were out on some uplands, and I was able again to give the Lowland her head.

With the needle pointing to eighty, we dived at a long decline. . . .

At last I slowed for a bend.

"Quick," said Katharine. "I see the glow of their lights."

I bit my lip.

"Where is this damned river?" said I.

"Not very far now. But we must be over the bridge, before they come on."

THE mile or so that followed, I cannot remember. . . . Poplars, I think, and some houses; but I cannot be sure. My brain was not recording. I drove instinctively. All my wits were focused on whether or not the next bend was masking the bridge.

"Are they coming up?" I breathed.

"I—can't be sure."

From that I knew that they were, and I set my teeth.

And then I saw the bridge coming—and saw its length.

"God Almighty," I groaned—and put down my foot.

"All you know," said Katharine. "They're—not very far."

As we left the road for the bridge, she spoke again.

"You're coming slap into a town. Cobbles. Bear right and stand by to brake and to put out your lights. I'll tell you when to do it. We're going to turn off."

Off the bridge and into a cobbled street.

As I lifted the Lowland up for a sharp ascent, she said: "Brake at the top of this, and turn sharp to the right."

"My lights?"

"Put them out when you've seen the turning."

With her words, it came into view—a turn and a half; I put out my lights and took it—on two wheels.

"And now switch off."

As I switched the engine off, I heard the wasplike note of the racing car.

I heard her leave the bridge, and the hum turn into a snarl as she leaped at the cobbled street. The snarl swelled into a roar. . . . And then she bore to the left, and the snarl slid into a mutter, and she was gone.

I turned to Katharine: but she was still listening intently, straining her ears.

I began to listen too, to hear what I could.

Suddenly, out of the silence, I heard the mutter flare up—for an instant.

I saw Katharine nod her head.

"That's right," she said. "They're taking the Evreux road."

There was a little silence.

"And we, my dear?" said I. "Which road do we take?"

"God knows," said Katharine.

She clapped her hands to her face and burst into tears.

I did not speak; I put my arm about her and held her close: but it wrung my heart to see her in such distress.

After a little, however, she drew away from me and lifted her head.

"There's something," she said, "there's something the matter with me. Never mind. We've got to get on. Get her going again. I'll tell you the way to go."

As I switched the engine on, I glanced at the clock in the dash, to see that this had stopped at twenty minutes to eleven o'clock. But when I looked at my wrist-watch, this said the same. And then I realized that the clock in the dash had not stopped—that it was but thirty-five minutes since I had walked into the café that stood in the little square.

DIGESTING this startling truth, I let in my clutch.

Except that she took me south, I do not know where we went: but I drove as hard as I could for over two hundred miles. Two or three times we stopped; but never for more than five minutes, to stretch our legs: and we had no need of petrol, because my tank had been full.

In all this distance we hardly spoke at all, because, I think, what had to be said was too much to be said whilst we were driving at such a speed. Besides, we were fugitives—not from justice, of course, but from something that knew no law. At least, that was how I saw it.

I have said that the night was warm; after some twenty miles we lowered the hood; and I well remember how very pleasant was the cool, sweet air, as the Lowland sailed on in the way of a bird.

What astonished me very much was Katharine's quiet assurance as to the way we should go. She never asked for a map, and she led me through town after town with hardly a check. And then, as the dawn came up, she told me to slacken speed.

"There's a place near here," she said, "where I've stopped before. I think I shall know the turning—it's just before or just after a tumbledown house."

"On the left or right?" said I.

"On the left. . . . There it is. And there's the old house beyond."

I braked and swung to the left; and after another two miles we came to a long stone bridge.

"Over this," said Katharine. "And two hundred yards farther on, you'll find a track on your right. You'll have to go carefully there; I think you should put her in first."

The track was pretty steep, and its surface was bad; but it just accepted the Lowland, and that was as much as I asked. Almost at once it began to curl round to the right, until I saw that we

were running down to the bank of the river which we had crossed a moment before.

A moment later the sides of the track fell away, and there we were on a decent patch of greensward, with room to turn, and trees growing thick about us, and ten or twelve paces away, the bank of the river itself. My headlights showed me the water, flowing deep and steady, but making no sound at all.

I brought the Lowland to rest. Then I switched off her engine and put out her lights: and though it was dark where we were, I could see the heaven above now pale with light, and the woods across the water were taking shape.

Katharine left the car, and I followed her out.

"We sha'n't be disturbed here," she said. "If only we'd got some food—"

"There's enough for six," said I, "in the Lowland's boot."

She let out a sigh of relief.

"That's luck and to spare," she said. "You haven't by any chance got anything hot?"

"I'm afraid I haven't," I said. "But I think a glass of brandy would do you good."

"If you'll give me a little," she said, "I think it would."

I found my flask and poured a tot of brandy into its cup.

"Drink that down," I said, "and I'll give you a coat."

"It's just the dawn," she said. "I'll be all right as soon as the sun gets up."

But I made her put on a big coat that I had in the car; then I gave her a cigarette and began to get out the food.

IT was a curious breakfast.

The sward was wet with dew, and so she sat in the car, a suitcase for a table, set up in the driver's seat. Smoked salmon and bread and butter, and *pâté* and galantine—I served them as best I could, using the step as a sideboard, and thankful to see her eat. For drink, we had only beer; but she drank a glass of that.

At length she slid out of the car and onto the sward.

"I've done, but you haven't," she said. "Could you possibly lend me a sponge? And soap and a brush and comb? If you could, I'll go down to the water and do my best."

I was glad to do as she asked; for only three days before, I had bought myself a new outfit of toilet requisites. But as she went off with these things

and a cashmere scarf, which I had, to serve as a towel, I could not help thinking how miserable she must be—dressed up in a party frock in which she had spent the night, yet quite unable to change so much as her stockings—because, of course, she had nothing else to put on.

And there it occurred to me that I had some new gray trousers and plenty of sleeveless shirts.

BY the time she was back, I had a change of raiment laid out on a rug—with a bath-dressing-gown and a new toothbrush, out of my store of spares.

I heard her cry of delight, as they met her eyes.

"Oh, Esau! How marvelous! Are these things really for me?"

"I thought," said I, "you might be glad of a change."

She stared at the clumsy apparel, finger to lip.

"I'll tell you what," she said. "Not now, but a little later, I'll have a bathe. And then, what joy—to be able to put on clean things."

"A bathe," said I, "would suit me down to the socks."

"But not for an hour. You've just been eating. Wash your face and hands—and shave, if you feel that way. But don't be long."

I was back in a quarter of an hour, and as I parted the bushes, I saw her before she saw me.

The cushions were out of the car, on the farther edge of the sward. Because of the rising woods, the sunshine was not yet falling upon the grass, but because she was higher up, her head and shoulders were bathed in the blessed light. She was sitting, staring before her, with her knees drawn up and her fingers laced about them—and as desperate a look on her face as ever I saw. She looked neither tired nor afraid, but her beauty was tragic.

Not knowing what else to do, I stole a few paces back. Then I advanced noisily. . . . As again I parted the bushes, I saw, to my relief, that the look was out of her face; and as I advanced, she met my gaze gravely, then set a hand on the cushion that lay by her side.

"Let me get a pipe," said I. "And you'd like a cigarette?"

"Very well."

A moment later I took my seat beside her, glad of the sun. Then I lighted her cigarette and unfolded my pouch.

"You don't look tired," I said. "And yet you should be all in."

"So should you," said Katharine, "—driving all night."

"For some reason I'm not. I imagine that later on we'll both be glad of a rest."

"I expect so. And we can have it. I don't want to leave here till dusk." She regarded the palms of her hands. "And now, if you please, let's tell one another the truth. The air has got to be cleared, so we'd better do it at once. I'm not going to keep anything back—it's too late now. And I'm not going to throw any stones, for the fault was mine. I should never have sent you that note. How in God's name did you manage to run me to earth? I mean, I had gone to ground before you were called."

I told her all that had happened the day before: how the one idea I had had had been to get to Bordeaux and to find her there; how George and the porter, between them, had let me down; how I had arranged to leave Rouen as soon as ever George came; and how the merest chance had taken me into the café in which she was.

"I was killing time," I concluded. "I meant to drive all night to get down to Bordeaux. But George's train wasn't due till eleven o'clock. And so I was walking the streets, because I couldn't sit still. Then I landed up in that square from which I couldn't get out, and seeing a café there, I decided to have a drink before retracing my steps. I never saw you at first: but when I did, I could hardly believe my eyes."

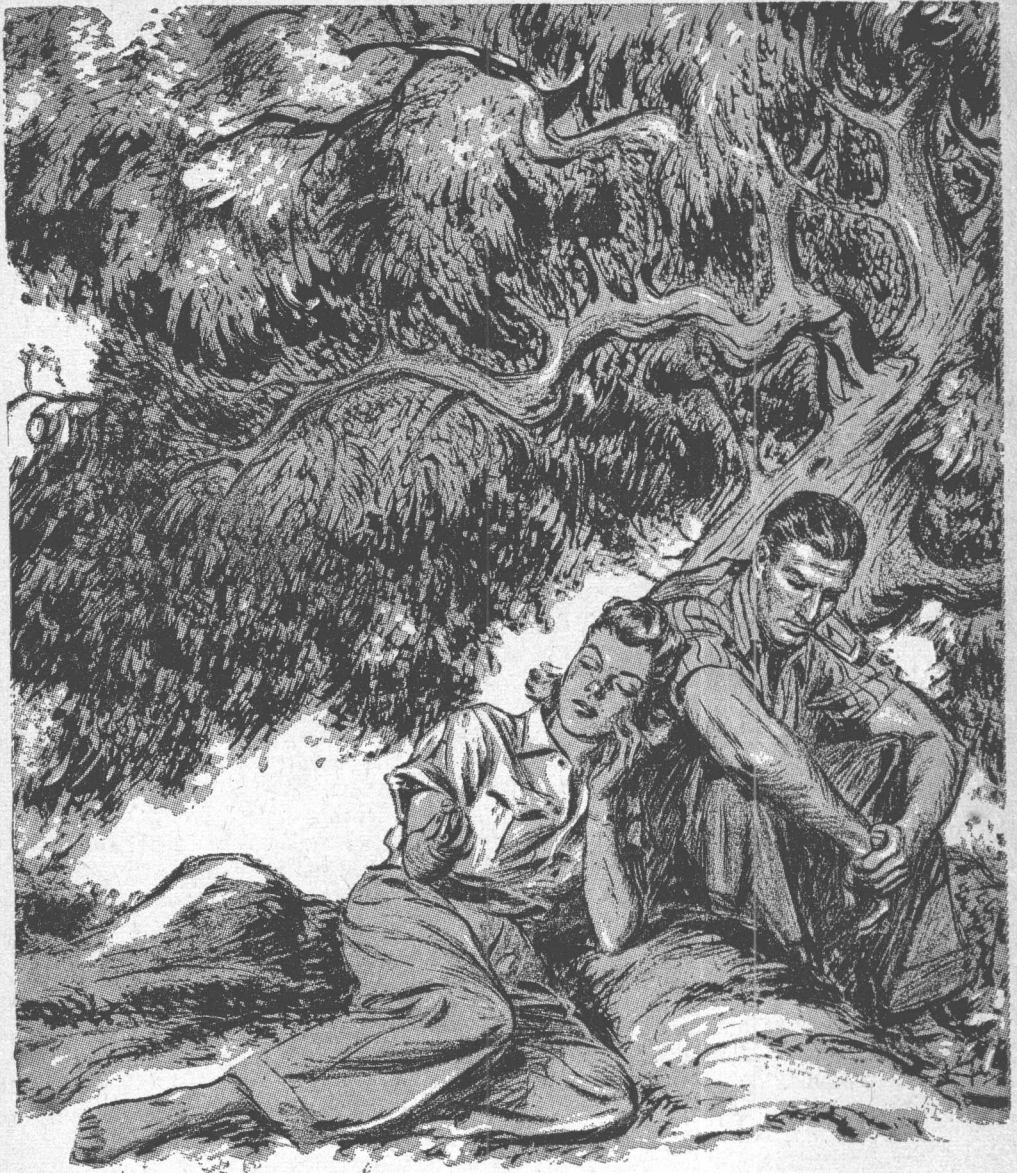
KATHARINE sighed.

"I wish you hadn't," she said. "And I'll tell you another thing: That you should have entered that café means that your guardian angel—well, he wasn't earning his keep."

"To be honest," I said, "I thought that some of the customers looked a bit queer. But it seemed all right from outside. In fact, better than most."

"Now and again," said Katharine, "a 'non-member' does blow in. It doesn't often happen. The Wet Flag's not in the books, and it's off the beaten track. But it has been known to happen. And unless he is answered for, unless some 'member' can say that he is all right—well, I don't know what happens to him; but he never comes back."

"Member?" said I, staring. "Then my first impression was right. It is a



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club of sorts—this place that you call the Wet Flag.”

Katharine raised her eyebrows.

“Yes,” she said, “it is. It is ‘a club of sorts.’ In fact, it’s a thieves’ kitchen—to use the traditional term. And I am a member—because, you see, I’m a crook.”

Chapter Three

I HAVE taken some knocks in my time: but this revelation of Katharine’s, so bluntly and casually made, actually set my ears singing—and that is the downright truth. . . . I began to review

the facts. Grisly or no, they simply had to be faced: This glorious, well-bred creature belonged to the criminal class; my most attractive companion, of whom I had been so proud, was nothing more or less than a common thief: Katharine was Formosa—the girl whose hand I had kissed, who had left behind her that tender, pitiful note:

“You’ve made it so very hard for me to do the right thing.”

It was the thought of that sentence that brought me up all standing, dispersed the facts I was facing and showed me, instead, two definite, flaming truths:

The first was this: though she gave herself that name, she was not by nature



"Yes," she said. "it's a thieves' kitchen. And I am a member—because, you see, I am a crook."

a crook. And the second—that I was in love with one of the criminal class.

"Takes getting hold of, doesn't it?"

I looked up to meet her gray eyes.

"It would," said I, "if it happened to be the truth."

"It's true enough—and you know it."

"Let me put it like this," said I, my eyes upon hers. "For some reason or other, you may have done as crooks do. But that doesn't make you a crook. Nothing on earth, my dear, could ever do that."

She was looking down and away.

"That's—very handsome," she said. "But you can't get round it like that."

"I'm not getting round it," said I. "I don't care who you've run with, or what you've done. Everyone there was a crook—I can see it now. But you are not of that kidney, and never were. That means that you had good reason for mucking in with that crowd. What that reason was, I neither know nor care. You had good reason—and that is enough for me."

"In fact, you believe in—Formosa?"

Her head was still turned away, and she spoke very low.

"With all my heart," I said gently. "I may not know my world, but I've seen the light in your eyes."

There was a little silence. Then—

"I've never stolen," said Katharine. "I only carry the stuff. That's just as bad, of course: it's no good stealing a thing if you can't get it safely away. But in fact, I have never stolen; and nine times out of ten, I never set eyes on a jewel. I'm not excusing myself. By rights, I should be in jail. But—since you believe in Formosa, I'd like you to hear her side, for what it is worth. No one has ever heard it, and no one but you ever will. And no one but you would believe it—it's just a shade too fantastic for people who know their world."

"I'd love to hear it," I said. "But don't think that I've got to. I know your hands are clean, and I don't have to have any proof."

Katharine looked at me.

"You're very sweet, Esau," she said. "I'll make it as short as I can."

"My father's an artist—a painter: at least, he was. If he had cared to paint portraits, I think he'd have made a big name; but he had a private income, and so he wouldn't bother, but painted whatever he pleased. He had a rare eye for beauty and all things fair. He never could bear ostentation of any kind; but simple, natural things were the breath of his life. Anything sordid or vulgar caused him genuine distress; and I want you to understand that this wasn't a pose. He was—and is—unusually sensitive."

"Well, he served right through the War, and as you may well imagine, it left its mark on his soul. What left a still deeper mark was my mother's death. She died in 1918, when I was born. Bruised and broken-hearted, for my sake he held up his head; but the ways of the post-war world were more than he could endure, and so he began to wander, in search of some corner in Europe which had been spared. He found it in 1930, when I was twelve; and he came straight back to England, to fetch me and take me out, so that I could share with him his great discovery."

"Cardinal is a little hamlet, right in the heart of France. It's really very lovely, set on the banks of a river and

sunk in magnificent woods. Its people are very simple and quite unspoiled, and they live and work as they used to in bygone days. But Cardinal's pride is its castle, a little pocket château, hung high above the village in the Fifteenth Century by someone who knew how to build. It was for sale, and my father bought it at once. And then he set to work to restore it.

"He and the village masons did all the work. It took five years to do, and I saw it done. And when it was finished, it was the most perfect thing. It's like a lovely little fairy castle. And it faces south, and it sleeps in the sun all day; and below it the water-wheels are running, and the smoke from a score of chimneys lies like a veil in the treetops, because the air is so still.

"Well, as I've told you, it took five years to do. And when Cardinal was once again perfect in every way, my father went blind. One day he could see, and the next he had lost his sight. And that, irreparably.

"He took it wonderfully. I'm sorry, he'd say, 'but it might be so very much worse. I'm here at Cardinal, and I know its beauty by heart. I'll be happy here, with the speech of the birds about me, and the lisp of the wind in the trees.'

"The servants were very faithful—we've only four: and as I was careful to see that everything went the same, he really survived very well this great catastrophe. He knew the castle so well that soon he could move about as he did before; his clothes were laid out, as always; the meals were served as usual, with Conrad—that's the butler—standing behind his chair; and after six weeks, Esau, if you had dined there with us, I honestly do not believe that you would have known he was blind.

BUT one thing he could not do; that was business. His correspondence was small; but he couldn't sign cheques or write letters, and things like that. Not that it mattered, because I took all that on. I was seventeen then, and though I knew nothing before, I very soon picked things up.

"There wasn't much to pick up. What savings he had, had gone on Cardinal; but he couldn't touch his income, for that was settled on me. It was fifteen hundred a year—and more than enough, for Cardinal only costs a thousand a year to run. So, as I say, I soon got the hang of things. . . . And then, on my eight-

WHEN THE DEVIL DRIVES

teenth birthday, I opened a note from his bank. It was very politely worded, but very firm. No more cheques could be honored, until my father's account was in credit again. This shook me up, for I knew that we weren't overdrawn. But there I was wrong. We were: for no income had been paid in for nearly six months.

TO cut a long story short, the money was gone. . . . A trust company had crashed, and we had nothing at all—except an overdraft of two hundred and fifty pounds.

"I never told my father—he doesn't know to this day; but I had a pretty bad time for the next few days. The thought of his leaving Cardinal was something I could not face; and yet I had to face something far worse than that—a blind man, lodged in some alley where rooms were cheap, while his daughter tried to earn money to buy them bread. Deprived of all he set store by, my father must surely die, or go out of his mind.

"Well, I managed to cover up somehow for twenty-four hours: and then I left for London, to sell my jewels. They had been my mother's, of course, and I worked out that they'd make twelve hundred pounds. That would pay off the overdraft and carry Cardinal on for the better part of a year.

"And then a strange thing happened:

"We had a fearful crossing—the Channel was at its worst. And one poor woman on board was terribly ill. To make matters worse, she had a little girl with her, and though the scrap wasn't ill, she was frightened to death. I happen to be a good sailor, and so I took charge of the child. The mother couldn't thank me enough, and all she wanted to do was to prove her gratitude. And then, on the way to London, she used these words:

"I know my place, and it's no good asking you out. But I'll tell you what, my dear—if ever you want a fine brooch, or a bracelet or diamond ring, never you go to Bond Street. You write to me. My husband's in Hatton Garden; and when he knows what you've done, he'll get you whatever you want and let you have it at cost."

"Well, that was good enough. There and then I told her that I had come to London on purpose to sell my jewels, and that if she meant what she said, here was her chance to help me to do a good deal. To say she jumped at it

means nothing at all. Her husband was at Victoria; and before I left the platform, I'd arranged to be at his office at noon the following day.

"I went—to get the shock of my life. He examined the jewels with the greatest possible care; then he said he would try to get me six hundred and twenty-two pounds.

"He proved his case, all right. He showed me other gems, and then turned them up in his books and showed me the prices he'd paid. But that didn't temper the wind; it only satisfied me that I was up against it far more than I'd dreamed. And what with all I'd been through, this unexpected punch put me down and out. I fainted properly. And when I came to, I was lying flat on a sofa, and he and another man were bathing my temples and wrists.

"Who the other man was I had no idea; but I took him to be some magnate, for he was issuing orders and taking charge; and my friend—Mr. Cohen—was fairly twittering. Then the man sent Cohen off for brandy; and when Cohen was gone, he asked what my trouble might be.

"I told him some of the truth—because I wasn't myself; but I had had no one to talk to, and he was a business man. I didn't like his looks; but—any port in a storm. He might be able to help me—you never knew.

WELL, he listened carefully. Then he asked me where I was staying, how long I should be there; then Cohen came back with the brandy; and soon after that I cleared out. Two days went by, and then I received a note. It was from the magnate, all right, and he said if I'd come and see him, he had a suggestion to make. Hatton Garden again, but a different house. I went, and he made his suggestion: Two thousand a year and expenses, if I would do as he wished. 'Smuggling,' he called it; for nearly three months I really believed it was. And then one day I found that it wasn't smuggling.

"My impulse was to go to the police, and I wish to God I had: but you see, my hands were not clean, and I dreaded the awful exposure which must result if I did. So I went to—my employer, instead. I told him what he was fit for, and pitched the stuff down at his feet. And then I walked out.

"I didn't get very far. That night I was in a cabin, on board a ship in the



SATAN

stream. The door was locked, and I couldn't open the porthole, and I didn't like the look of the negro who came when I rang the bell. He—my employer—came to see me an hour before the ship sailed. He said I could take my choice: carry on as before, or sail for Buenos Aires, to take on a—a different job.

"And so I went back.

"I TRIED again, later on. By that time I was afraid to go to the police. I was involved too deeply—he'd seen to that. And so I just disappeared. And after lying low for ten days, I ventured to Cardinal.

"A letter was waiting for me there.

"Till then, I had never dreamed that he knew my true name and address; for I'd taken my mother's name, and I'd always been so careful to cover my tracks. But he knows—everything.

"The letter was very short. It simply said that if I did not return, he was coming to Cardinal. *'I must make your father's acquaintance. In a sense he is my protégé. I have kept Cardinal going for more than a year. And when he knows this—'*

"Well—needs must, when the devil drives. I couldn't face torture like that. And so once more I went back."

She put her hands to her temples and pushed back her shining hair.

"And that was how I learned what I might have perceived before—that *having begun, I had simply got to go on.* When I reported for duty, he rammed that home. 'Don't do it again,' he said, 'lest a worse thing befall. You're worth the trouble you've given—but not any more.' I realized then that I'd never be permitted to clear, because I knew too much. You see, I know a great deal—that shouldn't be known. I know the thieves and receivers; I know the big men and small; I know their habits and customs and where they are to be found. I know how the police are outwitted and see the mistakes they make: when a crime's done, I can tell you who planned it as well as who carried it out—because I am in on these things. . . . And once you are in on those things, you've got to go on or go under—there's no other way."

"What d'you mean—'go under'?" I said.

Katharine shrugged and picked up a cigarette.

"Lose your life," she said slowly. "I can't put it plainer than that. Twice my life has been spared, because—well, because it was worth it. You see, I'm valuable. Because of my birth and my breeding, I am 'above suspicion,' and I can go anywhere. For that reason, too, he's always played straight with me. But now he's through. I know it. He's got a good many faults; but he never threatens twice."

There was another silence—a much longer one than before. Her cigarette was half smoked before I spoke.

"I'm afraid I've torn it," I said.

"Fate has torn it," said Katharine. "It wasn't your fault."

"The point is—it's torn," said I.

Katharine gave a short nod.

"Yes," she said, "it's torn. When you walked up to my table, the veil of the temple was rent." She threw down her cigarette and covered her eyes. "When I saw you come in, I was graveled—I couldn't think what to do. I knew you were bound to see me; and once you'd seen me, I knew you were bound to come up. And that was, of course, what happened.

"I hardly know what I said, but I tried to force you—to blast you out of

that room. If you'd turned on your heel and gone, I think they'd have let you go. But when you stood your ground—well, that was about as good as walking onto the drop. You would have been—er—rendered unconscious, then dropped into the Seine.

"Well, something had to be done. The door was hopeless, of course; but I knew the back way out. Most of us know it—in case: but it's not allowed to be used. I mean, that's understood. The question was how to make it, and take you too. And then I thought of the switch-board. I knew that was fixed in a cupboard, inside the ladies' room. Well, that was all right; but I had to be able to see, whilst everyone else was blind. So I shut my eyes for two minutes; then I put up my hand and pulled the main switch down; then I shut and locked the cupboard and took the key; and then I got hold of you, and you know the rest."

"You saved my life," I said.

"Perhaps. But what else could I do? If you had been placed as I was, you couldn't have let me go down."

"And as a result, you're—'wanted.'"

KATHARINE gave her short nod. "We're both 'wanted,'" she said. "The Shepherd wants us—that's the man with the eyes. And—it's no good not facing facts—he usually gets what he wants."

"Does he, indeed?" said I—and felt as ripe for murder as ever I did in my life. "Was he the swine who 'engaged' you three years ago? When you were right up against it, and ready to sell your soul?"

"Yes, it was he."

I sucked in my breath.

"It's as well for us both," said I, "that I didn't know that last night. Never mind. Some other time. If he tries as hard as you say, we shall probably meet."

Katharine caught my arm.

"My dear, you're out of your mind. You've about as much chance with the Shepherd as a baby would have with a tiger who'd lost his kill."

"I know," I said. "I'm not going after him. I don't believe in throwing one's life away. But if somebody's after you—well, the time may come when it suits you to let him come up."

"I'm afraid I can't see that time coming. I know the Shepherd—and his men Bright Boy and Satan—too well."

I rose to my feet and stretched.

"And I actually thought," I said, smiling, "that I had torn things!"

Katharine stared up at me.

"What has happened to change your mind?"

"Reflection," I said. "Nothing else. Upon reflection, I see that I've done you a very good turn. I think your mess of pottage has cost you enough."

I drew her up to her feet, and looked into her eyes.

"I'm sorry, my lady," I said, "but you shouldn't have sent me that note."

"Don't be a fool. I was trying to temper the wind."

"That's all I'm doing," said I. "Let's leave it at that."

TWELVE lazy hours had gone by. We had bathed and slept, and Katharine was wearing my clothes, which, because they were far too big, made her look like a beautiful child. For the time she went barefoot, because she was sick of her shoes; and there, of course, my wardrobe had broken down.

The change and the rest had refreshed her: and as she sat by my side on the sunlit sward, propping herself on one arm and considering one of my maps, I found it hard to believe that this was indeed Formosa, who had flouted the police of Europe for three long years.

After a while she looked up.

"Listen, Esau," she said. "We've had a nice, quiet day, and if things were what they look like, we'd pack up our traps and go to some good hotel. But things aren't what they look like, and though you mayn't believe it, we're in a hell of a jam. For the moment we're off the map. But we've got to *stay* off the map for some considerable time. For at least a month they'll ransack France for us both; and it's no good our clearing out, for they'll watch the ports. The Shepherd has wires he can pull all over the place. And the Wet Flag's like an Exchange. Last night the news went out that Formosa had cut and run; and what is much more to the point, that the Shepherd would like her back. And, as the Shepherd's worth pleasing, that means that petty crooks all over the place will keep an eye cocked for Formosa, and if they should see her go by, will try and follow her up."

I think that I must have shown the surprise I felt, for I heard her sigh, and a hand went up to her head.

"Esau dear, get this: However absurd it seems, you must accept as gospel

whatever I tell you. For one thing only—law-abiding people have no conception at all of the way in which news goes round in the underworld. Rumor, perhaps; but the rumor is always right. Nothing is ever written, so far as I know; but no system of information is half as quick or as good. The things they know about people would startle you out of your life. After all, it's a secret service; and the better the service is, the more money it makes.

“AND now let's get back to the point—which is that our lives depend on our not being found. Well, we obviously can't stay here. We've got to have food and shelter, and I've got to have some clothes. In a word, we've got to start fair; and that is why tonight we must make for Cardinal.”

“But won't that be asking for trouble? I mean—”

“I think he'll try elsewhere first. Only last night he told me a way to pass into Spain. And I think he's now going all out to stop that gap. I may be wrong, but I think he will make up his mind that Cardinal is the one place I shall avoid. If I'm right, that will give us a breather. No more than that, of course; for when he's drawn blank elsewhere, he's certain to go to my home. But before then we shall be gone. I can warn the servants against him, and Cardinal's half a fort; but I don't think he'll trouble my father—he's past blackmail.

“It may have been a mistake to rest today; but ask too much of the flesh, and the spirit will let you down. And I'd very much rather travel by night than day. Besides, to tell you the truth, when we got here this morning, I didn't know where to turn. It's only during the day that I've managed to work things out.

“Well, from here to Cardinal is three hundred and fifty miles. On the roads we are going to take, you'll have to drive very well to average thirty-five; and that works out at over ten hours—which means, if we leave at dusk, that we ought to be in by six. I sha'n't like the last two hours, but it can't be helped. And as I said just now, I think he'll rule Cardinal out for two or three days.”

“I'm in your hands,” said I. “But we'll have to take in petrol—twice, I'm afraid.”

She bit her lip.

“I'm sorry for that. Tonight doesn't matter at all. But tomorrow morning

does. It means waking somebody up; and when you don't want to be noticed, that's not the way to behave. Still, that's a drop in the bucket—of this appalling stew.” She put her hands to her eyes. “I'm afraid to look at the future, because if I did, I believe I should throw in my hand. Havoc's ahead all right, and I can't see any way through. But the obvious thing to do is to try and hang on to our lives—if only because, when we're dead, we can't do anything more.”

With that, she turned again to the map and left me staring before me, regarding the efforts of a beetle to find a way off the blade of grass he had climbed, without turning back.

Sitting there, in that peaceful place, it was very hard to believe that we were in peril, let alone danger of death; and when I remembered the office in Crutched Friars, my pleasant, window-boxed chambers in Savile Row, the cheerful London traffic and all that went to make up the safe, untroubled existence which I had so lately led, I was almost prepared to wake up and find myself sitting at Rouen, still waiting for George's train.

I THINK I may be forgiven.

I had read of crime in the papers; I had never been into a police-court, had never seen an arrest; I had always supposed that, pickpockets apart, unless you had great possessions, no rogue on earth could be bothered to look at you twice. And I had firmly believed that no crook ever did murder, unless he had his back to the wall. I had heard of the underworld; and it meant no more to me than the urban district council of Zanzibar. . . . And now I was “wanted” by one of its leading men—the dent on the Lowland's boot left no doubt about that. And because his writ ran in Europe, I must not drive by daylight over the roads of France; because I had encountered Formosa, I was to be put to death!

A gust of anger swept me. Who was this filthy sewer-rat to raise his hand against me? Who was this beast to pursue me, because I had dared to raise my eyes to his prey. His prey! A lady of high degree—of whom he had taken advantage, when she was down and out. “He called it *smuggling*.” And when she had tried to withdraw, he had made ready to ship her beautiful body for Buenos Aires. . . . I felt the sweat break upon my forehead, as I pictured the

stuffy cabin, and the Shepherd dictating his terms. And then—blackmail: a threat to break her father, to smash the life for which she had sold her soul. "And so I went back." Because he said so, she must go on or go under. For her, no hope; nothing but running the gantlet, risking her name and her freedom, to carry his stolen goods. . . . The thing was intolerable. If Scotland Yard— And then I saw that I could not call on the police; for Katharine was Formosa; and anyone in touch with Formosa would be just a shade too welcome at Scotland Yard.

"HAVE you got things straighter?" said Katharine.

I looked up to see her watching me, finger to lip.

"Yes," I said boldly, "I have; but I'm still a bit out of my depth, so I look to you. It's very kind of you to ask me to Cardinal; I'll love to meet your father and stay with you at your home. How we get there is, of course, a matter for you; but it seems to me a scandalous thing that in this year of grace, you and I should go in fear of our lives, because your late employer disapproves of our acquaintance. That sort of thing makes me feel that the Shepherd's death and burial are overdue: I mean, the man seems to me to have outlived his usefulness."

"There are many quarters," said Katharine, "in which that sentiment would be greeted with prolonged applause—provided, of course, that the Shepherd was out of earshot. But when, encouraged by this, you called for recruits, you'd find that all your supporters had something much better to do."

"That I can well believe. Of such is the kingdom of hell. And as a result, we have got to bow to the storm. We must, of course—for the moment. And when we're at Cardinal, we'll talk about him again."

"Do you realize now why he wants to find you so much?"

I shrugged. "Because, I suppose," I said, "I wandered behind the scenes."

"Let me give you his point of view, Esau. You followed me to the Wet Flag: you saw with half an eye that I was keeping—well, doubtful company; you determined to stand your ground and to get to the bottom of this. He therefore tried *and failed* to—shall we say, shut your mouth. Result: you are at large, and so at liberty, if ever you see

him again, to point him out to the police and demand his arrest. Add to all this that Formosa has thrown in her lot with you, and you must be able to see that, from his point of view, his mental and physical health depend upon your being found *and* silenced as soon as possible."

"Well, it's nice to think he's worried," said I.

"You may," said Katharine, "be perfectly sure of that. You see, he's a pretty big man. He has a beautiful flat in town; and I don't think you'd believe me if I told you the name of his club." . . .

I had driven for nearly eight hours, and we had covered two hundred and thirty odd miles. The roads had been tricky, and some of them none too good; but it was the level crossings that spoiled our time. How many we met I forget, but seven of these had been shut. Had it been day, this would have been bad enough; but in nearly every case the keeper was fast asleep and had to be roused. Of course if one goes across country at dead of night, one must, I suppose, expect to be badly served; but the waste of time was enough to break anyone's heart. I would have been thankful myself to open and close the gates, but though I tried more than once, they were always locked.

And now the dawn was coming—the east was pale; and we had still to cover one hundred and seventeen miles.

THE strain had told on us, for we could not lose sight of the fact that we might be driving straight into the enemy's arms; and in any event we were heading for dangerous country, where neither could tell what a bend in the road might conceal. Then again the delays at the crossings had sickened our hearts, had made us feel that the stars were fighting against us, holding us up to serve the enemy's turn.

It was just a quarter to five when I put out my lights. But I did not put out the hooded light on the dash. It was no good not facing facts: The petrol-gauge was a telltale I had to watch. And when I remembered the petrol which had been pumped out of my tank on a certain summer evening, a lifetime ago, I could not help feeling that Fortune must have her tongue in her cheek.

So for another ten miles, while the country about us unveiled, and distance took shape, and a crag on the left stood up like a mourning hatchment against the glow of the dawn.

At last I could bear it no longer, and cleared my throat.

"My dear," I said, "I'm sorry: but very soon we've got to take petrol in."

I heard her catch her breath, and saw her eyes leap to the dash.

Then—"How much does that say?"

"Just over a gallon," said I. "Less than twenty miles."

She bit her lip. "That means the next pump," she said. "And a hundred to one the fellow will be in bed. He'll never forget the people who had him up and out at a quarter past five."

"He needn't see both," said I. "You can walk on out of sight before I knock at the door."

"That's too easy," said Katharine. "I think perhaps we'd better make for a town." She picked up a map. "I think we're close to Volet. There may be an all-night garage; and anyway there'll be any number of pumps. It's the lonely petrol-station that lets the fugitive down."

Volet was twelve miles off, and eighteen minutes later we entered upon its cobbled streets.

For two or three minutes we picked our way through the town, moving very slowly and peering to right and to left down ways which we passed; then our street curved into a *place* in which stood a decent hotel. By the side of this hotel stood its garage; and the doors of the garage were open, though those of the hotel were shut. What was still more to the point, in the jaws of the garage entrance some car was being fueled—from a pump which was inside the garage and out of our sight.

"The luck that changed," said Katharine. "Who but a guest would use a hotel garage to fill his tank?"

The back of the car was toward us; and as I brought the Lowland to rest on the opposite side of the way, a man in clogs appeared, to play with the pipe for a moment and then lift it clear of the tank and screw the cap back into place. Then he reentered the garage, to hang up the pipe. A moment or two elapsed, during which, no doubt, some payment was being made; then he appeared again, to watch the car into the road. As its driver moved slowly backward, he waved him on with his hand.

I let the other get clear. Then I swung over the road, over the pavement and into the garage itself.

As I stopped where the other had stood, the man in clogs came shambling

up to the door; but when I asked for "petrol," he only stared, for *petrole* is not petrol, but paraffin. Of such is the curse of Babel. . . . And Katharine had to lean forward and put me right.

For obvious reasons, I did not get out of the car; but I watched the petrol-gauge and I took my note-case out.

After a frantic calculation—"How much shall I give him?" I whispered.

Katharine made no answer; and when I looked at her, I saw there was something wrong.

She was white as a sheet; she did not seem to be breathing; her eyes were shut.

"Good God," I said, "what's wrong?"

She did not speak, but I saw her open her eyes and look to the left.

I followed her gaze.

A glare of lamps was lighting the concrete sink, upon which a car could be washed. And a car was standing there, dripping—waiting on our convenience, before it was dried. And the car was "a racing Merk," which was painted an elephant gray.

Chapter Four

THAT I was rattled, I make no shame to confess.

Indeed, the shock was so great that I cannot clearly remember what happened next.

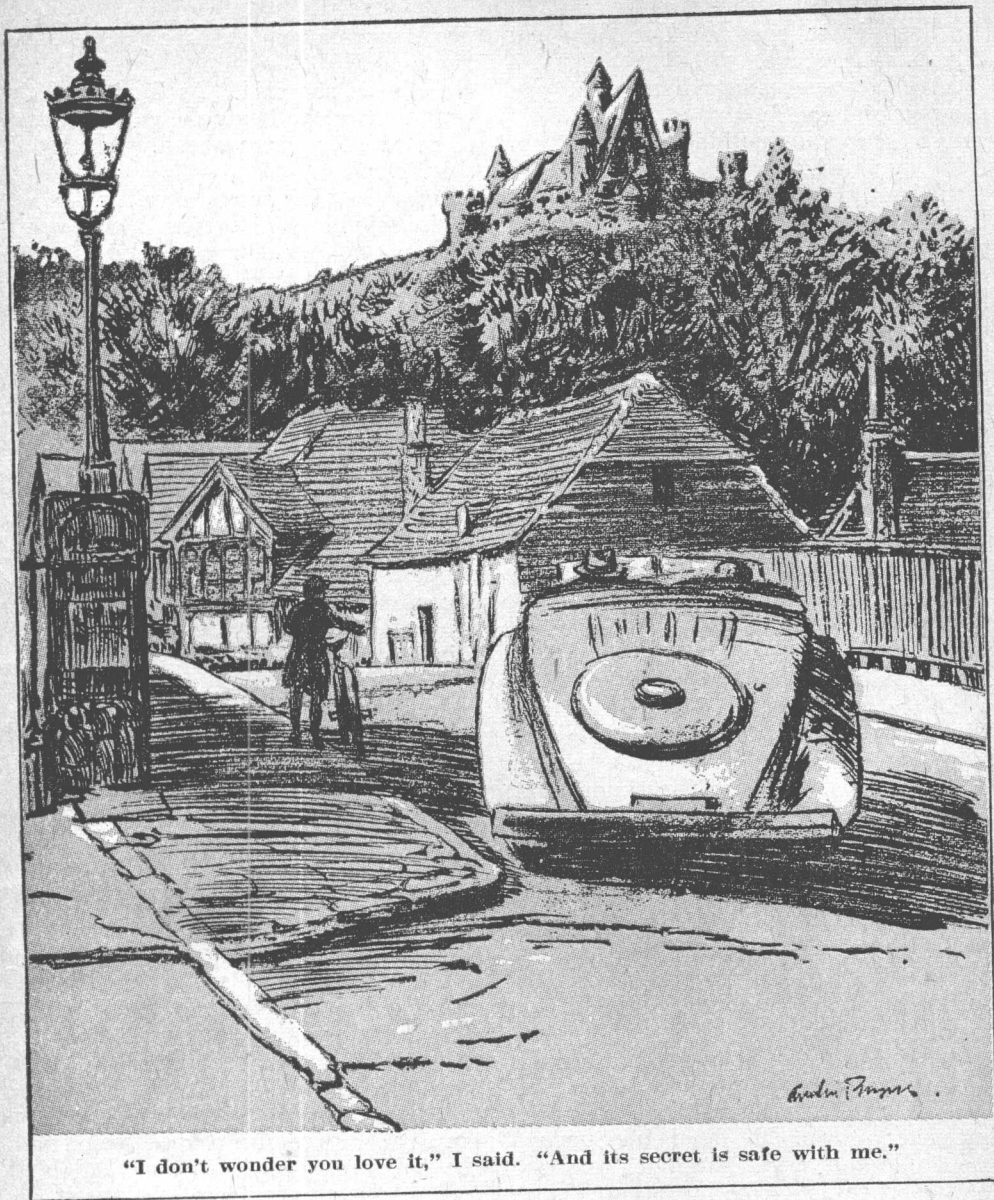
I know that the cap was screwed on, and that when the man came to the door, I could not understand what he said, and that Katharine had to tell me how much I must pay. Then I started the car and backed out, while the washer stood looking on and waving me back; and once I was in the roadway, I put the Lowland in first and drove straight on, careless of where I went, so long as I left that cursed garage behind.

At length—"Perhaps he won't talk," I said. "Unless they—they ask him, there's no reason why he should."

"What does it matter, Esau, whether they ask him or not? They're here—at Cardinal's gates. If they breakfast at eight, they can be there by half-past ten." She cupped her face in her hands. "You see, I'm a broken reed. I said they'd try elsewhere first; but I got them wrong. I'd hoped for a day or two of respite—a chance to rest and refit. And now, my God—"

"Tell me this," said I. "Are we on the right road?"

"For Cardinal? Yes."



"I don't wonder you love it," I said. "And its secret is safe with me."

"Good enough," said I, and put down my foot. "That brush was damned unpleasant—I'll give you that. But we do know where they are; and that, to me at least, is a great relief. And now let's look at it this way: As like as not, their visit has already been paid. The Cardinal covert's been drawn; and since it yielded no fox, they're on their way off. Of course they'll come back—very soon. But at least we shall have our respite—our chance to rest and refit."

"You may be right," said Katharine. "What if you're wrong?"

"We shall still have our respite," said I. "From what you said awhile back, they can't force their way in. Let the

swine wait our convenience. If, after thinking things over, we still consider it better to—to go our way, we'll choose our time and do so. I'm damned if I'll be rushed by a couple of burglars who happen to want my life."

Katharine made no answer, but I felt her eyes on my face. I went on steadily:

"I'm not so sure you're right, when you say we must stay off the map. I see two things against it: First, if you're off his map, the enemy must be off yours; and that is very trying. At least, I think it would be—moving with your chin on your shoulder from morning to night. Secondly, some day or other you've got to come on it again. I mean,

that stands to reason. I've only got three months' leave."

"Are you suggesting, Esau, that you should stand and fight?"

"I'm suggesting nothing," said I. "I'm thinking aloud."

"I don't like your thoughts very much. For one thing only, those two can play with a pistol, but you are not armed. And if they ran into us now, they'd bump you off, like brushing a fly off their nose. I mean that, Esau. France is not like England. They'd never hear any more of their—escapade."

"I'll take your word for that. But the honest truth is that neither you nor I will be fit to work out our salvation until we have had some rest. And when I say 'rest,' I mean a bath and breakfast. I don't feel a bit like sleep."

With the tail of my eye, I saw her give her short nod.

"There's common sense," she said. "We'll have things out when we've had a wash and brush-up. But do get hold of this: that we are up against people who know no law. They'll go all lengths to get us—because they will not be able to take *their* rest until they know that we are no longer alive."

Since a girl should have the last word, I left it there; but I felt that that statement of hers had proved my case. Unless I stood and fought, I must prepare to be hunted for years to come. Which was absurd. The thing was to choose one's ground and to come to grips.

FOR the next two hours we ran through lovely country—hill and dale and woodland, with here and there a village, but never a town. The day being Sunday, the traffic was very slight; but the workaday world was awake by seven o'clock, and bells were ringing and peasants were going to Mass. The morning was very handsome: I never saw sunlight so brilliant in my life; and the meadows were cloth-of-silver, because of a heavy dew.

Just twenty minutes later the Lowland swam over some crest, to enter woods so thick that the view upon either hand was wholly obscured; and though the road twisted and turned and rose and fell, for the next two miles we never saw any country, but only the curtains of foliage hanging and swaying and glancing to right and to left.

Katharine was speaking.

"Lift your foot for a moment; we're coming to a break in the trees. It's round the next bend. Half a minute

won't matter, and I'd like you to see—my home."

I did as she said. As I rounded the bend at twenty, I saw the gap she spoke of some fifty paces ahead. Abreast of this I stopped.

I was looking across a valley, the opposite side of which was as thickly wooded as ours. Below were lying green meadows, bordered with piled stone walls, and a stream was tumbling through them—I could see the flourish of foam, where a rock rose out of its bed. What caught the eye at once was the way in which woods and meadows were taking each other's ground, for the trees ran down in irregular lines and patches into the fields, to pay for this pretty trespass by casting their shade upon the grass; and now and again the meadows climbed up by lynchets into the arms of the woods. And other things caught the eye: Astride the stream was lying a tiny village, whose walls were white and whose roofs were an old rose red; a pocket church was thrusting a little belfry; a toy of a bridge was spanning the busy stream, and a water-wheel was dripping with silver, and smoke was rising into the breathless air. Over all, the air of contentment and simple *amour propre* cried out for the pen of a Goldsmith, to catch a charm which I cannot hope to describe. And above the village was hanging a miniature castle, exactly as its mistress had said. Sunk in the living green, its old gray stone looked finer than any jewel, and it made me think of a cameo, broochéd to a handsome cloak. All the lovely detail was there—battlement, turret and mullion, the slender spire of a chapel, the terrace, the old stone steps: nothing had been omitted by the builders who set it up. Yet all was Lilliputian. It was a baby stronghold, ruling a baby town.

AS we entered the village, I turned to Katharine, to see the softest look in her fine gray eyes.

"I don't wonder you love it," I said. "And its secret is safe with me; for if I told someone about it, he'd write me off as a liar and leave it there."

Katharine smiled—for the first time for fully four hours.

"Let's have a close-up," she said. "But don't expect too much. Cardinal has a guest-chamber; but you're the first guest we've had."

"*Force majeure*," said I, and let in my clutch.

"Yes, in a way, I suppose: and yet that night at Newhaven I wished so much that I could show you my home."

"No man could ask for a sweeter invitation than that."

Katharine looked straight ahead.

"You were nice to me," she said, "and you asked no—no payment at all. And what upset me was your eyes; they were down on the ground when they should have been lifted up. And Cardinal stood out so clearly as the ideal corrective for Crutched Friars."

TWO hours had gone by. I had bathed and changed; and Conrad, the English butler, had brought me a blessed breakfast of eggs and coffee and honey and new-baked bread. All this in two very small chambers, paneled with oak. Never before had I used apartments so fine; and the sunlight seemed the richer for falling upon such carving of wood and stone. And now I was down on the terrace, to which I had found my way, surveying the pageant before me, and gladly admitting the force of my lady's words. Cardinal *was* a corrective. You could not get away from the fact that the peasants who worked in the mills and the meadows below were better off than a merchant in Crutched Friars.

Then I put such thoughts aside and began to consider my surroundings from a fugitive's point of view. Looking across the village, I saw the gap in the woods from which I had viewed the castle two hours before. From there, though I could not see it because of the trees, I knew that the road fell down unusually sharp, doubling upon itself, to gain the valley below. This descent being over, I saw it curl into the meadows some fifty yards south of the bridge, and from there I could follow with ease the line which it took—over the jolly water and into the village *place*, and then up a very steep hill which presently brought it up to the castle's gate. Two other roads ran into the little *place*, but Katharine had told me that the one by which we had come was the only road which led to the world outside.

We had, therefore, but one to watch; but I could not lose sight of the fact that if we wished to drive out from the castle, we had but one road to take—a narrow way, that could not be taken at speed. Such roads are dangerous.

And then I turned to see Katharine, framed in a little doorway.

The Devil drives to even more exciting adventures in the next—the August—installment.

As I stepped to her side, she said: "You were right: the enemy's been and gone. Someone inquired at the village yesterday afternoon. Whoever it was, was on foot; so there must have been a car in the offing, which didn't appear."

"Good," said I. "Have you given the servants orders—to let no strangers in?"

"Yes. I've told Conrad—something." She put a hand to her head. "What's going to be so hard is my father. I've told him nothing so far. I don't know where to begin."

I bit my lip. Then: "I think I ought to know what you've said about me."

"I've lied—as usual," she said. "I've had to do it for years; but it only seems to get harder as time goes by." She looked away, twisting her hands. "He thinks I'm a secretary—to a very big business man. Offices in London and Paris; that accounts for my flitting between the two. I call him 'Mr. Shepherd'—you see, it's all founded on fact. And now I've told him this—that you met me yesterday evening. You found me beside the road, with my car burned out. Everything I had with me had gone with the car, so as you were only touring, you offered to bring me home. I said that you were making for Carcassonne."

"Why Carcassonne?" I said, staring.

"Well, you had to be making for somewhere! I had to think of some name."

"That's all right," I said gently. "I only wanted to know." I glanced at a cushioned bench. "Before I meet him, d'you think we could have a talk?"

"That's why I'm here," she said. "He's down in the village now. A colt has hurt itself, and he is so strong and so gentle, they've sent for him. They always do; but I don't like his going much. He had an attack of angina two years ago; and any effort is bad when you suffer from that." She moved to the bench and took her seat on its arm. "We seem to have got our breather. How long do you think it'll last?"

"As long as we please," said I. "I'd no idea that Cardinal was so strong."

KATHARINE raised her eyebrows. "I'm not going to stay here, Esau. I'm not such a fool."

I fingered my chin. "In that case," said I, "there's nothing more to be said. What time d'you propose we should leave?"

"We must leave by night—on foot. It's the only way."

The Fourth Officer

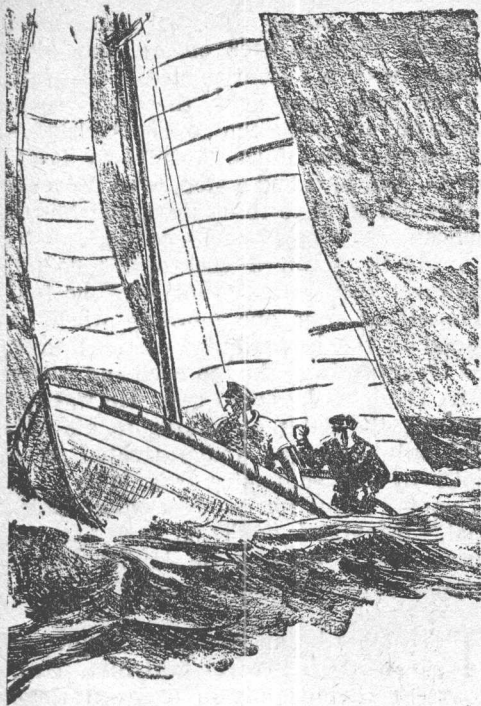


THOUGH he had made seven voyages in her fore-castle, Chris Arnold came up the bridge ladder slowly, as if it were new to him. He walked over to the mate, who was a tall man, and schoolship-trained.

"The Old—Captain Pope has made me acting fourth officer, sir," Chris Arnold said to Mr. Davis.

Mr. Davis didn't say anything. Out of his prominent eyes he stared down at Chris. The mate's bulging eyes always made him look startled. Now, combined with silence, he looked thunder-struck.

The young A.B. suffered under the strain of that blank interval. He started to explain: "It's so when you're working cargo all day at the island ports, I'll



*'A bitterly contested ship's boat
race (and a trick keel) teach
the tune of command.*

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

the day for Chris Arnold. The mate seemed ready to let fly his eyes, one-two, like stones out of a sling.

"Keep from underfoot while I'm standing my watches, or I'll step on you," Mr. Davis said. He shook a finger like a club at Chris. "I asked for an experienced junior, not something that's just crawled in through the hawsehole."

"I have my third mate's license, sir."

"When tickets make officers, underwriters will go broke," said the mate. "Off the bridge!"

Everybody liked a joke on the mate, for he had removed much skin with his whiplash of a tongue. Chris Arnold, youngest A.B. in the ship, as the fourth officer for whom the mate had been clamoring, was a good one. The Old Man, who had to play his jokes with a dead pan on account of his dignity, knew well that the conscientious mate would stand every minute of his four-to-eight morning and evening watches, no matter how busy he was with cargo at the island ports of call. It was a good one.

BUT to be a joke, as Chris Arnold now was, to be even a good joke, can be tough. It can be so tough, in fact, that weary Chris Arnold took a long hard look at the beach when she dropped her hook in St. Thomas harbor. All the way down from Brooklyn to the Virgins, the embittered Mr. Davis, pacing the bridge, had belabored the joke, since the joker was above him.

"Mr. Arnold! Go down and show those soldiers on the foredeck how to handle a chipping hammer—and continue showing 'em till eight bells. Hit twice their pace—and keep hitting it. . . ."

"Mr. Acting Fourth! Some of those fellows seem afraid that souji mouji will burn their delicate hands. Give 'em a lead! Show 'em how to clean paint like an officer and a gentleman, and to blaze with hands! I'll struggle along up here by myself. . . ."

"Those cargo-nets are bad, Mr. Arnold. You couldn't trust 'em to hold a rubber elephant. They need an officer's

stand your bridge watch, sir, and you'll have all night in."

*Aleck Munro, first assistant engineer, who had been overhauling the telemotor gear, suddenly stuck his grinning face out of the wheelhouse door.

"All night in!" he said. He smacked his lips and edged toward the bridge ladder. "All night in, and nothing to do all day. Maybe ye can learn to sail a small-boat now, Mister Mate!"

He ducked away before the mate could let go his tongue.

Mr. Davis sniffed. "Engine-room oil!" he said with great distaste to the highly interested second officer. "That fellow will never get over that time I allowed him to sail past me."

The second officer's grin was broad. The mate frowned, and swiveled his eyes to Chris Arnold, who was still there, right under the guns.

"Acting fourth officer!" Mr. Davis said. "There's a rank for you! I've heard that cockroaches have cooties. Now by Peter I believe it!"

"Haw!" The second mate was delighted. "Acting fourth! A cockroach's cootie! That's one!" He laughed again, but this time it was at the mate. "A good one, but not as good as the Old Man's pulled on you!"

Mr. Davis' increasing scowl blackened

touch. Yours, Mister. Put your back into your work, or I'll put my foot into your back."

It wasn't the work: it was being a joke. The bewildered Chris Arnold wasn't flesh, fowl nor good red herring in that ship. He was neither officer nor seaman; he wasn't even a flunky. He hadn't figured that studying navigation in the forecabin would make him the butt of the ship, even if her watch officers were all schoolship-trained men.

It was quite as tough with the men as with the officers. He got no backing from the bridge. When he pointed out a patch of rust that Bauman, a morose A.B., had skipped, Bauman dropped his chipping hammer and spat on hands that were hard as a goat's hoofs.

"S'pose you make me scale that plate, kid," the A.B. said.

"There's no good wastin' paint on rust-blisters like that," Chris said, kicking at the plate with his heel.

"Make me scale it, kid," Bauman repeated. He had a body as thick and hard as a barrel, and his long massive arms curved like ice-tongs.

Chris Arnold gulped air. He was alone. He had nobody standing behind him. He couldn't lick Bauman, who was an ex-pug. Was it better to take a lacing than to back down? He wasn't sure. He could take a lacing standing up. But what would it get him. He hesitated.

"On the foredeck!" hailed the mate from the bridge. "Keep that hammer going, Mister! Keep it going!"

Slowly Chris picked up his hammer.

Bauman laughed. "That's the trouble with the mate—he don't like murder in the ship. An' it would ha' been murder, kid—fast murder."

"I always wanted to see how they buried a guy at sea," said a seaman.

BAUMAN elaborately avoided the plate that started the controversy. That night Chris had slipped back on the foredeck with a scraper. There was no use painting over rust, and he had a proper feeling for the old bucket. He found the neglected spot. But he didn't scrape it down. He just stood there, looking at the deck. To do that job, seemed to be an acceptance of defeat.

He hadn't a friend in the ship now—or even a real enemy. But there were other ships, ships on which a young officer would get the backing-up essential to discipline.

Chris Arnold hardened his jaw. This had been a happy ship, barring a little trouble between deck officers and engineers, with a decent enough Old Man. When cargo was light, there was some time off, and some fun among the islands down the line of the Antilles to Trinidad. And he'd had a step, even if everybody did seem to think an acting fourth officer was a cockroach's cootie.

"Maybe I am a cockroach's cootie, however they rate or rank me," he told himself at four one morning when he stood in the leeward cab of the bridge, as far away from the red-eyed and weary Mr. Davis as he could get. He was acquiring the habit of talking to himself. "Usually any guy that's treated as a joke by his shipmates is a joke. . . . They got a line for it—'Not officer material.' Maybe I don't get any backing from Davis because he knows I'm a swab not fit to stand a watch."

THE mate began tramping the bridge, slowly, as if his feet hurt him. He'd overseen the juggling of cargo at three island ports the day before.

"The Old Man might give me my A.B. rating back," Chris muttered to himself. He shook his head. "Not yet. Not quite yet."

Things were still like that at Port of Spain, Trinidad, where the *Amalia* lay over two days before turning north again.

Long before the ship was finished working cargo, Mr. Davis had One and Two lifeboats overside. All hands knew what that meant. The brooding Mr. Davis was about to challenge and take over the jumps the bumptious Mr. Aleck Munro, and with him the whole engineers' department.

In a little brush of the lifeboats off Dominica two runs before, Mr. Munro, who claimed to have been the cream of Clyde sailors in his youth, had actually jammed his boat past Mr. Davis' under sail. And Mr. Davis had been trained in his schoolship days in handling lug-rigged lifeboats. It was the contention of the deck that a gust of wind off Dominica's towering mountains was more responsible for that than any sailing prowess of the first engineer. Nevertheless Mr. Munro had borne down hard.

It was put up or shut up for Mr. Munro now.

The plump and sociable Old Man, who was about to escape the grueling necessity for standing on his dignity by a visit

Illustrated by
Cleveland
Woodward



"Keep from underfoot while I'm standing my watches," Mr. Davis said.

to the Ice House ashore, dismissed his shore boat and hung about the bridge to see the race. Twice Chris Arnold caught him whistling like a bird at the prospect of sport, and was frowned upon in consequence. The chief engineer, the skipper's only comrade, joined him; and frozen-faced, they awaited action by their respective departments.

Muttered details of a bet reached Chris Arnold's ears. This could be fun, were not Chris a pariah in this ship. He ached for a chance to bear a hand in the mate's boat.

Mr. Davis, passing by, caught his eye.

"I'm a good man at tending a sheet, sir," Chris said.

"Get down in Number Two 'tween-decks, Mister Acting Fourth, and show 'em how to tend a broom," Mr. Davis commanded. "Brooms are more in your line than sheets."

When Chris Arnold climbed out of the hold three hours later, the breeze came fresh to his dust-choked lungs. It had been a hard sweep-down. He smeared the dirt and sweat on his face against his sleeve, and looked eagerly overside. The clinker-built boats, with masts unstepped, still lay alongside, soaking up.

"What happened, Lippy?" he asked a messboy.

"Munro got leary," the boy said. "Claims he had to sew a few patches on the boilers or somethin'. Anyhow, he aint got time to sail against the mate this after. Maybe tomorrow, he says."

Chris Arnold was relieved. He wanted to see that race, even if he wouldn't be one of the lifeboat crew. It would even be some joy to see an engineer wipe Mr. Davis' ferocious eye.

Lippy edged closer to him. "How about puttin' in a word for me for ordinary seaman, sir? I don't want to be no pot-juggler."

It was the first time Chris Arnold had been called "sir," save in mockery, in that ship. He shook his head. "A word from me would be a ticket as messboy for life, Lippy."

"Aw, hell!" said Lippy.

Perhaps Aleck Munro and the other engineers were struggling with some whimsy of the rock-crusher below. Any-

how, not a man of them went ashore that evening, which was news. But the Old Man, the second and the third officers all piled off in shore boats as soon as possible. Frederick Street—and other streets—called.

The mate, who was short of sleep, had volunteered to remain aboard. Acidly he declined Chris' offer to take the deck.

"Between you and nobody, I'll put my two dollars on nobody," he said. "Go below, go ashore, go to blazes—but keep off that bridge."

To the sulky Bauman, who was on anchor watch, the mate commanded curtly:

"Call me if needed."

Then, rapidly, he went to his room to make up some of the shut-eye he had missed among the islands.

Chris Arnold wrote a letter and tried to get to sleep himself. But the ship was still glowing hot from the vertical Trinidad sun. The water alongside, the

soupy water of the Gulf of Paria, was too warm to cool off anything. And the air, motionless, was humid enough to drink. He got up in his pajamas and roamed the ship.

Near the accommodation ladder he came upon Bauman stretched out on deck and breathing like a cargo winch. There was a bottle beside him. Chris Arnold picked it up. It was cognac, good cognac from Martinique, probably. Chris frowned. It wasn't the sort of thing Bauman would spend his money on. He ran to quantity rather than quality in his taste.

Chris Arnold's hair prickled on his skull. Maybe some dirty-work was afoot. He walked aft to the galley, and near it located Lippy's bunk. Lippy wasn't asleep. Chris dragged him out.

"Watch that gangway," he commanded. "I'm going to take a look around the ship."

His search for villainy began on the boat-deck and ended there. Near the fiddle he halted, eyes wide.

The boat-deck seemed aswarm with men. They were working with cautiously screened flashlights. Chris Arnold stared and listened. A wayward flash or two of the torches helped. Engineers! These were the engineers—the first, second, third and junior engineers. In the blackness the engineers were as busy as gnomes.

It was the first time
Chris had been called
"sir" on that ship.



THE FOURTH OFFICER

They had hauled up and swung in on the davits Number Two boat, the boat that Aleck Munro was to sail next day. The blocks hadn't so much as creaked. They had been well oiled—an engineer's trick. And now they were very busy with more engineering stuff—nuts and bolts.

A flashlight focused momentarily on the shallow keel of the lifeboat—and Chris Arnold grunted. Holes had been bored through the long strip of wood. And now these engineers were very busy bolting on a section of sheet metal that dropped a full foot below the embryonic keel of the lifeboat. They were giving her a keel like a racing sloop.

Somebody in the dark took hold of Chris Arnold's arm. The steel-like clamp of the fingers made Chris think once more of the engine room and its mechanical might. His head swiveled swiftly. The chief engineer himself was standing beside him in the gloom.

"Jus' a bit of fun," said the Chief softly. "A bit of a joke on the mate. Are ye on duty?"

Loyalties squirmed inside Chris Arnold. But that mention of the mate quieted his conscience. This had nothing to do with the deck; it was on the mate.

"I have the mate's own word that I'm not on duty," he answered, grinning. "So it was the black-gang that set up cognac for the anchor watch, hey?"

Mr. Worsley sighed faintly. "It was necessary," he said. "Man, what a waste!"

"The black-gang will take over the gangway watch, then, I suppose," said Chris Arnold. "I'm going to sleep myself."

HE went back to the vigilant Lippy, who jumped violently at the sound of his footfalls.

"Go to bed," Chris Arnold said. "It's just some kids out ringing doorbells."

In the first dog-watch of another dog-day Chris Arnold emerged from a dusty oven, Number Four Hold, this time, and wearily crossed the burning steel deck to the port side. The noise was coming from that side, and the whole crew was strung out along the rail.

The waters of the muddy Gulf were roiled by the brisk east-northeast trade-wind. And up that wind, zigzagging into it, each with two lugsails drawing, came the two lifeboats of the *Amalia*.

The lifeboat of the engineers, Number Two, was well ahead and came along

like a Cup Defender. Aleck Munro, the picture of nonchalance, lounged in the sternsheets with a casual hand on the tiller. That sheet of metal, invisible under her, gave the boat a grip on the water, preventing her from sliding side-wise.

Mr. Davis, sitting abruptly upright in his boat, had passed the stage of skill, and was fighting his tiller.

CHRIS ARNOLD lifted an eye to the bridge. The Old Man, dead-pan as usual, was leaning his portly stomach against the rail. Beside him, rocking blandly on toes and heels, with his pipe drawing, was the chief engineer. He met Chris' eye without a flicker of emotion.

Munro's boat made a final hitch and drove across an imaginary finish line at the bow of the *Amalia*. Promptly the boatswain jerked a lanyard, and the line-throwing gun barked congratulation.

The mate finished ingloriously later. It may have been the razzing he got that wiped the grin off Chris Arnold's face. Or possibly it was the fact that Aleck Munro was showing no remorse whatsoever. He was offering to race the mate again, standing on his head with his eyes blindfolded and his hands tied behind his back.

Chris glanced up at the bridge to see if the chief engineer were now spilling the joke to Captain Pope. He wasn't; both men were looking away from the boats toward a ship that had come through the Dragon's Mouth into the Gulf and now was sliding cautiously to an anchorage. Chris saw she was the *Amaryllis*, a sister ship, whose run was down the east coast of South America.

Her men had been watching the race. Shortly after she let go, her crew, with more enthusiasm than usual, swung out her lifeboats. The wind had quit by then, but men were busy in her boats till dark.

That night Captain Pope shot off to have dinner with the *Amaryllis'* Old Man. They had been shipmates together; they were both masters; the Old Man could damn his dignity and have a good time with an equal. He was heard to whistle in the boat.

Chris Arnold got grudging leave that night and took his troubles to a movie. The people on the screen were having trouble too, but Chris Arnold still had his with him when he headed back to St. Vincent's Jetty.

He found near the wharf a little group of men earnestly engaged in chaffing with each other. Closer to, Chris made them out to be most of the officers of the *Amalia* and the *Amaryllis*. The third officer deigned to tell him what it was all about.

"Our Old Man made a bet with the *Amaryllis*' skipper that even one of our engineers could outsail any man they picked. Easy money!"

It was apparent just by listening for a moment that all the wages the *Amalia*'s crowd would draw in the next three months had been placed upon the nose of Aleck Munro.

There was one exception. Aleck Munro and the second engineer were present, and neither was risking a nickel. But they were very pleased. Chris Arnold scrubbed his jaw in thought.

"The black-gang knows all bets will be called off after Munro wins and they hoist out the lifeboat with that keel on her," he decided. "That's it, all right. Just another little joke on the deck."

WHEN he started for a boat, Aleck Munro followed him, to caution him to keep silent.

"It would be most awkward for you, young fellow, if the mate tumbled that ye'd known about the keel," the first said impressively. "Most awkward."

He pointed the acting fourth officer into a shore boat, and followed himself.

Chris Arnold nodded. "I'm not saying a word," he said. "I've got enough grief to hold me now."

The boatmen swung their oars.

Aleck Munro tapped him on the chest. "Ye'll have sweet revenge on the deck—on every ruddy one o' them," he assured Arnold. His voice sank to a hoarse and conspiratorial whisper. "The beauty of all this, d'ye see, is that by the terms o' the two skippers' agreement, there's to be no special equipment an' no tinkering with the boats, on the penalty of the other side winning the race by default."

He rocked in his seat, suppressing a Vesuvius of mirth. "The beauty of it!" he gasped. "My keel in the hole will slay 'em. There won't be a dime left in a deck-officer's pocket for months. They'll learn—the lubbers! Wait till the boat comes out, an' they get a look a' that keel! Bettin' on engineers! A fine deck, that is!"

"And a fine acting fourth officer I am!" Chris Arnold told himself two hours later that night. He was still

pace the deck. "A Judas to the deck—an' more than that! That flighty black-gang don't see that it's the ship's name they're triflin' with. Winnin' a race with a keel in the hole! But what's a ship's name to an engineer? I ought to split to the Old Man!"

But he didn't do that. Instead, at one in the morning, when the anchor watch was slumbering as peacefully as if the engineers had set up the cognac again, Chris Arnold was shaking Lippy into life.

"Come on and keep quiet!" he commanded.

The lifeboats were moored astern. Down the line went Chris. Lippy, spurred on because it was a seagoing job, went with him. In Number Two lifeboat they shifted ballast, spars, water-breaker and equipment over to port, to give her a heel. Then, with a monkey wrench clutched in his hand, Chris Arnold went over the side.

He had heard a lot about sharks and barracuda in tropical seas. He could fairly feel them tearing at him as he thrust his legs down into the quiet black water. Slowly he lowered himself under. Every ripple was a shark turning to attack. Every splash was the flying fins of a barracuda charging to strike with a mouthful of teeth like a sawmill.

The engineers had set up those bolts on the sheet-metal keel as if they were to hold an engine on her bed-plates. Chris Arnold swore and strained. He thrust his body under, braced his legs on her bottom and strained again. The job was below water, even with the lifeboat heeled over. He thought his heart was going from the inhuman exertion without air to breath. Finally he started one bolt.

By this time he had consigned sharks and barracuda to perdition. Their tearing would only release him from torture. Stubbornly he struggled. Those nuts had been turned to stay. Lippy, awed by the battle, perched on the port rail with a noose in his hand. . . .

CHRS finished the job. He got the last bolt out of the plate. He felt the keel drop, swerving, toward the bottom of the roadstead. Lippy dragged his limp body aboard. Lippy straightened up the boat. Chris stretched out flat, panting himself back to life. It was tough going, up the line to the deck.

"Now let 'em sail!" Chris said hoarsely. "The deck'll lose their pay, but the

"Wait till the boat comes out and they see that keel!"



ship'll hang onto her good name, anyhow. A ship's good name is like a woman's, Lippy; it don't come back."

The exigencies of cargo held over the race until four next afternoon. Ordinarily she would not have had her hatches on until eight that night. But even the stevedores were caught in the swing and drive of the crew's impatience; and only Number Five, a slow hatch, was working cargo at four.

Chris Arnold looked the first assistant engineer in the eye and demanded a place in the crew of five.

"You'd rather have me working in your boat than talking in the ship, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"Ah, well," said Aleck Munro. "'Tis blackmail, but what can ye expect of a deck man? Get in."

Time compelled a short race. The race committee, consisting of the two skippers, now together on the bridge of the *Amalia*, sent them away downwind toward a dirty little coaster anchored a mile farther out in the shallow Gulf.

Mr. Munro, pleasantly confident, had maneuvered his craft well in the crucial seconds before the Old Men let go the starting gun. He slid over the line with fore and main lugs goosewinged out to port and starboard. But the snub-nosed, leather-faced mate of the *Amaryllis* was quite as confident. Was he not racing an engineer? He crossed the line

almost alongside Munro's boat, and with his bow only a scant six feet behind.

Chris Arnold, tending the fore-sheet, kept his eye on every slight movement of the canvas. This was a fair race, even if his skipper wasn't aware of it. Chris didn't want the *Amalia's* boat defeated too badly.

"He may beat us on this leg, boys, but when we start back to windward—" Mr. Munro winked knowingly at his crew. Chris Arnold understood that he was thinking that his sheet-metal keel, a liability as it dragged along under water going downwind like this, would be a crushing advantage in checking the leeward slide of the boat once she was zig-zagging upwind.

Not knowing that that keel was now on the bottom of the Gulf, the first engineer was fully prepared to be a poor second in rounding the coaster and starting home. When he found that his boat was holding its own downwind against the *Amaryllis*, his opinion of his own skill took a sudden jump.

"This button-nosed lubber is worse than our mate," he muttered to the sec-

ond engineer, who was handling the main-sheet. He eyed the other boat, which was not yet bow and bow with his. "I could beat that fellow without—" He paused and added lamely, "Without difficulty."

ONE advantage the mate of the *Amaryllis* seized. He was to starboard of Munro; and in rounding the coaster, she was to be left to starboard. That gave him the inside berth on the turn.

Neither boat tried any covering. These heavy boats weren't built for yachting shennannigans. Mr. Munro continued to admire himself audibly as the other boat gained only a few feet on him.

The snub-nosed mate heard him. "Get a line ready," the *Amaryllis* man bawled to his crew. "Once we quit blowin' downhill, the black-gang will need a tow home."

"Why, that—"

Mr. Munro ceased to search for adjectives. The coaster was looming up close ahead. The mate was hugging her close.

"I'll show him how it's done on the Clyde," said the first engineer to the second, softly.

"No monkey business!" the second warned.

Mr. Munro did not answer, but his face was still brick red under his sandy hair. He swung wide of the plates of the coaster. "When I give the word, gybe over that main," he muttered. "Keep sheets eased, but be ready to close haul her."

The second, looking at his angry face, perspired gently.

"She'll do it with—you know," muttered Mr. Munro. "I'll wipe his eye right!"

The mate of the *Amaryllis*, reaching the stern of the coaster, gave her hidden propeller a good berth—too good a berth—as he rounded.

"You'll foul him if you try it!" the second warned.

But Mr. Munro, confident of his non-existent keel, was already trying it. He put down his tiller and sent his boat, with wind abeam, knifing for the gap between the unseen propeller of the coaster and the side of the *Amaryllis'* boat.

He made it. By scant inches he made it, as far as the other boat was concerned. How close he was to the blades of the propeller, no man knew. But he won the inside berth.

Confusion reigned in the mate's boat. He was shouting too many orders. Mr. Munro, confident of his good engine-room-produced keel, hardened on the wind and prepared to enjoy himself. He put a lazy foot up on the gunwale and kissed his hand to the angry mate of the *Amaryllis*.

"I'll tell 'em you're coming!" he called.

Chris Arnold kept one eye on the fore-sheet and the other on Mr. Munro, who was so soon to be disillusioned. The eye on the engineer became sharp with speculation and wonder.

For Mr. Munro sailed that boat. Utterly care-free, utterly sure that he would win, he relaxed completely. On port hitch or starboard, he got all she had in her, and more. He knew she could do it, and she did.

Down-wind from him, and losing all the time, floundered the *Amaryllis'* boat. The mate, like Mr. Davis on the day before, was fighting his tiller and fighting his wind. He was cursing his crew and his boat. The sails were wrong and the breaks were bad.

Right up to the finish-line Mr. Munro swept along in unchallenged triumph. Chris Arnold's eyes, at the finish gun, were still on the first assistant engineer, with a question churning in them.

Past the *Amaryllis* and up to the *Amalia* Mr. Munro sailed his boat; and his grin widened as he received the applause of the jubilant—and now wealthy—deck officers of his own ship. All hands were there on the boat-deck, the two Old Men, the sourly smiling Mr. Davis, the deck, the black-gang and the stewards. All!

"Wait till they see the keel—and the *Amaryllis* crowd see it," Munro said softly to the second engineer. "And then stand by to dodge bricks and dead cats from both ships!"

THE second nodded. He was somewhat apprehensive about that fine joke. Chris Arnold, watching him, was thinking hard.

"Down sails!" the engineer commanded as he spilled the wind and headed her for her swinging davit falls. "Unstep masts!"

They hooked on the tackles, and the cheering crew of the *Amalia* hoisted the boat on the run. She was on the side nearer the *Amaryllis*.

"They don't see it yet," said Mr. Munro as the boat was hauled up short on the davits. "Get ready to run!"

He leaped out of the boat onto the deck of the *Amalia*, prepared to take refuge with the black-gang. The cheering increased. Suddenly Mr. Munro halted. He stared incredulously at the lifeboat. The rest of the black-gang were staring with him. Only the bolt-holes in the narrow wooden keel revealed that this was indeed the craft onto which they had bolted so securely that solid piece of sheet metal.

Mr. Munro's face was a study, and Chris Arnold was studying it. Slowly the realization came to the first assistant that he had beaten the *Amaryllis* fair and square.

CHRIS sensed the tumult inside Munro. "He didn't know he was good enough to win without a keel to back him up," Chris told himself. "By Peter, that might be what's screwy with me. Do I need anybody else's backing up to be an officer? I've got to get an answer to that one!"

He was only half aware of the scowl that ripped across Aleck Munro's face and was succeeded by an expression of great pain.

On the faces of the other black-gang officers a similar anguish showed. There was a touch of the Scot in every man of them. Now it was dawning on them. They had put a great financial opportunity in the way of the deck. And they had kicked that same great financial opportunity in the face themselves. Aleck Munro had won impeccably.

"Ah, what a waste of money!" moaned Mr. Worsley. "What a sinful waste!"

But greatest was the pain on Mr. Munro's own face. "I've been gypped!" he cried to the world in reckless fury. "I've been robbed! I had a keel on her. Somebody snitched it! And I had forty dollars bet on the *Amaryllis* boat!"

There was no sympathy on Mr. Worsley's face. "And it's your deserts—wagerin' on another ship!" he said.

Mr. Davis grabbed the first engineer's arm. "Did you have your keel on her when you raced me yesterday?" he demanded.

"I did that—and made a double monkey out o' you!" said Mr. Munro wildly. He swung around of a sudden on Chris Arnold. "You— It's you!" he cried. "You unbolted that keel, you—you—"

"I did," said Chris Arnold. "In the middle watch." He laughed. He roared with laughter. He poked his face boldly

forward at the angry fist of the engineer. "What's the good of a keel to you? You don't need a keel—the way you sail 'em."

"My forty—"

But Chris Arnold pushed past him. He had to get the answer to his red-hot question that wouldn't wait. He was sure now he had a grip on the thing, but he must prove it. He ploughed through the uproarious mob around Munro, and on to Bauman, A.B., on the outskirts.

"I've learned something, Bauman," he said softly through his teeth. "I don't need any backing to make you obey. I didn't know that. But I do now. You're going to chip the rust off a spot I pointed out to you."

"You're crazy as a bug," said Bauman, staring. "I'll—"

Chris shook his head. "It's an order, Bauman. I'm acting fourth officer of this ship. Maybe you won't chip off that spot now. Maybe you'll knock me out with that big fist of yours first. But when I come to, sailor, I'm coming back to you with whatever is heaviest that's handy. I'll repeat that order, Bauman: unless you kill me, sailor, you're going to chip rust. Get going!"

BAUMAN looked at Chris' set face. Bauman's feet began to move, he was on the ladder before he knew it. "Why, hell, I was just kiddin'," he protested, outraged. "Hell, kid, I'll—"

"Mister Arnold to you. Keep movin'!"

"Mister Arnold, I wasn't refusin' duty. I—"

Bauman got a chipping hammer. He chipped rust—right.

Chris Arnold left him. Chris was feeling weak, but his walk was strong and his jaw looked tough. On the lower bridge he met Mr. Davis. He started past him. It occurred to him then that the mate didn't miss much that happened on that ship.

The mate stopped him. Chris Arnold went hot again.

"So what?" he said. "I don't need a school-ship. Or backing, either. Or a berth in this ship. I know that now, and on my own steam I'll get a job—"

"Stow the gab," commanded Mr. Davis harshly. His eyes swelled and got ready to let go, one-two. "I asked for an experienced officer as a fourth. All right! I've got one. Grab some sleep. If you need me during your bridge watch, I'll be in my bunk."

Beggar's Holiday

A memorable story of China today by the able author of "The Fourth Messenger" and "Cold Blood."

By HUGH WILEY

AN hour after sunrise Cheng Lin of the Beggars' Guild took his post against the warm wall of the Smiling Friend Pawnshop on Blue Hill Road. Here, with a caged sunbird of brilliant plumage, he awaited his patrons. The sunbird, whose name was Chong, was the act that reaped the copper cash for Cheng Lin. The bird was caged in an ornate structure of gilded bamboo that enclosed the drooping branches of a dwarfed willow tree. In payment for one grain of millet, the sunbird would chirp a note or two. For five grains of millet he would repay the favor with twelve or fifteen liquid notes of a pleasing song.

From the bird's musical contributions to the din of Blue Hill Road, Cheng Lin would translate predictions of good luck, for which customers might pay with copper cash. On good days, the total receipts from the sunbird's efforts would amount to twenty cents; but if the day were cold, or if rain came, Cheng Lin would have to eat his evening rice in the Guild House kitchen on credit. Evening rice, for the Beggars' Guild, included rice and fish, lung soup, strips of pork, and now and then a cup of black wine, for the guild members lived well in spite of the war-cloud that hung over the Chinese city.

Cheng's territory against the wall of the Smiling Friend Pawnshop was a thirty-foot space that included, at midday, the cooling shadow of a balcony. Here, in the smile of Kwan Yin, enjoying the favors of Milo Fo, Cheng lived life as it came, contemplating the beauty of the resplendent Chong and the graceful curves of the branches of the dwarfed willow in the sunbird's cage.

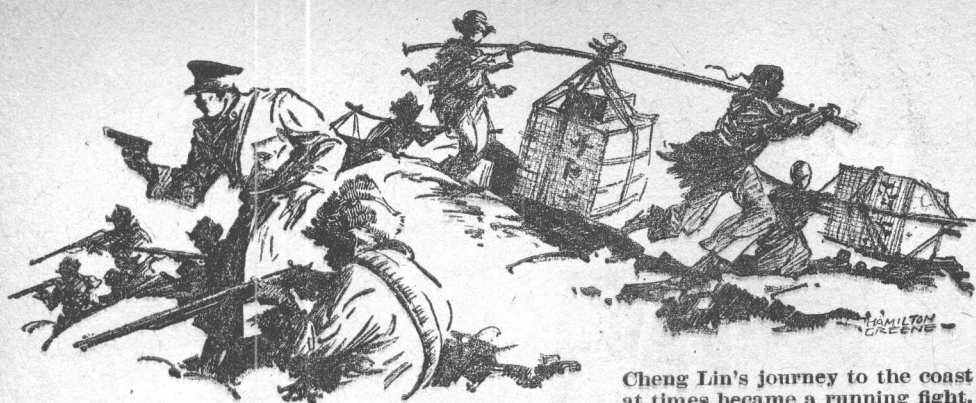
The sunbird's name was Chong because he was faithful and loyal, and his cage was nicely equipped with a cloisonné cup for his dry food, a porcelain cup for bits of fruit and green leaves, and a little brass water-tank wherein at his pleas-

ure he might bathe for relief from the midday heat, or drink to assuage his thirst.

At evening, off duty, Chong would sing for an hour or two in the Guild House, and at morning his song was the first interruption to the guttural snores that filled the sleeping-room. Chong was respected by all of Cheng Lin's companions, and his owner was considered a fortunate man. Various beggars with no better exhibits than ulcerated arms or twisted legs or leprosy envied Cheng Lin; and many offers of large cash had been made for Chong. Invariably these had been refused, for Cheng Lin realized his own limitations. He knew that Chong was the source of his income, and he doubted his ability to make a living without the sunbird's help.

At midday a wisp of scouting planes came out of the south and circled the city. Within the hour they were followed by a squadron of bombers. The first explosion on Blue Hill Road destroyed the Smiling Friend Pawnshop.





Cheng Lin's journey to the coast at times became a running fight.

Cheng Lin returned from a brief journey away from life. His left side was wet with blood that flowed from a wound in his shoulder, and a flap of his scalp hung over his right ear. He crawled out of the débris about him and gained the unbroken pavement of Blue Hill Road. Three young boys in uniform stopped the blood that flowed from his shoulder. An American doctor in an emergency dressing-station sewed the flap of his scalp back into place and sterilized both wounds.

Cheng was conscious of a burning thirst. Presently he realized vaguely that half of his mind seemed to be sleeping. He turned instinctively toward the house of the Beggars' Guild. He had covered half the distance to this poor sanctuary before the question of his sunbird's fate came to complicate the tortured hour.

He returned to the wreck of the Smiling Friend Pawnshop. For a while he searched for the sunbird, but all that came of this was the discovery of a fragment of the gilded cage wherein the sunbird had lived, and a blackened twig that might have been a branch of the dwarfed willow.

He lay unconscious for a while thereafter, inert until the cool airs of evening came, bearing their little gift of life. Cheng was gone. Hope in Cheng Lin's heart was dead throughout his plodding toward the house of the Beggars' Guild. There were places along the way where corpses lined the road; and on one street it was necessary to detour around the wreckage of a hundred houses.

The severed hand of a woman lay in the street at the entrance to the Guild House. A gold-piece near the severed hand gleamed faintly in the light of a street-lamp. Cheng-Lin picked it up. Clutched in the dead hand, he found two other gold coins. He took these, and entered the house of the Beggars' Guild.

A barrage of reproach greeted him.

"See now the death and destruction that your former companions, disciples of violence, have wrought!"

"A man can be forgiven for the mistakes of his youth," Cheng Lin returned in his own defense. "True enough, I was a soldier before I gained wisdom."

"Enough of bitterness," another member of the company advised. "Our companion is wounded. He has paid for his folly."

One of the beggars examined Cheng's wounded shoulder and lifted the bandage from his torn scalp. "You are to be envied," this man said. "That cut in your shoulder, and your broken head, properly developed, can be worth large cash to you."

"A handful of sand rubbed into that cut on your head can become a sore so disgusting that even a priest would give you alms," another advised.

"What of the sunbird Chong?" another asked.

"Chong is dead," Cheng Lin said. "His song is ended."

Now there was a quick chatter of sympathy, which was suddenly stopped by the booming notes of the gong that summoned the beggars to their evening rice. They gobbled their food in silence; thereafter for a while they lay resting, grateful to Milo Fo for the small blessing of food that he had bestowed.

THE clang of an alarm-clock aroused the assemblage. "The evening lottery!" The beggars gathered at a table that stood near the west wall of the room. One by one, upon this table they laid the trophies of human sympathy that they had collected through the daylight hours.

For a moment Cheng Lin contemplated holding out the three gold-pieces that he had found. Then, obeying an obvious principle of Right Conduct, he dropped the gold on the table, together with a handful of brass cash.



HAMILTON GREENE

Cheng Lin crawled out of the débris about him and gained the pavement of Blue Hill Road.

Rewarding virtue, the tumbling dice of the lottery marked Cheng Lin as the object of Kwan Yin's smile. A fortunate throw brought him half of the total profits of the day. He counted the money.

"Something over thirty dollars in silver," he announced. He bought three bottles of black wine for the company, and while his companions enjoyed this, he accepted an invitation to a night of pleasure with a beggar, Soon Yut, who had been fortunate in the previous night's lottery and who still retained half the money he had won.

Starting out, "I suggest the Pavilion of Delight in Blood Alley," Soon Yut offered. "Large pleasures can be enjoyed there for small cash."

In the Pavilion of Delight, after his third cup of wine, Cheng Lin joined the players at a fan-tan table. Within the hour he had won eight hundred dollars.

"Hola!" Soon Yut exulted, proud of his companion's success. "A big chicken does not eat small rice. You still enjoy the smile of Kwan Yin—why waste your time here?"

"A wise man understands a nod," Cheng Lin agreed. "Where shall we go?"

"I have heard of large games in the Paris Club," Soon Yut advised.

"They would not admit us," Cheng Lin protested.

"The world smiles upon a rich man," Soon Yut said. "Even an emperor welcomes a rich man."

"Let us go there."

The Paris Club was thronged with a mixed company of Asiatics and Europeans—officers of six armies, navy men, White Russians, and a miscellany of French and English and American business men. At a roulette-table Cheng Lin sought his companion's advice.

"What number do you say?"

"One," Soon Yut answered. "One—yourself against the world."

"WHAT number did you say?" Cheng Lin asked. For the moment it seemed that he had been hypnotized by the beauty of the hands of a girl across the roulette-table. She was a White Russian, on whom, strangely enough, the battle of life had left no visible scars.

"One," Soon Yut repeated. "Are you deaf?"

"Observe the beauty of that woman's hands," Cheng Lin suggested. He bought a stack of ten-dollar chips, and set ten of them on the number one. "She has the most beautiful hands in the world," he

continued. "Curves more graceful than the flowing branches of the dwarfed willow wherein the sunbird Chong—"

"Watch the game," Soon Yut admonished as the whirling ball slowed to click against the metal fins of the wheel. Then, exulting in his vicarious luck: "Number one. You win!"

"I win," Cheng Lin agreed quietly. "We will play the number again." To the dealer: "What is the limit of play?"

"Your bet is the limit bet," the dealer said, pushing thirty-five yellow chips toward Cheng Lin. "There you are—thirty-five hundred dollars."

AN hour before dawn, the burning pain in Cheng Lin's wounded shoulder became unbearable. He called for opium. With the relief that came to him after he had swallowed a pill of good black Malwa gum, his thoughts and his desires concentrated on the beauty of the White Russian's hands.

"What would that girl cost?" he asked Soon Yut.

"The prices on these slaves have ranged from ten dollars up," Soon Yut said. "She is an exceptional specimen. But why should you give any thought to her purchase price? You are wealthy."

Cheng Lin nodded. "Yes, I have won more than thirty thousand dollars tonight. Invite her to join us."

An hour after the midday sun burned down upon the twisted corpses that still lay along Blue Hill Road, Cheng Lin had leased a house on Empire Avenue, together with its furnishings and its servants. In the courtyard of the house was a willow tree of pleasing curves wherein a dozen birds of brilliant plumage did their best to compensate Cheng Lin for the loss of his sunbird Chong. They sang in vain, for his ears were deaf to their song, and his eyes were blind to their brilliance. Beauty lay only in the curves of the White Russian's hands. The girl had become the queen of Cheng Lin's heart. . . .

Before half of Cheng Lin's money had been spent, he had received a dozen offers for Olga. To the various emissaries of the captains of commerce and the several minor warlords who had desired the White Russian girl, Cheng's invariable reply was a refusal of their offers. To the agent of the great General Fang Hung, "I do not wish to sell the girl," Cheng Lin said.

"General Fang's gratitude would make you rich. Permit me to advise you to

present the White Russian to General Fang with your compliments."

With considerable courage, "These warlords have cost me too much happiness," Cheng Lin answered, thinking of the raid that had brought death to the sunbird Chong.

Following this, there came an invitation to Cheng Lin to attend a banquet at General Fang's headquarters. After too much wine had been served, the General sought Cheng Lin.

"I thank you for the honor you have done me by being my guest tonight," the General said. "How does it happen that commerce instead of war engages your brilliant mind?"

"I have had small experience in the art of military combat," Cheng Lin explained.

General Fang nodded his understanding. "It is true that a peaceful courtyard is to be preferred to a soldier's camp," he said. "Scholars are the nation's treasure—but you have had some experience in war?"

"Four years in the armies of the south," Cheng Lin admitted.

General Fang hesitated a moment, and then he said: "I have a mission for you in a province to the north. You will report to my headquarters at midday. Your credentials and your orders will be ready for you."

Cheng Lin realized that from this there was no escape.

Late in the afternoon of the following day, "I must leave you for a while," he

said to Olga. "My heart is heavy. General Fang has ordered me to go north into the province of Shensi, and there is no escape."

"I can go with you," Olga said. "I have known hardships worse than you will encounter on the way."

"IMPOSSIBLE," Cheng Lin said. "You will remain here in my house. Let your heart be light. There is wealth enough in this venture to keep us in luxury for a hundred years. When I return, we will escape to some sanctuary where we can enjoy perpetual happiness. Here with the fires of war around us, the blood of my people flowing in the streets, there is no happiness."

"We can escape tonight, you and I," the Russian girl insisted.

"You and I are—prominent people," Cheng Lin said bitterly, fearing that Olga's beauty had marked them both for destruction. "We bear Fang's brand."

With an escort of a hundred soldiers, Cheng Lin began his march to the ancient capital. In Sianfu, by arrangement with the provincial governor, his force was increased by a thousand soldiers. "These veterans will guard the treasure from here to the coast," the governor said. "General Fang will provide for them after that. They are good soldiers, but they have eaten us poor."

The treasure which was to be carried to the coast was a thousand chests of opium. "This venture will make us rich," the governor declared.

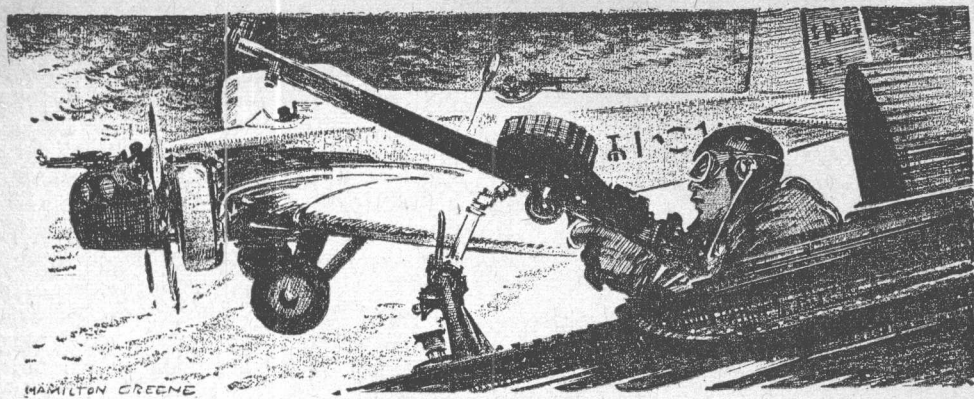
"I have no financial interest in the affair," Cheng Lin protested.

"General Fang will gain more than three million dollars if you are successful. Do you imagine that you will go unrewarded? If the opium market holds, your treasure may be worth five millions. If you encounter opposition, be merciless; kill as you go."

Cheng Lin's journey to the coast at times became a running fight. Nearing the city, he felt a growing impatience to be done with the job. He dreamed of the White Russian girl. Hatred for General Fang flamed in his heart. Wealth could buy a hundred other women as fair as Olga, but Cheng Lin knew that all the treasure of China could not regain the lost happiness. He knew instinctively that Olga would never again belong to him, and he charged this loss to General Fang.

Twenty miles from the gates of the city, a courier met him with orders bear-





ing the General's seal. The orders had been written on the eve of Fang's departure to join the military council of the north. They covered the disposal of the opium that Cheng Lin and his command had convoyed from Shansi, and contained instructions, carelessly explicit, relative to the money which Cheng Lin would receive for the General's account in payment for the illicit cargo.

Three million dollars was the specific sum that General Fang had required as his minimum share in the enterprise. On the day that Cheng Lin entered the city, the price of opium was up, and he finished the transaction with a personal profit of more than a million dollars.

He began forthwith a search for Olga. His inquiries revealed that she had lived for a while in General Fang's residence. She had not gone north with the General—that much he discovered; but thereafter her fate was a mystery.

Without much ceremony and with some small problems solved by the use of minor bribes, Cheng Lin got out of the army; but after that he could not escape the complex responsibilities that his wealth imposed. There were a hundred servants in his house now, and his courtyard was forever brilliant with the banners of messengers and agents of other important men. While the war raged, every enterprise of purchase and sale meant profit; and within the year Cheng Lin was recognized as a member of the inner circle of merchant princes whose traffic in the stuffs of war had made them millionaires.

His house was now a palace of a hundred rooms; and in his wide courtyard fifty graceful willows ranged about an emerald lake whose boundary was a gleaming parapet of white marble. His army uniforms had given place to voluminous robes of brocaded silk. The new costumes were comfortable enough,

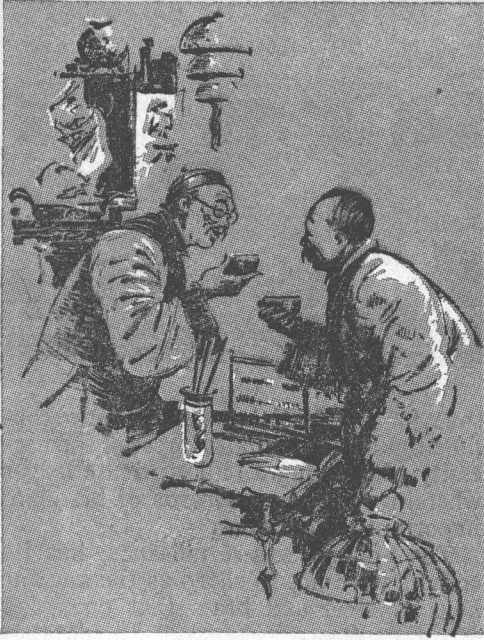
save for the fact that Cheng Lin's confidential business affairs imposed the necessity of carrying a bulky private ledger wherein were secret records of his more important transactions.

The volume was a nuisance, but its corners were not so sharp as the angular keys of steel and brass that opened a dozen vaults. These vaults held other ledgers and other record-books, and treasures of gold coin for use in commercial emergencies where ready money often meant double profit. Cheng Lin's brief military experience had taught him the advantages of traffic in arms and ammunition, in food and uniforms for a million men, in tanks and planes. He carried the keys of his treasure-vault in the left sleeve of his robe, and they were bound to his wrist by a silken cord, braided around a fine steel chain. Through his waking hours, and through increasingly briefer stretches of his troubled sleep, the keys were with him. The bulky ledger that held the secrets of his wealth was carried in an oiled silk pouch beneath his outer robe.

FOR important but annoying reasons, it had become advisable for him to carry a heavy automatic pistol in a shoulder holster under his left armpit. Day and night these possessions never left him. They were symbols of his status—essential tools of his vocation. There had been brief moments at first when he had hated the weight and bulk of these incumbrances. He accepted them now as necessary evils.

Cheng Lin had fattened on rich food until his girth was almost equal to that of General Fang. His private chairs had been widened, and his chair at the head of the long table in his banquet hall was as wide as an emperor's throne.

On a night when the silver crescent of the seventh moon had gorged on the star



rice in the western sky, Cheng Lin sat in his banquet hall with a varied company. About the table were minor diplomats of eight foreign powers, a dozen agents of munitions firms, various ladies from the European settlements, and a group of millionaire Chinese who had been associated with the host in profitable business ventures.

For his guests' entertainment there was music, and presently dancing and cards, with roulette for those who elected to gamble. In a darkened room a cinema projected the latest news-reels from abroad.

The news-reel flashed a gray tragedy of a luxury liner breaking on a reef of the southern seas. A new dictator bowed to a turbulent mob in Central Europe. A bowlegged pole-vaulter cleared the bar at fourteen feet. A fat woman whose teeth needed fixing held a mop in her left hand, and in her right a check for eighty thousand dollars that she had won in the Sweepstakes. Then, smiling at a horde of ten thousand admirers who blocked the traffic in front of a great London hotel, Cheng Lin and his companions saw Olga Saratov.

She was Vera Latovna now, and fame and fortune had come to her in Hollywood. While Cheng Lin's eyes devoured his lost one, the girl laid her lovely hands above her heart. Her fingertips sought her lips, and then the vision faded.

Cheng Lin's heart was still for three seconds. A surge of blood, born of an

emotion beyond his control, throbbed in his veins. The impact of his distress blinded him for a moment. A tropical volcano devastating its little world replaced the scene that had shaken Cheng Lin. Speaking with difficulty to one of his Chinese companions beside him, Cheng Lin said: "You will excuse me for a little while. Explain to our guests that I will return presently."

He walked out of the darkened room and turned to the left, seeking the sanctuary of his private apartment. To a servant in the hallway, "Your arm," he demanded. "My legs are strangely weak. Aid me to my room."

On his bed Cheng Lin rested at first on his right side. The bulky ledger in its oiled silk case annoyed him. With evident effort he rolled to his left side, but now the heavy angular keys chained to his left wrist were spears against his heart. The pistol in its shoulder holster under his left armpit made his present posture impossible. He struggled to his feet, groaning.

A servant bowed low before him. "The General Fang Hung presents ten thousand felicitations—and desires to see you," the servant said.

Cheng Lin frowned. After a moment, with a sudden, savage energy in his voice, "Bring him here!" he commanded.

When General Fang Hung stood before him, Cheng Lin blinked his eyes in astonishment. "Where are the insignia of your exalted rank?" he asked.

"Stripped from me by the general staff," Fang Hung admitted reluctantly. "I am no longer a general. I am no better than a beggar. I beseech your aid. The gods of disaster have claimed me for their victim. Traitors on my staff destroyed me."

"Enough of this recital!" Cheng Lin said. He turned to a servant. "Bring us wine."

WITH a brimming glass lifted toward Fang Hung, "I drink to the gods of disaster," observed Cheng Lin. "They have served me well. . . . What of the Russian girl whose hands held all the beauty under heaven? Confess!"

Fang Hung gulped his wine. "She was in my palace for a while," he admitted. "She surrendered later to a foreign devil from the great city where moving pictures are made. I know that she sailed on the ship with him, and—"

"Enough!" Cheng Lin ordered. "Be silent!" His face, contorted with rage,

mirrored the burning hatred for Fang Hung that filled his heart. This passed. Evenly then he said: "The eyes of the blind need no ointment. Only a dead snake is straight. Who am I to question the will of heaven?"

He called for writing materials. Thereafter for three minutes, scowling at Fang Hung, he affixed his signature and his seal, stamped in vermilion ink, to ten blank sheets of paper. He tossed them to Fang Hung.

"Write what you will above my name," he said. With a savage strength he broke the thin steel chain from about his wrist, and tossed the keys to Fang Hung. "You will need these," he said. The bulky ledger of Cheng Lin's private enterprises followed the keys. "This will guide you to ten million dollars. My fortune is yours." He ripped the heavy automatic and its holster from its place under his left arm. "And this; you will need this!"

FANG HUNG looked blankly at Cheng Lin. "What is all this?" he asked again.

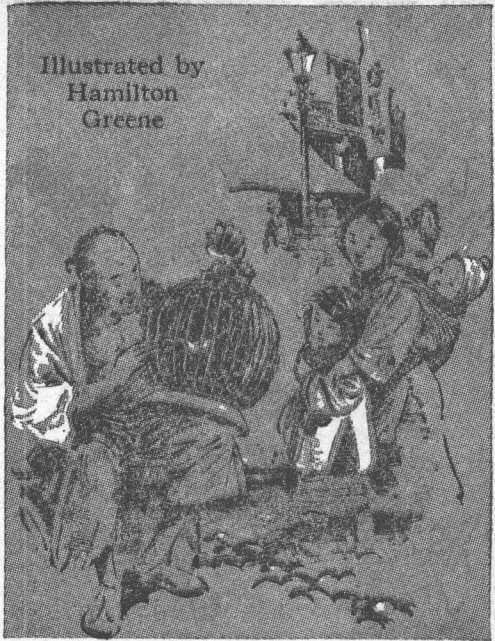
Cheng Lin scowled at his questioner. "I give you all of my wealth," he snarled, "all of my possessions, save one. You came to me just now as a suppliant for some trifling favor—and you receive my material estate."

After a moment of silence, "Give me your coat," Cheng Lin demanded. He threw his silken robes aside. "Your coat is ragged enough to serve my present purpose." He poured another glass of wine for himself alone. He lifted the glass toward Fang Hung. "I drink to the day when you will suffer the torture that wealth can bring!"

With Fang Hung's shabby coat about him, Cheng Lin made his way toward the obscure, crooked alley behind the servants' quarters of his courtyard. In the dark night a mongrel throng of fifty hungry men waited here. He shouldered his way unrecognized through this pack of derelict humanity, and turned toward the house of the Beggars' Guild.

Midway of his journey, his lagging steps quickened. The ponderous burden that had crushed his heart was lifted. "Water for my thirst, coarse rice for my food, my bended arm for a pillow—that is happiness. . . . Heaven smiles upon the resourceful man."

At the doorway of the Double Blessing Bazaar, where caged birds were sold, he



spent one gold coin that he had saved from the heavy purse in the sleeve of his discarded silken robe.

"A sunbird," he demanded of the Double Blessing proprietor. "A sunbird of resplendent plumage, whose song is sweet at sunrise. A sunbird, and a fitting cage from whose earthen floor may grow a dwarfed willow—a willow tree with drooping branches more graceful than the curves of a woman's hands."

"A cup of warming wine against the chill of dawn?" the proprietor of the Double Blessing inquired. "See, the eastern sky is gray."

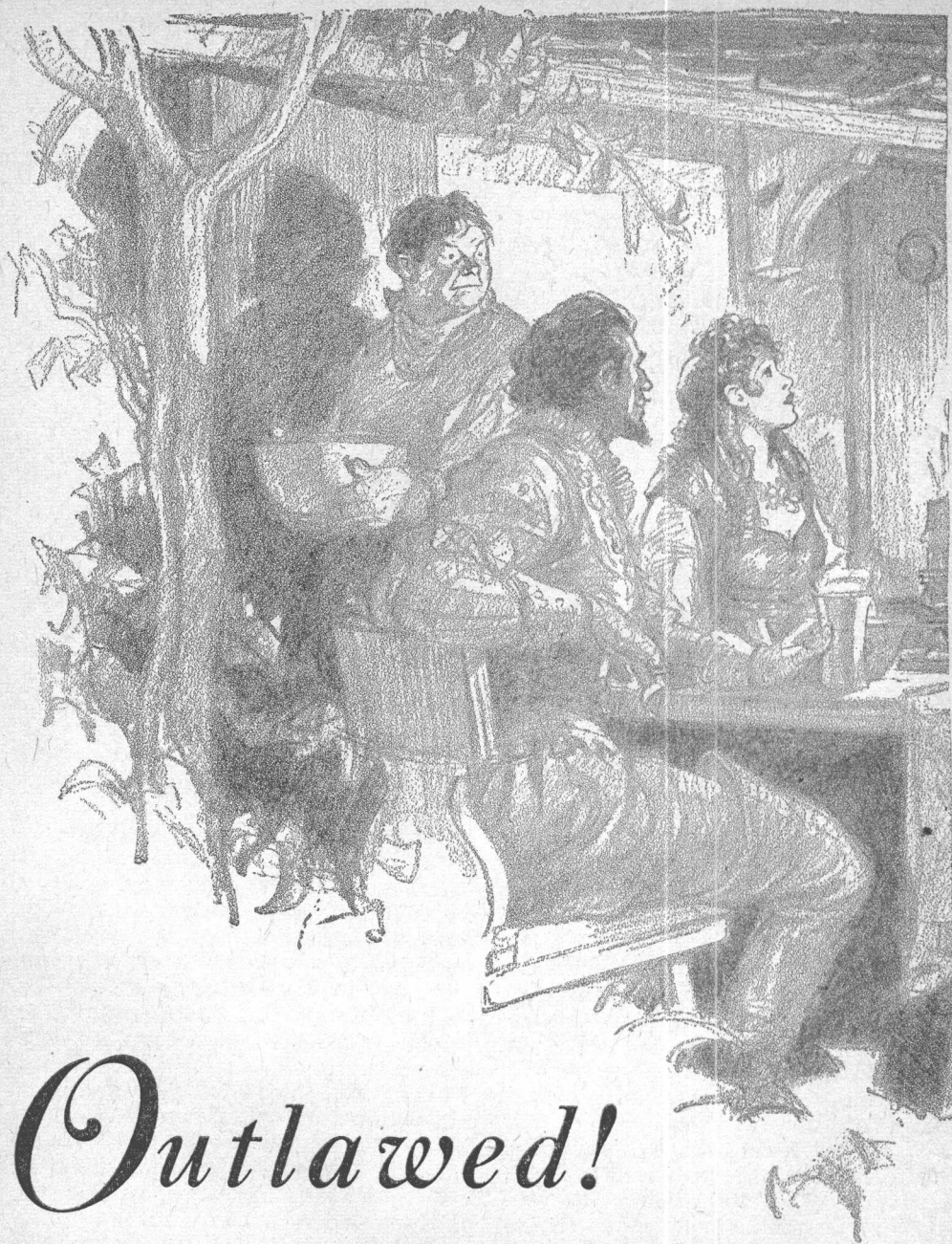
"Long life, plenteous years," Cheng Lin said, bowing over his wine.

The proprietor of the Double Blessing drank to Cheng Lin. "I hope that you will enjoy wealth and power in the favor of Kwan Yin," he said.

Cheng Lin smiled. "I have regained the Middle Pathway," he returned. His brow had lost its heavy furrows, and tranquil contentment lay cool within his eyes.

Carrying his caged sunbird, he left the Double Blessing and turned toward the house of the Beggars' Guild. On the way, without the bribery of millet grains, greeting the morning light, the sunbird voiced his tribute to the dawn with a measure of melody that made an appropriate overture for the song in Cheng Lin's heart.

Another story by Hugh Wiley will appear in an early issue.



Outlawed!

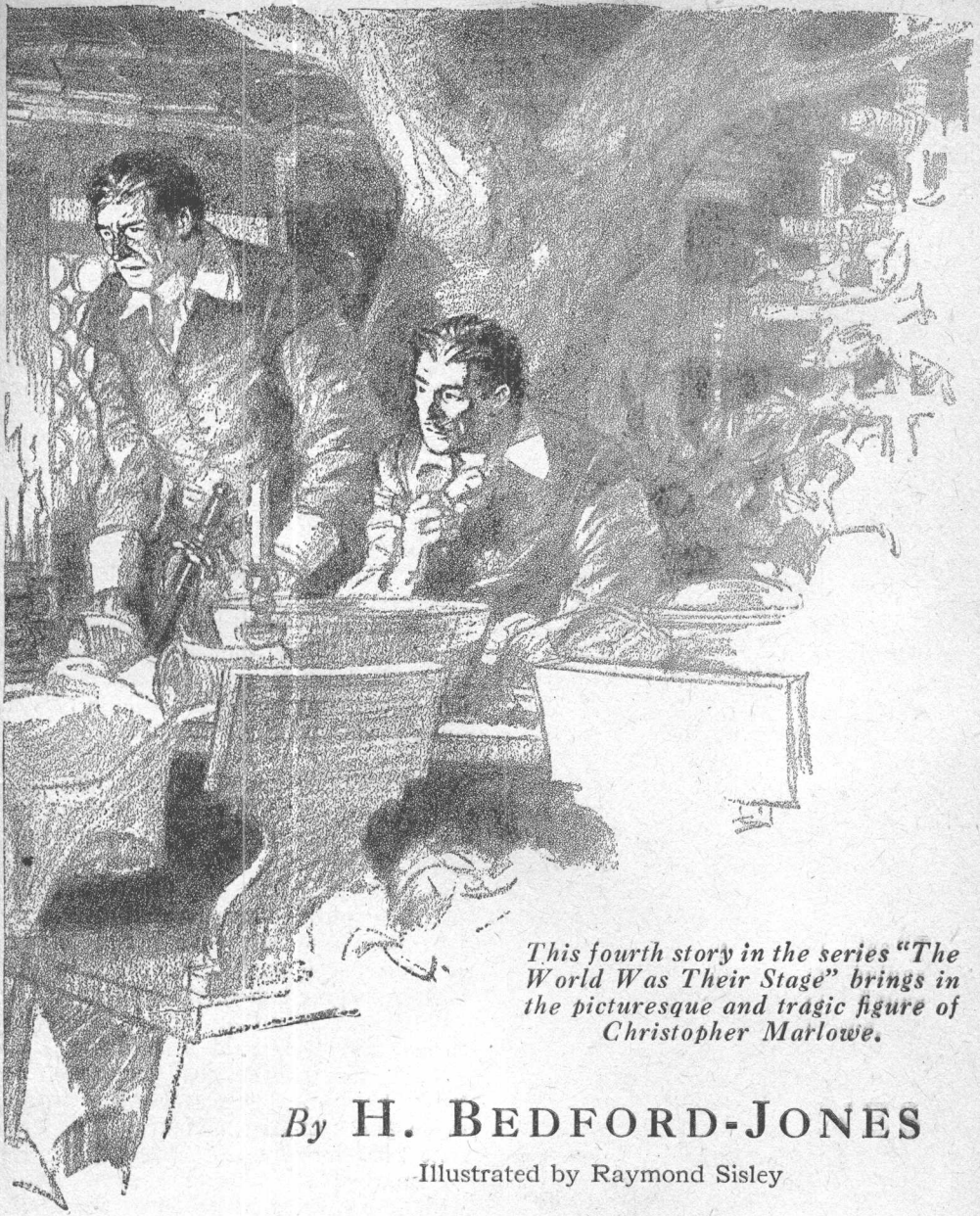
WAY in Deptford village, and the moon at full above the gray spire of St. Nicholas. Her silver light floated down, warmly caressing many a corpse-face rolling past in the wide river. Roses were in the air, for June lay upon the morrow, but upstream over London rested the quivering horror of the plague.

Here in the tavern garden a long board was set with cloth and glass, candles unflickering under the rose-arbor, the wide Thames glinting radiant beyond. A motley throng sat at this table, with a fair, genial man at one end; he had a

laughing face, a jovial face, but reckless. Indeed, a reckless and godless man was Kit Marlowe, and worse.

At the other end of the board sat the lone woman of the party, a radiant lass in a neat but common gown, broken shoes, and a necklace of flowers about her throat. In her features lay a forced folly, a desperate laughter; under the lurking fright was a piercing sweetness and tenderness. Even in the moonlight her fresh-washed wealth of hair was like massy gold.

Marlowe, who had begun to drink heavily, lifted his goblet.



This fourth story in the series "The World Was Their Stage" brings in the picturesque and tragic figure of Christopher Marlowe.

By **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"Tomorrow brings June and more roses for Deptford," he cried blithely. "Therefore—more wine for me, and a toast to the blessed damsel who queens our board!"

A burst of voices rang applause. "How be she named?" bawled someone.

Marlowe's gaze swept the company with a touch of scorn.

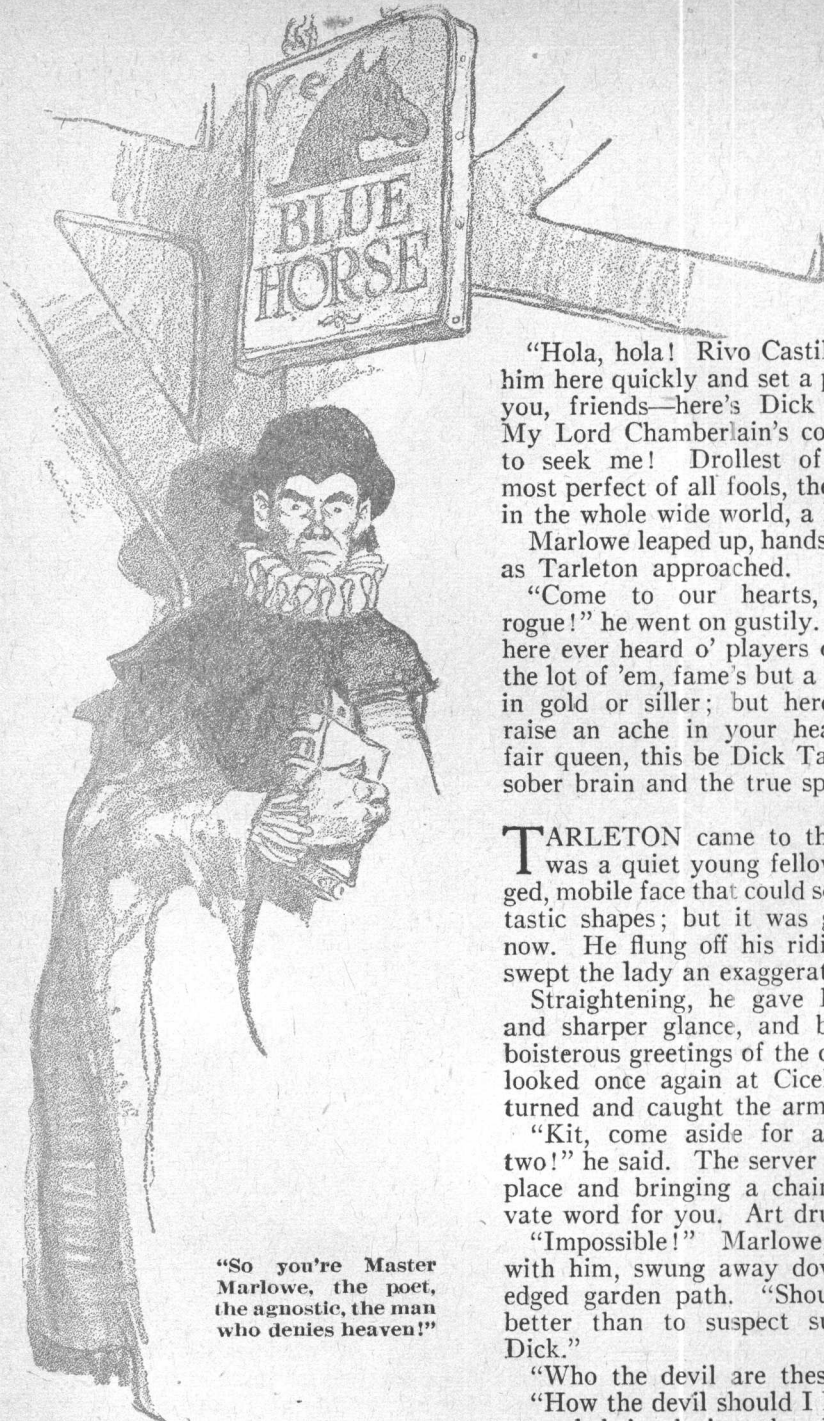
"A pretty face needs no name and brooks no questions. We be merchants, clerks, gentry and God knows what, gathered here in hasty flight from London town. If Queen Bess be fled from court, here's Queen Cicely to seek our homage! Cicely, royal salutations!"

Laughter rose, and coarse jests. Rascal or gentleman, lackey or soldier, all these had fled from the terror that stalked through London. Under shadow of the plague, a rogue with money was good as any lord, and could drink as deep. One man, however, spoke out at Marlowe; he was a man in black, a furtive, snarling figure with angry, brooding eyes.

"So you're Master Marlowe, the poet, the agnostic, the man who denies God and heaven!"

"Or hell," added Marlowe, with a roaring laugh.

"I've heard of you, and no good neither."



"So you're Master Marlowe, the poet, the agnostic, the man who denies heaven!"

"That's more than I can say of you, who sit at my board and revile me! What's your name, if you were bequeathed one by any lawful sire?"

"Richard Bame, clerk of Cheapside, am I, and no godless runagate."

Marlowe, a spark in his eyes, was about to reply when the server came and whispered at his ear. Instantly he forgot Bame, and his fist crashed on the board.

"Hola, hola! Rivo Castiliano! Bring him here quickly and set a place! Look you, friends—here's Dick Tarleton of My Lord Chamberlain's company come to seek me! Drollest of all players, most perfect of all fools, the rarest thing in the whole wide world, a loyal heart!"

Marlowe leaped up, hands outstretched as Tarleton approached.

"Come to our hearts, you divine rogue!" he went on gustily. "Not a man here ever heard o' players or poets. To the lot of 'em, fame's but a jade stamped in gold or siller; but here's a lass to raise an ache in your heart! Cicely, fair queen, this be Dick Tarleton of the sober brain and the true spirit!"

TARLETON came to the table. He was a quiet young fellow with a rugged, mobile face that could screw into fantastic shapes; but it was grave enough now. He flung off his riding-cloak and swept the lady an exaggerated reverence.

Straightening, he gave her a second and sharper glance, and bowed to the boisterous greetings of the company. He looked once again at Cicely, before he turned and caught the arm of the poet.

"Kit, come aside for a moment or two!" he said. The server was setting a place and bringing a chair. "I've private word for you. Art drunk?"

"Impossible!" Marlowe, arm in arm with him, swung away down the shell-edged garden path. "Should know me better than to suspect such a thing, Dick."

"Who the devil are these people?"

"How the devil should I know? They straggled in during the day, fugitives from London. But the lass—ah, Dick, the lass is a jewel, a gem o' Samarkand, a very pearl of Araby! She was trudging at a cart-tail. I had her bathed and dressed. Who? Bah! The only name I know is Cicely. I bade 'em all to dine with me, and here we be."

"Then they're not friends of yours?"

Marlowe laughed. "Under this terror, Dick, names and friends are all forgot. Man wants only liquor, and somewhither

to flee. Escape for mind and body, that's the cry! I find it rare good fun. These prating cowards, clerks and gentry and merchants—faugh! One but plays with them!"

"You've fallen into your satanic mood, have you?" said Tarleton. "Years ago Ben Jonson called you the kindest heart alive; and that was years ago. When you were young and the royalest of friends—"

"Pox take you, Dick! A sermon?" burst in Marlowe fleeringly.

"No, an errand. I've money for you to squander on that feckless trull—"

"Careful, lad!" Marlowe halted, and his voice bore warning. "I said the lass is a jewel, and so she is, and hath within her something rarely noble, some quality delicate and fragile that leaps to one's soul. You'll see. Within the hour you'll be her slave. Well, well, no more of this. You bring news?"

"Aye, from Ned Alleyn. He's off with a company o' players to Bristol and the west country. He left a purse with me, saying it was a debt he owed you. I've had no chance to bring it, until now."

Tarleton produced a purse. The poet took it and pocketed it.

"Rare Ned Alleyn! Wilt ever forget him in my Tamburlaine? The lordliest presence of them all! What news from your own company? Is Ben Jonson i' the city?"

"He's gone. Everyone's gone, scattered in mad flight," said Tarleton. "Will Shakespeare and his brother are gone—"

"They would be gone," Marlowe broke in sourly. "I never liked that fellow, Dick. Is it true that you and the other players swore an oath, after that first play was writ for him by another man, never to reveal the secret?"

"Kit, Kit, would you trick me?" Tarleton asked reproachfully. "If I admitted any such oath, you'd know all. You're not a player, but a writer. I can't let you into what is, after all, a secret of the profession."

"That's answer enough," laughed Marlowe, and he clapped Tarleton on the shoulder. "Old friend, it's a sorry business when the clink o' siller enters into the making of plays. When oaths are sworn. When a rogue is exalted into a great man, upon pretense. When a cheap and petty brain hangs upon the repute of a great and noble brain—"

"Kit, forget all this; you've been drinking," cut in Tarleton abruptly. "And I must be off. I'm riding on, to

look up my married sister in Gravesend and stop with her."

"Nonsense, lad! You'll bide here with me."

"Only for a bite and a sup. Art doing a new play?"

"I was, but am no longer." Marlowe looked back at the candles and the company. His fair, eager face was curiously twisted in the moonlight. The gentle kindness of it stood out strangely and strikingly. So did the dark and terrible evil of it, as he went on:

"She's been here two hours, Dick, and the world's different. I know nothing of her, yet I know everything. She's the most rare and delicate creature alive. I've no more than brushed her lips with my fingers—"

"Good God, man, are you serious?" exclaimed the other. "You, the foremost poet in England, the genius of us all, greater than Jonson himself—struck mad by a Bankside wench? I know her face, at least; can't remember where I saw her. Some light-o'-love."

Marlowe put an arm about Tarleton's shoulders and shook his head, smiling gently.

"Lad, I'm close to thirty, and in my time have looked up more than one lane. What counts most is not what has been, but what is! Reality takes a different aspect under the wings o' death, Dick. You don't know her—"

HE broke off abruptly, looking back at the table. The boisterous mirth had fallen silent. Forms were stealing off into the darkness. The company, one by one, were leaving the half-eaten feast.

"They fear you, Dick," said Marlowe soberly. "You're just from London, and the terror of the plague is on them."

"Then I'll go—"

"Silent! You'll not. I'm glad your coming has rid me of them. After all, the quicker the devil takes the lot, the better! Look you, lad; I've a new argument in regard to that book which they call the Bible—"

"For shame, Kit!" Tarleton swung upon him with abrupt anger. "Now I know you're drunk and the devil in you. Sober, you're a poet, a dear fellow loved by all the world. Liquor makes you a rascal, a sorry blackguard, a blaspheming, loutish, crafty fiend planning evil to all around. . . Oh, Kit, Kit!" The comedian's voice broke with sudden agonized appeal. "Will you not see the truth ere it's too late? The noblest heart

alive, when sober; and in liquor a foul beast plotting harm to everyone!"

Marlowe broke into a laugh. "Come, lad! Every man has two men in him."

"You have a devil for one o' them," said Tarleton bluntly. "That's why you wanted to know about the oath, with all your fine ranting talk about the clink o' siller and so forth! You're drunk and blaspheming and plotting evil! It's no secret. You, who might be so high, are another man when drunk, and the foul fiend himself is in you!"

Marlowe, still laughing, caught his arm. "Come, Dick; back to the board! As for what ye say, this wanton talk plagues me not. I've heard it often, and it's not true. If I deny God and man, it's from conviction, not from drunken folly. Besides, I'll drink no more this night. Upon my honor. Nor, perhaps, tomorrow neither—tomorrow and tomorrow! Honor bound."

"Good, if ye mean it. No more wine tonight, upon your honor!"

THEY came back to the table and the candles. Of the entire company, only Cicely remained, and two men. One was Richard Bame of the angry eyes; the other sat at Cicely's right hand. He was over-dressed, with a fur-trimmed tabard, green silk doublet, rich lace at throat and wrist, and a profusion of gold chains and jewels. His features were smooth and strong, but his eyes were deep, smoldering, dangerous.

"So fear hath spoiled the supper, for all save us—" began Marlowe. The scowling man, Bame, came to his feet.

"And your blasphemies have spoiled it for me," said he dourly. "Good night."

He went striding away. Dick Tarleton took the place prepared for him and began the meal, hungrily.

Marlowe stood looking at the man beside Cicely.

"Well, good stranger? Neither fear nor blasphemy can spoil your meat?"

The other shook his head. "I've supped wi' the devil before this."

"You're flattering," Marlowe said dryly. "How shall we name you?"

"Francis," replied the other. "A simple country gentleman, my lord."

"Lord me not, ye fool!" snapped Marlowe. A snarl showed in him. All at once, the fine gentleness was gone from his face. For a moment it showed the stamp of a diabolic, sneering fury; then this passed, and Marlowe shrugged and smiled again.

"To me, every poet is a lord," said Francis calmly. He gave Cicely a side-long glance. If there were no fear in his eyes, there was suddenly no lack of it in hers. "Having paid a full two shillings for upper stalls to enjoy more than one of your plays, may I not worship here free and gladly at your shrine?"

Marlowe looked at him. "A fulsome rogue, and I think a lying one," said he calmly, then pulled out his chair and sat down and fell to meat.

Francis showed no offense, but smiled and spoke under his breath with Cicely. Dick Tarleton glanced from one to another and ate, and spared no wine. Marlowe, not touching his cup, looked up as Francis addressed him.

"Master Marlowe, will ye drink a health with me?"

"I will not," said Kit Marlowe curtly. "I'm drinking no more wine this night. Dick, wilt go out on the water with me and Cicely, later? Full moon, the river, and a boat to be had—you shall prick a lute, Dick."

"Not I," said Tarleton. "When my horse is baited, I'm for Gravesend. Hm! Master Francis and good Mistress Cicely, we've met before this. The Francis tongue hath a touch of Yorkshire that rings familiar."

"Not to my knowledge," said Francis lightly, and Tarleton knew it for a lie. But when he glanced at Cicely, she smiled and nodded to him, a twinkle in her eye.

"I've seen you often, at the theater. You and Kemp, the tragedian, were with Master Burbage the day I spoke with him."

"Ha! By the saints, I remember now!" Tarleton laid down his knife and stared. It came to him how fair she was; another sweet caught in the devilish net of Kit Marlowe—a net apparently all tenderness and nobility, but with Satan grinning at the drawstrings.

"AYE, I remember now," went on Tarleton. "You wanted to play a part. Kit, that's the truth—she wanted to play a woman's part! I swear it! Who has ever heard the like?"

"It's no such nonsense as you seem to think," protested Cicely quickly. "Why shouldn't women be players, too? Why should women's parts always be played by boys? That's the real nonsense!"

Marlowe leaned forward, his eyes warm. The liquor was dying out of him now, as Tarleton could see.

Once a hand shot
out of the water
as though point-
ing at them.

"So you want to play on the stage!" he said to Cicely. "I think it'd be marvelous. All the better that it's never been done. And you came to Diccon and he hemmed and hawed and put you off—good old Burbage! Gad, I can just see him! Must have outraged him to the soul—the very idea of a woman on the stage!"

He slapped his thigh and roared. Tarleton laughed, Cicely smiled; but Francis sat with his gray eyes on Marlowe, giving no sign of any emotion.

"I should like to try it," said Cicely, and sighed a little. "I know I could do it."

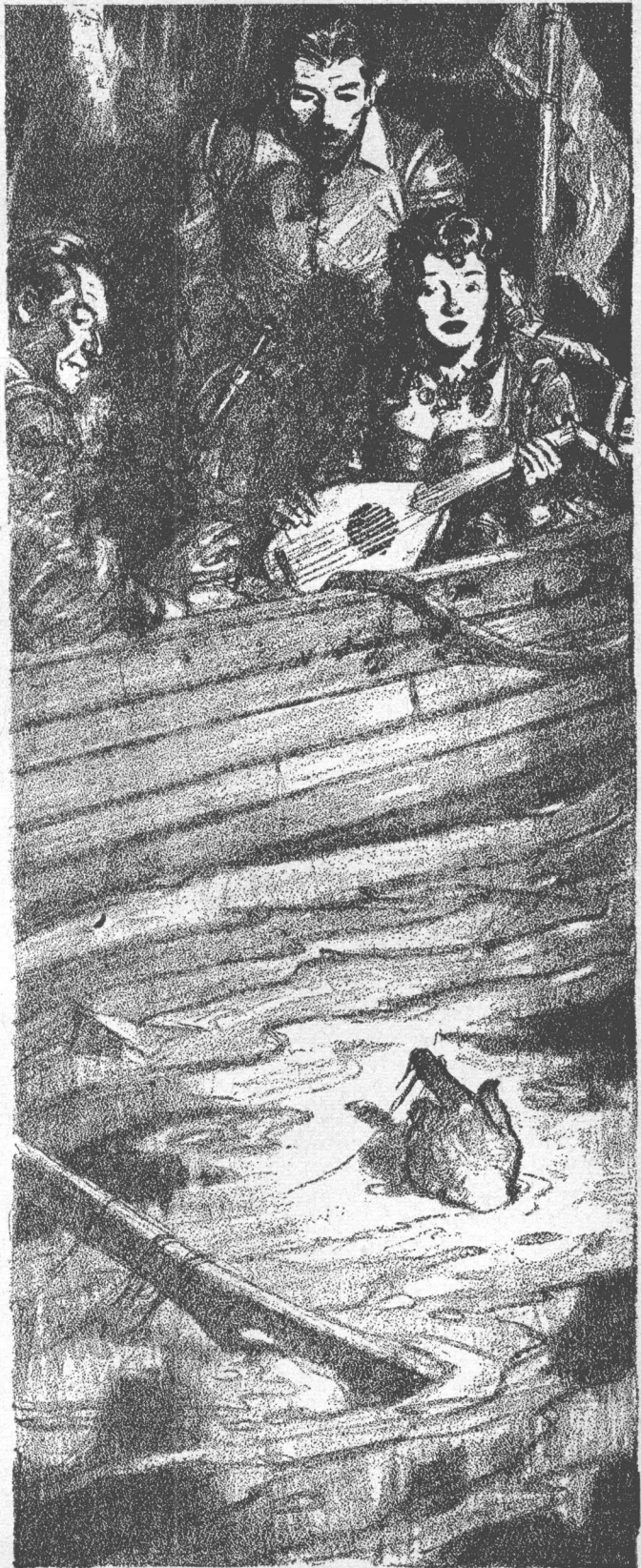
She was fair and slim, a slender girl but well budded, her hair like spun silk, her face wide and lovely to see, for all the look that sat in the blue eyes. Tarleton regarded her with open interest, now, and his heart leaped to the meeting of eyes, for she was gazing straight at him.

"You shall have the chance," spoke up Marlowe. "I swear it, lass! Tarleton, lad, why not do a bit with her? A snatch of my Edward Second—see how it might run on her tongue!"

Cicely looked at Dick Tarleton, and his heart scurried again.

"We—we could not, here i' the garden," said he. "Too many folk about; it would cause great scandal, were it known."

"Scandal enough without it," spoke up Francis, a certain unctuous pleasure in his colorless voice. "Master Bame hath gone



to lay complaint of blasphemy against poor Kit Marlowe. Says he, that a man should so talk against God is sheer lawless rascality, and the talker an outlaw or should be."

Tarleton looked again at the man, and could make nothing of him, except some vaguely familiar hint. A queer impassive man, young enough, but something grim in his eyes of agate-gray.

"Why, we'll take to the water!" said Marlowe. "A barge, with rowers; a lute for you, Dick, and for me as well. Queen Cicely to sit enthroned as we float—and you, Sir Fop, with your gold chains and talk of outlawry, will you accompany us?"

"Thanks, I'll to bed," said Francis. "But not *my* talk of outlawry, mind you; that was Bame's doing. Outlaw you may be, Master Kit, in godly eyes, in all decent eyes—outlaw, and a foul beastly thing in shape of man. However, that's naught of my affair, and I'll wager all my golden chains against your belt and dagger, that I can drink you under the table in an hour's time."

"Done," cried Marlowe, evidently between laughter and fury. This smooth way of hurling insults in his teeth and smiling them away, baffled him. "Stay! Not now, though; I've sworn to touch no more wine tonight. Tomorrow noon, let's say!"

"Aye, tomorrow noon." Francis rose, and bent over the hand of Cicely, with a bow of Castilian grace. "Fair queen, make the most of your poet by this silver moon, for he'll be too drunk to see it tomorrow night!"

He swaggered away into the darkness and was gone, toward the tavern. Marlowe turned to Dick Tarleton and besought him to stay the night. The player, looking past Marlowe's cheek, met the gaze of Cicely.

"Stay!" said her eyes, and her face confirmed the word.

"Why, then," said Tarleton, "I'll stay, Kit. Since you're drinking no wine for love o' me, the least I can do is to play up to you!"

MARLOWE shouted for the landlord, got a bed put in his room for Tarleton, arranged about the player's horse, and secured a barge and oarsmen. He flung away toward the tavern in search of his own lute. Dick Tarleton found himself alone with Cicely.

"Quickly!" he said to her, his eyes urgent. "What's he to you?"

Whether it were the candles or the moonlight, color rose in her cheeks.

"Nothing," she said bitterly, "but how can I help it? If he wants me, he must have me. I've no choice. All my world was wiped out by the sickness. I can't earn my bread by singing madrigals and playing the lute."

"You don't know him," Tarleton said hotly. "See him in liquor, before you decide. The poet then becomes a ravening beast—crafty, elemental, brutish! Those who loved him have turned from him. His friends warn others against him, as I warn you."

"Perhaps he needs me," said she.

"No. I need you," Tarleton rejoined, and looked into her eyes.

AND you call yourself his friend?" Her voice held a hint of scorn.

"God forbid! I'd save him if I could; no one can," said Tarleton. "The nobler part in Kit recognizes your worth and loveliness; the devil in him will debase and kill you. He has done this to others. There was a lass only a year ago—a certain Mistress Anne—who died because she thought he was an angel, and found otherwise. Indeed, it is no secret how liquor makes this frightful change in him, as it has changed his whole life. But I'm staying until the morrow, because of what I read in your face, and because of what my heart tells me."

She laughed in faint derision.

"A play-actor who misses no chance at a light-o'-love, eh?"

"Shame to you for those words," said Tarleton quietly. A flicker of the candles brought out the grave, earnest lines of his face. She leaned forward, suddenly contrite.

"I'm sorry, indeed I am! But who am I? Nothing. A toy for men. I must fight all you men—him, and you, and that one who was here last—"

"You don't have to fight," broke in Tarleton. "Instead, trust. Fight the others; trust me. Keep that thought in your mind. Who was that fellow last here? That Francis? A liar, by the feel of him. You know him?"

"No," she said. "But he frightened me. There was some terrible thing in him—a deadly hatred, perhaps. I could feel it; just as I feel faith and kindness in you."

Tarleton grunted. "And what feel you in Kit?"

"Fascination and—and fear," she said. "Something wonderful yet terrible."



His ranting words stopped at nothing. . . . In the midst of it, Sir Francis did what he had come to do.

“Keep your feelings to yourself, unless you want to burn for a witch,” he said quickly. “Above all, trust not Kit with such words. A stoup of wine or two, and he’d scheme to see you burned. Here he comes. Tomorrow, say the word and I’ll face him down, and take you away to my sister in Gravesend; and I’ll ask naught in return.”

Kit Marlowe came with a laugh and a gleeful shout. He swept them up in his impetuous way and all three hastened down the paths to the river, where a

barge with four rowers was now waiting at the landing.

Cicely took the lute from Marlowe and pricked it deftly. Never was Kit more charming, more merrily debonair; he sang his own songs, and Cicely sang, and Dick Tarleton did a bit or two in character until his clowning set them in a gale of laughter. Then the boatmen were roused to song likewise, what with brown ale and Marlowe’s urging, and took up the old Saxon drinking catch, with its silly rhymes:

*Take a deep deep draft, and think of how
we laughed*

*When the tankard fell, adown on the fat old
abbot's crown. . . .*

*So drink your fill of the beery rill
And then go down in motley.*

Thus all made merry on the silvery radiant tide, wherein every now and again flashed a white and horrible face rolling down in deathly wise to the sea. Once a hand shot out of the water as though pointing at them; this made Cicely cry out and cover her eyes, but Kit Marlowe only hummed another catch.

*He who devils this devil around
The fitter the saint will be!*

"Not a half bad philosophy, whether applied to a bottle or a loose habit!" exclaimed Tarleton, laughing. "I'll apply it to the Virginia tobacco and never smoke another pipe, Kit, provided you'll do the same with the bottle. Eh?"

"Avaunt, tempter!" Marlowe clapped him jovially on the shoulder. "I'll do nothing of the sort. What, abandon good liquor? Never while I live, lad—never!"

Later, when the lass had drifted off to sleep and the rowers were heading back to the Deptford landing, Tarleton touched the poet's arm and spoke very softly.

"Ye saw the corpse-hand pointing, Kit? Look, now; maybe to you it was pointing, in warning. Try none of your tricks with Cicely."

Marlowe stared at him in the high moonlight.

"My tricks? You dare to speak thus?"

"Think of Anne Shipley, Kit. With her death, ye lost your last friends. I've hung on longer than most, but now it's ended. I'll take this lass from you if I can, so there's fair warning."

The poet took a deep breath, and laughed a little.

"Why, Dick, I could love ye for those words, loved I not this fine fellow Tarleton already! So, you're taken with her? I am also. I'll not let ye catch her away from me; and there's fair warning back at you. But you and I are friends, can win and lose like friends, and no need o' swordplay."

He put out his hand, and Tarleton gripped it.

"Well said, Kit, and truly meant," he answered sadly, "but God save us if you start drinking again tomorrow! Then I'll to sword if I must, for her sake."

"And you, who this same evening called her a feckless trull!" chuckled Marlowe.

"True; my eyes hadn't been opened," Tarleton admitted simply. "Something in her has gone straight to my soul, as it has to yours. Ah, Kit! I'd give her up gladly, could you but have faith and all the high nobility of your genius—"

"Stop whining like an old woman," broke in the poet roughly. "I believe in nothing beyond what I see and hear and feel; that's plenty, too. Genius? Tommyrot, lad! Away with all that nonsense. Had I not desired to keep my oath to you, I'd be roaring merry this moment, instead of going home with a sad heart and evil presages."

"Evil presages on such a night? Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Tarleton comfortably. "I've seen none and felt none, unless it were that hand rising from the water and pointing. By the way, who is that man with the queer eyes—that fellow Francis?"

"Who knows or cares?" retorted Marlowe. "Dick, you've given me straight, true words; I thank you for 'em. Now wake the lass and ask her choice. If she'll have you, take her and begone, with my blessing."

"Not so," Tarleton objected. "Sleep on it, Kit. If I'm o' the same mind regarding her in the morning, I'll take you at your word."

SO they came back to the tavern and stumbled up to bed. Marlowe was snoring in no time, but Dick Tarleton lay staring upon the moonlit window, sleep evading him.

He was under no illusions about the splendid brawny Marlowe, the genius whose young thunderous voice had rung through England. The poet was not yet thirty, but for the past two or three years had been more and more silent as the frightful change crept upon his life. That generous, noble spirit had been gradually gnawed away until now the mere breath of alcohol awakened a malignant flame in the man. . . .

Wakening, Tarleton found himself alone in the room. He dressed and went down to the inn-yard pump, discovering that Marlowe had gone to the river with some townfolk in order to see some great ship newly anchored there. His ablutions made, Tarleton went into the ordinary for his morning draught, and was sitting there over a long pipe when Cicely made her appearance. He rose, and they laughed together in joyous greeting.

"You look like a spring primrose!" said he presently, when she was quaffing

her draught of milk. "Tell me, Cicely, have ye no relatives?"

"I have nothing," she said with a terrible simplicity.

"That's not the right sort o' talk for a June morning! June is in today, lass!" he exclaimed. "Nothing? You have everything! All I can give you, from name to the silver groat in my pocket, I'm no roaring gallant of nimble tongue, nor one of the gay careless crew who have made the stage and all plays a mess of vileness, to the disgust of sober folk. I'll take ye as ye take me, at face value and the bid o' the heart, if you say the word!"

She smiled as she watched him; it was a tender, wise smile.

"Master Tarleton, I do not love you, nor you me; but I might, I might! Wilt give me time to think?"

"Not under this roof," Tarleton replied bluntly. "Kit said to ask you; if ye prefer me, we go with his blessing. Need not stare, lass! I'm no liar."

"I know that," she replied. "Dick Tarleton, will you help me to play stage parts?"

"No wife o' mine shall set foot on the stage," he said firmly. "Lass, it's a bawdy place. Bacon and Barclay and their ilk will ha' none of it for that reason. Nor shall you."

"Some day," she said, looking out at the blue sky and the river, "some day woman's parts will be played by women, and the stage will discover what it's missed all these years."

"Will ye go home with me to my sister in Gravesend?" asked Tarleton steadily. "Or stay here with Kit?"

Her eyes came back to him and dwelt upon his face for a long moment.

"You know the answer well," she replied at last. "But I'll not sneak out while his back is turned."

TARLETON beamed, and reached for her hand, and gripped it warmly.

"We be of a kind, lass, you and I! Go and pack. I'll wait here."

"Pack? I have nothing." She looked down at her dress. "He got me this, yesterday."

"Then we'll get my horse saddled, and another for you, and be ready to go when he comes back, if that suits you. Don't remain long enough for drink to get into him."

"It suits me," she assented gravely.

He gave the orders, hiring a horse for Cicely. They were talking together when

one came from the upstairs and joined them with a cheery greeting; it was Francis, his eyes gray and chill as ever. They exchanged a few words, and as he went out to put his head under the pump, Cicely looked after him.

"I know now—I remember!" she exclaimed. "I knew I'd seen him somewhere. He was with the Earl of Montgomery's following; a gentleman of his. Someone pointed him out to me, for he and the Earl were arm in arm and most handsomely dressed. This was at the Revels last Twelfth Night."

"Aye?" queried Tarleton, in amazement. "This agate-eye a great gentleman? And his name?"

She shook her head. "I can't mind it now, but I vow he's the same man. Ah! There he comes—look!"

BUT she spoke not of Francis now, but of Marlowe, who came swinging and swaggering in from the open, to stand blinking at the dark room and then cross to where they sat.

He greeted Cicely as though she were Queen Bess in person, then met the eye of Tarleton, and came erect under that steady, unflinching regard.

"What, Dick?" said he. "Ye look at me mortal hard. What's to do?"

"This, Kit," Tarleton said quietly. "Cicely desires to go with me. The horses are ready; we waited to face you with it."

Marlowe's features changed, twisted, became suffused with blood, then paled again. His eyes gripped Cicely with an expression of dismay. He found fumbling words.

"Why, little lass, would ye leave me?"

"It was only yesterday I came, Kit," she said gently.

"But I can't lose you like this!" he cried out. "It's impossible! You must stay!"

"I will stay for a while, on one condition," she told him. "Provided you touch no drop of any liquor, Kit."

"Absurd! That I should let you injure me, condition this and that, prove your unfaith by promises of faith as to a child!" Marlowe said, with a burst of anger. Almost at once it passed, and he drew a deep breath like a sigh. "Well, I found a precious thing and it slipped from my hand," he said slowly. "Go with her, Dick; art a loyal man. How rarely lucky are they that have not spirit to plunge into the lusts of life! My blessings follow after you, Cicely."

With this queer speech, he turned from them, strode out into the courtyard, and when the two followed, he was standing in hearty greeting with the man Francis. They mounted, and Marlowe waved heartily to them, and Francis bowed with the grace of one trained in courts.

They rode out of the inn yard and out of Deptford, taking the downstream road for Gravesend. High twelve came, and passed again; they stopped to eat bread and cheese under the shadow of a hawthorn hedge, and there spoke of Kit for the first time.

"It was nobly done of him," said Tarleton gravely.

She nodded.

"Yes. He might have said many things; I expected him to upbraid me. And if he had begged me, Dick, I must have stayed a while, for very decency toward him!"

"Art sorry now?" queried Tarleton.

"Nay! All's well with the June world!" she said brightly. "Better here than there, with the cold gray eyes of Sir Ralph eating into me like worms!"

"Who?" demanded Tarleton.

She laughed at his gawking face.

"Oh, Sir Ralph Shipley! I just remembered his name, as we were riding. You know . . . the man who calls himself Francis."

Tarleton sat frozen, until an incoherent cry escaped him. He came to his feet abruptly and his hands were shaking.

"Shipley, Shipley!" he exclaimed, plunging to catch his horse. "God of furies—Anne Shipley's brother! Wait for me here, lass—wait for me here—"

He mounted and spurred; behind him lifted the dust of a madman's riding.

IN the tavern at Deptford, Kit Marlowe sat with Francis, the two of them drinking with many a jest and racy story. By little and little, Marlowe fell to cursing and blaspheming. True, he had never been a man for monkey; yet in the old days when his star rose so brightly, there had been no venom in his words.

Now it was different, as the heady wine took hold of him. It was strange, almost incredible, how the temper of the man changed. His ranting words stopped at nothing, and what had been a noble mind became a pool of vileness.

In the midst of this, Francis did what he had come to do, then mounted his horse and rode away. . . .

A little later, Tarleton's foam-lathered steed came to halt in the inn yard. Almost at once he found he was too late. The host came running to him with news Marlowe was stabbed, but not yet dead.

"Oh, sir, if ye be a surgeon, look to him quickly!" pleaded the innkeeper. "There be none roundabout, and he'll not let us touch him—"

TARLETON came to where the dying man lay. Sober now—dreadfully sober—Marlowe smiled up at him.

"Dick, lad! Nay, leave my wound alone; I've but a moment or two left."

"I came to warn ye!" babbled Tarleton, kneeling and holding the chill hand. "It was her brother! I just learned—"

"Aye, so he told me. Careful, lad! Speak not the name!" Marlowe's fingers clenched hard on his. "Let him be known as Francis, nothing more. Swear it to me, swear it! Let him go unpursued, unknown—after all, I was to blame for her death—swear it!"

Dick Tarleton swore the oath. Marlowe sighed and relaxed, and smiled again.

"Well done, well done. Dick, he was a curious man!" he said faintly. "He would not strike last night, as he meant, for I stopped drinking then. He had to make me drunk, d'ye mind? And why, think you? He told me before he left. So he could send me to hell in the midst o' blasphemies . . . he believes all that stuff . . . he wanted to make sure of landing me in—in hell."

Kit Marlowe died upon the word. . . .

Tarleton did what might be done, which was little enough. With the plague in London and the terror of it everywhere, no one cared whether poet or great lord or street-beggar lay dead in a corner. Lucky was a man to get burial at all, with the Thames so close!

However, Dick Tarleton arranged the burial, securing a niche under the gray walls of St. Nicholas. Keeping his oath to say no word regarding Francis, he set out at last, his face toward the waiting Cicely and Gravesend.

As he rode, he wondered within himself because Kit Marlowe had died smiling, the cold relaxed face very gentle and sweet to look upon. Thus wondering, he rode on, a loyal, genuine fellow who happily suffered not from the tortures and temptings of genius!

And in Deptford town lay the poet of "Tamburlaine" and "Faustus," a voice of gold forever outlawed and silent.

Another story in "The World Was Their Stage" will appear in our next issue.



A brief comedy of justice—overheard in the jury-room.

By KARL DETZER

Stubborn

In the case of Ruth Ardlam versus James Winford Ardlam, her husband, Judge Hale ordered a mistrial and dismissed the jury when Jurymen John Purkis was rushed to Emergency Hospital suffering from a minor concussion. Purkis struck his head against the concrete floor when his chair tipped backward while the jury was deliberating. . . .

NOW, gentlemen, let's not get excited. You've got no call to start hollering at me again, just because you're too stubborn to agree with me. Calling a man names never was known to change his mind, after he's reasoned things out like I have.

I'm the most reasonable party in the world and— I'm glad you find something to laugh at, gentlemen. It'll be a lot nicer in this jury-room to have you laughing at John Purkis instead of hollering at him.

You see, gentlemen, I've served on plenty juries before this. Do it whenever I get a chance. Besides, I've studied law some. Bought a book once off a

fellow that needed quick cash. So I know the answers. . . .

Sure I can count, Mr. Murphy. Eleven to one, that's how we stand, just like we been for nineteen hours. Eleven of you hell-bent for sending poor defendant Ardlam to jail, and me with a little milk of human kindness wanting him set free.

Sure, I'll explain again, Mr. Murphy, though I got my doubts you'll ever get it through your dumb heads! This defendant, Ardlam, he's charged with hitting his wife with a rocking-chair.

Well, if ever a woman needed a punch on the nose— What's 'at, Mr. Murphy? Oh, I thought you said something under your breath. I ask you, gentlemen, have any of you got wives like this Ruth Ardlam, the complainant? Well, I have. Dead ringer for that female, my own wife is. Soon as Mrs. Ardlam comes into court, letting on she's scared, I'm sure glad I'm on the jury that's trying her poor husband. And when she opens her mouth, I can see she's meaner than a box of rattlesnakes, just like Mrs. John Purkis. Accusing, always accusing, just like Mrs. Purkis.

Would you believe it, gentlemen, if I take one little drink on my way home, my wife says I'm drunk? Just the way the wife of this poor defendant does. Well, three or four drinks, then, if you got to argue. Only, I'm not drunk, simply in high spirits, like poor Ardlam. But what does my wife do? She starts nagging—asking where is my pay-envelope. Just like this Ardlam woman admits she asks, too, as if it's her business.

And this woman, complaining the way she did about her poor husband not working! Why, he can't find a job! I know. I'm looking for work most of the time myself, in the want ads. And she admits right in open court how she raised hell with him for using up her hard-earned money. What's she want him to do, starve?

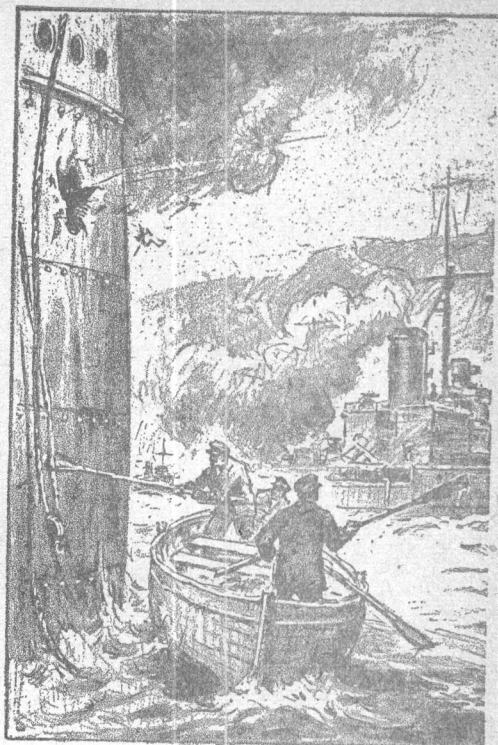
There's no argument, gentlemen. If you had one ounce of sympathy, you'd understand why Ardlam socks her with that rocking-chair. What's a broken nose, after all he's suffered? She had it coming, if ever—

WHAT'S that, Mr. Murphy? What do I want? Why, just this: Either you eleven men are going to get some sense and acquit Ardlam, or we can stick around from now on. I'm in no hurry; neither is the judge. I know him. He'll keep a jury two or three weeks, till it finally gets together. No reason to start groaning, gentlemen. If you're bound to be stubborn, it's up to you.

No sir, I don't want a mistrial. Neither does this judge. He don't like mistrials. Never gives one if he possibly can help it. I've looked up his record. Last time Judge Hale declared a mistrial was seven years ago, when a juror got sick after they'd deliberated fifteen days. . . .

Fifteen days, yes sir, that's what I said. So if you got businesses to take care of, that's your lookout. Me, I got all the time in the world. Stay here a month if you want. . . . Hey, Murphy, take your foot off my chair! Almost tipped me over. I'll stay here till—Hey—look out! I'm—

Patrick Murphy, jury foreman, said no one happened to be looking at Juryman Purkis when he fell, only heard him cry out as he struck the floor. In the excitement, before Purkis could be gotten to his feet, a heavy table also overturned on top of him. Judge Hale thanked the other jurors and sent them home.



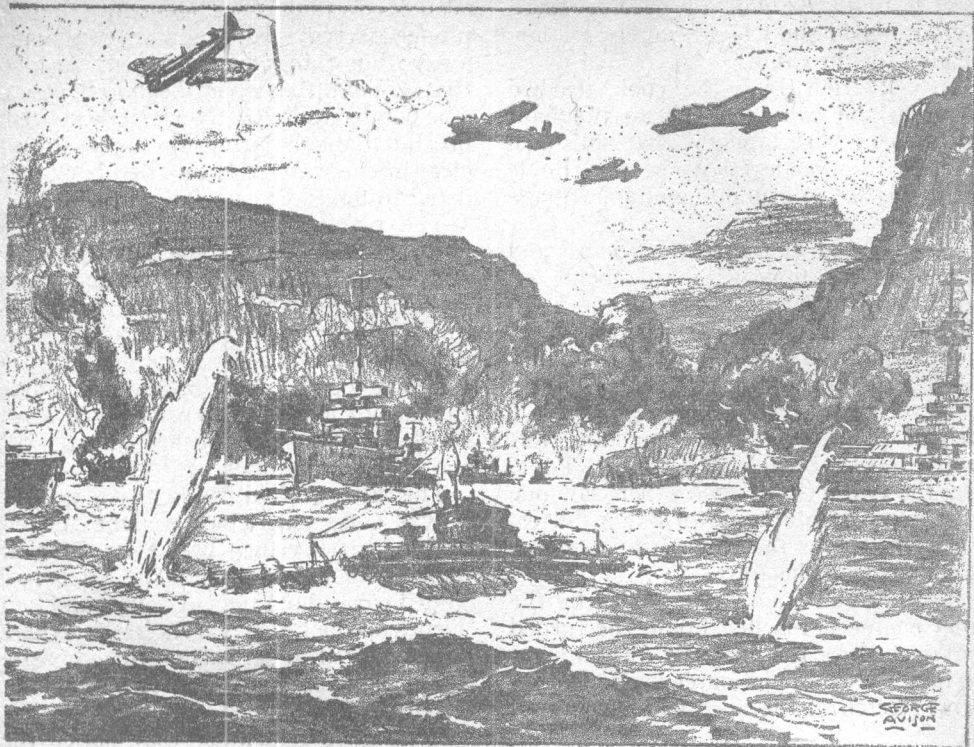
FREE

The wild adventure of an American merchant crew who took sides at Narvik.

THANK God they left us the cook!" said Mr. Foyle, who was or had been second mate. "Did you notice them Nazis come one day ahead of the blizzard? Smart work, that was. And the Britishers showed up right in the middle of it, and got hell knocked out of 'em."

"I knew I was a fool to stay with this ship," grunted McClelland, "after it got headed north! I should have quit her at Havre."

Foyle chuckled, and swept shore and harbor through his binoculars. It was early morning; the fourth day after the naval *Blitzkrieg* and the blizzard had struck Narvik, to make this far northern port temporarily Nazi. The blizzard had raged for three days; the shores were deep with snow.



AND EQUAL

By MICHAEL GALLISTER

Illustrated by George Avison

Two British freighters, three German, three neutral—they were empty of men, all crews swept ashore when the Nazi destroyers and troopships steamed in. During the blizzard British destroyers had come and had gone again, roughly handled; that sleek Nazi U-boat, now lying on the surface near the destroyers, had done part of the damage. At the enormous iron quay across the harbor, Foyle saw two troopships lying; and he heard something that pierced the distant gunfire drifting from the mountains.

"Wake up, Chief!" he exclaimed. "Something coming up! That's why them troopships have been laying alongside the quay. You're goin' to see something."

"I've seen too much," growled the Chief. "Damn them, they smashed our radio! Wish—"

The sound came clearer—the droning roar of an airplane engine. And there was the plane herself—Foyle could see the Nazi emblem on her wings. A pursuit-ship, evidently. She circled out over the harbor and headed back.

"Smart guys," said Foyle. "We'd ought to celebrate that, Chief. You and me could look in the Old Man's locker. He had some prime Bourbon in there; the Nazis cleaned him out before he had time to take anything."

"We might put it safe, then," said the Chief, brightening. "How did you happen to get left aboard? Even if you were sick, as you say—"

"Oh, they didn't know I was sick," broke in Foyle. "Only God knew it. I crawled under a boat-cover, and nobody saw me except Izzy, who crawled in too."

"I'll thank ye not to become sacrilegious," said the Chief severely as they headed for the cabin.

A yell from Izzy the cook reached them in the cabin—a yell so pregnant with alarm, with urgency, that both men jumped for the deck. As he ran, Foyle heard the angry drumming of an airplane motor—a diving plane.

He emerged at the starboard rail and stared at the town; the tide being on flood, the ship swung so that he had a full view of Narvik, opposite. The two Nazi troopships were still moored at the mammoth iron bridge where the ore-chutes were. Over the bay and going fast was a British plane. The Nazi machine was trying to get above it, and failing. Foyle saw the two dash at each other, saw one of them go tumbling down like a fluttering bird. It was the Nazi ship, done for, crashing near the town.

Another yell from Izzy, echoed by the chief engineer, reached Foyle; he turned and dashed for the port rail. From here, he had a view of the outer harbor and a scant stretch of the fiord outside.

ALMOST at the harbor entrance two destroyers were now racing in. Shells were bursting all around them; one yawed wildly and then vanished from sight in a burst of steam, and was gone. The other must have been badly hit. The water-wings fell from her bows and she lost way, gradually swinging around until she faced the fiord.

"Crippled, by the Lord Harry!" yelled McClelland. "Look, look!"

His voice shrilled and cracked; no wonder. Half a dozen smoke-pouring destroyers edged into view. The Nazi craft seemed to break all to pieces, but her torpedoes were taking the water. She was dying game. Under their eyes, she became mere bits of wreckage amid spouting water, and was gone.

The town and harbor were in a screaming din of whistles. The five Nazi destroyers had wakened to mad activity; so did Mr. Foyle, suddenly conscious that all hell was about to break loose here.

"Look alive!" he roared at the Chief and Izzy. "We got to get us a boat in the water, so shake a leg."

"Wait!" The Chief caught his arm, pointing. "Look, man! Look!"

The British plane had turned and was hurtling down from the sky with a wild roar. Guns from the destroyers were spurting at her. She came on and on; her objective was the submarine, still on the

surface. In midair she suddenly faltered, plunged, recovered, and went winging away; but things had dropped. Around that U-boat the water began to spout. The bombs exploded. None made a direct hit, but the submarine was flung almost clear of the water. She settled back and listed to one side, crippled and silent.

The plane went winging out to the fiord, no doubt to some battleship or cruiser, for a heavy smoke was mounting the sky. The Nazi destroyers were jetting smoke from their funnels; the troopships by the quay were heading out.

"Come on, come on!" ordered Foyle anxiously. The other two obeyed now, and he led them to the after port boat, one of the two remaining.

The three worked frantically to get the canvas cover off. Once a fight started in this circumscribed bay, everything in sight was going to suffer. The Nazis had landed some thousands of troops and had the prize, which was Narvik itself. Where Foyle wanted to get was on this opposite shore, whose scattered houses were all deserted and abandoned.

"You guys remember that notice the Old Man posted up! We're neutrals," he said.

"Yah!" snorted the Chief. "Give me a chance to be anything else, and see!"

"That's so!" Izzy chimed in defiantly. "All men are born free and equal, aint they? And them Nazis won't allow—"

"Neither will I," broke in Foyle. "You pull that free-and-equal stuff aboard ship, and you'll have something to remember it by! Off the ship, that's different; make it stick if you can, and more power to you. Now get her swung out; you pile in, Izzy. Chief, if you want to salvage anything, hop after it! I'll get the instruments."

McClelland departed. As though to hasten him,—which it did,—a shell came screaming overhead and burst with a queer after-clang of iron on iron above the destroyers. Shrapnel, thought Foyle, as he came to his feet and met the sheepish grin of Izzy.

"Straighten out them falls," he ordered. "I'll be right back."

Duty pounded at him. He gained the cabins, found the skipper's instruments and the rough log, then paused. Beside the chronometer box was a whacking big Webley automatic pistol, and it was full loaded; he dropped it in one pocket, a bottle of Bourbon in the other, and hurried back to the boat. Mr. McClelland was just coming in sight, dragging a small army locker after him.

Foyle and the Chief got the boat down safely, with Izzy in the stern-sheets.

"Now," he began, "if we got to abandon ship—*wow!*"

He and McClelland went to the deck together as a wailing scream grew upon them. It passed. Without rising, Foyle lifted himself on his hands and gawked, his eyes bulging.

"Lookit!" gasped the Chief. "Lookit!"

The Nazi submarine lay motionless, but the destroyers had spread out, making an effort to get out of the harbor into the open fiord. Too late! Those gray Britishers were in full sight now and working their guns, but they met trouble. One of them slewed violently and began to run in circles—just like a galled whale, thought Foyle. A second lost headway and bloomed in a cloud of smoke and white steam. But three others came on, and behind them two more—and from the shells, a cruiser must be somewhere in the offing. Here in the harbor, hell was let loose, as Foyle had foreseen.

The Nazis seemed to catch it all at once. Down by the head, one sank slowly, her guns still spurting flame. Two were drifting, afire; another rose in the air, and Foyle saw her break in two—a torpedo, probably. Shells were quartering the entire harbor now, and in horror Foyle saw the troopships and anchored freighters reeling, exploding!

THEN the ship under him heaved, and the deck blew into ripples. An explosion below told that a shell had gone into her. Izzy was yelling frantically from the boat. The Chief gripped the rail and yelled at Foyle:

"What ye waiting for?"

"You, damn your eyes! Go down the falls!" retorted the second mate.

McClelland lost no time. Up forward sounded a fearful clang, then an explosion that made the ship shudder. Before the Chief was safely landed in the boat, Foyle was sliding down; it was comforting to feel the ship between him and the clanging death.

"Blast it, the limeys are sinking everything afloat!" he exclaimed.

"Well, let's get to town and be safe," said McClelland, who was in the bow.

"Town? Not much!" barked Foyle. "Izzy, cast off them stern falls! We got to land here on this side the bay. No Nazis here; keep the harbor between us and them."

For the moment, lying under the freighter's counter, they could see nothing



No time now to think; he made his weapon do the chattering.

of what was happening, but they could hear plenty. Foyle whipped out his knife and cut the lashing of the oars that were beneath the thwarts, and passed one forward to the Chief with an order to shove off. The falls were already cast off. Another shell hit the ship above them, went clear through her without exploding, and blew the rusty iron plates into flinders just over their heads. Izzy, trying to ship the rudder, yelled and shook the boat-stretcher in air.

"Gimme a chance at them Nazis!" he cried out. "Just gimme one chance!"

Foyle was busy freeing the oars. In the bow, Chief McClelland was standing and pushing off from the ship. And at this instant something swung around under the ship's stern—a trim Nazi launch that must have come from one of the troopships. There were only half a dozen men aboard her, one of them an officer.

Foyle did not see her. Izzy did, and yelled anew. McClelland gave her one look and paid no heed, shoving out the boat. But the officer in the launch, just as Foyle became aware of her and looked up, shouted something inarticulate in a hysterical voice, threw up a pistol, and fired point blank. He had no doubt lost his head completely.

One wild cry burst from McClelland. He dropped his oar, spun around, and pitched down across the thwarts.

The Nazi officer fired again. The two craft were almost alongside. Foyle saw his face, convulsed in panic emotion, and heard the bullet sing past an ear. He saw one of the other Nazis raise a rifle to aim, and then Mr. Foyle was conscious of nothing more except the fury of rage that consumed him, and the Webley pistol in his own hand, jerking as he fired.

Next thing he saw was Izzy, over in the launch; and Foyle stared, slack-jawed. Izzy had taken the boat-stretcher with him. Four Nazis were on their feet, and Izzy went into them with his club, screaming like a maniac. The officer, who had been winged by Foyle's first bullet, staggered to his feet, pistol still in hand; Foyle fired once more, and this time finished his work.

It was Izzy's fight, however; and he went into it with a will, and despite a bullet that raked across his cheek and left it a red smear, he concluded it without help. That club took the last Nazi seaman under the jaw and knocked him overboard, and he did not come up—those who went into that bitter icy water seldom did.

FOYLE dropped his pistol and went to the prostrate McClelland. A rich and peculiar odor struck Foyle's nostrils; a groan escaped the Chief, and he stirred and spoke, as Foyle turned him over.

"There's blood all down my legs; I can feel it! For God's sake, clap a bandage on the wound. Hit me in the right side, it did. My ribs are broke."

Foyle explored, caught his breath, and then drew back.

"You blasted son of a sea-cook! You sanctimonious old Scotch fraud!" he cried out, in so keen a revulsion of relief that he wanted to laugh and cry at once. "Get up and get to work! Had a bottle of your damned French cognac in your coat pocket, eh? Well, lick your own wounds, and you'll taste the kind of blood that suits you best! Come on—allez oop!"

He caught the hand of the dazed Chief and jerked him upright, then turned.

A thousand anvils exploded; the ship's plates, close by, bulged and clanged. A shell had gone off inside her. She was already listing to port, Foyle saw. The launch was alongside now, Izzy's voice ringing at them.

"Hurry up, youse guys! I got the engine on neutral!"

McClelland stumbled aboard, and Foyle was after him, with a hasty look at the sprawled figures. The officer and two men were dead; another was wounded; there were no more. Izzy's stretcher had sent them over the rail. Bidding McClelland look after the wounded man, Foyle jumped to the tiller. Izzy was monkeying with the engine controls.

"All right, Izzy! Let her go!"

The launch moved, swept into speed—and a good thing. She was not fifty feet

from the ship when a shell must have reached the superstructure, for it went into the air.

"Lucky we had no steam up," said the Chief morosely, abandoning his patient. "Losh! Would ye look at the sight!"

The two troopships were gone. From the iron quay across the bay at Narvik, and from the adjacent shore, two batteries were pumping three-inch shells at the destroyers, who were holding off outside the harbor proper. Foyle had already learned that the invading Nazi forces had no artillery larger than this.

But those destroyers had done their work. The last Nazi destroyer was sinking, her stern high in air. Foyle saw that his own ship, like every other freighter in harbor, whether German or British or neutral, had been deliberately cleaned out. One was afire; the others were settling or had already plunged.

The launch headed in for the nearer shore. Izzy shut off the engine; Foyle held her toward a dock coming out from a fish-wharf; there were no fishing-boats here. And as he scanned the shore, he saw everything deserted. No one was here. Under cover of the blizzard, the inhabitants had all cleared out. Nor had the Nazis come here.

So, out of the harbor that was adrift with wreckage and spotted with bodies of men and all slick with oil, they crept into the shore and made fast. The wounded seaman died as they tried to lift him. The bodies were put on the snowy dock.

"Whew!" said Mr. McClelland. "And now what?"

"Explore," said Foyle. "This craft must have grub aboard and we're going to need it. Look below. Izzy! I want you for'ard. And, Chief! See if you can turn up any binoculars. I lost mine in the shuffle."

The Chief vanished. Foyle went forward, with Izzy at his heels. The launch was a spick and span steamer, evidently from some naval craft; but what had drawn Foyle's attention was the machine-gun mounted forward.

"DON'T ever tell me a Yid can't fight!" he observed, as he eyed the cook. "And me thinking you were scared stiff all the time!"

Izzy grinned sheepishly. "So I was, Mr. Foyle. But some of my folks got it in the neck in some of them concentration-camps in Germany, and I've always hoped maybe I'd get a chance to pay up a bit."

"You paid, all right. I suppose you don't know anything about machine-guns?"

"Yes sir!" came the eager reply. "I was in the National Guard back home before I went to sea. I've shot 'em, many's the time."

Foyle grunted. The gun was well cared for; ammunition was at hand, and Izzy turned up a lot more in the lockers. There were rifles aboard too; examining them, Foyle found them excellent rapid-fire rifles of sub-machine-gun type.

"Why all this?" asked Mr. McClelland when he emerged from below, his arms full. Foyle rubbed his stubbly chin and looked out across the harbor, where everything had fallen quiet.

"Damned if I know, Chief; but I figured things out and— Hey, what's that? Grub?"

"Grub," said the Chief. "And something to drink, too."

THE batteries had fallen silent. The destroyers had temporarily withdrawn. Only drifting wreckage, a waft of smoke from the burning, half-sunk freighter, and the occasional reports of Norwegian guns from far back of Narvik spoiled the quiet of the scene. The U-boat, floating awash, had not moved, as though all her crew were dead.

"What was it you had figured, Mr. Foyle?" the Chief inquired.

"Oh, that!" Foyle squinted across the water, got his bearings, and nodded. "About these Britishers: Now, why d'you suppose they sunk all these perfectly good ships? Because they're cutting off the Nazis, of course, but are taking no chances; most likely they've got no men to spare, and want to make a clean job of bottling up these lovely Aryan invaders. That means, they'll be coming back presently."

"Most like," agreed the Chief, while Izzy looked wide-eyed from one to the other.

"What are they going to do?" pursued Foyle. "Shell the town, bust up the electric railroad the quays and the expensive equipment over there? I doubt it. On the other side of town, the snow has blocked everything, and the Norwegian guns are working. These Nazis have no place to go but back; and now their ships are gone, they can't go back. They're stuck. No heavy artillery, no ships, no supplies. What would you do if you were the limy in command of those destroyers?"

"If I was a Britisher," said McClelland, scowling, "I'd do most anything to be something else."

"Be sensible," retorted Foyle. "Those British are going to head for this spot, right here, opposite Narvik! Tonight they'll slip in and land men and guns. That's why they destroyed all the ships; the Nazis won't have any searchlights to use in the harbor, savvy? But why do you think this launch was nosing over to this shore? Those Nazis missed a bet by not having some men and guns here, and they're waked up to the fact. They'll be coming along pretty soon to get established."

"And what'll we do?" said the Chief.

"Work. You're a mechanic. That gun is bolted onto a steel plate. Get it out and put it on the dock here—steel plate and all. Then, Chief, you'll take a bottle of aquavit in one hand, and the tiller of this fast launch in the other, and go contact the British destroyers. Izzy and I stay here. . . . Never mind talking, now! Get to work."

An hour passed. The shelling had ceased, all was quiet; no doubt the British took for granted that the U-boat had gone down to the bombs. She lay under the headland at an angle that left her invisible to the outer fiord. Presently Foyle, with the glasses, saw two men emerge from the conning-tower, working at something. She rose in the water, though still at an angle. Foyle called the Chief and pointed.

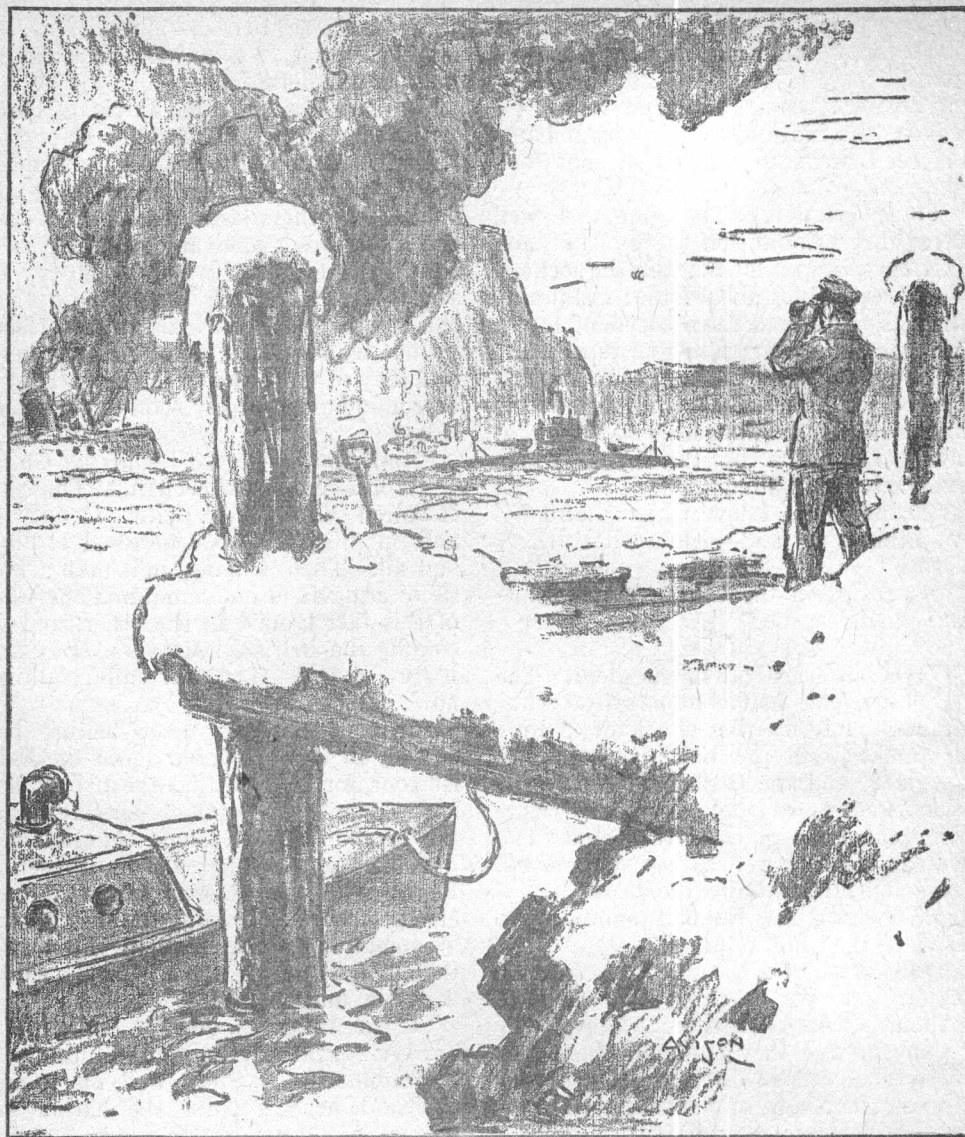
"If she wakes up, you can make it?"

"Aye," said McClelland, blinking at the submarine. "She's well off to our right. I head left for the harbor entrance. She'll not fire on one of her own launches. And she can't catch me, for the launch is fast and she is not. A good risk, aye!"

BY this time the half-sunk freighter had burned out. The gun and its mounting was set up on the dock, which meant that snow had to be cleared from the timbers, and the snow was three feet deep.

Foyle, with a pair of Nazi binoculars, kept an eye on the town and quay opposite, and discerned a bustle of activity there; now, however, the chief was all ready to go. A seaman on the submarine was wigwagging to Narvik.

"Tell the Britishers to come along and waste no time about it," said Foyle. "Izzy and I will hold the fort. What's the good word, Izzy?"



"Free and equal!" said the Brooklyn lad. "You said so yourself, once we got off the ship. All men are born free and equal."

The Chief got into the launch, and turned.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, pointing somewhat unsteadily to the stores that had been piled up in the snow of the wharf, along with the rifles, "that the bottom box in the first pile is a case o' champagne. Save it till we celebrate. So long and heaven protect you."

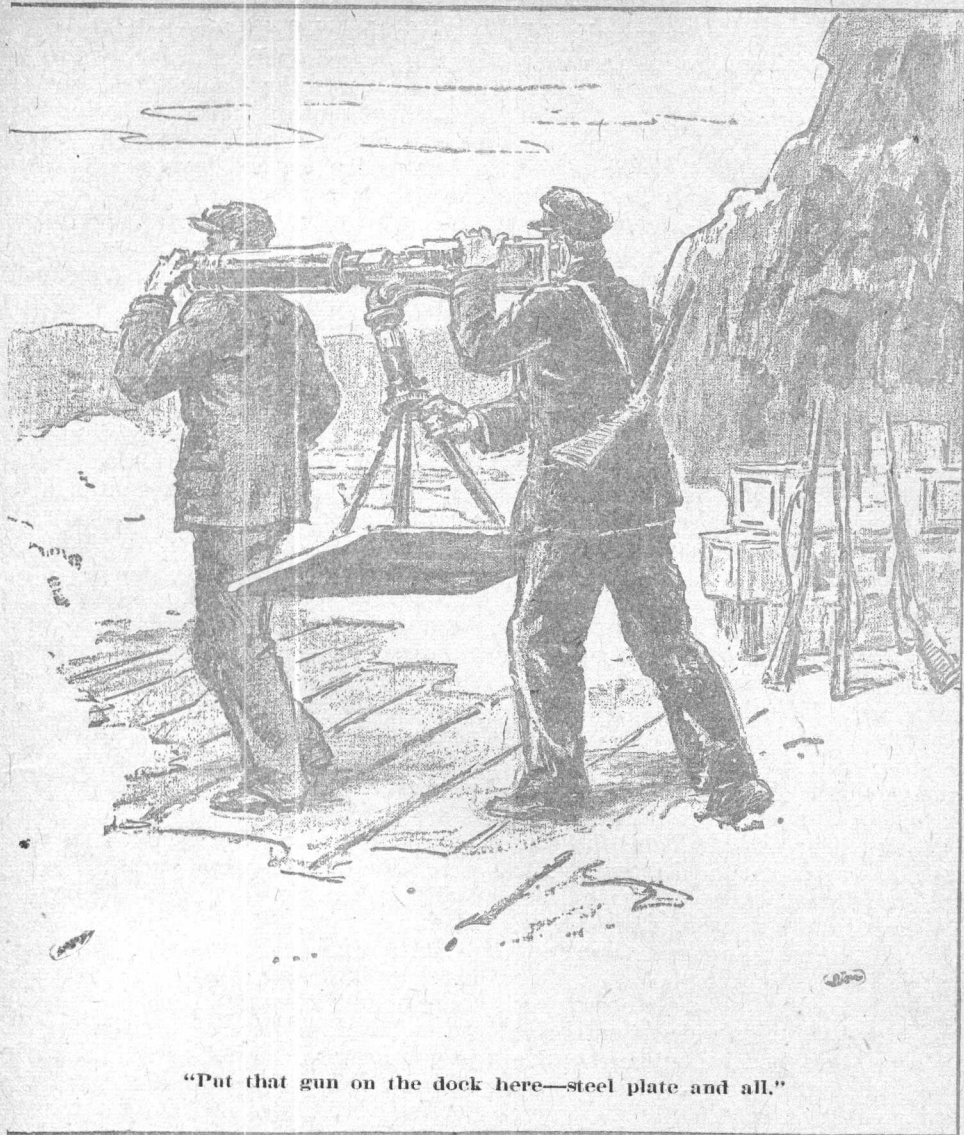
His movements were erratic and uncertain, but he knew what to do. The launch churned the water and darted out, and Mr. McClelland sat down heavily. Before he had pulled himself together the launch was a third of the way

across the harbor; then it spun about and headed for the open fiord. The man on the U-boat apparently paid no attention.

—Foyle watched with a groan. "I meant to tell him to hug the shore, blast it! —Izzy! Come along and make sure the gun is loaded, and those magazine rifles or whatever they are as well. Jump, ye scullion!"

Izzy rolled the last drops from the aquavit bottle over his tongue.

"I was thinking of that champagne," he said reflectively. "I drank champagne, once, when we were at Havre. And mind you, we're all free and equal now! I'm just as good as you are, and I know how to use that gun and you don't, so keep civil."



"Put that gun on the dock here—steel plate and all."

Foyle was so dumfounded that he just stood there staring—and then his eye caught sight of something moving on the water.

"Look at your Nazi friends coming! Izzy!"

The launch had vanished from sight: Mr. McClelland had evidently had no trouble in reaching the fiord. But two boats had come around by the head of the bay and were now lying alongside the submarine. The concussion of those bombs must have left most of her crew dead, but she herself seemed little damaged.

Other small-craft, however, were now streaking across the water. Ship's boats, another and larger launch, several fishing-craft.

"Soldiers!" cried Izzy. "And look at the sub—she's moving! Pointed this way!"

So she was, and towing the two boats, though moving very slowly. Men in naval uniform were busy around the gun on her forward deck, and had installed another, evidently meant for aircraft, aft. Foyle focused the binoculars, and cursed heartily.

"I expect she can't submerge, so she's heading this way. Some of her crew must ha' been ashore and now they've got her working. She can shell us out of here in no time."

"Not if she comes real close before she knows we're here!" exclaimed Izzy excitedly. "You take them rifles and go down to the next dock and lay for her."

I can work this here gun by myself, if I got to do it. You keep her from shelling us, see? I'll stave off them boats. Maybe we can hold 'em off till the British get here!"

Maybe! Foyle rubbed his head and cursed again. But suddenly he saw the whole thing plainly, and clutched Izzy by the shoulder.

"Right! Look here—see their game? Put men here, and guns, and get the submarine fixed up a bit; then, when the British show up, they're caught between two fires and can't land any men. Here's your chance to really hurt them square-heads, Izzy! It's a go. Gimme them rifles; I can work 'em. And the extry ca'tridges. . . . That's right. Don't be in any hurry to shoot, either. So long."

He plunged away through the snow.

IN five minutes he was ensconced snugly on the next wharf, with rifles, extra ammunition, and a bottle of aquavit. He took a pull at this last, and eyed the water ahead. That the launch, boats and submarine were all making for this group of wharves was now evident. The submarine would get here first. The launch was towing a number of boats strung out behind her; and she, like the first launch, had a gun mounted forward. The immediate threat, however, came from the U-boat's more dangerous armament.

"Provided, that is, she gets to use it," reflected Foyle.

From the conning-tower an officer was steering, and two men were mounting an anti-aircraft gun there. Foyle had only a vague acquaintance with these sub-machine-guns; even their sights were past his comprehension, and he could not afford guesswork. Better play safe, he told himself. That U-boat was a good five hundred yards off and coming in at an angle. Wait for a hundred yards; even that would be risking a good deal, since he could not depend on his own aim at first.

"All right?" called Izzy, hidden behind the snow that framed his machine-gun.

"Guess so. And lay off that liquor!"

"To hell with you!" came the response. "We're free and equal, you slave-driver!"

"What about you and them Nazis?" queried Foyle wickedly.

"They got machine-guns too, aint they? That makes us equal. But I'm free."

"You won't be, once I get my hands on you! Shut up and watch sharp."

Foyle tipped the bottle again; frankly, he was scared stiff. A trifle over two hundred yards, he figured, and cursed the unfamiliar rifle-sights. There could be only one end to this business. What a blasted fool he had been not to clear out with the launch!

"Smart guy," he muttered, squinting down the rifle-barrel. "Show-off guy, you are! The kid and his free-and-equal stuff—why didn't you forget you were an American, and slide out of here? And him a Jew, fightin' like hell—you just had to go him one better, you blasted fool! Hello—"

The submarine drifted into his sights. He blinked, and drew a bead on the officer standing at the wheel in the high conning-tower. He squeezed, and cursed to the recoil. The officer fell. A lucky shot.

No time now to think; he made his weapon do the chattering. Not too fast, either. A couple of misses—he was overshooting. The men at the after-deck gun, two of them, caught his burst and went floundering. He swept forward, again; two figures in the conning-tower, jammed and crowded there with the dead officer, became quiet. On forward—ah! The men were at that quick-firing gun, were slipping in a clip of shells! Foyle's bullets raked the group, mercilessly, deliberately.

At that range it was good shooting; by sheer luck he had adjusted the sights more or less accurately, and the weapon was a beautiful piece of mechanism. He peered forward eagerly. The submarine, with no living thing on her deck, was forging ahead, straight in for the shallows and the wharves. A man came leaping erect on the conning-tower, and yelled sharply. Foyle fired again and again. The boat of the dead came on.

SUDDENLY he ducked, at the scream past his head—another! He remembered those boats, and peered forth. The launch, in the lead, had her gun going. Snow spurted all about him; panic gripped at his heart. There was a long, slow, rending crash—the U-boat had run her narrow nose up alongside a wharf, fifty feet away.

Then Izzy cut loose, and the blaring stutter was sweet to hear. That launch, filled with men, took the blast of lead on its port bow. Those about the machine-gun were mowed down. The men with rifles in this and the other craft were all blazing away now; but the havoc

wrought among them was frightful, as Izzy's bullets swept back and forth along the line—the launch was ridden down by the boats in tow, and everything became a jumbled mass of drifting death and chaos.

The boats were stopped. Then the infernal stutter ceased; Foyle heard the voice of Izzy uplifted in a frightful wail.

"She's jammed, hard jammed! Keep shooting—for Christ's sake, keep shooting!"

A burst of laughter welled up in Foyle—furious ironic laughter, at such a word coming from Izzy. He fumbled for his rifle! It slipped away and was gone in the snow and water. He caught up the other one and tried to handle it. Something wrong. However, he got it working, spraying bullets out at the boats for a moment, until pain jerked at him. He knew he must have been hit somewhere; his head drooped.

VAGUELY he had a mental picture of Izzy's lanky figure, leaping and running toward the stranded sub. His senses leaped alert; he found the aquavit bottle, put it to his lips, and swallowed. Everything cleared.

Izzy was leaping aboard the U-boat. Men were there, shooting—they must have come up from below. Desperately, Foyle turned his weapon on them, and groaned as the recoil shocked pain through his body. The figures wilted. Izzy was still going, darting to the quick-firer on the upended forward deck, swinging it around.

The gun exploded; the shell exploded; another followed it, slap among the boats where men were firing rifles. Another shell. The boats broke, opened out, took to flight. Two of them were sinking; heads were dotting the water. A roaring laugh shook Foyle, and with entire forgetfulness of himself, he came to his feet.

"Good work, Izzy!" he yelled. "Good work!"

He pitched over into the snow. . . .

When he came to himself, everything was different; there was no more snow; he was sitting propped up on a hard surface. He blinked around, wincing at the pain in his leg, wondering to find it stripped and bandaged. He was sitting on the submarine's deck, propped against the forward gun-standard. His eyes focused on things around.

"Hey!" said Izzy's voice. "Woke up? Good. We'll have a drink in a minute."

Izzy was there, a dozen feet away, sitting against the base of the conning-tower, a long Luger pistol in his hand—Izzy, grinning at him, but haggard and white of face, eyes blazing, shirt and jacket gone, and a bloody bandage across his chest. And working at the corks of bottles, two men across the deck—two men who stole frightened glances at Izzy as they worked. Two men—German seamen by their uniforms.

"What the hell!" said Foyle weakly.

"It's all right," exclaimed Izzy. "These guys showed up. Your leg's broke, and I've got a bum chest, but I guess we'll pull through. Anyhow, we're going to celebrate, see? Those bottles are champagne. This here submarine is ours, and we're sitting pretty, and by the smoke over the headland, the British fleet's coming. Suit you?"

Foyle gasped. "Why, you darned little Yid! Free and equal, says you—and that goes for me too! Yes sir. I take off my hat to you!"

He turned his head and looked at the water. The boats were gone. Smoke, sure enough, curling up with the wind! A sharp report made him jump, but it was only one of the corks going out. The other followed.

The two Nazis, with sheepish grins, approached with the bottles. They eyed Izzy furtively; whatever had happened, thought Foyle, that lad must have put the fear of the Lord into those two survivors. They handed over the bottles and then stepped back.

Izzy lifted his bottle in his left hand, keeping the pistol in the other.

"WELL, Mr. Foyle," said he, "we celebrate in champagne! You give the toast."

"Not me," said Foyle. "It's your war, Izzy—your U-boat, your prisoners! The honors are yours. Name the toast your own self."

"Okay," replied Izzy cheerfully. He waved his fizzing bottle at the two prisoners. "Boys, whether you understand or not don't matter, but there's one thing you aint got and you need mighty bad, and about the only person you can get it from is a Jew."

"Hurry up," said Foyle. "I'm thirsty!"

"Okay!" And Izzy waved the bottle again. "Here's luck to you, Nazis, no hard feelin's, and when you need it most . . . Let there be light!"

"Amen to that—and here's the British coming!" cried Foyle, and drank deep.

Swamp Angel

The Story Thus Far:

WHAT'S yo' business, stranger?" demanded the older of two men in a fine pirogue who held Wing Dobussy up at the point of their rifles.

"Wild-crafting," Dobussy answered. "Trapping, fishing, frogs—"

"Jes' loafing! Tha's all—jes' a vagabond! We don' 'low no tramps er sech trash down yeah, no suh! I 'rest yo', charge of no visible means of support! Pick 'im up, Duck!"

And an hour later Dobussy found himself a shackled slave among a score of others, beaten with a mule-whip if he slackened in his labor at an illicit distillery concealed in the vast swamp—the property of old Dolomen Hatchie, who with his overseer Duck Wamber, had kidnaped the luckless wild-crafter.

Dobussy bided his time. And one stormy evening weeks later he heard a sudden rifle-shot, and the armed guard pitched into the water. At once Dobussy plunged into the undergrowth; there was no pursuit, and he finally came to his moored cabin-boat. And no one saw the canoe of Isabelle Strake—a Swamp Angel girl who had been friendly with Dobussy—as it sped away.

Dobussy went back to that peonage moonshine still. He shot up the guards. Then he freed the other slaves, set fire to the still—and went back to his boat.

The feud went on: Dobussy shot and killed old Dolomen Hatchie. But later Hatchie's son and Duck Wamber got the drop on Dobussy, and Wetzel Hatchie deliberately shot him three times in the stomach—leaving him to die, Hatchie supposed, a lingering and agonized death. Dobussy's thick money-belt saved him, however, and he recovered. Meanwhile, young Hatchie, needing money, marketed some of his father's hidden illicit liquor, and was caught by the Federal authorities.

(The story continues in detail.)



WETZEL HATCHIE was ready to fight his arrest for liquor-running and -selling, clear up to the United States Supreme Court. He called in Attorney Ranger to see him through the mazes of the Federal Court. Bail was supplied by a professional.

In Ranger's office Wetzel announced his indignation, his determination and his war intentions. Ranger let him run down like a phonograph, and with a deprecatory wave of his hands dismissed all such foolish and blustering talk.

"Now listen, Wetzel," Ranger said. "This is Mendova, so it's your turn to learn your lessons. You Hatchies have been accustomed to your own way. But where you made your mistake, Wetzel—Pap Dolomen neveh transported. He run his merchandise out to the bank of ol' Mississip'. Theh he took his cash and made his deliveries an' God-blessed his customers, wished 'em luck an' they took their responsibilities, came to Mendova or went to Cairo, or wherever they

*An epic of the wild Dark Corner region of
the lower Mississippi.*

By **RAYMOND S. SPEARS**

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



"There's a limit to legitimate snooping," Dobussy retorted.



pleased. No amateur can run liquor on big Muddy Gut! Now *you* transported; you just delivered—an' you got caught. Now yo'll pay to boot. Don't mistake that, Hatchie. I'll take yo' plumb to Washington, but I advise you to plead guilty, to smile, and top off by apologizing for the small quantity you had aboard and the amount of trouble you made in proportion to how much good stuff you had."

Sweat gathered on Hatchie's brow. "I reckon I better not fight—this time," he said.

"Next time don't get caught," Ranger said—and the back-swamp man saw the amusement in his attorney's eyes.

Ranger shoved the case through in a hurry. The U. S. Commissioner assessed a nominal fine of five hundred dollars each on Hatchie and Wamber, the liquor being confiscated. Hatchie went to one of his banks, the Swamp Bottom, and gave a three-months' note, raising money for Ranger's five-hundred-dollar fee and the two fines. He went up the Mississippi with Duck on the steam packet. His launch and the barge he'd bought from

Isbelle Strake became valued equipment in the service of the Prohibition Division. Of course the Government seized such equipment.

The boat landed on Monday afternoon, about one o'clock. Wetzel Hatchie and Duck Wamber headed right up through town on their way to the old Stalcum mansion. Both of them were just practically ready to explode with indignation.

Then two mutts began to yap at their heels, and they discovered the attention they were getting—people holding their hands over their mouths, hiding smiles. Wetzel drew his two 32-caliber revolvers and started to shoot the mutts, and they turned running, yelping with their tails between their legs. Wetzel slam-banged away. . . . Twelve shots—and one bullet glanced and killed a mule, but the dogs got away. The mule was worth two hundred dollars and belonged to Judge Brooner's brother-in-law.

Hatchie and Wamber headed for the house, but Wetzel told Duck to see about the mule. It had to be settled for, another two hundred bucks. Early on the following morning Hatchie and Wamber



"Git goin' off'n these bottoms—don't eveh come back! This is gun-muzzle notice!"

headed back into the brakes up the Albion. They were hot and heavy, now, looking for whoever had raided their cache. Wamber did the heaviest thinking he had ever done in his life.

Back in the old distillery days Wamber recollected trouble with a runner named Simon Pure Kelton. Kelton got in Wamber's way at the whisky-landing, and got upset, tripping over the tramway. They had a fist-fight, and Kelton hit Wamber in the stomach. Wamber pulled his gun and Kelton threw a bung-starter and

Wamber was knocked senseless. Then Grandpap Hatchie took a hand, stuck Kelton up with his gun and worked him in the distillery for a month, same as anyone else. Kelton had declared he would get even with Duck and Grandpap for that, but this was the first sign Duck ever had of his bragging being made good.

"I bet hit was Kelton," Duck declared. "Lately he's been self-pretending he quieted down, honorable. I reckon he's snuck in onto us, the way things look. I betcha he raided that liquor!"

"Kelton's just the kind of a scoundrel to perform a trick like that!" Hatchie approved. "He's just a gambler, loafer, runner-around."

Back in the swamps they headed over into Old River, where Kelton had a shanty-boat. They took it through bayous Wamber knew, and luck was with them.

Kelton had been down to Scattering Court the day before, and they saw him coming with a big outboard skiff just loaded down with supplies. They headed him, Wetzel pulling one of his revolvers. Kelton grabbed up his shotgun, but Wamber was ready for business with his 30-30. He made a sure pretty shot, getting Kelton through and through.

Hatchie and Wamber both looked around, for it was risky, even in the deep swamps, to shoot a man down, kind of careless like that. And sure enough, over in the marsh in the next channel they saw the wake and swells of a fast, light boat. They caught two or three glimpses of the traveler, whoever he was.

"Why—why—why, that looks like—" Hatchie half spoke, half whispered to himself. "But it *cain't* be!"

He turned and glared at Wamber, who was blinking and swallowing.

"I tol' yo', Mist' Hatchie!" Wamber shook his head violently. "I know yo' don't b'lieve in no ghostes—but—but that's Wing Dobussy! I seen 'im plain, suh!"

"Ghosts—Wing Dobussy! What nonsense, you damned fool!" snarled Hatchie, glaring, waiting for contradiction; but Wamber just licked his lips and watched those boat-waves rocking in the sunshine.

Kelton's skiff had run aground. They hauled off the boat, retreated into the narrow jungle ways, and looked over their reward for vengeance: Supplies worth a hundred or so dollars. Around Kelton's waist was a horsehide pocket belt full of paper currency. Hatchie counted out \$3800, and probably fifty diamonds to boot, worth as much more.

"NOW, that's luck!" Hatchie declared with satisfaction. "That'll just take care of things nicely!"

Wamber hesitated. He had killed Kelton. All that loot, he figured, by good rights belonged to him. Even partnering, he was entitled to half. Hatchie had an unmitigated gall to hog it all!

"This'll clear things up right!" Hatchie went on. "It'll make up the five-hun-

dred-dollar fine I paid for you, Wamber, and pay for the lawyer and all the rest you got me into, running that damned liquor. And we'll have a little spare change to work on, to boot."

"Yas suh!" Duck nodded glumly.

"What'll we do with this?" Hatchie diverted attention to the body of Kelton. "You better show your swampcraft now, Duck. Killin's is serious."

TO conceal the body in that swamp was not difficult, however. And afterward, when night had fallen, they drove down the winding river back to Scattering Court and up the Mansion Bayou, where Wamber stocked the Hatchie pantry larder with the supplies that Kelton had bought.

In the morning Hatchie covered his embarrassing overdraft in the bank; he casually paid several annoying little bills; he gave Lotus Stalcum two hundred dollars he owed her, his bearing that of a man conferring a great favor on a working-girl.

Next day Hatchie went to the floating fish-dock at the Scattering Court landing on the Mississippi. Nobody knew more about affairs up the Albion Bottoms than the fishermen and other wildcrafters. As he came to the top of the bank, Hatchie saw a barge load of musselshells, forty tons or so of them. Burdock Watkins had stopped in to talk with the fish-dock boys and eat a snack uptown in the lunch-room.

"I'm paying one hundred fifty dollars a ton for those selects!" Hatchie heard Watkins say. "They make fancy pistol-butts, knife-handles and sech like. I have two tons theh'n the bow compartment. Theh's thirty-eight tons of regular stock. Yas suh! Theh's eighteen hundred dollars sunk in that load!"

Watkins had been drinking 'shine or he would never have bragged his business thataway.

Wetzel Hatchie sauntered up the levee, hissing a tune through his long, narrow teeth, squinting thoughtfully. He wrote a column of figures on a scratch pad:

Shells	\$1,820.
Rat skins	1,835.
Turtles	172.80
Frogs	??
Fish	800.
Fur (10 days)	300.

\$4,927.80

(Frogs not figured.)

"Why, damn it!" Hatchie exploded under his breath. "That's real money! Why, those damned scoundrels are taking my fish, my furs, my button-shells, my feathers, my turtles, frog and game-meat right off my land and I'm not getting a damned smitch of it!"

THE people living on Backbone Ridge plantations were served by a ferry where the Albion cut through the Ridge at a place called the Narrows. The ferry franchise belonged to the old Pagen plantation, most of which was now covered by quit-claims, and tax-sale receipts.

"Right theh's the place for me to establish a dock and a trading-post!" Hatchie decided when he went up the Albion looking at the things he had never seen or dreamed before. "Every boat up or down carries business—and they have to go through the Narrows! Why, this place was made for a toll-gate for collections! Huh!"

Having looked over the situation, studied the related papers and seen that a quick smash would probably do the business, he discovered just about the prettiest piece of opportunity he had come across yet. Lon Pagen hadn't renewed his State ferry license, ten dollars. When the license was delinquent, anyone could take it up. Nobody ever had; probably nobody ever thought of it.

Hatchie went up to Pagen's ferry, tacked up the new license and informed Lon that he was very sorry, but the old license and franchise had a new owner. Lon had about one hundred acres of land left, where he put in an acre of garden and what with the two hundred dollars or so from the ferry and a little killing of pork, lard, beef, he eked along.

"I'll give you five hundred dollars cash money for your quit-claim, backed by your wife's signature, for what's left," Hatchie said.

The money in currency was more cash than Lon had seen in one bunch before. He'd never kept any books. He couldn't tell, even, how much came from the ferry business. He'd been thinking about selling out, anyhow. He had a nice shanty-boat, big enough to live on, and he had a spare launch, heavy-duty, to tow it. He reckoned he could make more fishing, shelling and trapping than running that plaguey old place. He reserved the furniture and personal property and signed with his wife, giving up the patch of land and whatever rights that remained.

He was down at the fish-dock in the Mississippi when he happened to remember he must have two-three hundred hogs and a hundred head of beef running around in the brake. He went uptown to bargain the stock out to Weriman, a cattle-drover, who knew about what he had. Weriman agreed to pay twelve hundred dollars for the pork and beef if the title was all clear. Weriman telephoned to Wetzel Hatchie.

"Oh, I bought the stock with the place," Hatchie said.

Some nice points of law were involved as to whether the verbiage and the specifications actually transferred the cows and hogs with the land, timber, "etc.," but Lon Pagen had his five hundred dollars cash. It would take about all the money if he went to lawing, even against any one on equal terms.

"I wouldn't have a show in God's world against that Wetzel Hatchie," Pagen decided, and cast off his lines, floating down the Old Mississipp', his wife crying noiselessly, and he feeling pretty mean himself.

Hatchie knew what he was about now—a good deal of it, anyhow. He printed a notice in the *Scatterings Commercial* stating that the Hatchie Estate, all its lands in the Dark Corner area, had been duly established as a private reserve, that notices to this effect had been and were being posted every hundred yards around the outside boundaries of the preserve and along all the private roads, private waterways, ditches and around the lakes, ponds, marshes, old rivers and as specified.

"Those interested will find in the County Clerk's office maps and descriptions according to titles herein claimed and owned by the Hatchie Estate," the notices read; Wetzel Hatchie signed as "Manager and Executor."

EVERY autumn for at least twenty years, the Mendova Turkey Club had tripped up the Albion, pitched their tents, moored their boats, spread out with their weapons and banged away at their favorite game, table-meat, enjoying themselves immensely. This autumn they headed up the Albion out of the Mississippi, towing a shanty-boat for headquarters to do away with tent-bothers. When they plowed up into the Narrows, they saw bright new cabins built on top of the bank, and read an extraordinary and surprising sign nailed on two posts in the ground for all to read:

SWAMP ANGEL

PRIVATE PRESERVE!
ALL TRESPASS FORBIDDEN
UNDER LEGAL PENALTIES!
Hatchie Estate, Inc.

The cabin-cruiser which served as a towboat slacked its speed while the ten sportsmen glared at that peculiar and inexplicable warning. A tall, gangling, cabbage-headed man appeared, a 30-30 rifle in the crook of his elbow. He was grinning across his crinkled countenance.

"OH, hell!" Attorney Ranger exclaimed. "That's Duck Wamber—I know him! Speed up, old man—let's go! They can't do that!"

The motor took hold, and the propeller boiled again under the stern of the cabin-cruiser. The little houseboat, the string of small boats, straightened out and gathered headway in the pale green waters as they started on up the long stillwater.

"Hey-y, where do yo' fellers think ye're goin'?" Duck yelled like a hog-caller. "Yo' cain't go by heah!"

"The hell we cain't!" Ranger shouted back. "You know me?"

"Sure, I know yo'!" Duck shouted, grinning. "I paid yo' for co'rt-business. Now yo' pay me for huntin'-business!"

"G'wan!" Ranger turned to the motor engineer. "He can't do a damned thing!"

The little fleet started up the eddy. A shot cracked and a bullet splashed off to the left of the tow. The club burgee, a yellow silk flag showing a turkey gobbler rampant, flopped over as the jackstaff broke down, cut in two by Duck's soft-nose bullet.

"Next time I'll git yo' carburetor! Mist' Hatchie means business, you fellers!" Duck shouted. "Keep yo' hands off'n yo' guns, theh!"

"Damn it!" Ranger spoke under his breath. "We'd better see Hatchie! This scoundrel's ignorant! Swing around, George!"

"This knocks us out of a hunting day!" Dr. Scurtis spoke up.

"Wamber's got notches on his carbine!" Ranger said. "He's bad!"

On the way down to see Hatchie, the club met the fish-company tug plowing up for a regular Thursday collection. Cap'n Trask learned that Mr. Hatchie was handling the Dark Corner fish himself. That was his private country, and he didn't want private competition. Burdock Watkins returned with his forty-

ton shell barge to pick up the button stock he had bought only three days before.

"I don't know nothin' about that!" Wamber told Watkins. "My orders is to keep trespassers off'n these lands and waters."

"This is a public highway!" Watkins shouted angrily.

"Not while I got my 30-30 unlimbered, 'taint public!" Duck assured him, grinning hopefully. "When I stop talkin', this carbine speaks!"

Watkins returned to Scattering Court, where Attorney Windgate said he didn't believe navigable waters could be closed, but it would be better to reach an amicable understanding with Mr. Wetzel Hatchie, an honorable, friendly gentleman. "Yo' don't want trouble, of course," Windgate said.

Hatchie was affable. Watkins told of buying thirty-five tons of button shells on the east fork of the Albion, and believed he had a right to his own property. Hatchie shook his head. He was sorry. He was acting on principle being obliged to obey his own rules. He figured Mr. Watkins ought to have found out who owned the shells, before buying. However, this time Mr. Hatchie would relinquish his claims, asking merely a nominal ten dollars a ton on the shells—\$350 on the tonnage.

A SCORE of boats had gone down the Albion to buy supplies in Scattering Court. On their return they found themselves stopped at the old ferry narrows. The Barston boys had sold their first autumnal take of fur. They turned back and went up the Mississippi around to their homestead river landing. Prat Adkin, the willow-basketmaker, had sold twelve dollars' worth of baskets, and started home with store eatings for a feast. Duck stopped him and there he was outside, and his wife with four children were inside. Wamber slammed a bullet right through Adkin's skiff.

The sports, the shell- and fish-buyers, and seven Swamp Angel outfits were stopped; when night fell, a score of boats were moored to the banks below the narrows. Rumors had reached them that the Dark Corner wasn't public any longer, that the waterways were all to be closed up. No one believed it possible. But there stood Duck Wamber, chuckling at their predicament—unable even to go get their tents and outfits, their shanty-boats and other things.

All alone, Duck stood guard, flourishing his carbine. The sun shone on him as he strutted back and forth at the top of the bank, proud and haughty in his new job of superintendent of the Hatchie Estate wild-lands, grimacing, and his red hair bristling, all ready for business.

At the foot of the bank, which was steep and about fifteen feet high, was a landing-float, a platform laid on twelve iron barrels in a raft-frame. He had two big, powerful lights, one with a yellow glass, a fog-penetrator, so he could watch the river night or day, in a fog or if it was clear.

The sun lowered toward setting, the sky all clear and the light turning yellow. Duck Wamber stood with the shine on him, shoulders back, stomach out, head up, jaws set, carbine ready for business, the sun glaring in his eyes.

Suddenly there was a thudding shot across the river on the west side. Some claimed they saw a fuzzi of smoke in the green cane brake. A "smack" followed—all knew the sound of a bullet landing, a heavy lead slug hitting hard. The back of Wamber's coat jerked back, and another smack followed, quick as a wink.

The superintendent guard staggered, stumbling back three or four steps, dropping his carbine out of his elbow, his eyes bulging and mouth opening wide. His big feet cross-stepped, as he swayed and bent over, his face wearing a look of terrified astonishment. He started to reach, stooping to pick up his rifle, and pitched down on his face, right at the edge of the bank. He bumped up, slid over the brink and went rolling, flopping down the slickery clay and slid diving headfirst into the water like an otter.

EVERYONE in sight watched him. No one said a word; no one stirred, more than to wriggle. Some squinted toward the thickety stand of green cane, but if they saw anything, didn't show it. Faces set in grim expressions, gazing into the clear green waters.

Some could see Duck Wamber sprawling deep in the limpid depths, kicking and spreading like a big crawfish, silver bubbles lopping up to the surface, bursting there.

"Reckon them two big revolvers an' all them shells in his belt sunk him, looks like!" Prat Adkin called to the three Strakes, who were just below him, having been barred from their return to their outfit. "Well, hit looks like the blockade's lifted, folks! I'm gwine home!"

All down the two banks the boats that were moored-in cast off their lines.

The sun was down; day was rapidly fading as the long-delayed fleet plowed upstream. In a few minutes the ferry eddy was quiet, deserted in the gloom.

Chapter Thirteen

SHERIFF HARKER INVESTIGATES

WORD of the killing came to Scattering Court in a kind of rumor.

Sheriff Harker was eating lunch in the Court Square Restaurant when a river tripper who had dropped down the Mississippi said that talk was, down at the landing, that somebody had been shot up the Albion yesterday evening.

"They say he was a sure-nuff bad actor," the river man added. "Feller name of Duck Wamber, who was performin' an' cuttin' up, promiscuously interferin', an' he jus' naturally got popped oveh. Course, all I know's jes' the talk echain' around."

"Duck Wamber!" Sheriff Harker exclaimed, full of surprise and alarm. "Shu-u! Well, I betteh—"

Without waiting for his pie or second cup of coffee, the Sheriff headed over to the brick office of the Hatchie Estate.

"Duck Wamber killed up!" Hatchie yelled. "Why, that cain't be! The scoundrel don't live that'd dare kill my head man like that!"

Inquiry around failed to discover more than the rumor. However—

"We betteh run in theh jus' to satisfy ouh curiosity," Sheriff Harker said to Hatchie. "We'll take out the runabout—kinda look the situation oveh, Wetzel."

The two headed up the Mississippi and around into the Albion. They discovered a fast launch heading past them presently, one belonging to a wild-crafter neither Harker nor Hatchie knew. Hatchie suggested they try to head him, but the boat drove on, leaving the green waters of the Albion rocking and back-washing from the banks. When they came in sight of the Narrows, the fast launch went right on past the newly established outpost without the steersman even turning his head to look at it.

"I don't understand that!" Hatchie exclaimed. "Duck's orders were to stop everybody—going and coming!"

Harker uttered an exclamation, pulling the runabout wheel hard over to keep from hitting something sucked up from the river bottom by the boat ahead, and



"I demand an explanation!" declared Hatchie. "Just where do yo' stand, Sheriff Harker?"

looking overside, the two men saw it was a floater—Duck Wamber himself, light enough now to carry up the two guns on his hips. Reversing, Harker backed down; Wetzel Hatchie slipped a white-line noose over the dead man, and they towed the body to the landing-float where every passer-by was supposed to stop and show his credentials.

"Shot right plumb through the chest!" Sheriff Harker shook his head uneasily, and then the two glanced around with searching eyes at the timber less than a hundred yards distant across the green waters of the sliding Albion.

Hatchie went up the gangplank to the top of the bank and looked toward the cottage and little commissary where supplies were stored and papers could be made out. At the rear was another small structure containing a barrel of motor-oil, gasoline and cans of grease. The door had been broken open, and apparently gasoline and other supplies had been taken.

Over at the edge of the bank ten yards distant lay the 30-30. Hatchie picked it up. That was Wamber's, sure enough. It was cocked, ready to shoot, but the barrel was clean and the magazine full. When the Sheriff came, he saw where Duck had pitched down the steep, slick clay bank, leaving a few plain traces of blood where he had slid into the water.

Hatchie stared at the body stretched on the new, yellow float-deck boards.

"Well, Sheriff Harker?" he demanded in sudden impatience.

"I don't like the look of that, Wetzel!" Harker said frankly. "This aint no common killin'!"

"Bosh!" Hatchie snarled. "Hit's jus' plain, mean, ornery murder! This means a hanging. What you going to do 'bout it, I want to know?"

"Well—I been noticin'! See that fresh bark-scar back theh?"

After killing Wamber the bullet had struck the bark of a shapely pecan tree a hundred feet back from the bank. From a branch of the tree a long gambrel pole reached to a hickory pole fork, fifteen feet distant. The pole was like a gallows beam more than ten feet from the ground; razorbacks, beef, deer, bear and other game could be hung from it.

"That's a sizable bullet," Harker remarked. "A 38-55 old-fashioned lead, I reckon by the stain. Sure gouged the sapwood, splinterin' hit. That shot came from the green cane brake on yon side—dead-level flight."

"Damnable, cowardly bushwhacker!" Hatchie exclaimed. "You offer one thousand dollars reward—I'll make up another thousand. We can buy a rive-hat or swamp-angel's soul for a hundred dollars! But some sportsman may know

something. You have to pay reasonable to get a sport's testimony."

"I'll have to have the Supervisor's authority," Harker said. "I wouldn't be too hasty. Theh's legalities—"

"I know you wouldn't!" Hatchie said. "You old-timers—slow, easy and thrifless. Why, with all due respect to the dead, those damned trespassers have walked and floated right out under my father's eyes—mine too—with more than a million dollars in products. And they didn't half work it. Makes me mad to think of it! Perhaps a million in furs alone!"

"Reckon we'd betteh go back to the courthouse an' get a posse," the Sheriff said. "Two of us can't do much—"

"Swear them in heah!" Hatchie cried. "There comes a boat—"

"You reckon you want Swamp Angels for a posse?" Harker asked, his voice mild. "Or—um-m—they're shanty-boaters, riveh-rats, drappin' down."

"Try them!" the angry heir of the Dark Corner ordered.

"You betteh stay up the bank," Harker suggested. "I'll drap out an' talk to them!"

A fleet of shanty-boats, small gasoline cabin-boats and rag-shacks were coming down in a string, outboards and marine motors running as the tow moved slowly in the long Albion river bend. The officer recognized a slim, tall, stoop-shouldered figure.

"Howdy, Cateen—movin' out?" the Sheriff asked.

"Yas suh. Gittin' purty fresh. Feath-ehs is heavy; razorback melt is thick. Lowed we betteh git to go below the Mud Hole, or the Old Mouth, or some'rs. Gwine to be a hard winter."

"Listen, Cateen—don't you want to be deputy sheriff—"

"Lawd Gawd—no!" the man cried shrilly. "Not fo' a millyum dollars rewardin's!"

"Anybody here want to do posse duty?" the Sheriff called.

"No suh! No suh!" voices answered shrilly, many from behind cover.

"What's the matter—two dollars a day and found?" the Sheriff asked.

"No suh!" Joe Faldry, a wildcrafter, shook his head. "Hit's chillin' rheumatic weather; 'sides, my wife's sisteh's sick-enin', liable to be took bad any time."

FIVE families went on by with more than a dozen boats. Some of them had been for years in the Dark Corner, but

they didn't want trouble with anyone. The world is big. They would settle somewhere else, in free country down below. The Sheriff sheered off and shoved back to the landing-float.

Wetzel Hatchie stood tall and thin, darkly silhouetted against the milky sky at the top of the bank, his rifle resting in the crook of his elbow.

"They're getting out," Hatchie said as the Sheriff came to him.

"Yas suh, shiftless, peaceable ones," Harker assented. "The feeble, fearful, harmless ones."

"They're *all* going out!" Hatchie declared sharply. "You'll serve notices on the rest—take a real posse in! You'll run the hard, mean, despicable ones out afteh these low-downs!"

"I neveh yet needed a posse to serve a notice," Harker answered gently. "Not often even to serve a warrant. But this yeah's right serious, Wetzel Hatchie!" Harker shook his head. "I'd better work friendly and serve the papers right. Now theh's Duck. Yo're special under-sheriff, Mist' Hatchie—yo' c'n jes' take him down in yo' launch, an' knowin' the legalities—what the coroner needs to go by, an' so on. That'll get things goin' all accordin' to the common law."

Wetzel showed his yellowing teeth, and the grimace was like an angry cat's. "All right—come on!" he ordered. "Heave 'im aboard, there!"

HARKER, a large, thick-waisted man, with deceptively slow motions and imperturbable gravity, smiling wrinkles and serene blue eyes—never more serene than in the face of deadly peril—watched Hatchie steer the boat around in a circle to head downstream. The Sheriff's glances flickered along the lines of trees on both sides down the river.

"Trouble-meanness in the Brakes, now!" He shook his head, and then he entered the county launch to head up the Albion, visiting, to go to tents, shanty-boats, shacks and the abiding-places of those who hadn't made up their minds whether they were going to get off God's own country or not!

His badge, large, bright and golden, was right square over his heart, a sure good mark to shoot at against his gray-brown wind-proof shirt. Back in here, somewhere, was a man who had shot Duck Wamber down without warning, from the brush; and there was talk about Old Pap Dolomen's 38-55 rifle being hid out, ready for more business. Perhaps

this killer would hate Sheriff Harker even more on account of his official position. Well, a Sheriff'd count on that.

UP at the Y-fork on the east bank was a camp built of logs, brush, tarpaper—nets hung up: Highjack Wager's—no one in sight, but he hailed.

"Howdy, Wager! This is Sher'f Harker—I aint legal today—jes' lookin' 'round—"

"Howdy," a voice answered from the brake, and a man with a gun and squirrels in his game-sack, as if just in from hunting, appeared.

The Sheriff landed and joined the fisherman. Inside the shack the fire in the stove was burning, coffee was set back on the top, and cups were poured immediately. When they had been drunk, Sheriff Harker began to talk:

"The Hatchie Estate's developing its holdings," he explained. "They've got titles filed all legal by the court clerk. Wetzel Hatchie's going to license eve'y-body, 'cording to law, so's they c'n sell their fish, furs, ducks an' shells to him, theh't the Green Cane line crossin'. He's goin' to hire out huntin', trappin' an' otheh privileges."

"All we fish'men got to do is sell to hfm?" Highjack asked.

"I understand that's all theh is to hit."

"What's he goin' to pay fo' runnin' wateh buffalo, spoonbill cat, crappie—all them profit-fish?"

"Well, I don't rightly know—prevailin' prices, I expect."

"He gwine to send a tug 'round to pick 'em up?"

"I neveh had no particulars from him, Highjack. Well, reckon I'll go on. The Barston boys out around some'rs?"

"Well, Sheriff, I—yo' see—" the fisherman hesitated.

"Oh, I see—they've kinda hid out, 'count of havin' furs in camp—some of these riveh-pirates bein' mighty unreliable, I reckon. Well, if'n yo' happen to see any of the boys, I'm jes' politicianing," the Sheriff said. "I aint on official business. Why, I aint even postin' reward-notices this trip. The Hatchie Estate's offerin' a thousand dollars reward for whoever killed up Duck Wamber, but I aint even had the bills printed yet—"

"Duck killed up?" Wager asked. "Somebody said something 'bout that—I didn't hear the right of hit."

"We found him floating just b'low that new dock," Harker said. "He'd

been plumbed right through, the left side in' out. He aint autopsied, yet. Looked to me as though the bullet come from the green cane, a fine shot at 180 yards, I figure. Well, I'll be moving."

The Sheriff shook the Swamp Angel's hand, and turning back around the point, went up the West Fork of the Albion.

The Dark Corner was lonesome, quiet, treacherous. Wearing his badge that-away in the bright sunlight was bold, especially as he was going single-handed into those gloomy fastnesses. When he came into the first broad, a lake with a deep channel through it, he heard a motor and met the waves coming down, but his shout brought no answer. Somebody was in a hurry or something.

Then he met Prat Adkin, the willow-basketmaker, coming down on his way to camp with a dugout canoe loaded with great bundles of osiers. Sheriff Harker just waved his hand genially; Prat wouldn't talk to God Himself, according to the saying—not confidentials. The Court had tried to make him testify about a killing he witnessed down at the county-seat river-landing. Thirty days for contempt just made him happy—all he wanted to eat and nothing to do!

THEN the Sheriff took the square turn at the head of the broad toward the east. And suddenly a fast skiff came up behind him.

"Howdy, Sheriff!" a man greeted him. "Reckon yo' know me—Wing Dobussy?"

"Why, hello, Wing! Sho' do! Been wonderin' where the dickens I'm gittin' to," the official exclaimed as the boats drew side by side together.

"Yo' aint lost heah, Sheriff?" Dobussy shook his head. "Yo're a Swamp Angel yourself!"

"Oh, I was jes' talkin'," the Sheriff admitted. "I reckon I've chased scouters, killers, scoundrels or witnesses through jes' about ev'y slough, creek, wide-water an' mud-puddle from the haud of the Albion clear down't the State line, far as that goes. But yo' know, couple days ago somebody jes' drapped Duck Wamber daid's a hammer down't the Hatchie holdings land line. Wetzel done built him a toll-gate theh, an' had Duck in to c'lect licenses, but somebody done c'lected him instead."

"An yo're afteh the killer, Sheriff?"

"No suh, not to know 'im, I aint. Oh, course, if I run across 'im for sure an' certain, I'd tote 'im in, I expaict," the

officer admitted. "But when I head in afteh him, personal, I gotta have a posse of mighty good shots an' plenty of nerve! He drapped Duck plumb center at a good 180 yards. Take more'n one officer to blockade that feller! What I'm doin' now is explainin' the legalities of this yeah private-preserve injunction. The proposition is, I aint got no papers to serve, nothin' like that. I jes' want ev'ybody to know the way things is."

"That's fine, Sheriff!" Dobussy exclaimed. "I've heard 'bout this hogging of the game, fur, shells, fish. I read the private-preserve notices on the trees an' what they said in the newspaper. I wondered about it. I'd like to hear the right of hit, of course. Hit's gittin' kinda late, Sheriff. Yo' betteh just spend the night with me, hadn't you? Or are yo' goin' some'rs in particular?"

"I'm jes' moseyin' around, nowhere in particular," Sheriff Harker answered. "I jes' aim to hang up my hat mos' anywhere they c'n stand my comp'ny."

Accordingly Dobussy led the way and the officer followed him through the intricate waters to the beautiful pine- and white-oak-framed cabin-boat hidden in the little harbor on deep water, as nearly impossible to find, unguided, as an alligator's nest.

WING lighted a gasoline mantle lamp and started to get supper, while Sheriff Harker sat smoking a pipe taken from a large wooden bowl with loose tobacco on the table. Wing worked easily with both hands, making wild-goose croquettes, frying scrapple of white-corn and razorback, baking hot-bread and setting the table with a variety of fruit, molasses, wild honey and other specials.

Neither one pretended the Sheriff's visit wasn't serious. There was murder in the Dark Corner. Trouble was feared. Even this shanty-boat, being located away back in the heart of the Brakes, was according to the notices posted by the Hatchie Estate, illegal. Frankly Sheriff Harker told his host what to expect.

"Course, the next move is to swear out dispossesses and send me in heah with posses to move yo' boys out," Harker said frankly. "That's law, strategy and—"

"Passing the buck for you to handle when hit's hot," Dobussy said.

"Reckon yo' know the right of it," Harker assented morosely.

Supper was sure tasty and plenty. The two of them cleaned the dishes together and then sat down in the living cabin before the sheet-iron wood-baker. Curtains covered every window; not a streak of light would shine through to betray the boat to a passer-by in that water pocket, surrounded by dense willows and island brake.

"Course, Wing, I want you to understand this," Harker said after a long silence: "I'm Sheriff, elected by most of the voters to perform the duties of my office. But I don't reckon anything you've told me is part of my official information. I respect yo' confidences. The day I come into this country with warrants an' dispossesses, I've got to learn all these brakes an' bayous oveh ag'in. I'll hire a guide, an' I won't know more'n he knows, more'n my posse thinks. With a posse, I'm fair game fo' outlaws. When I'm alone, I'd hate to be shot down—for then I'm jes' ornery human."

Dobussy gazed at him, his face expressionless. It was a lot for Sheriff Harker to admit that he was human when he wasn't official, when he was alone.

"No matter what happens, Sheriff," the swamp man said, "I reckon we understand each other. If yo' kill me daid, some day, that's duty. I'm not po'r white. I'm not quality, course, but I'm not rat, scamp, er riveh-pirate."

"I'm kinda s'prised to meet yo', specially." The Sheriff hesitated. "My information was very direct, reliable, unquestionable, that yo'd been swallowed up, complete."

"Who told yo' the Swamp had sunk me—if you don't mind tellin'?"

"Wetzel Hatchie; does that mean anything special to yo'—if'n I aint gittin' too clost an' personal, Wing?"

"I reckon he warn't regretful, none."

"No suh; I noticed that in particular," the Sheriff said quietly. "Fact is, he 'peared to take a great deal of personal satisfaction—he an' Duck Wamber did."

"Well, some men are glad to know when somebody else has been killed up," Dobussy said slowly. "I don't reckon everybody was disappointed or dissatisfied about Duck Wamber, Sheriff."

"No offense, Wing, but theh's talk that yo' had strong personal reasons for not begrudging either Duck's er Gran'pap Hatchie's gittin' killed up," the Sheriff said slowly. "Course, I don't say so myse'f. Hit's official records that men served as shotgun labor an' slept in



"A boat's comin'!" Wing exclaimed. "Hit's the sheriff," Isabelle said.

chains in a Dark Corner moonshine stockade, now ruined an' shut down."

"I don't need sworn statements to believe that," Dobussy said.

"Wing Dobussy, I want to ask yo' a personal favor," Harker said. "Tell me confidentially, if'n yo' eveh know of that kind in my territory ag'in. Yo' got friends I wish I had; I've heard 'em lie, laugh, turn down money—big money!—an' a sick crow couldn't of been poorer than them."

"Sheriff, I want to deserve my friends!" Dobussy said. "Yo' know those friends I have. I'm forbidden to pack a short-gun against a personal, merciless, despicable enemy. If I kill him, I'll be hung for murder. If he shoots me down, in the Dark Corner, hit's justice and honorable."

"Shoots yo' down, Wing Dobussy?" Sheriff Harker exclaimed.

Wing brought out the empty money-belt with its bullet-holes. He laid three 32-caliber bullets on the officer's hand. He opened his shirt and showed the scars. On his back were the welts of the blacksnake whip.

"I'm dependin' on yo' to keep this confidential," Wing said as he saw the officer angrily squaring his shoulders.

"No man can do that in my county!" Harker declared hoarsely. "Wamber did a bit of talking, corroborative. I couldn't have believed hit. I know those bullets; I've fired that fancy gun. I cain't let yo' take revenge in yo' own hands, Wing."

"I don't ask yo' to let me, Sheriff!" Dobussy assured him. "I jus' told yo', plain an' fair."

"That's a nice carbine yo' got, Wing!" the Sheriff indicated.

"Sure is! A 25-35," Dobussy added.

"Duck was knocked down by a 38-55—it looked like."

"Kind of an old-fashioned caliber."

"Mighty fine for timber deer and bear shooting!" Harker remarked. "Grand-pap Hatchie swore by his. Hit aint been seen sinct he got killed up."

"I looked into its muzzle; sho' was big's a stovepipe!" Wing said. "Good gun to have hid out, in case of business, Sheriff!"

THEY talked on the inevitable Scatterings problems, hundreds of wild-crafters, squatters, natives living on fish, game, herbs, wild grapes, nuts, wild honey, frogs, turtles and other Swamp Bottoms by-products. Wing brought out a writing-board with paper clipped to it, a relic of his student days. He showed Harker the Mississippi Engineer report that figured the area above Hatchie's toll gate to be about one hundred fifty thousand acres.

"But he's got the law, you know." Harker shook his head.

"No, he hasn't," Dobussy denied. "For a thousand years wild life has belonged to the King, to the State, and now

Chapter Fifteen

MENDOVA CLUB TAKES OVER

to the public. That's the *Law*. What Hatchie has are the courts and legislators and police forces. We've got a lawyer for that—"

"You have? I hadn't heard of that."

"Perhaps there's a lot you haven't heard, Sheriff," Dobussy assured him. "We're trying to be legal, first. Sevier Martine's our attorney."

"One of you boys killed Duck Wamber," the Sheriff declared hotly. "Do you call that legal?"

"Suppose a bandit holds you up on a public highway with a gun and tells you not to go home," Dobussy asked quietly. "And he shoots holes in your boat if you don't light out."

"But this is Hatchie's land—it's the Hatchie Estate!"

"Theh's five homesteads all proved up back here."

"A few hundred acres!" Harker cried. "And murder in cold blood—"

"Was anything colder than Wetzel Hatchie shootin' me down?" Wing checked himself, whitening. "And leavin' me to die slow and cruel?"

"Well, I don't blame you—much," Sheriff Harker said presently, when he had figured on it. "This means war in the Swamps. I'm legal. I have to abide by the law as the co'rts interpret it. They'll hand me ejections an' I'll come doing my duty, Wing. Theh'll be fightin', shootin', meanness, raidin', battles. I don't reckon we can be friends."

"Not be friends with the law an' our elected officials?" Wing asked. "We got right on our side. All we want is what's ours. All that makes the trouble back yeah is cheating."

"I know!" the Sheriff sighed.

IN the morning, Dobussy showed the Sheriff out to the East Fork and they shook hands, parting potential enemies. But when the cabin-boater returned to his craft, he found on the table under the squat sugar bowl a paper which read:

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Scattering Courthouse

To Whom It May Concern:

KNOW ALL by these presents that I have on this day, November 2nd, over my hand and seal APPOINTED

WING DOBUSSY

to be and serve as Deputy Sheriff, with power to represent me until my term expires or he is removed.

Jackman Harker

SHERIFF

THE Mendova Turkey Club were much surprised and badly discouraged when they turned back from the Dark Corner, their annual hunt before Christmas stopped short by the Hatchie Estate guard and private preserve legality. Happily, Attorney Bob Ranger was with them.

"I tell you, boys, this is prob'ly our chance!" Ranger declared. "We'll just go see that young Hatchie. I'll bet if we make him some kind of an offer, he'll jump at the chance of giving ouh Turkey Club first whack in here. We'll get a club-license, and take a club site—this preserve'll improve conditions! These damned riveh-rats kill turkeys to eat any time, shoot ducks for market, geese for feathers, deer any time they damned well feel like it. We'll have private hunting benefits, an' get more game, pay no more for lots better privileges."

Accordingly the Mendova Turkey Club turned back to the mouth of the Albion, on the way to see Hatchie. When Ranger and Doctor Scurtis as a committee, went to the Hatchie Estate office in Scattering Court, they were very welcome. Wetzel Hatchie was feeling poorly, but when he received the suggestion of the Mendova Turkey Club, his features lighted up visibly.

"Now that's surely opportune, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, heartily. "You say you're authorized to transact business, gentlemen? As regards the hunting concession, I haven't rightly made up my mind. I don't know—"

"Here's what we thought of suggesting." Ranger handed him a paper, and when he read it Hatchie nodded.

"That seems perfectly fair—parties of the first and second part," Hatchie said. "Everyone accepts and acknowledges. . . . Conservation of wild life, shooting rights explicit; that section regarding unforeseen questions to be considered by representative of each party, who in turn select a third, for equitable adjustment—fine! Now that's foresighted—"

They had Lotus Stalcum write down the details, and then they drew up a contract; and when it came to the Estate's share as regards the purchase of club memberships—duly acceptable to the Mendova Turkey Club and Hatchie Estate, both, a fifty-fifty division of the five hundred dollars received seemed eminently fair.

SWAMP ANGEL

Just to be on the safe side, Ranger carried the precious contract to Mendova to put it in a safe-deposit vault. It was too valuable a paper to have kicking around in a hunting-camp with considerable hard liquor in the luggage. Maybe Hatchie wasn't aware of its implications!

In Mendova, Ranger took the paper to the Cotton Bottoms Trust, where he had it photographed and recorded again as a precautionary measure in case the county clerk's office at Scattering Court should burn. Then he went to his office.

Miss Caprone, his secretary, greeted him with a squeal of surprise, but he explained his unexpected return. She was reading the first edition of the Mendova Evening *Alert*. There was the heading:

NO CLUE TO MURDERER

Scattering Sheriff
Unable to Locate
Hatchie Estate
Warden Bush-
whacker in
Swamps.

Ranger looked down through the account, squinting, indignant, helpless and surprised.

"I'd better have a talk right now with Hatchie!" Ranger said. "He'd better show his hand, when I call him, he sho' had, yes, indeedy!"

Wetzel did just that, without hesitation, when Ranger came strolling in on him, late on that same afternoon, polite, serious, and broad-minded. In fact, Hatchie took Ranger home with him, and the two attorneys talked heart to heart over everything, with utmost frankness.

Come to find out, the sporting end was only just the beginning of Dark Corner business. The fur-trapping showed perhaps fifty thousand dollars, maybe plenty more than a hundred thousand dollars, some good seasons—rats, mink, coons, beaver, otter, 'possums and so on. The mussel shells were being looked into, sharp, by Burdock Watkins—just one pearl might bring five thousand dollars!

"Well, Hatchie, I'm flabbergasted!" Ranger exclaimed. "My Gawd! Yo' know I suttin'ly neveh dreamed of anything like that lying dormant in those swamp brakes. I'll promise you right now, that the Mendova Turkey Club'll sure see to it that those damned pot-hunters are brought up with a round turn, snubbed right! But now—about Duck Wamber getting killed. That was

pretty serious, Wetzel. The Mendova Club doesn't want to step into a feud."

"Well, about Duck." Hatchie hesitated. "Course, sportsmen wouldn't find any pleasure in the Dark Corner if they were-likely to be bushwhacked. Duck told me all about it. Grandpap contracted his distillery labor, and you know how they are, white trash and negroes. They'd take twenty-five or fifty dollars advance, spend it, and then try to run out on work they'd agreed to do. One of those contract laborers was Wing Dobussy—some such name. Duck had a fight with Dobussy, and naturally Duck larruped him, good. He was real enthusiastic about such things, Duck was.

"Well, Dobussy served out his contract, but he always held it up against Duck for licking him. Maybe Duck did kinda overdo hit! Anyhow, when Dobussy's time was up, an' he pulled out, he left word that the sorriest day Duck Wamber'd eveh git to know was the one he blacksnaked a white man. Mebby, too, theh's a Swamp Angel gal mixed up into it. Duck neveh did have any pride, thataway. Course, he was common himself. You know the type."

"Duck was killed just when he was holding the boats from going up the Albion, I understand," Ranger said, "at the preserve boundary?"

"That's so. This killer's right smart, thataway. He wanted the sympathy of the Swamp Angels, so they wouldn't sell out on him." Hatchie shook his head, thoughtfully. "He opened up the Albion temporarily to their trespassing, and they went on in to their boats—camps. They don't want trouble, not with scouters, not with us. We have the law, sheriff, judges, juries, reputable sentiment, everything in our favor."

"Well, of course, none of our members are exactly spring chickens, when hit comes to takin' care of themselves, Wetzel," Ranger chuckled. "They're plumb peaceable and honorable, but they're high-spirited too."

MEMBERS of the Turkey Club just couldn't believe their luck. There they were, liable to make big money out of their fun! When they had celebrated the happy ending of their panic at the fear of losing the right to hunt in that great wild country, they headed into the brakes and pitched their tents back in the West Fork flow, where ridges gave wild turkeys oak acorns, and wild grapes in abundance—fattest, biggest gobblers ever!

The first day out Dr. Scurtis killed a gobbler with nine beards, and it weighed thirty-one pounds, a great beauty, for a fact. The weather was fresh, the frost staying on the ground in the gloomy places. The gobbler would keep for Christmas. Attorney Ranger knocked over a seventeen-pounder and a twelve-pounder, right and left. Jeremiah Case spotted a flock of wild geese coming low overhead and put down four with his automatic.

AS Ranger was working over toward Old Mississipp', he saw probably the biggest flock of wild turkeys he had seen since he was a boy. He planned a campaign, took his sneak and circled to head them. He saw the grandpap of gobblers coming—and then over yonder somebody began to whack and slap away with rifles—little pops, .22's or perhaps a 25-caliber, and the whole flock doubled back, scattered and Ranger never even got a shot.

Of course he was annoyed, and lost his temper. Sure-enough, it was just two Swamp Angels, two low-down white trash boys—twenty-two or twenty-four years old, gaunt, competent but sullen, with three birds.

"Why, damn you!" Ranger exclaimed, staring at the two hens and a nice eleven-pound gobbler. "What the hell do you mean, hunting here—spoiling my shot at the biggest gobbler I eveh saw? Don't yo' know this is a private preserve?"

Neither answered.

"Speak up, you! I'm arresting you for trespass—"

"By God, yo' cain't!" one exclaimed. "Drap that gun, yo'!"

Ranger stood stunned, staring—looking into the muzzle of a 25-20 carbine repeating rifle aimed at his chest, plumb center. The other youth leveled his gun—a .22 repeater.

"Drap hit—er yo' drap, Mister!" the other youth cried shrilly, and Ranger eased his automatic shotgun to the ground, knowing he'd better.

"Why, oh, hell, boys! I didn't mean anything—"

"Yo' lie," one retorted. "Yo're Lawyer Ranger; hit's yo'r business to lie, trick, steal poor folks' livin's. Git goin' off'n these bottoms—don't eveh come back! Git aout! Stay gone, Ranger! This is gun-muzzle notice, Mister! This aint no damned print-notice on a tree, no indeedy!"

Literally it was gun-muzzle notice! And when Ranger backed away, one of



the youths slipped around and picked up the shotgun.

"Hue-ee—hit's a automatic five-shot take-down special!" he cried, swinging to aim at the sportsman. "Git goin' er I'll prick yo' plenty."

"Look out—she pulls easy!" Ranger gasped, starting to run. "This close, it'll kill me!"

"Git goin'!" the two yelled, laughing to see him run; and when he was sixty yards or so away, the youth let go a charge of shot—chilled sixes, and Ranger gave a yell, plastered in the back by stinging pellets. Running, raging and helpless, Attorney Ranger forgot to notice in which direction he was going. He ducked and dodged, thinking he was pursued until at last, breathless, he realized he was in the lonely bottoms on a dull, cloudy day; and looking at his wrist, he discovered he had forgotten his strap compass.

Hurt in his skin and feelings both, he looked around. He was on a ridge four or five feet high, with a cane strip ahead of him along the back. To his left he could see water, with swell-butt cypress and tupelo gums in the soft muck and shoals. To his right he saw only the spreading levels of cottonwood, gums, red oaks. He headed in that direction and came to a wide lake, with marsh and trees in the slicks. He turned in another direction and found a deep, green bayou eddied—having no current. He followed it and came to a green-water stream, narrow, deep, bridged by fallen trees and jammed drift. That wasn't the right direction. He turned back—and with breath-taking suddenness, black night fell upon him, cold, raw, miserable. He shouted, but no answer came.

All night he ran around a tree, keeping warm physically, and in a rage mentally.

In the morning he headed off across country, keeping three trees in a line ahead of him, picking up another one when he passed the nearest, so keeping going straight. In half an hour he heard distant gunshots—the booming of scatter shells; he yelled answer, and sure enough it was members of the Mendova Turkey Club looking for him.

“I better not tell them,” Ranger reflected. “We aint all signed up, yet—if they knew I’d been peppered, and Duck Wamber just killed up—I’ll just take their guying at my being scairt and losing my gun.”

They worked back to the camp, and Ranger changed his clothes, covering up the blood-spots where eight or ten shot had hit him and stained his clothing. He was sore, but he could take it. In confi-

“Hold on, ge’men!” Sheriff Harker pulled his own forty-fives. “The fustes’ man who shoots, I’ll sho’ sink ’im—yas sub!”

dence he told Dr. Scurtis about the matter, and the surgeon deftly picked out the pellets, using local pain-killer. . . .

Turkeys were plenty, and Ranger had his anyway. On the following day the party headed for Mendova. Ranger and Scurtis stopped over at Scattering Court, fully authorized in writing to complete the bargain as regarded bringing in one thousand sportsmen to enjoy the exclusive privileges of hunting over the Dark Corner, heretofore supporting none knew how many people.

WETZEL HATCHIE was glad to make the arrangement on a fifty-fifty basis. And he was perfectly frank:

“You understand, gentlemen, the problem of keeping poachers from interfering is right serious. You know they killed Duck Wamber, I reckon.”

“What’s that—killed Duck Wamber?” Dr. Scurtis exclaimed.

Ranger gave Hatchie the duty of explaining; Scurtis heard for the first time that the superintendent gatekeeper had been mysteriously and feloniously assassinated. Scurtis was surprised and perturbed. And Ranger told Hatchie how he was held up and robbed of his shotgun and was peppered with it by two youths, when he caught them with three wild turkeys stolen from the biggest flock, probably, on the private preserve.

“We’ll have to make an example of those scoundrels,” Hatchie declared an-



grily. “Yo’ll testify to your experience, Mr. Ranger?”

“Yes, indeed!” the attorney assured him. “Nobody can steal my gun holding me up thataway, then pepper me and get away with it—and I a lawyer!—but what I’ll make a personal matter of it.”

The three left the brick office, crossing to County Judge Brooner’s chambers in the court building. They found the Judge, a small, dapper, perky man with dignity in proportion to his lack of weight. Gravely he stood to welcome them. Hatchie explained the situation.

“We want warrants for trespass issued against Clem and Huck Barston,” Hatchie said. “Then we want John Doe and Richard Roe warrants for highway robbers, stealing an automatic, and assault with a deadly weapon. Same case, understand, but we may want to spread the matter a bit, for effect. You understand.”

Miss Stalcum filled in proper blanks; Ranger signed the information; then Judge Brooner sent a trusty for Sheriff Harker.

“Kind of important case, Sheriff!” Brooner said when Harker arrived. “Sit down and I’ll explain it to you.”

Harker sat down, and read the warrants, without comment. Then he said:

"Duck Wamber's killer aint caught, yet, gentlemen. Kind of a come-down from criminal homicide to stealin' a gun and trespass!"

"I demand an explanation!" declared Hatchie. "Just where do yo' stand, Sheriff Harker?"

"With the Law, accordin' to my oath of office, Mist' Hatchie," the Sheriff answered. "If you order it, Judge Brooner, I'll be moving. But I better take a posse, this time."

Chapter Sixteen

THE POSSE CALLS

WING DOBUSSY met Isbelle Strake on the West Fork. She had been down to Scattering Court, trading. The two swung over into an island chute out of the main channel and landed. A flock of mallards came flying swiftly by, bound upstream.

"A boat's coming!" Wing exclaimed.

"Hit's the Sheriff," Isbelle said. "Hatchie, Ranger, Doc' Scurtis and Judge Brooner were figuring on bringing in the Barstons, 'count of insulting that smart lawyer and ignoring the trespass signs."

"Then they actually mean business, hogging the Dark Corner!"

"Depends if Harker's got a posse what they decided on," the Swamp girl answered. "Theh's fine p'int of law. They finally gave Harker warrants, John Doe and Richard Roe for felony, and the two Barstons for misdemeanor trespass."

"I'd better go fair-warn the Barstons!"

"They're going to be easy caught," she said. "Clem came in last night, and I talked to him. He had Ranger's automatic with him. I had to laugh."

"You don't mean yo're jeopardized in this mess?"

"Nobody's safe, absolutely," she answered. "What if I did hide aout that scatter-gun! —Git back aout of sight! Hyar comes the county launch, speedin' —cut-out open! See? Theh sits Sheriff Harker in the bow, big's life, proud, leadin' his posse! Look't those men! Five — Undersheriff Staunton, Whack Olean, Jud Layes, Cole Sparks an' Ban Weeks. Lawse, if those Barstons weren't primed to s'render, or if'n somebody spits fire, accidental er bad-tempered, hit'd sho' be ter'ble bitter!"

"The boys'll surrender, Isbelle?" Wing asked, astonished, as they hid behind a fallen cottonwood and watched the fast-plowing boat go by.

"Course, they mought make a mistake!" Isbelle shook her head. "The boys are all primed, sensible. I asked hit as a *personal* favor of ouh friends, to s'render this time."

"You reckon lawin' in a fixed court'll do any good?" Dobussy asked.

"Yes, indeedy! That's jes' hit!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Thataway ev'ything goes on the records. They can't go behind their own crooked works."

Dobussy stared at Isbelle Strake's shining eyes and face, wondering and puzzled how-come she had all that down so plain, those things he had been struggling to know as well as feel.

"I'm vengeful, Isbelle," was all he could say. "I mistrust these scoundrels if'n once they lay hands, put irons on those Barstons' wrists, lock them behind the bars."

When Isbelle had slipped away to go home in the late evening, as sunset drew near, Dobussy—his outboard running quietly and keeping close to the bank—skulked on his way. Nobody could take any chances or feel safe the way things were in the Dark Corner.

DOBUSSY felt that Sheriff Harker was honorable, that he would respect the secret of the hidden cabin-boat. Nevertheless he dropped down the West Fork to Highjack Wager's fish-camp tent and boats. Wager heard the outboard when Wing opened up his cut-out just to let the Swamp Angel know he was coming, and Wager came out.

"Howdy!" Wager hailed, answering Dobussy's greeting. "Sheriff Harker an' five deputies went up this Fork afteh noon. I 'lowed yo' betteh know, Wing."

"They headed for the Barston landing," Dobussy agreed. "Thanks alive, Highjack! What do I cyar if they did?"

"Well, course, I mind my own business," the fisherman answered. "I jes' wanted to make sure yo' knowed. An' otheh thing, I heah theh's a feller, a strangeh, messin' around. He's smooth-shaven, a scar on his chin like a knife'd cut him. He's in an eighteen-foot skift, with a four-hoss outboard an' camp outfit. He hints he's a scouter. When the fish-tug come by yest'day mornin', he was jes' comin' down from the Green Cane at the Narrers on the *west* side, Wing. He'd poked round jes' 'bout where the Duck Wamber killin' shot came from. He told the boys he'd seen sunthin' glint yellier in the sun, an' theh 'twas—a 38-55 shell right where that bushwhacker likely

laid. He was kinda playin' with hit, watchin' those boys. Course, they neveh said a word!"

"Well, what of it—special?"

"Grandpap Hatchie always toted a 38-55. Nobody else through hyar had one like hit. Nobody's heard a word about hit sincet he was killed up in the Dark Corner, whereveh hit was."

"I'M sure obliged to you for telling me!" Dobussy exclaimed.

"Us Swamp Angels all got to stick together now," the fisherman explained quietly. "We gotta chip in fo' a damned lawyer. I paid a ten-spot to'd him, myse'f."

"You did? I hadn't heard about that! I want to sit in, too. Who collected?"

"Course, we aint s'posed to tell, not the enemy or outside, but I reckoned yo'd know. Hit's Miss Lotus Stalcum, Jedge Brooner's typewritin' gal; she told Isbelle Strake the first thing she hearn Duck was killed up, how serious hit was. She warn'd ev'ybody not to say a word, not to talk, not to light aout, but to be brave, an' hold ouh forts!"

"She said that—Miss *Stalcum*?"

"Yas suh, in jes' so many words."

Dobussy had a sociable cup of Louisiana drip coffee and went on his way down the dark and winding waters. A faint reddish glow under the trees revealed the tent of Prat Adkin, the willow-basketmaker. The hour was pretty late for him to be up, but the lamp cast a human shadow against the canvas—a stranger; and the hand of the shadow had something in it.

"Why, there he is, showing Prat that 38-55 shell!" Dobussy said to himself; and then he opened his cut-out. Instantly Prat came through the flaps, greeting:

"Howdy! I got a strangeh visitin'!"

"Thankee, Prat, for fair-warnin' me," Dobussy answered in a low voice. "If'n a man behaves himself, he don't need to fear anybody but mean scoundrels. Did Sheriff Harker come with a posse?"

"Not's I seen up this fork—no county boats went by," Prat answered. "He afeh somebody?"

"Sho' nough, Prat," Dobussy answered significantly.

"I'm the stranger," the visitor said, emerging. "Who are you?"

"I'm jes' a Swamp Angel," Dobussy answered.

"What started the Sheriff off this time?" Prat asked. "—If hit aint confidential business."

"'Bout noon Harker went up the West Fork, I reckon, with his charges of insult, disrespect, trespass an' felonies," Dobussy answered.

"Then—then they're goin' at hit, claimin' possession, aint they?"

"Looks like—taking all the brakes, all the Dark Corner," Wing assented. "This is their first big move."

"Well, I reckon we'll have to take hit," Prat sighed, "like hit or not—come hell or high water!"

"What I was going to say, Wetzel Hatchie has hired himself a private detective to come back in here finding out all he can," Dobussy said; "probably he's a good fellow, personally, but he's hired to ask into all our private business. The Constitution says no man can be made to testify against himself."

"So you're one of those Swamp Angel pettifoggers, big-mouthing!" the stranger standing by exclaimed.

"I'm just passing on advice given by a competent attorney-at-law, Mister," Dobussy retorted. "There's a limit to legitimate prying and snooping into back-home affairs even of Swamp Angels. I don't recommend that you trespass any beyond it. Those Turkey Club trespass notices don't cover all the possibilities of violation back heah in the swamps, suh. Well, good night, Prat! Mind your eye—see you ag'in!"

"So long!" Prat exclaimed heartily, as Wing let in the gears and shoved on into the night.

As Dobussy's big skiff swung out of the landing eddy into the current upstream, he heard the stranger mumble a question. Prat spoke up as if to be louder than the noise of the motor:

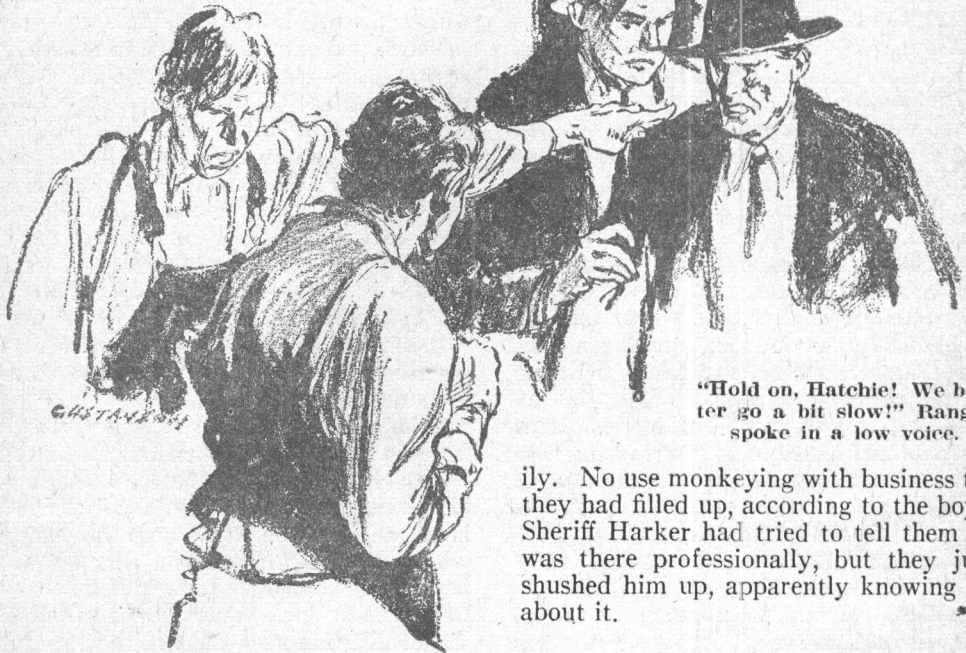
"Who's that feller? Oh, he's jes' one of those shanty-boaters. I sho' disremember his name. Them kind come in an' out all the time."

Dobussy caught his breath. Prat, he realized, was loyal. . . .

Driving his outboard along at a cruising speed, seven or eight miles an hour, Dobussy stopped along at two other camps and at a shanty-boat, giving every one a fair warning about the detective on the prowl, and asking that the word be spread back in the brush to the scouters and those off the main ways.

SUNDOWN was near when Sheriff Harker ran his motorboat to the bank and the six men went ashore. They had to cut across the bottoms to reach the Barston place, and were in sight for

a mile before they reached the landing. They landed at a deer runway, and followed it over the neck and came to the clearing with its two-story log house, the upper one the counterpart of the lower, so that when the overflow came the family could move upstairs and tie their boats



"Hold on, Hatchie! We better go a bit slow!" Ranger spoke in a low voice.

ily. No use monkeying with business till they had filled up, according to the boys. Sheriff Harker had tried to tell them he was there professionally, but they just shushed him up, apparently knowing all about it.

to the outside stairway. The boys were at home, sure enough.

Just as the Sheriff arrived, looking over the brush and driftwood fence, having come sneaking, the Barstons lifted three big lumps out of a hole; right before the eyes of the posse the two shucked off the clay-shells and revealed three turkeys baked in that hole in the ground. This was supper-time—just coming sunset.

"Theh's corroborative evidence—three turkeys!" Sheriff Harker whispered to Undersheriff Staunton.

"Howdy—yo' sheriffers!" Clem Barston turned suddenly and called. "If yo' fellers want sunthin' to eat, betteh come git hit while hit's hot!"

Two of the deputies burst into a guffaw, and the others stood up, looking sheepish and shamefaced. They could see the boys didn't even have on belt-guns. Come to find out, Huck had seen them coming around the short bend up the meanders, and so they'd prepared for company. Hole-roast turkeys, with three kinds of dressing, more hot-bread than all the men could eat, wild-grape jam, coffee, yellow Illinois butter, jelly and wild honey—they just ate and ate stead-

OF course, after supper, when they were all sitting around the fireplace, Clem passed the tobacco-bowl with pipes; and when they were all settled down, Clem like the backwoods gentleman he was, made it just as easy as possible for the officer to perform his duty.

"Reckon yo're after us Barstons, Sheriff Harker?" the brother said, formally.

"Yas suh—sorry 'bout hit, boys!" Harker said. "Yo've always be'n friendly, neveh no complaints about yo'—"

"Till this lawyer Ranger figured if we weren't good business, he'd make us good business—that it?" Huck asked.

"Well—I cain't try the merits of the case, boys. I'll read the warrants—"

He read the two Barston papers. They charged trespass, and were signed by Robert Ranger, "Attorney for the Mendova Turkey Club." All looked at the two brothers.

"Sheriff, if yo' make this arrest, are you responsible or is the man who swore out the information and those he acted for responsible?" Clem asked.

"Boy, that's a legal question!" Staunton exclaimed admiringly.

"The one who initiated the proceedings," Harker answered, "he's respon-

sible. I don't know anything about it. Course, anything you say c'n be used against you—we're all legal witnesses."

"That suits us, if yo' don't commit perjury," Clem Barstow observed grimly. "Suppose yo're on yo'r own land, inherited, proved up, taxes paid and all, an' a man comes along with an automatic shotgun, draws down on yo' in a threatening manner, uses abusing an' scoundrelly language—would yo' reckon self-defence conditions prevail?"

"What's that—Ranger wa'n't on your own land, was he?" asked Sheriff Harker. "What do yo' mean, anyhow?"

"I mean just that," Huck said. "Yo' men heard those warrants read that we were trespassin' on private prop'ty. That's perjury. We own this half-section of timber here, Mr. Sheriff. This is ouh home. I'm fair-warnin' yo'; we aren't goin' to be arrested and lugged off'n our own prop'ty on perjury, invasion an' assault of our home; nor to satisfy any lawyer drummin' up business among peaceable, honorable poor white folks. Is that plain?"

"Who—who advised you? You got legal ideas!" Sheriff Harker asked.

"None of yo' business who our lawyers is!" Huck countered promptly. "What's more, don't come into these swamps with crooked court conspiracy papers to deprive us of our prop'ty rights, our civil rights, and all our otheh rights accordin' to the Constitution, statutes and common laws as provided, suh! The on'y reason yo're here tonight is on account of we're peaceable, to a certain extent, not because yo' invaded. When yo' come invadin' with crooked papers, yo' aint legal any more!"

"You boys have me stumped," Harker admitted, frankly. "Yo' sho got legal advice. I reckon, Staunton, yo' and Cole Sparks better go back to the co'rt and explain the situation to Judge Brooner. He'll get in touch with Ranger—some attorney sho' has treed us!"

THE two brothers grinned. Staunton grumbled, but went with Sparks for the long, cold ride back down the winding West Fork of the Albion. Embarrassed, nonplused, the three posse-men who remained wriggled uncomfortably.

"Hit's a long night," Clem Barstow said. "We all betteh go to bed. Anotheh day is comin'. Choose yo' own beds, gentlemen!"

Five beds were in the room, one at the end opposite the fireplace, and two on

each side. Sheriff Harker took off his belt with its two holsters and hung up his big coat, which sagged with the weight of 30-30 shells in boxes of twenty. The deputies followed suit. Neither of the boys had any guns on them. In ten minutes the fire was banked and all were in their bunks, but perhaps not asleep. They had plenty to think about, those officers and Swamp Angels.

FIRST the posse knew, it was morning, Clem calling them to the kitchen for breakfast. The sun just shimmered on the frost. Hot-bread, fried fresh razor-back chops, coffee, sour-milk to drink, sweet for coffee, and cornbread. After breakfast they went outdoors.

"Let's go oveh here!" Huck suggested. Blocks took them over the fence protecting the garden, and quarter of a mile in the brakes the Barstons stopped and faced the Sheriff and his posse.

Around a big gum tree, just clear of the roots, was a scuffed runway ring where someone had run around the stump hundreds of times. Sheriff Harker gazed at the mute evidence of a lost man exercising all night long, keeping warm. A slow smile suffused the officer's rotund countenance, his eyes twinkling.

"Now, Huck," Harker turned, inquiring, "course, I aint askin' yo' to testify against yourse'f. I aint trickin' yo', nothing like that. Jes' confidentially, not officially, not for no legal purposes, I'd sho' take hit friendly, if'n yo'd tell me jes' zactly what did happen."

"Well—" Huck Barston hesitated. "Course, I cain't testify—not ev'ything. But—I'll jes' show yo'!"

Turning toward the north line of the woods half-section, they came to where the homesteaded "ridge" sloped down toward the tupelo-cypress growths marking the soft, wet ground.

"Theh's man-tracks," Huck indicated. "Yo' c'n see where he run down that-away, struck water, turned over east and came to the Blocked Bayou, an' his tracks circle all around, every which way, through there. He never got more'n a mile er so in any d'rection. If'n he'd jes' stopped to listen, he'd heard the Mississippi. Kinda comical—in a way!"

"Who gave you all the legal advice?" Harker asked, trying again.

"None of yo' business, Sheriff!" Huck grinned, though his eyes were narrowed and had a hard sparkle. "That's what we call confidential lawyerin', I reckon. I done answered that one."

The Sheriff colored, but chuckled too. The trappers were shrewdly advised; and Attorney Ranger, for all his acumen, had made plenty mistakes in his fall from professional to human emotions. Other errors were indicated, too, when the boys showed Sheriff Harker notices of the "Dark Corner Private Preserve" posted along the Mississippi river bank, enclosing the homesteaded land of the Barstons. Realization of the inclusion of private property in the Hatchie-Mendova Club project was shown when, on toward noon, Undersheriff Staunton, Wetzel Hatchie and Attorney Ranger arrived at the two-story trappers' cabin.

HATCHIE strutted to the two brothers with his hand out, smiling, but Clem put both hands behind him.

"We want to know what you want, Mist' Hatchie. We aint friendly."

"Why, boys, no need of hard feelings!" Hatchie said, smiling but coloring too. "I've decided to buy your holdings—"

Unable to meet their straight stares, he looked around. They were in the midst of utterly virgin timber, red gums of highest export quality, huge sound oaks, some three hundred acres of prime timber. The logging of it would bring hundreds of dollars an acre, done right. He could hardly pay too high a price for it.

"We don't want any trouble, boys—no use of hard feelings!" Hatchie turned, his ivory cheeks showing pink. "I'll give ten dollars an acre—say three thousand dollars cash money for this place—a quit-claim."

"You go to hell!" Clem retorted hotly. "You know damned well we can sell this timber any time we get ready for ten-fifteen thousand, stump price. No suh, this place aint fo' sale."

"Oh, come now! There isn't anything from men's souls to property that isn't for sale!"

"I reckon—lawyer-honor, er Gov'ment prop'ty, fur, shells, fish, birds,—yo'd sell anything yo' don't own—sell yo'r soul. But who'd want a soul like yourn, Mist' Hatchie—the Devil?"

"Who the hell yo' talkin' to?" Hatchie drew his revolver partly out—but the trappers were faster with their short-barreled automatic trap-line pistols.

"Hold on, ge'men!" Sheriff Harker pulled his own old forty-fives, as he stepped back to get clearance. "The fustes' man who shoots, I'll sho' sink 'im with soft-nose lead—yas suh!"

The brothers, and Hatchie and Ranger, who had backed up at the gunplay, rolled their eyes to look into the forbidding muzzles of the Law's guns, and restrained whatever impetuous ideas they had had of settling their antagonisms right there and then.

"Drap those guns—all of 'em—on the floor! Not in yo' holsters, boys!" Sheriff Harker ordered, and five short-guns were eased to the ground.

"Yo' boys better sell right now," Ranger declared. "We need this tract fo' an outlying club-camp, contacting the riveh—and turkey land."

"Taint for sale!" Clem shook his head, obdurately.

"I fair-warn yo'!" Bob Ranger said. "Theh's a flaw in yo' title. I'll advise yo', honestly—on my honor! Nine years ago yo' didn't pay the levee bond assessment. The Mendova Club owns that tax-sale title. If'n yo' fight, we'll fo'-close, an' then yo' won't git anything. This half-section is ouhs, right now—"

The lips of the two brothers parted, their faces whitening, and their confident pose wilted. Always the old levee bond scandal had hung over the bottoms, though the levee never had been built. The issue had been a fraud, but the levee district had paid interest on the bonds, and the matter had slept in courts and in schemers' vaults for years. Attorney Ranger had selected the bonds, filing claims in the County Clerk office of Scattering Court—"Jes so's we'll have leverage when it comes to argue," the lawyer had said.

"Can these fellers steal the land Dad proved up fifty years ago, Sheriff?" Clem turned to the officer. "C'n they hold us up thisaway?"

Hatchie and Ranger turned to stare, with deep meaning, at the Sheriff, whose rotund countenance drew in grim lines.

"I don't advise them to, boys," Harker said quietly. "Theh's such a thing as se'f-defence in the Constitution, if'n it comes to stealing a man's lands, same as any other property, fur as my office is concerned."

"By God, Sheriff—do you invite murder?" Hatchie screamed.

"Then we'll begin court proceedings of dispossession, Mr. Hatchie!" Ranger turned with dignity. "The Sheriff'll serve court papers, course."

"Court orders—" And Sheriff Harker sighed. "I'll have to—or resign. But don't make any mistakes, you two! I represent law."

"Hold on, Hatchie! We better go a bit slow!" Ranger spoke in a slow voice. "We got to get our law right—firstest!"

"Reckon we'll all go, boys," Sheriff Harker added, his voice hollow with anxiety as he followed the deputies who trailed after Hatchie and Ranger.

"Sher'f!" Clem Barston called to Harker. "Yo' all betteh take the guns of these yeah raidin' quality."

Barston carried the three weapons Ranger and Hatchie had dropped to the floor, and the Sheriff nodded approvingly, for this was common sense.

"Thank yo', boys! I won't fo'get yo' did this!" the officer said. "I'm neutral, course, but I'm sho' proud yo' boys held yo'selves in—provoked the way yo' was."

The single file of men dragged over the fence blocks and followed the old land trace toward the Albion river fork. Presently the Barstons heard the throbbing of two motorboats heading down the winding stream.

"Well, I reckon hit's 'good-by home,' Huck!" Clem shook his head.

"Course, they'll law us to death," Huck assented.

Chapter Seventeen

LAWED TO DEATH

NO one made a sound as Judge Wayling finished reading the Court's decision. Just the attorneys who had flocked with the Judge on his circuit showed in narrowing eyes and slight flashes of grins as they stirred and settled, uneasily, their satisfaction that the old boy had done it again.

Beyond the railing the Swamp Angels and outsiders looked blankly at one another. It wouldn't come to them at once what it was all about, just what had been decided, who had won. The doings of the courts and attorneys-at-law were learned, mysterious and perhaps most of them never would know what exactly had happened.

The two Barston brothers sat within the railing, being litigants. When the learned and honorable Judge had turned the last page, affixing his signature, he looked up to bring his bitocals to bear on the other papers in the case, for he very meticulously kept everything all according to the legal Hoyle—as he would say in jovial moments.

Attorney Martine turned to the Barstons and whispered: "We've lost, boys."

"That means this Wetzel Hatchie gits ouh place?" Clem asked.

"Yes."

"They c'n run us out, now, Mr. Martine?"

"Yes; Judge Brooner'll order Sheriff Harker to dispossess you."

"Well, course, we knowed what to expect," Clem Barston sighed, and the others nodded. "Hit sho' was friendly, Mist' Martine, comin' in thisaway to he'p us po'r folks. That damned scoundrel fined yo' fo' fightin' our fight. Hyar's the money. We got a li'l' cash, suh—"

Martine grew tense as he blinked. He had not expected that. He had been fighting alone so long that he had not realized that the indignant scorn and anger of his fellow-attorneys was not everywhere shared. Lotus Stalcum had tried to encourage him in his quixotic refusal to stand in with the court chasers. The Swamp Angels understood—they counterbalanced the scorn of the others.

The spectators saw the Judge fill his brief-case, and in his grand, complacent manner move for the chambers. They saw the host of attorneys heading to congratulate the old boy on his handling of that delicate and important case.

The lawyers had had their say. The Court had had its say. All the Swamp Angels, the men, women, children who had seen two of their members lose title to thousands of dollars' worth of lands they had occupied and their father had occupied more than fifty years—imagine any courts not recognizing their rights to fur, fish, game, all the eats they had!

Pretty tired after being in town, having so much excitement, and being so busy, the Swamp Angels drew toward the levee street slowly and strung out, scuffling along, heading toward their landing at the long reverse-current eddy on the Mississippi above the fish dock, toting their burlap, cotton and willow basket carry-alls with their supplies, going homeward.

DOWN at the landing they broke up into little groups, looking over their shoulders back at the levee above which they could see the low roofs of houses, some peaked, some hipped and others flat, and the big white cupola of the red brick courthouse with its big alarm bell, upstairs windows like staring white eyes, the great white columns and the top balcony where lawyers were leaning on the white railing admiring the scenery and

talking things over, shaking their heads with pride and emphasis.

From the white pole hung the flag, fluttering in the waning sunshine above the autumnal leaves of the trees in the Courthouse Square Park. They always hung up the flag on court days—just kind of a habitual custom harking away back yonder into the old days and kept up, except for a while when the times were disputatious, parlous and whooping.

Weather-wise gaze turned to the mid-day milkiness of the sky and the great halo circle around the sun like a frame which might mean a storm in a day or two—a weather-breeder—couldn't be sure. It might blow away in a dry wind instead of a rain.

AS the boats headed stringing away up the Mississipp' from the landing eddy, the steam packet *Kate Adams* swung in and stopped at the Scattering Court landing to load sixty or seventy bales of cotton, nine mules, live cane-rooters, crates of chickens, and whatever passengers were going out.

The roustabouts—double-shuffling darkies—sang their marching tune, cake-walking under boxes of coffee, bales of dry-goods, hardware, nail kegs, barrels of sugar, whatever was coming or going. Presently when the old *Kate* cut loose, the big engine southing and coughing, the stern wheel thudding and splashing, she headed down the wide, glistening yellow current of the placid-looking Mississippi, visitors and townspeople watching.

The last Swamp Angel was gone and a string of skiffs and canoes towed by an outboard was just flickering around the point at the head of the eddy up the crossing. Attorney Bob Ranger turned to Wetzel Hatchie, beaming with complacent satisfaction.

"Sure is fine!" he exclaimed. "Afteh all the rumpusing and the threatening of the storm and difficulty, to have everything flatten down thisaway, Wetzel, sure is gratifying. Yo' know, theh's lots of bark an' snap in those Swamp Angels if they don't know their place. When they looked upon the determined front, the august majesty of the Law, they realized how useless it was for ignorant, ornery, no-'count white trash to cope with the intellectual courage, the deserving competence, the trained legal minds of superior mentalities. They felt the dif'rence. They couldn't help but see it. Yas suh, Hatchie, this yeah's the best example I eveh saw of the natural, fundamental,

unmistakable differences between the high-class professional quality and ability and the ornery low-down and de-graded classes."

Wetzel Hatchie started to speak, but hesitated, looking up the bottoms in the direction of the Dark Corner. The mid-day warmth had lasted till late—the sun was dimming, now, and out of the north a chill breath came upon them. Both men shivered.

"Right smart of the legal fraternity stayed over," Hatchie said. "We ought to show the hospitality of our great private preserve, Ranger. We could go kill a buck and a razorback—have a barbecue—"

"Now, that's an idea!" Ranger declared. "Nothing could please me better. I was just wishing I could go out and relax, enjoy the swamp brake, look over our domain of wild-life and recreation we've definitely for all time devoted to the love of sportsmanship, Nature—the reward of the deserving. Um-m—fine!"

They headed briskly over the levee, up past the courthouse and on to the Hatchie mansion, pausing merely to make sure that the visiting attorneys, Judge Wayling, Sheriff Harker and other notables understood they were to share the triumph at a barbecue on Saturday evening up at the Preserve Line, at the Narrows, and enjoy the combined hospitality of Wetzel Hatchie, Bob Ranger and the executives of the Mendova Turkey Club. Not exactly celebrating—they were modest, of course!—but just being hospitable and showing an open house.

IN the sporting-room of the Hatchie mansion, Hatchie and Ranger chose arms equipment for the wild-meat hunt for the barbecue. They changed to hunting-clothes and on the mansion bayou they embarked in the varnished pirogue, with everything amidships—even to cartons of favorite cigarettes, a wide choice of liquid refreshments, native and imported, and staples in quantity. They had, of course, details regarding the establishing of the preserve, getting everything down right, now that they had things in their hands the way they wanted them.

The Albion was clear, green, beautiful on that late Friday evening. The pirogue, swift and as graceful as a wood duck, swept up the winding bends and cut the emerald reaches. In the brief twilight they switched on a powerful battery spotlight, and they saw the tents with lanterns in them, saw shacks on the banks—



Swamp Angels living below the preserve line on timber holdings and close-in plantation lands. They exchanged smiles of congratulations as they discussed their easy victory—passing slow craft bound into the back country, the occupants silent and dejected in the consciousness of their defeat. No one even hailed them as they passed.

The two men landed at the float, where they slid alongside and quickly heaved the hamper, bags and firearms out of the pirogue and then carried their duffle up the gangplank over the bank into the

hunting-cabin and river watch-house of the Club.

They stood silhouetted by the high-power gasoline lantern on top of the bank, their shadows thrown down on the quivering flow of the stream. They could hear the pounding of small motors up stream and down—the going home of the Swamp Angels who had been ordered to evacuate with their outfits, their chattels and removables—up the bank and down the waters.

"A good riddance!" Ranger remarked, absently, listening to the night sounds.

"We c'n bring in respectful, honorable help who'll know their places—"

"We sure can!" Hatchie spoke quietly. "We better go out with our headlights and make sure of our meat for the barbecue. Reckon we need a big buck an' a young razorback—two-year-old, say!"

"Let's go!" Ranger exclaimed, and a few minutes later they headed out into the brakes along the Backbone Ridge from the Narrows.

Presently, after just a little while, the rolling *boom-ponk* of a shot returned to the river. A little later came three *ponk-ponk-ponks*, rifle-shots in the night. The echoes wandered hither and yon, smart, uppety, taunting sounds—killing big meat just for the fun of it! That was the sound of it!

ON Saturday the sky was sunny, balmy and autumnal. A better day for the barbecue couldn't have been chosen. The visitors remaining over and the local people were abroad early in the morning, sauntering along in leisurely pairs or small groups, enjoying the great charm of a perfectly delightful, glorious day in Scattering Court.

Shuffling through the leaves fallen from abundant shade trees, the attorney circuit riders strolled along the best streets and across the Courthouse Square. They needed the exercise to whet their appetites for the hospitality of their hosts, Wetzal Hatchie, Bob Ranger and the Mendova Turkey Club up the Albion.

Sheriff Harker and several deputies organized the boat parade which was led by the big county launch and all the available lesser craft. When the fleet had been assembled and the hour of embarkation arrived, the throng came down from the bank out onto the Hatchie floating boathouse and landing-stage. The swift and orderly despatch astonished everyone and when the long fleet headed through the arched bayou and out into the Albion the powerful launches towing strings of skiffs and the swift craft tempered their speed to the common gait of a little more than seven miles per hour.

No one would ever forget that ride up the Albion with the trees sifting down yellow leaves swirling in the varying breezes out over the emerald-green water, birds calling, squirrels barking.

They saw a school of alligator gars rolling their ugly heads, flocks of black cormorants, nigger geese in V-formation undulating like long black ribbons against the white sky aglow with diffused sun-

shine and high against the zenith a flock of sandhill cranes flashed like winged jewels in the silvery light. They jumped flocks of mallards which raced on ahead of them for a few hundred yards, dropping down into another eddy to be disturbed again.

They saw no tent, nor shack, no craft nor any Swamp Angel. It was as if even the open country below the Dark Corner preserve had been abandoned by the squatters and homesteaders. Sheriff Harker kept his head turning to survey the long banks, squinting under his wide-brimmed hat. At familiar deer-stands and two or three places along he looked to see somebody, but nobody was along the way watching the big party go by.

They came in sight of the old ferry crossing of the Green Cane Ridge Road and the bulge up the long, low hill, with the opening on the right bank. As they approached they saw the bright new cabin and other structures at the line of the private preserve, marking the entrance.

No one was on the float-landing nor at the top of the bank where they had expected to be greeted by their hosts.

"Toot the whistle!" The Sheriff gave the order; one of the deputies pulled the cord and the shrill, piercing blast announced the coming of the party. Only the echoes replied, something like mockery and cackling in the reverberations.

The Sheriff steered up to the head of the barrel float and a deputy stepped out on the wharf holding the county-launch line. Harker and all hands on board climbed over the splashboard and the Sheriff led the way, climbing the stairs up to the level of the bottoms. He looked at the little lodge, he glanced over at the storehouse and around as he walked into that quiet and deserted opening in the heavy brake. And then he stopped short, gasping for breath.

PARTLY behind the buildings and inconspicuous among the scattered shade trees was a pecan with a good fork in it. In the fork rested a gambrel pole extending twenty feet or so to a large set post, about twelve feet from the ground where game was hung on gambrel sticks by trace chains or ropes.

At the end of the pole at the post hung a huge striped yellow and black razorback hog, a two-year-old prime porker, and a long-legged swamp buck deer, game that had been killed for the barbecue.

In the middle of the peeled hickory pole, about five feet apart, two bright new

three-quarter-inch ropes had been tied with two half-hitches and a bight around the line. These lines led straight down to the necks of two men where six-inch-long hangman nooses had been drawn tight on their throats so that their bodies dangled in the terrible limp relaxation of those who are hanged by the neck until dead.

Sheriff Harker swayed and took quick steps to save himself from falling over.

"Wetzel Hatchie!" he whispered, almost whistling, and leaning to look more keenly, he sighed with breathless finality, "Bob Ranger!"

He hardly noticed the sound of climbing footsteps nor the rustle and smack of the soles of those who came hurrying to join him, but stopped short when they saw what he saw and knew what he knew. Men sighed and gasped, and women began to utter sharp little cries which grew louder and became a chorus of shrieks and sobs.

ALL stopped short of the burly, heavy figure of Sheriff Harker. The whole throng who had come to the barbecue huddled together around the back of the chief executive of Scatterings County.

Sheriff Harker never did a better day's work than he did getting all those people back to town, except just him and the posse. The bodies were taken to the town right away, the coroner and authorities being right there to make it all legal and according. . . .

Yes sir, there never was finer funerals in all this part of the country. And popular, too, ev'ybody turning out and no expenses spared. Mr. Ranger's remains was taken out yonder, some'rs, but Wetzel Hatchie was interred local, at Scattering Court along by his family plot in the graveyard, at the headstone for Grandpap; but they took the statue off'n the base on account of Wetzel never paid for it, and come to settle the estate, come to find out, the Hatchie house and local properties belonged to Miss Stalcum, on account of legalities relating to the murder of her father and the chicaneries related thereto. . . .

Well, suh, it was sure surprising, all them circumstances! Um-m! Course, Sheriff Harker and his posse-men pulled up their belts and r'ared out into the Dark Corner, looking for them scoundrels who did that meanness. The Law was terribly provoked. Time and again he headed in, but the posse'd no more'n get

started than word echoed up the Albion, somehow, spreading out through the brakes—and it seemed like thataway the Swamp Angels always knew who was coming, and when the officers located the camps and outfits, shacks and raghouses, cabins and shanty-boats, or where-so-ever, nobody'd be to home. It appeared like nobody wanted to testify to anything anybody really would like to know.

Of course, the Scatterings is what you might call wild country. Sports go in there, roust around a while, mebbey shooting a wild turkey, or getting a buck venison, catching a mess of big-mouth greet trout. Just kind of sporting, you know, not aiming to stay any length of time to speak of, or make any serious business of it. They say they got some fine, ethical sporting game and fish laws for them kinds to live up to, real honorable and seasonable.

There've been fellers gone in there, rousting, r'aring, flustering around, big's all get out, but they quiet down presently, or they come stepping out, kind o' awry-eyed, looking for somewheres else right hurried. What happened? Oh, nothing any one could lay tongue to, definite—it just aint a place for performances, seems to be. You know how places aint like one another in some particulars.

Nobody gets shot up there, exactly—unless just confidential. Nobody settles down, either, claiming to own a fishing bend or taking up trapping or hornswogling the shells, seining the spawning beds of the fish, hogging anything in general or particular—not against popular opinions. Then course, 'taint a place for interfering—that's the main thing, I reckon, minding your own business.

No, suh, Stranger, personally, up and down Old Mississipp' and these contributing streams, back into the hills and over the prairies, as well as in the overflows there's lots of open country, plenty of it—but just along here, from up above the old stillhouse down to b'low the riveh-mouth, say along by the Court Landing, it's all right to tie in for a night or two, or riding out a wind, but as for locating—um-m—I'd say it's done took up.

WHERE'S Wing Dobussy now? Oh, like the Barstons—he's right there.

Him and his wife that was Isabelle Strake, they got a nice outfit and a passel of chillun—I disremembah if it's three going on four, or how many, the last time I heard. A nice little fambly. Yas suh!

THE END

Within the Enemy's Lines

A World War pilot gives us this fascinating story of daring espionage: the second in the adventures of the "Legless Legion"—a group of rehabilitated veterans organized by wealthy Mel Service into a daring intelligence corps.

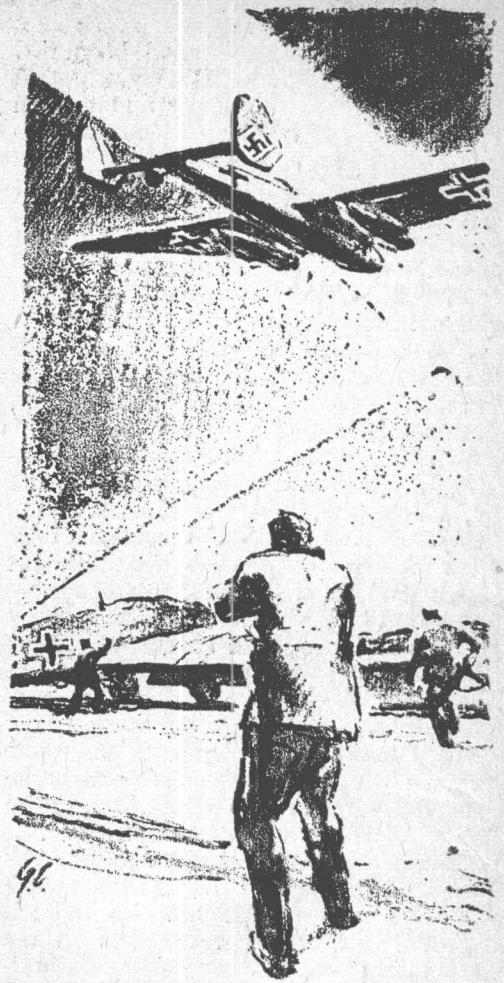
By
**TRACY
RICHARDSON**

AS the flashes of the anti-aircraft shells were left behind, Flight Lieutenant Coulter-Brown relaxed a bit and eased himself on his seat-pack chute. He wiped his forehead free of perspiration and checked his instruments. Cruising at twenty thousand feet, the outside temperature was registering thirty-two below; but inside the closed cockpit, protected by his electrically wired flying-suit, it was comfortably warm; and the tricky flying he had been forced to do during the last barrage had not cooled him down a particle. Now it would be clear sailing—until they hit the next aerial barrage.

They were flying on oxygen. He spoke to his photographer-observer, Lieutenant Linton, through the interplane phone, its mouthpiece an integral part of their oxygen masks, so they could talk without removing that important accessory.

"How'd you like that burst of hate, Linton?"

"A little bit of all right, what! Been too bad if they'd had our line of flight as close as they did our altitude. I'll bet



I got a picture of every A.A. gun within ten miles of the Holland border. What do you make of our position?"

"That crooked streak down there is the Ems River. We'll be over Meppen in about a minute—and I'll be glad to get past that spot; it's a tough baby."

"There they go again!" shouted Lieutenant Linton as flashes speckled the darkness above them. "About a thousand feet high and short. Gad! Looks like a swarm of fireflies down below. I'll get some good negatives of this."

Flying Lieutenant Coulter-Brown was busy trying to keep track of the bursting anti-aircraft shells, so that he might change his course when they came too near. He was throttled down until they barely had flying-speed, making it better for pictures, but more difficult for the detectors on the ground to pick them with any degree of accuracy. . . . Strangely enough, when the trouble came it was from above, not below. A piece of archie shell crashed through the nose of the plane, smashing part of the instrument panel.

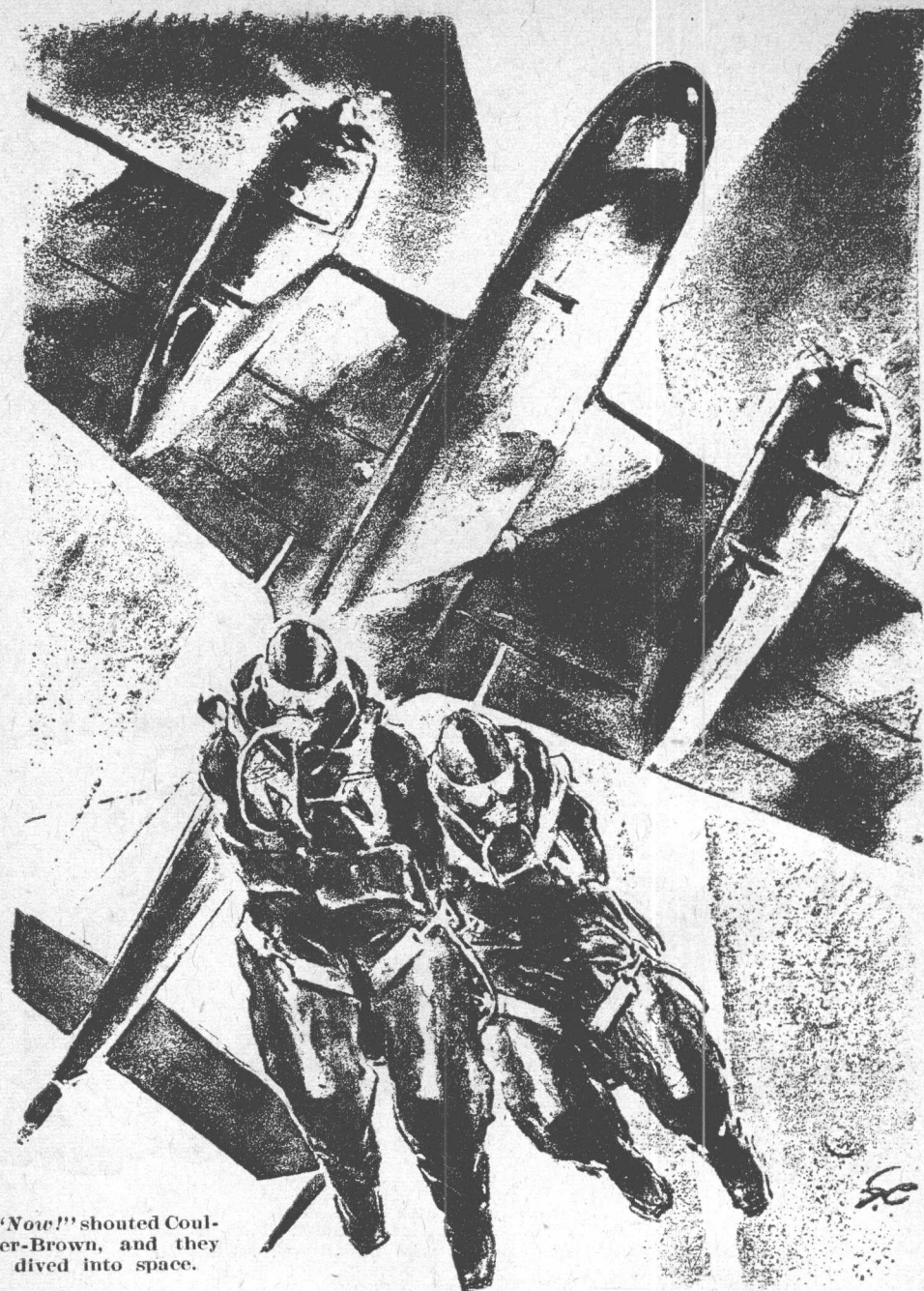


Like a giant bat they bored into the darkness. Then lights sprang at them, from below and ahead, criss-crossing.

There was a jar as it struck. A draft of cold winter air surged into the cabin, and both motors quit without even a warning gurgle; both propellers quivered to a standstill. Rapidly the pilot made adjustments and then pressed the starter switch. Nothing happened. The galvanometer on the instrument-board was dead, and he realized that the piece of shell had cut their vital ignition-system.

Everything was deathly still in the cabin. Outside, they could hear the exploding shells searching for them. "No time to lose!" he shouted to Linton.

"We're going down, but if we can make it to Meppen, we've got a chance. I have friends there. Get out your films and put 'em in your pocket. We'll jump together, and try to land that way. We've got an actual service-condition chance to try out that double parachute drop the Special Service unit has been practicing. We'd better pray it works as well now as it does in practice. It'd be a fine howdy-come-do to have them jam together now. It'll work, though—never fear. . . . I'm setting the controls so the ship will glide; and before she lands, a time-bomb will



"Now!" shouted Coulter-Brown, and they dived into space.

go off. I hope they'll think we burned with the wreck."

"All right," said Linton a moment later. "I've got the films stowed away. I'm ready. What's our altitude?"

"Down to sixteen already. Out you go!"

Linton slid back the hatch-cover and clambered out onto the wing. Coulter-Brown pulled the safety pin from the bomb, turned a cock from the gas-tanks so the cabin would flood, and hastily joined Linton outside. Each grasped the other's belt firmly with one hand,

while the other hand engaged the ring of the ripcord. **"Now!"** shouted Coulter-Brown, and they dived into space.

Cold biting air rushed past them, burning their cheeks. It was like standing on the prow of a fast speed-boat and heading into a biting gale. Coulter-Brown counted, "One and two, and one and two, and one and two—" every count meaning a second, and each second a certain number of feet closer to the ground. The flashes of the anti-aircraft guns were springing up at them at a great rate, seeming to encircle them.

Brown twisted his hold on Linton's belt. Linton turned his head, nodded. As one, their hands moved downward; little pilot-chutes shot out and dragged the big billowing 'chutes after them. There came a jerk that nearly wrenched them apart, and they were floating gently, the terrific body-pressure relieved.

"Gad!" Brown said, and realized he couldn't hear. He pinched his nose with his free hand, and blew. His ears crackled and popped, then opened, and he heard Linton say:

"If they line one of those searchlights on us, it's good night. . . . Mister, we've got something in this double-parachute jump. Couldn't have worked better."

"They're looking too high," replied Coulter-Brown. . . . "We'll be down in a minute. We must hang together to the end. Well, here's hoping. Better not talk any more; they might hear us."

THEY could see the earth now, but it was hard to judge its distance, for patches of snow gave everything a mottled appearance like a crazy-quilt. They had to pull their shroud-lines to avoid landing in a tree—then they were down, easy, on soft snow, and a wall breaking the drag of the wind on their 'chutes.

"Now," said Lieutenant Coulter-Brown, "let's get out of this parachute harness. Get to the other end, and fold 'em toward the middle, and roll 'em tight. Got to make 'em small as possible, so they'll look like a duffle-bag or something of that sort. There isn't a place here where we could bury them or anything like that, so we'll have to take that much of a chance."

Just as they had about completed rolling the 'chutes into a compact bundle, there came a terrific explosion off to the south, and the sky was lighted as though by a giant flare.

"That," said Lieutenant Coulter-Brown sadly, "was the end of a perfectly good photographic ship. Every German patrol within miles will be rushing over there for the next thirty minutes, so it's up to us to get set before that time. These 'chutes make it sort of awkward, but we can't leave them behind—they'd be a dead give-away. All set? Let's go. It's half a mile from here, almost across from the railway station, probably the toughest spot in the town."

"You know this place?" asked the astonished Lieutenant Linton.

"Yes. That's why I'm flying this special photographic mission. I know this

border from Williamshaven to Switzerland as well as I know the Strand. Now just pray no one thinks it strange to see two men in flying-suits trotting along the streets at night. Better take off your helmet—it's too British. This is the first time I've ever blessed the blackout, but if it were light, we wouldn't last two minutes, what with the patrols, air-raid wardens, secret police and all. If there's any talking to do, I'll handle it—I know the local German."

There was a lot of activity on the streets through which they passed, jogging along as though under orders to get somewhere in a hurry. Coulter-Brown turned off just before they came to the railway station and gave the bell-pull of the corner house a hearty jerk, then several more short pulls. The side of the house where they were standing was in deep shadow, and it was almost impossible to see when the door opened, but a woman's voice spoke to them, in German: "Yes? What is it?"

Coulter-Brown leaned forward and spoke softly in German: "Christine, it's Jerry Brown, and a friend."

A stifled exclamation came from the darkness, and Linton felt Brown's hand drawing him in through the doorway. The door closed behind them silently, and a bolt shot home. They walked down a short dark passageway and into a room dimly lighted with a shaded bulb. The woman turned, peered intently into Coulter-Brown's face, and threw her arms around him.

"Jerry! Jerry! In God's name, what are you doing here? Oh! I know, you were in one of those planes they were firing on. Thank God you got down safe! But you are in a terrible place. Meppen is alive with soldiers. The secret police are everywhere. One can hardly move, and they've cut us off from all communication with the Dutch border. Herman's out on duty—he's an air-raid warden. He'll be back at midnight, so you'd better go down and wait." She looked inquiringly at Lieutenant Linton.

COULTER-BROWN introduced Linton without explanation, and that puzzled officer followed as Christine led them into a back room, then into a closet. "You know what to do," she said. "I'd like to sit and talk and talk, but I'll have to wait here till Herman comes in. I'll send him down as soon as possible."

She closed the closet door, leaving them in darkness. A second later Lin-

ton felt the floor sinking beneath him. He grabbed the arm of Coulter-Brown, who chuckled: "Just a stairway being lowered, Linton. Actually, the closet floor is a stairway that unfolds and can be operated only when the closet door is closed. . . . Here we are! Now for the lights."

AS the moving stairway came to a halt, a light sprang up, revealing a strange-looking room—a sort of workshop, laboratory and living-room combined. They stepped off the stairs, and at once it slowly rose back into the ceiling, and a heavy beam swung into position, locking it into place.

"Come on," said Brown, as he laughed at Linton's stupefaction. "First let's shed some of this flying-outfit, and get rid of these 'chutes. Might as well make ourselves comfortable, for we'll probably be here several days."

"Gad! I say, Brownie, d'you mind giving me a little light about all this? What are you, anyway—an Intelligence officer? This is certainly one up on me."

"Linton, if you hadn't been all right, you'd never have been assigned to Special Service; but you must never mention a single thing you see here, not even to those you know in the service. If one little leak got out about this, it would mean the death of dozens of good men and women. Suffice for the moment that this is part of a veterans' organization devoting their lives to the welfare of the Empire. I know about it, because my father is one of them. I've spent a great deal of time in this part of Germany, so I know the key men."

"I see—a branch of the Intelligence Service. I certainly don't envy them their jobs if this is a fair sample."

"No, they are not members of any Government service; in fact Government doesn't know officially that such an organization exists. It's a commercial organization that has adapted itself to war-time necessity. They'll play a tremendous part, though entirely unsung, in this war. I'll tell you more about it when we get back to England."

"You feel sure we'll get back?" There was a hopeful look in Linton's eyes.

"Well," said Coulter-Brown confidently, "if we don't, it will be because the Legion of Legless Men have lost their combination; and believe me, they haven't. It's going to be hard going, though. . . . Here, take a look at this wall map."

He turned to a large-scale map that showed that section of Germany bordering on Holland and Belgium, as well as all of those two countries.

"You see this salient below Meppen? There's a railway running from here down to the Zuyder Zee. This salient, and down where the Rhine enters Holland at Bommel, are the two shortest routes to cut into Holland; if they should strike from here and get down to the Zuyder Zee, they'd control not only the sea but the Frisian Islands as well, and that would give them a perfect base from which to attack England. From the looks of things, I think that's what they are preparing to do—strike a lightning blow before it's expected. We'll know more about that when we get your negatives developed."

"They'll be old before we have the chance to do that—and yesterday's war-news is ancient history."

A red light flashed on in the ceiling. There was the faintest sound from the direction of the stairway, and Linton watched with astonishment as the closet floor above came slowly down, unfolding into a perfect stairway. Standing on the bottom step was a typical German of the small towns. He peered intently at them, then stepped forward with hand outstretched. Linton noticed that one of his legs was a wooden peg that protruded from his pants-leg.

"Jerry!" exclaimed the German as he stumped forward and grasped the outstretched hand. "If this post never did another thing, it's paid for itself this night. Was that your plane that blew up, out south of town?"

COULTER-BROWN introduced Linton, and then he answered: "Yes, Herman, that was our plane, and I hope it did a good job of exploding. What's the report about it?"

"They say they must have scored a direct hit on the gas-tank, ammunition, bombs or whatever it was on the plane. Blew everything to bits, including pilot and crew. They don't think it possible any of them escaped, but nevertheless they're scouring the country, just in case anyone did parachute down. But tell me the news."

"First, Herman, we've got work to do. Linton has a bunch of infra-red negatives that must be developed and transmitted to London right away. I fancy we'll have to work under the orders of the Legless Legion until we get out of here.



Is there any underground into Holland now?"

"Jerry, it's so tight a thought couldn't get through. Give me the negatives, and I'll rush them through the developer. While I'm in the darkroom, you'd better talk with London, and tell them how things stand, so they can get moving. You know where everything is located."

Herman disappeared into a closet in one corner—the darkroom—and Coulter-Brown seated himself before a small machine at the table. He adjusted a tiny dial to a number, threw a switch, and after a few seconds' pause, a voice spoke, so clear and vibrant that Linton gasped and looked around. "Seventeen!"

"Seven-eight-two," replied Coulter-Brown. There was a pause; then: "Yes, Seven-eight-two, go on."

"J.C.B." was Brown's rejoinder; then the voice came back: "Jerry, what the devil you doing in Meppen? Thought you were flying Special Service."

"Let's get out of this parachute harness. Got to roll 'em tight—make 'em as small as possible."

"Was," Jerry chuckled. "Got hit by an archie. Lieutenant Linton and I parachuted down, and our plane was completely destroyed by our time-bomb. I think we're in the clear. Made it here, and Herman is developing some infra-red negatives. As soon as they're ready, we'll send them through, and you see to their getting to Headquarters. They're important, for they show beyond doubt that the enemy is concentrating a huge force of mechanized troops in the salient here at Meppen, and all the way to the coast. Don't know how far south they extend."

"Herman been able to pick up anything new?"

"That I don't know. He said everything was closed between here and the Dutch border. Haven't had a chance to talk things over with him."

"Right! Get the pictures through as soon as possible—better shoot a set through to Paris while you're at it, and we'll leave it to Paris to get them to the Hague. I'll have news and orders for you soon. Good luck!"

FOR a moment after the London conversation was finished Coulter-Brown sat as though in deep thought, while Linton stared speechless. Then Brown set the dial at another figure, and a minute later was exchanging identification numbers with the Paris office. He gave them the news of their being shot down, and of their temporary escape, and asked them to stand ready to shoot the papers along to the Hague as soon as they were relayed to Paris.

"These pictures," he told the agent in Paris, "will either set the Dutch on their toes so that Germany will hesitate to invade them, or it will throw their weight on the side of the Allies. Either will be something worth while. We'll have them through to you within an hour."

"Right! We'll take care of them. Watch your step, Jerry, and let us know if there is anything we can do to help get you out of the country."

"How the devil can you talk with London and Paris without the Germans picking up your wave-length and locating this station? How do you get the power? Where are the broadcasting aërials?" demanded Linton, when Brown had finished his conversation.

Coulter-Brown explained all he thought advisable. After all, Linton was a member of Special Service, and that was a top-hole recommendation; but it was not up to Brown to tell the secrets of the Legless Legion to outsiders. "This is a development of the radio that has never been placed in public service," he explained. "It operates on a wave-length so far removed from the shortest or longest known waves, that no existing station can pick it up. It's free from all types of interference, natural or man-made. No other station can block it, and it requires very little voltage for transmission. This radio is one of the keys to the success of the Legion as a commercial organization.

"Now that war is raging again, they've turned themselves over to the services of Great Britain—under cover of course. They will— Here's Herman. Let's see what you got on your films."

"Remarkable, these infra-red films," said Herman. "How they can go

through fog, rain and blackness and register detail is a mystery to me; but it's here. Look! I'll put this one in the projector and throw it up, so you can study it. Clear as a bell it shows troops on the march toward the Dutch border. Troops, tanks, artillery, every branch of the service. Look at the flash of the anti-aircraft guns. Now if an expert can pick out the mobile guns from the fixed positions, it may mean something. We could work out a path through them where it would be safe for an airplane to fly, like going through a mine-field."

To anyone not versed in reading aerial pictures, the projected image would have been meaningless, but to Coulter-Brown and Linton it was like reading print, and they were more than pleased with the results they saw.

"Can you send that over the radio?" asked Linton.

Herman smiled at the skepticism in his voice. "Yes, we do even better than send the photographs, which could only go in black and white outlines. We send direct from the negatives, and it reproduces exactly at the receiving set without loss of detail. . . . Let's start. Just give me your identification-cards, and I'll send them through first, in case the War Office is hard to convince of the authenticity of the pictures. Then we'll shoot along the negatives."

Herman placed the flyers' documents in a metal frame and inserted them in a small machine with the front facing a lens. When he threw a switch, a small wheel behind the lens began to turn, and there was a slight hum, hardly noticeable. Two minutes were required to send the identification.

HERMAN made an adjustment to the machine, explaining that they used a different light and lens for transmitting negatives. One after another they fed the negatives into the machine. When they were done, Herman switched the machine to voice.

"How did they come through?" he inquired.

"Clear as a bell. That is, the first ones; the others aren't developed yet. Stand by—I'm sending orders for Coulter-Brown and Linton, placing the two of them under the direct orders of Admiral Yardsley. That's the only way we could work it so they could operate freely through the Legion. —Stand by."

The orders that came through were reproductions, typed and signed by an offi-



"If they ever discovered this cellar—" "We'd go up in a blaze of glory," said Christine. "However—"

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

cial of the Special Service whose signature both of them knew. It ordered them to detached service under Admiral Yardsley of the Naval Intelligence until further notice. With this was a brief message from Yardsley wishing them good luck, and adding: "You'll receive orders if necessary from Number One."

"Who's Number One?" inquired Linton when he read the message.

"That," replied Coulter-Brown, "is something I'll never tell you. Such information must come from the man himself. Now let's shoot a set of these pictures to Paris; then we can go to sleep with the knowledge that we've done a good night's work for the Empire."

"Now," said Herman after they had finished with Paris, "let's talk about ourselves for a while. You'll want to get back to England and active service as soon as possible, I presume."

"That's right," they both exclaimed. "As soon as we possibly can. Got any ideas?"

"That's hard to say at the moment. You, Jerry, with your knowledge of the country around here, and your ability to handle the German language, might be able to make it through to Holland, but

you'd be not much better off there—you'd be interned. The Dutch are doing their best to remain neutral. Belgium would be better, but it's harder to get there, from here. This part of Germany is packed with soldiers, but worse is the secret police—they're devils!"

"Is it safe for us to lie up here—that is, won't it endanger Christine and you?"

"Safe enough, yes. We've had this place for twelve years, and are established as pure-blooded Aryans. But no one is safe from suspicion nowadays. No one knows what his neighbor is doing, and anything suspicious is sure to be reported. Can you handle one of these German planes?"

"I'll handle any plane if I can get five minutes to study the layout of the instruments. Think there is a chance to get away in one of them?"

"It might be done. It's worth while looking into. As air-raid warden, I patrol one of the fields here at the edge of town. On my tour of duty, from four in the afternoon to twelve midnight, you could slip out and conceal yourselves in one of the planes, and then about an hour before daylight, you could make a dash for it. If you made it, they would never

know who got away in the plane. It's a chance, but the only one I see for the moment that offers even a possibility."

"It would be tough, starting off with a cold motor. Once in the air and the motor warmed, it would be better than an even break. —What say, Linton, would you take a chance?"

"Would I! I joined the Special Service squadron because I was willing to take chances. I'm with you all the way. Get me in the rear seat with a machine-gun, and I'll keep our tail clear."

"Good. —All right, Herman, you watch for the chance. Locate the fastest two-seater possible, and be sure there's enough room in front for a take-off. Check the oil and petrol and ammunition for the guns. We'll hedgehop out of here so fast they'll never be able to lay a sight on us. One hour later, we'll be ducking British archies."

"That can be taken care of," said Herman. "Once you get in the air, I'll dial London and tell them you are on the way in a German plane, so they'll be looking for you. Better sit down on the cliffs at Dover."

Linton laughed good-naturedly. "You two talk as though you were already in the plane and on your way. Don't forget, there'll be a few dozen German soldiers watching those planes."

"That'll be our best bet. They feel secure in numbers; anyway, who'd ever expect anyone to be crazy enough to steal a plane from under their very noses?"

They turned in for the night, Coulter-Brown and Linton in the secret basement, where there were several bunks made up against the wall, and Herman upstairs, where in case of an emergency he would be at home in bed as any honest burgher should be.

IN the seclusion of the sub-basement they never knew when day came, or the darkness of another blacked-out night settled down. Christine brought their food and stayed as long as she dared, to chat. "You must be careful, Jerry," she said one day. "The people here are not the Germans you knew when you were visiting these parts. Something's gone wrong with them. They're convinced that their very existence depends on the annihilation of the English. If they were to catch you, they'd tear you apart."

"What about yourself, Christine? You've lived here for years over this mine. What would happen if they ever discovered this cellar?"

"That's all taken care of. We'd go up in a blaze of glory that would startle Germany. There's enough high-explosive under this cellar to wreck the entire city. We were just about to retire and get away from it all when this new war came along. Now of course we must see it through. We're established here, and no one could take our place. However, I think we're safe enough here."

DAY after day they remained in the basement, keeping in touch with outside things via the radio. They knew that the pictures they had made on their last flight had been sent to Holland, and had been acted upon with promptitude. The Dutch had canceled all army leaves, and called another class of reserves to reinforce the soldiers already posted in the border defenses. Others were in readiness to blow the strategic dikes to flood the country ahead of any invading horde. Warned, Holland was ready to fight for her independence.

Apparently this had had its effect on the Germans, for Herman reported that while huge quantities of war material were still being piled up along the border, no new troops were arriving, and many of those already there were being shunted to the north, where word had it they were digging in along the coastline of the Baltic Sea. But the cordon of troops along the border was still considered impassable.

Then one night Herman gave them the word that the time had come to make the attempt to escape. Shortly before midnight they made their way without trouble to the air-field, where reserve planes were stored. Herman met them and slipped them past the guards to where a dozen planes were standing in the open, with motors and propellers protected from the weather by canvas.

"Here she is," said Herman in a whisper as he led them to a sleek, powerful reconnaissance plane that carried six machine-guns as armament. "I've been working all night filling her with petrol." He whispered again: "She's equipped with aerial camera and will make a nice prize in herself. Good luck. As soon as I get home, I'll pass the word along to London that they can expect you."

After a silent handshake they crawled into the cockpit. Like mice they cowered in the darkness; then while Linton watched for the guards, Coulter-Brown took the opportunity to use his tiny flashlight to study the instrument board

and locate the controls. Finally he whispered that he was all set, and all they had to do now was to wait.

The weather had moderated a bit, and in their heavy flying-suits they were not uncomfortable, but it was a relief when their watches showed another hour would bring daylight. Linton slipped out, removed the canvas cover from the motor.

Carefully Brown adjusted the controls for petrol, oil and ignition. He reached out and grasped Linton's hand, then threw the starter-switches. There came a dull slow grind as the starter's motor overcame the inertia of the cold motors and the thickened oil. They held their breath. Now was the moment that decided everything for them.

With a sudden roar the motors caught and burst into a full-throated blast. For a moment, as long as he dared, Coulter-Brown held fast, giving the motors a chance to loosen the oil. If there were any sound of alarm, they could not hear it above the noise of the motors. Then he eased the throttles back, watching the instruments closely for synchronization. The ship moved forward, slowly at first, heavy; then as the petrol was fed to the motors, it leaped ahead like a thing alive, and they were on the field.

"Lights sprang into dazzling life behind them. But controls that had been harsh and heavy became feather-light as the lift was transferred from the wheels to the wings. Coulter-Brown *felt* the ship off the ground, and held her level for a bare matter of seconds, then zoomed into the darkness of the heavens. Linton, looking back and down, could see stars twinkling on the air-field—and knew them to be flashes from rifles and machine-guns.

BBROWN'S intention had been to hedge-hop the few miles to the Holland border, then climb; but when he felt the surging power of the ship's two powerful motors, and knew they were functionally perfect, he changed his mind. Like a giant bat they bored into the darkness, higher and higher. Then lights sprang at them from below and ahead, criss-crossing, wavering, searching, making strange patterns in the pre-dawn darkness. Brown turned and climbed away from the lights and the anti-aircraft guns he knew were there. In wide spirals he climbed, three thousand meters, five, six—they were breathing heavily for want of oxygen when Brown headed on a compass course for the cliffs of Dover.

Up where they were flying it was glowing light, but the earth was shrouded in a deep purple haze. Linton checked his watch and announced they were well over Holland—and they breathed easier. Then through the graying light they saw the white-capped waves of the Channel below them, and a minute later the chalk cliffs of England loomed ahead. Brown picked up his bearings from landmarks and shifted his course a bit.

NOW safety depended on whether Herman had got a message through; it was a chance they had to take. Brown throttled the motors and glided down. There were no signs of activity on the airdrome below. Linton patted him on the shoulder and pointed upward. He stole a look, and a smile spread over his face as he saw a dozen or more Hawker Hurricanes scattered out above them in attack formation. He dragged the small field twice to get the feel of the settling ship, and with a prayer on his lips set the wheels on the ground. A fitting climax to the adventure was forming in his mind, and it called for fast work.

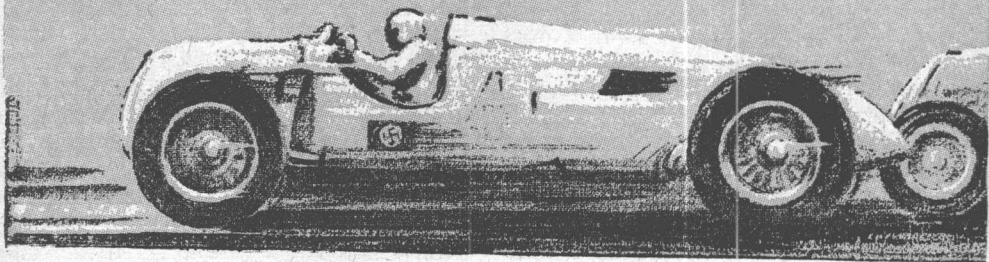
Officers and men came up as they rolled to a stop, suspicious at first, then at sight of their British uniforms, they burst into cheers.

"Get this plane under wraps," said Coulter-Brown as soon as he could make himself heard. "Get it out of sight, and set the archies to beating hell out of the clouds."

The officer in charge looked as though he thought he was crazy, so Brown explained: "Keep the plane out of sight, stage a fake air-battle with all the trimmings, and then report that the German raider was shot down and fell into the sea. Later report part of it washed ashore, and give the numbers of this plane. The Germans will get the report, of course, and they'll always be in doubt as to just what really did happen. They'll think that whoever did steal the plane was shot down, and if it was British spies escaping, why, it was a good joke on them to be brought down by their own forces within sight of safety."

And that was the cause of one of the terrific air-battles reported along the coast. Later the plane was flown at night to another field, where it was inspected and studied by R.A.F. engineers. And ten days afterward Coulter-Brown and Lieutenant Linton were presented to the King, who pinned a much-coveted decoration on their service tunics.

THE SMOKY



The able author of "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse" sets forth the adventures of an American airplane hostess and an auto-race driver in war-time Europe.

AS far as I knew, I was the last American left in London, and it gave me a solitary, castaway feeling as I walked down the hotel foyer.

The doorman looked at me, because he had orders to see that nobody went into the street without his gas-mask.

"Okay, I've got it!" I growled, and showed him the dented cardboard box.

"Thank you, sir," he said politely.

I dived between heavy drapes, pushed on a shrouded glass door and stepped into London's blackout. A few cars crept along Piccadilly, and a few pedestrians blundered along the sidewalk. Except for the down-thrown blurs of masked auto-lamps, there were no lights of any sort anywhere.

I intended to take in a news-reel, on the chance of seeing bits of film from the U.S.A., which was about the only way I could satisfy my homesickness. I turned up the collar of my top-coat, slung the gas-mask over my shoulder by its loop of string and headed for Piccadilly Circus, where they have the local equivalent of a Trans-Lux.

I kept away from the shopfronts, because they were cluttered with sandbags over which it is easy to trip. I dodged a man with a luminous button pinned to his hat, then bumped into something fat and hard, and once again found myself

saying, "Pardon me!" to a sandbagged fire-alarm post.

That annoyed me, and I was not in a good temper, anyway. I'd had more than enough of blackouts and all that went with them. And on top of a string of bad breaks, I knew that now I couldn't get back in time to drive at Indianapolis.

In the absolute darkness—and you need to be there to realize just how dark a blackout is—I jolted down a curb, fumbled across a side street and stubbed my toes against another curb. I was getting straightened out when the air-raid sirens went off.

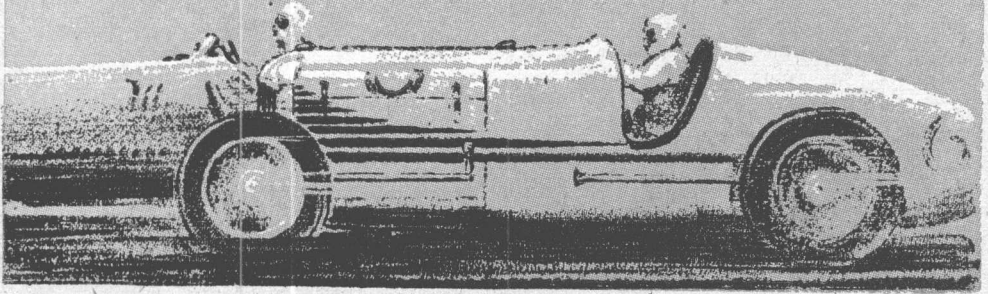
They made a massed wailing noise, very scary in the night. Cars with white-tipped fenders wheeled toward the sidewalk, stopped and emptied all at once. People came from nowhere out of the dark, hit me and were gone, running for shelter. I kept going because I wanted to watch a news-reel, not waste time in somebody's cellar; the place was hardly a block ahead, and it was down a basement, anyway. I heard air-raid wardens calling directions, and one grabbed as I passed him.

"There's a shelter here, sir!" He was just a shadow under a steel helmet. "Plenty of room, sir!"

"Nuts!" I said, and went on.

"I say!" he called, and he was very indignant. "I say, there!"

ROAD



A novelette, by
BARRÉ LYNDON

With the sirens moaning, I made another twenty yards; then somebody else caught at my arm.

“Down here, please!” A big cop had stopped me, near sandbagged steps leading to a cellar under a shopfront.

“I’m going to that news-theater,” I told him.

“You’re going down below!” he told me.

They can’t make you. They can’t force you to carry a gas-mask, even, and you don’t have to take shelter in an air-raid if you don’t want to!

“Now, listen—” I began.

“If you please, sir!” suggested a very cultured voice, and a special constable took my other arm.

“I’m an American!” I snarled. “You can’t make me go down there!”

“Push him!” said the cop.

They pushed, and I went slithering down the steps into a musty gas-blanket. “This way, sir!” said another plummy voice, and I was shoved into a cellar which was lit by a screened hurricane-lamp. There were a dozen people sitting on benches along the walls, all looking at me.

“You remain here until we get the All-clear, sir!” said the warden on the entrance.

“You go jump in the lake!” And I started for the steps just as the gas-

blanket opened up and the cop came through. Because of the low ceiling, he looked bigger than normal as he put a hand against my chest and pushed.

“Sit down,” he said gently, and backed me across the cellar. “Sit down!”

I felt the edge of a bench behind my knees, and sat down. It’s never wise to argue with a cop, and this one must have weighed two hundred twenty pounds. I scale only a hundred and forty, stripped; auto-racing tends to thin you down.

“Now you’re here, stay here,” said the cop, “and keep quiet!”

He nodded at me, hitched his belt and went out. Then someone spoke at my side.

“It’s no good. They’ve got you, brother!”

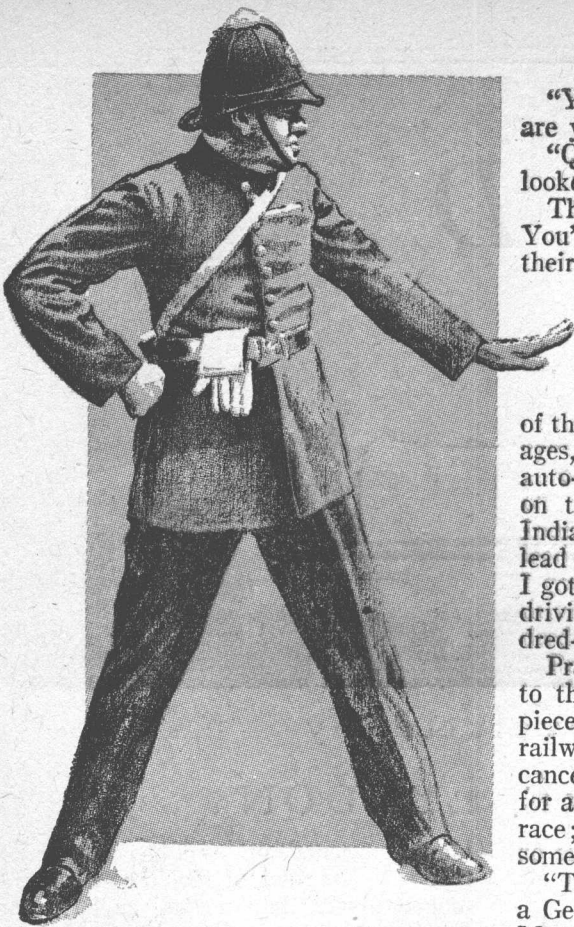
It was a girl’s voice; and if I hadn’t guessed it from her tone, I would have known that only an American girl could have looked so smart in that dingy Piccadilly basement. She smiled while I stared at her.

“Well, what d’you know about this!” I tipped my hat, feeling suddenly cheered. “I’m Tommy Vandenburg, New York.”

“Lucy Martin,” she introduced herself, “and I live out in Queens, Long Island.”

We shook hands.

She wore a Persian lamb coat, and a neat little hat with a new kind of snood, and she had gray eyes with long lashes.



When you're three thousand miles or so from home, it gives you a very warm and friendly feeling to meet someone who speaks your own language. She seemed just as pleased as I was.

"I thought all American girls had gone home long ago," I said.

"Well, I've been collecting baggage that other Americans left behind," she answered, and went on: "I've been rounding it up in France and Switzerland and Belgium, and now I'm locating some here."

"For a travel agency?"

"No, just for myself," she said.

I didn't get it, at first. The sirens stopped as we talked on, and nobody paid any attention to us; they were all listening for the guns. It's generally all right in an air raid, until you hear the guns.

Apparently she had landed on vacation just as the war started. Other Americans had shed baggage in all directions, stampeding for steamship berths, but she had got the idea of assembling their abandoned baggage and following them home with it, charging five dollars and up per piece, delivered in New York.

"When I'm through," she told me, "I'll have about a thousand pieces of baggage to take back!"

"You're not doing this all on your own, are you?" I asked.

"Quite on my own," she said, and I looked at her again.

This was something I could appreciate. You've heard about those boys who work their way through college. Well, I'm one

"Sit down," he said gently.

of them. I did it by working around garages, but I never graduated. I slid into auto-racing instead. It took five years on the fairgrounds and three rides at Indianapolis before my rebuilt Miller lead the rest home over the bricks. Then I got the idea of coming to Europe, and driving in the world's fastest five-hundred-mile race, at Brooklands.

Practice on that tough track did things to the old Miller. The motor went to pieces finally and completely along the railway straight and, anyway, the war cancelled the event. But I cabled home for a new engine, and looked for another race; being in Europe, I wanted to drive somewhere, war or no war.

"The freighter with my new motor hit a German mine and sunk," I told Lucy Martin, "but now I've bought the power unit out of a Miller owned by a man over here. It's been hung up on the railroad, coming down from Scotland. When it arrives, I'm off to Italy for a race called the Circuito d'Alessandria. That's due in ten days from now, and then I'm going home, via Genoa."

"That's the way I shall go," she said.

After she'd collected the baggage in London, she had to pick up four hundred pieces that she had assembled in Calais, and she had that much more stored in a garage on the Rue Monsigny, Paris. I tried to imagine what a thousand pieces of baggage would look like; it seemed to me that when she had it all together, transportation was going to be quite a problem.

"It'll be more than just a problem,"—and she had a funny little smile,—"because I've already begun to wonder what I shall do for money. But don't offer to help me, please!" Then she went on quietly: "I'm going through with this entirely by myself!"

She meant that. She wasn't just talking.

"I'm going to get that baggage over home," she added firmly, "if I have to build a raft and punt it across!"

"Good for you!" I said.

I noticed that she had a tiny bridge to her nose, and that her face was shaped, not just rounded. She had style and effectiveness, and there was something downright nice about her—something which made her the sort of girl you'd always be pleased to see. I felt that I'd like to talk somewhere different from that chilly cellar.

"I know a place near here where they make good waffles and real coffee," I said. "Is that an idea?"

"It is, if you'll allow me to buy my own waffles and coffee," she agreed.

"Then let's go!" I started to get up.

Then someone spoke at my side.
"It's no good. They've got you, brother." It was a girl's voice.

"Better wait," she said. "You'll only quarrel with that cop!"

She looked at me as we talked, and she didn't see so much. I'm too lean to be handsome, and seven or eight years of beating fast trouble does things to your face. You get tight around the jaw, so your chin squares up; and wind and dust give your skin a browned-off look.

Inside another ten minutes, sirens sounded the "All clear!" and the cellar emptied. Maybe it had been a false alarm, maybe just practice; you couldn't tell.

Things were coming to life again as we went toward Piccadilly Circus. Traffic lights were masked to tiny colored crosses; busses were lumbering around the misty Circus like black hulks; and little groups were still climbing up from basement shelters.

Dodging things didn't give much chance for conversation as we went along to Leicester Square, where the entrances to the movie houses were dark and chill as morgues. The gardens had been cut up for shelter trenches, and you could just see the statue of Shakespeare in the center. The café that I wanted was at the far side, and we fumbled through heavy drapes beyond the doorway. It was a bright spot, once you got inside, all polished woodwork and chromium, and about the nearest thing London has to a Broadway cafeteria. . . .

We ate waffles and drank coffee, and she had an air of taking time out from whatever troubles were worrying her. When she laughed, I noticed that her long



lashes shut themselves, and that made you watch for her eyes to come peeping through again.

Presently she told me that the friend who had been with her had gone home, and this girl had been sending her authorizations to collect the baggage.

"I wanted to see something of Europe, in spite of the war!" She added that she'd seen more than enough by that time, and she wasn't very pleased with London. "The baggage here is scattered around in about twenty hotels," she told me. "I want to find some way of assembling it without spending a cent more than I'm obliged. You see, I've got just about two hundred dollars, and I must stretch it as far as I can. I think it will get me to about halfway between here and Paris!"

"And then what?"

"Then I don't know what," she admitted.

"How about sending home for more money?" I asked.

"There's a lot of money in New York, but none of it belongs to me," she said, "and I've had all that my friend can send me."

She realized that sooner or later, and probably somewhere short of Paris, she would find herself sitting beside a great pile of baggage, broke and stranded. What she would do then, she didn't know. How she could possibly make out, she didn't know. But—

"I've started this, and I'm going to finish it—by myself!" she said.

"Why, particularly, by yourself?" I asked.

"Because, if I don't, I'll be licked. And I'm just not going to be licked, that's all," she answered.

That was a good-enough reason, and it was one which anyone could understand.

It seemed that she hadn't even a return steamship ticket; she had cashed that in for expense money, and it had provided most of her two hundred dollars. I watched her sipping coffee, and it occurred to me to ask what she did when she wasn't on vacation.

"**A**CTUALLY, I quit my job to take this holiday, but they said I could go back," she told me. "I'm an air-line hostess."

That accounted for why she was so small and dainty and smart. And if they were all like her, it accounted for why air hostesses are so popular.

"If you're in transportation, I could wish it were railroads," I said. "Then maybe you could tell me how to get some quicker action over the motor they've lost for me here!"

"That's easy!" And she laughed. "Go after the biggest man in the outfit, and tell him he's got a lousy railroad. That'll start something!"

We talked a little more; then she said she had things to do. I walked with her to the underground station just by Leicester Square.

"Would you mind if I call you tomorrow, to see how you're coming along?" I asked, after she had mentioned the name of her hotel.

"I'm afraid I shall be busy," she answered, and offered her hand. "But it's been nice meeting you. Good-by, Mr. Vandenburg."

I suppose they teach air hostesses how to stall men off, but I hadn't meant it that way. Maybe she realized it, because she smiled as I tipped my hat.

"But if you get an idea of how I can round up all my London baggage for about five cents, call me early!" she said.

I thought a lot about Lucy Martin and her thousand pieces of baggage, and I

didn't see any way she could make out if she was short of money. The more I thought about her, the more I wanted to see her again. But I made up my mind that I wouldn't offer help, and I knew she wouldn't ask it. She wanted to plow her own furrow in her own way, and it wasn't for me or anyone else to interfere.

I had some small troubles of my own, and not the least of these was a question of time. I had the car in a little garage off Jermyn Street, which is by Piccadilly. You couldn't hire racing mechanics in England any more; they were all in aviation factories. I'd been straightening things out by myself, and all I now had to do, when I got the motor, was drop it in the chassis and rig things the way I wanted them. But that was going to take a couple of days, at least.

Then I'd got to get to Italy, which was going to take two more days, and maybe three. That didn't leave much time for practice on a road circuit I'd never seen.

The general opinion was that this Alessandria event might be the last race held in Europe until the war was over, because the Italians expected to step into the struggle any time. It meant all the cracks who could get there would be out for one last fling, taking what might be their final chance to settle a lot of old rivalries and pay off a few grudges.

Looked at by and large, it was likely to be exciting, and I didn't want to miss it. And being the only American running, I did want to make a fair show.

I WENT after my engine again next morning, down to the freight depot of the London and Scottish Railway, by dingy King's Cross. The man in charge had his routine answer all ready: everything possible was being done.

"You've said that four times in a row, but nothing's happened!" I said, and remembered Lucy's advice. "Who's the biggest man on this railroad?"

"Sir Philip Trenton is the general manager," he said smoothly.

"Is he here now?" I asked.

"He attends transport conferences at Whitehall every morning," he told me, "and Sir Philip invariably lunches at the Carlton on the way down here. He'll be in at about three o'clock."

"Then I'll be back," I said.

"He sees no one without an appointment," he told me.

"I'll still be back!" I said.

I couldn't afford to waste any more time. I'd got to have action, and the



"I'm just not going to be licked, that's all," she answered.

way to get it was to come back at three o'clock, raise hell, and bust in on Sir Philip.

There was nothing more I could do until the afternoon. I started to walk back to Piccadilly, and the scenery wasn't pleasant. I went through streets where sandbags were stacked at every cellar entrance, and where every window was guarded against blasts by criss-crosses of gummed paper. The cops were all wearing steel helmets; there were gas-detector stations and first-aid posts; every open space had been dug for trenches, and each corner bore air-raid shelter direction-signs.

I was thinking about Lucy Martin, wondering how she was coming along about assembling the London baggage. To collect it by taxi would cost like the dickens, and with gasoline around sixty cents a gallon, hiring a truck would be expensive.

Then I had a bright idea.

I had struck a street market—where the local folk buy from barrows everything between vegetables and silk stockings. With stocks depleted by the war, trade looked pretty bad, and I saw one tough little gray-haired cockney sitting on his barrow looking altogether fed up. I had an idea.

"Do you ever hire yourself out?" I asked him.

"Guv'nor—" He pushed his cap to the back of his head as he spat in the gutter. "Guv'nor, I'll shove this blasted barrow all over London for two bob an hour, and be glad to earn the money!"

Two "bob" meant two shillings. That was near enough to fifty cents. He said the same figure went for anybody else on the street, and I saw that you could get a lot of baggage on barrows like his! Four of them could probably collect all Lucy's baggage for somewhere around eight dollars.

I made for the nearest telephone and called her up, still working the thing out. She came on the wire, and I explained.

"Mr. Vandenburg, I'm glad I met you!" She was tickled to death. "That'll save me a lot of money!"

Right then I had another idea.

I told her what had happened at the freight depot. It seemed to me that if I lunched at the Carlton, I could just step over to Sir Philip's table and tell him what his railroad was doing to me. It would be a lot easier than trying to bust in at his office.

"I believe the Carlton is a pretty swell place," I said, "and if I had a little decorative background it might be useful. So would you care to lunch with me there, and supply the background?"

"Of course, if you think it will help you," she said. "But while I can still afford to eat, I'll buy my own lunch!"

"Okay," I said. "I'll make a date for four of these men, and we'll pick them up afterward."

"TO a girl from Queens, this certainly is something," said Lucy quietly. "Thank you for bringing me."

We were in the Carlton, and the place had shaken me a bit. It was ritzy, ex-



The cockneys knew all the short-cuts, and the trip was fun. . . . She was very pleased with herself.

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

clusive, all pastel tones and flecks of gold, with a scattering of staff officers, naval men and important-looking civilians.

The Carlton had something all its own. The ceiling was as high as the roof of a church, which gave everything a sort of hallowed air. You just couldn't laugh off that smooth, élite atmosphere. It certainly impressed me, but Lucy might have been born to it. She was bright and smiling, and she looked like a million dollars under a different hat with a new kind of snood.

"Perhaps your idea isn't quite so hot now," she suggested, and I knew she'd guessed the way I felt.

It would be next to impossible to bust in at Sir Philip's table, as I'd expected. As the English say, that sort of thing simply isn't done—not at the Carlton.

"If you only want a chance to speak to him," Lucy said slowly. "Perhaps I could introduce you."

"Do you know him?" I asked, surprised.

"No," she said, "and he doesn't know me. But you need your motor quickly, so I'll see what I can do!"

She said nothing more until the waiter brought her potted shrimps and my grapefruit; then she asked him casually: "Has Sir Philip Trenton come in yet?"

"There he is now, madam," the waiter replied. "With Lord Arlington."

The head waiter was bowing them in. Sir Philip was tall, stiff-necked and beak-nosed, and he wore starched linen. Lord Arlington had a red face and white hair, and he was short and tubby. They went to a reserved table, and then I saw Lucy smiling in the way a girl does when she has thought of something daring.

"Let's go halves on a bottle of champagne," she said. "Then you leave this to me!"

I didn't know what she had in mind, but with a girl like her, it was bound to be something pretty good. Soon there were filled glasses on the table, and a bottle in an ice-bucket. She had started on smoked trout when I saw her glance toward Sir Philip. She caught his eye, then bent her head in a gracious little gesture, as if she recognized him.

He clutched his table napkin, came half to his feet and bowed. Lucy nodded to him again, then spoke coolly to me.

"Give me a little more champagne, will you, Mr. Vandenburg?"

I could see Sir Philip glancing at her now and again, as if he was trying to recollect who she was. She ignored him until, presently, she picked up her glass. It was halfway to her lips when apparently, she just happened to catch Sir Philip's gaze again. With a tiny little movement, she raised her glass to him, and hurriedly he reached for his own, smiled and drank with her.

"I THINK we're halfway to that introduction," she said. "But if he's never been to New York, I'm going to look foolish. So stand by to help me out, and be smart when it comes to names."

She glanced at Sir Philip once again. He had his eye on her, and smiled. She got up. "Come on!" she whispered to me, and Sir Philip rose as she went across to the other table, with me close behind.

"I'm sure you haven't the slightest recollection of me, Sir Philip," she said. "But I think you'll remember that dinner in New York!"

"Of course, of course!" he exclaimed; and with a girl like Lucy anybody would have remembered that dinner in New York. "What are you doing in London?"

"I hope to leave for home in a day or two," she said. "May I introduce Mr. Vandenburg?"

I remembered what she had said about helping with names.

"Miss Martin told me who you were, Sir Philip," I said.

He nodded to me, picking up her name neatly: "Miss Martin, may I present Lord Arlington?"

Arlington bowed; she bowed; then the old buffer bowed to me.

"I think I chiefly remember the speech you made," Lucy said conversationally.

"Oh, at the Plaza!" Sir Philip exclaimed; apparently that placed her for him. "I was in form that night." Then he asked: "Won't you join us for coffee?" A waiter had already started to bring chairs. "This really is a most delightful meeting, Miss Martin," he said; "and Arlington knows New York, too!"

He did, but it was the New York of a long time ago; he wanted to know if Ziegfeld still ran his Follies. I gathered that a Follies girl had been a brief but very bright spot in his life, and she had left him with a liking for anything American. He couldn't take his eyes off Lucy.

Everything was grand, right from the start. Lord Arlington insisted on our having liqueurs, and Lucy said she'd have a Drambuie; I had a feeling that

was a blind bet on her part. Sir Philip talked about the speech she hadn't heard him make, and Arlington kept switching back to the Follies girl. Each, in his own way, seemed to have had the time of his life in New York, and we talked until Sir Philip asked again what kept Lucy in London.

"Hundreds of things," she said; "and Mr. Vandenburg's waiting for something lost on a railroad!"

"What railroad?" Lord Arlington asked.

"It's the London and Scottish," I said.

"Your line!" Arlington told Sir Philip, and chuckled to me: "As my New York acquaintance would have said, his railway is utterly bum! What have they lost for you—luggage?"

I mentioned what it was.

"Troop movements, and so on, have rather disorganized us," Sir Philip said stiffly. "A racing-car engine from Scotland, you said, Mr. Vandenburg? I'll have it looked into!"

That was good enough. If nothing happened, I could call him up now.

SHE had been grand, and I told her so, while the taxi took us to the street market.

"I've never done anything like that before," she said. "But what had we to lose?"

All I hoped was that my idea about the barrows would work out, because I owed her something now. The cockneys knew all the short-cuts, and the trip was fun. It took a long time to work through her list of hotels, and the blackout was almost on when we made the final trip, the four barrows piled high with the last of the baggage, heading for the little hotel where Lucy was staying.

She was very pleased with herself, swinging her gas-mask jauntily. The men carried the baggage into a store-room, and she paid them off. Then we were standing on the sidewalk in the dusk; and here, it seemed, we parted.

"If I can hire a truck, I shall leave tonight," she said. "Thanks to the money you've helped me to save, I now have just about enough to reach Paris."

When I asked how she would get from there to Genoa, she hadn't the slightest idea. She realized that she was going to be stranded in Paris with no money, and with enough accumulated baggage to frighten a company of redcaps, but it didn't seem to faze her. She said it was something she'd worry about when she got there.

"Good-by," she said, and I had a feeling that she didn't much like saying it.

"I'll be in Genoa the day after the race, waiting for a boat," I said.

"I'll probably see you there," she told me, "if I can make it!"

"You'll make it," I said, but I didn't see how she could; and something in my tone must have told her that. Her chin came up.

"You don't think I can, do you!" she said. "Well, I'll show you. Good-by!"

She turned to wave as she went up the steps. I tipped my hat again.

"Good luck!" I called. "I'll be rooting for you!"

That evening I got my first halfway decent break. Sir Philip must have chased his people around, because a horse-van turned up, bringing the missing motor in a big crate. I called Lucy to tell her the good news, but she had already checked out and was on her way.

The railroad van dumped the power unit in the little garage where I kept the car, and I opened up the crate. Inside was a fat envelope full of data and information, and with this was a letter from the man who had owned the engine.

He was a young Scot named Kinnaird, and he'd raced a lot in Europe. Like pretty well all these wealthy British amateur racing men, he had put on uniform, and his letter was written from the depot of the Seaforth Highlanders, which apparently was his regiment. He wished me luck, then went on:

I imported this Miller two years ago, and the engine comes to you tuned for attempts which I had intended to make on international records at Brooklands. I attach full details of all work done, together with test data. You'll also find some notes which I made when I raced at Alessandria last summer, and came home fifth. It's the hell of a course! Pietro Gazzini, who has a garage in the town, will look after you and staff your pit, if you mention my name. He is a good man.

The entire mess of the Seaforth Highlanders will drink to your success on the evening before the race, and if by any chance you should win, we shall stage the whale of a party to celebrate it. We feel that you'll be riding for us, as well as for Old Glory. . . . Good luck.

The tone of his letter made me feel fine. I sent a long cable to Pietro Gazzini right away, then put on a boiler suit and started work.

The test data showed that the motor itself needed no tuning, but I'd run my own Miller unit with twin superchargers. These were okay from the wreck, and I wanted to fit them. Also, I used an exhaust cooling system, and an extractor to get the gasses away quickly. These things would give the engine more punch, and fitting them meant a lot of work.

The garage lent a couple of mechanics, but they were not very experienced, and I couldn't leave them alone on the job. I worked a straight twenty-four hours, caught four hours' sleep, and then went back.

Just sixty hours after I'd received the motor, we had the car on a truck, and one of the men was driving me down to Dover. I shipped the car across the Channel, picked up another truck at Calais and headed for Paris, figuring to look in at the Rue Monsigny in the hope of seeing something of Lucy.

THE car was just about as good as I could hope to get it, leaving out adjustments for atmosphere and fuel, which I could make only on the circuit. According to Kinnaird's figures, plus what I doped out from my own additional work, the Miller should be able to touch something around 170 m.p.h., which is pretty fast. I knew that I should be up against models capable of peaking at close to two hundred, but I was saved by the fact that the Alessandria course didn't permit such speeds to be used.

Just the same, the Italians would have the edge on me in lots of ways. They were experienced road-racing men, and I wasn't. On the other hand, I was used to riding close and stealing inches, and not getting scared when you're practically locking wheels on a turn—and maybe that might prove useful.

Altogether, I was looking forward to it. Still more, I was looking forward to the chance of seeing Lucy in Paris. It was late at night when I got in, checking at a hotel near the Place de l'Opéra.

I locked the truck away in a garage, ate in a hurry, then went to find the Rue Monsigny. I'd never been in Paris before, but it was much like London, with the same blackout and the same sandbags. Rue Monsigny was not far away, and I located the only garage in it. The doors were closed, but there was a wicket gate on the latch, and I went in.

I saw a colossal pile of baggage stacked against the back wall, and bags with London labels were in the foreground. At

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one side was an old sedan, jacked up for transmission repairs, with a roof-light burning. I expected to find someone who'd tell me where Lucy might be, but she herself was inside the car, startled until she recognized me.

She looked tired, and I saw two blankets opened on the rear seat. In a corner was a bottle of milk and a bag of rolls. She was pleased to see me—at first.

She'd got the London baggage across at a cut rate on a cargo-boat. She'd had a lot of trouble with the customs in Calais; then she'd hired transport, and everything was now assembled in this garage.

"You're not sleeping here, are you?" I asked.

"Why not?" she said.

"Are you so broke?"

"I am so broke," she said.

Her tone became chilly then. She didn't like my seeing that all she had was cold milk and dry bread for supper, and the rear end of this broken-down old Renault sedan for a bedroom. I didn't like seeing it, either.

"Have you done anything about getting down to Genoa?" I asked. "I'm going via Modane, in the morning."

"I'll follow that route; it's the quickest way to Genoa," she said, but she had no idea when she would start.

Paris, it seemed, was a tough city. She'd been there two days, with her thousand steamer-trunks and suitcases, bags and hat-boxes and what have you, and had been completely unsuccessful in getting any farther.

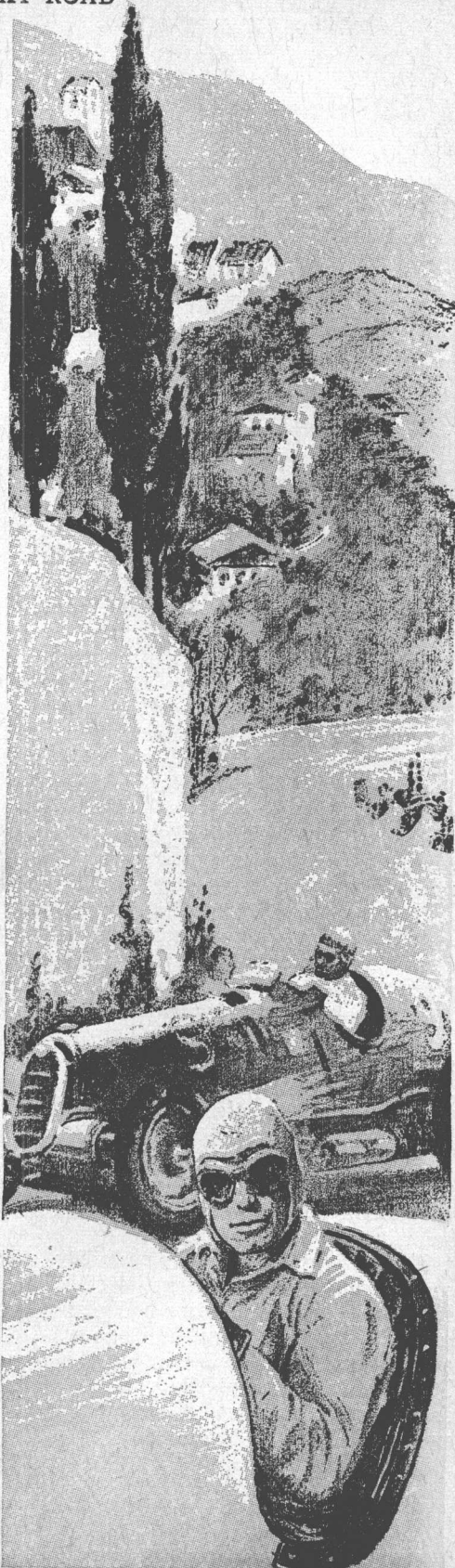
I COULDN'T see how she'd even start to raise the funds she needed, and I said so, but she didn't want to talk about it. She just wanted to be left alone to fight the thing out for herself. She indicated that.

"I'm very tired, and I haven't been getting much sleep," she said. "So would you mind if I put the bolt on that door and say good night?"

I did the only thing, and she followed me to the wicket gate.

"Good night!" I made it cheerful, as I stepped outside. "If you get away in time, Alessandria's on the road to Genoa. Could you stop off and see the race?"

"I will, if I can," she said. "I'd like to watch you do your stuff!" Her tone was much warmer as she went on: "Thanks for the visit, and keep rooting for me, won't you?"





"You're not sleeping in this old sedan, are you?" I asked.

She shut the wicket, and the sound of the bolt was lonely in that empty street.

She was going to sleep in that garage! It looked as though she'd been doing it since she'd got to Paris, and maybe she wasn't eating much between times. She was broke, but she wasn't complaining. She was just taking it and keeping her chin up.

I knew she hadn't a chance in ten thousand of raising the money to go on. She'd need four or five trucks to get that pile of baggage away, and that would cost something like five hundred dollars. How could she scare up that much money, when no one knew her? And her French was probably lousy, anyway.

I'd told myself that I wouldn't interfere, but I couldn't just go ahead and leave her like this. Anything could happen to her in war-time Paris. If I offered help, she'd turn it down, I knew. So I decided to do what anybody else would have done: give her a hand over this rough patch, and do it without her knowing.

I'd thought about the possibility, on and off, and I'd worked out how it could be done. People at home had given me a wad of introductions, and one was to a man named Emile Pepin, on the Rue Pigalle. He contracted to transport autos from race to race, and would have been useful if I'd wanted to drive much in Europe, as I'd had some idea of doing.

It seemed to me that he might transport baggage, and a taxi took me up to the Rue Pigalle, a dark and narrow little street. Pepin was a short man, with a

leg crippled in a crack-up, and bent shoulders, and the kind of gray eyes that never flinch and which tell you that here is clean honesty. He spoke very good English, and he knew my name from that win at Indianapolis.

We talked a bit; then I told him about Lucy and the transportation she needed. He said that he could provide trucks and the men. I told him to see her in the morning, tender for the job and accept her signature to pay from New York. He was to argue, and above all make it real, and not let her guess anyone was behind it.

I gave him five hundred bucks in travelers' checks, so that he'd be covered if anything went wrong; then I went back to my hotel, feeling like the world's worst low-life.

I knew that I'd done the common-sense thing, but I also knew I was cheating her. I felt, somehow or other, as if I'd lost something.

She'd never know what had happened, and Pepin would mail me my five hundred bucks after she'd paid up. So everything would work out to the same in the end; yet I didn't feel happy.

Presently I discovered that, apart from anything else, chipping in had made a difference to my finances. I could see myself through the race, but I had no return-passages ticket.

But it was useless to worry about that. All I'd got to think about was getting on the course in time for some practice.

I didn't sleep too well, and I pulled out with the truck at dawn. By noon I'd got

as far south as Dijon, and the driver on the truck helped me call the garage in the Rue Monsigny. I wanted to know how things were working out about my arrangement with Pepin, and guessed that I could get a hint of it from Lucy. She came on the wire.

"I'm leaving right away!" she told me. "I've had the most beautiful stroke of luck!"

"That's grand," I said, and felt as phony as a seven-dollar bill. "What happened?" And I made that sound as if I didn't know.

"I'll tell you in Alessandria," she answered. "I'll be there inside forty-eight hours, and I'll stay to see the race!"

Only, she wasn't there inside forty-eight hours. By that time I was driving around the course on a car borrowed from Gazzini, and one lap was enough to tell me that this Circuito d'Alessandria was going to be tough—very tough indeed.

APPARENTLY, when they decide to have a road-race in Europe, they give the course a non-skid dressing, but that's about all they do. You take the telegraph-poles and curbs, jutting trees and houses, corners, bridges, ditches and everything else just as they happen to be.

There were no safety-zones beside the road. If you went off the course, you were bound to hit the side of a house or a two-foot elm tree or tangle amongst some telegraph poles. Which is what makes road-racing the most exciting sport in the world, and about the most dangerous.

The one straight section—where Kinaird said you could touch one hundred and sixty—had been built up on an eight-foot embankment. If you lost control there, your car would hit nose down and start somersaulting—which is spectacular for the onlookers, but not so good for the driver.

There were two wicked-looking iron bridges to negotiate, and the home stretch had old street-car lines embedded in the surface, with a water-filled dike at one side, and balconied Italian houses flush against the road-edge at the other. They all had protruding doorsteps.

It was about five miles to a lap, and sixty laps made the race distance. This was about all any driver could stand; and it was unusual for more than about six cars to finish out of the twenty permitted to start.

There was a main stand, and other little stands placed where things were likely to happen. There was bunting every-

where, and flags, and every second flag was the Stars and Stripes, hung out because of me!

I hadn't realized that an American car with an American driver was a very rare thing over there. About the last time one had shown up, he had walked off with the French Grand Prix, using a Duesenberg. They wanted to encourage me, but that was only for the pleasure of seeing their own men lick me.

We put the Miller on the road for carburetion adjustments when the afternoon practice session started. I did quiet, three-lap spells, then came back to the pit, where Gazzini did the tuning and sent me out again. He was a good man—a tiny man with delicate features and hands like a woman's. Maybe it was this which gave him the right touch; and inside an hour the Miller was strutting her stuff, but I didn't try anything showy.

Italian drivers took their crimson autos past me, nearly every man lifting a hand as he went, challenging me to put my foot down, but I wouldn't have it. I had to get familiar with the course.

Three German cars were in the event, and they had come specially from the Reich. There was a Mercedes, and two were Auto-Unions—vicious, low-built, cruel-looking cars with rear engines, the drivers sitting away up front. They were beautifully streamlined, with road-wheels hidden under fairings; and the noise they made as they went by was a wicked scream.

I STUDIED the corners and bends, picking my best line through them, fixing my emergency braking points, getting the feel of the Miller. Just before practice ended, I hit the fast stretch in an attempt to find out what the wagon could do. The Miller came into it with twin blowers screaming—exhaust note reaching up and getting lost in the wind that shrieked past my ears, feeling solid as water.

In those moments the car had the life you get only with real speed, while the road became a streaky ribbon, and the low ground beside it was a streaming blur. I took the revolution counter needle into the red, and held it, which meant that I was doing a shade over 160 m.p.h., and I still had power to spare.

That satisfied me. If the Miller could stand up to the thrashing the race would give her, and if I could handle the car right, I should make a show, I felt.

I spent the evening studying the turns on foot. There was to be practice for the

whole of the next day, and that would be all I should get. The day after that, the course would be closed, and officials would check over the cars. The next day would bring the race.

I expected Lucy to show up next day, but she didn't. Gazzini borrowed a fast machine for me to use for part of that long practice spell, so that I could save the Miller. I didn't put my own car on the road until the final hour; and the moment I went out, no less than five Italians and two of the Germans came after me, trying to work me into a scrap.

They were burning to know what I'd got, but I wouldn't show them. I played cagey, going easy down the straights, but opening up for the corners, hitting them as fast as I dared, going through them with everything howling, coming away wide open—and then easing for the straight again, so that I didn't show fast figures over any lap.

Like that, I got practice on the corners, without giving anything away.

THERE was still no sign of Lucy that evening. Next morning Gazzini sent a man around the town, inquiring for a lady with a lot of baggage. When he drew a blank, I got the idea of driving out to the frontier, and maybe meeting her on the way. There was nothing more that I could do; and Gazzini was able to handle the official business about the car better than I could.

He lent me a quick little Fiat. I did some fast work along the *autostrada* to Turin, and went still faster over the military road out to the frontier station below Modane. I made the distance inside three hours, and I'd seen nothing of any trucks which might have been Lucy's when I parked the Fiat by the frontier post.

The place was sandbagged, and there were soldiers everywhere. I saw great cradles of barbed wire ready to sling across the road and close it; and the ground on either hand was scarred by trench systems, with more wire.

There were blockhouses, concrete tank-traps and camouflage—all of it a reminder that the Italians were standing by, ready for anything. Equally, it was a reminder that it is dangerous to monkey around on any European frontier nowadays.

I waited about the post for a while, watching the customs men check traffic that trickled through. I spoke no Italian, and could make no inquiries; but finally

I got myself passed onto the kilometer of road that crosses No Man's Land to the French frontier. I thought I could ask them there whether Lucy had passed through their post; I'd learned enough French in college for that.

The road was cut along the side of a hill, so that there was a cliff at one hand, and the ground fell away at the other. It was quiet along there, and across the falling ground I saw still more rusting barbed wire, great masses that twisted endlessly away, looking very ugly in the sunshine.

Around a curve in the road I saw the actual frontier markers, where you step from Italy into France. Then I saw something else:

Stacked up just inside Italian territory were one thousand-odd pieces of American baggage, and Lucy was with them, sitting on a trunk and eating an apple. Two Italian sentries, with fixed bayonets, were keeping guard over her.

"I'm arrested!" she called when she saw me, and she didn't seem worried.

The sentries wouldn't let me go near. We stood ten feet apart while we talked. She said that her trucks had been slow on the road, and one had broken down coming over the mountains near Grenoble. The Italians wouldn't allow them to cross the frontier, so the men had simply unloaded everything, and Lucy had been there since seven o'clock that morning.

Now and again different officials had been down to look at her, and she'd had three different reliefs of sentries; and she didn't think being arrested like this was really serious, because one of the sentries had just given her an apple. As if that meant anything!

"I'll get the rest of the way somehow," she said.

Obviously she'd been arrested as a suspect; and being picked up more or less unaccounted for on any frontier in Europe nowadays can lead to all sorts of complications.

SO far as the Italians were concerned, here was a girl, blown in from nowhere with a lot of other people's baggage; and things being what they were, they'd want to know all about it.

She was, she said, still broke. She had a few francs, but that was all.

"But I'll be in Alessandria before your race starts," she said, "because I want to see it. And the Italians will have to provide me with transport now! After all, they've stopped my trucks going

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through to Genoa, so they'll just have to take me there! And they can't leave me sitting beside the road forever, either!"

AS she said that, four big army trucks came rumbling down the slope behind me, and soldiers dropped off them as they backed around beside the luggage. Things happened then.

The sentries moved Lucy and stood close guard over her. An officer had me shifted to the far side of the road. They halted all traffic coming in from France, then began to pitch the baggage aboard the trucks.

Lucy looked across at me and smiled triumphantly when she saw them doing that. In no time at all, the trucks were loaded and starting back the way they had come, with Lucy, small and wide-eyed, sitting on the baggage in the front truck. She had a sentry on each side, and she was waving back to me like a kid on a hayride.

There had been something very efficient and very threatening in the way those soldiers had come up. I started to run through the dust that the trucks raised, and I stayed with them until they took a side road just short of the frontier post. Then a sentry stopped me.

I argued with him, but that got me nowhere. Men came over from the post, and as far as I could make out, she had been taken to the frontier guard barracks for examination. After that, they told me to get going. They sent a couple of men with me to the Fiat to make sure that I did.

I drove down the road for about a mile, then pulled onto the grass and stopped.

I knew enough about the general situation to realize that when you're grabbed on a frontier, as Lucy had been, it's just your bad luck. Being wartime, they are likely to stick you in jug, and there you stay until every statement you make is verified—and who was there to speak for Lucy? The least they would do would be to give her the whale of a grilling, and they'd also give that baggage a going-over like nobody's business. She'd probably be held for days, and she wouldn't be given a *de luxe* room with bath, either.

I wondered if I could strike that side road somewhere above the sentry, get through to the barracks, vouch for her and help to explain things. So I left the car and started across the field beyond.

Inside five minutes I found myself jumping trenches; at the end of another

five minutes I had lost all idea of direction and was dodging swathes of barbed wire and ducking around block-houses. It was when I took time out to look at some tank-traps, things I'd never seen close up, that an officer and six men came from nowhere and surrounded me.

Half an hour after leaving the car, I was in a guardhouse, being searched. They took away my passport and put me in a cell, and it was dark when they brought me out again. An English-speaking Italian had turned up, and he said that he knew nothing of any American girl or her baggage.

He was as suspicious as a rat, and what I told him about being there for the Circuito d'Alessandria didn't seem to count. He asked more questions than I would have believed possible—the nationality of my great-grandparents, when I arrived in Europe—what for, why? Where had I been since? Could I prove it? He questioned me for two hours, then put me back in the cell.

I knew that Lucy must be in another cell in some other guardhouse, going through the same thing, and I cursed myself for having gone to Emile Pepin. If I hadn't, she'd have worked things out for herself some other way, and would never have been in this jam.

Around midnight they gave me two blankets and a bowl of soup. By that time, I was desperate. It looked as though they'd do nothing more until morning, and I hadn't helped Lucy, and would miss the race as well.

I cat-napped all night. Around eight o'clock in the morning, they gave me bread, beans and the lousiest coffee I've ever tasted, and at ten they took me out of the cell. The Italian was there, and with him was Gazzini and two race officials from Alessandria. They identified me.

"YOU will go under escort to Alessandria," the Italian said. "You may take part in the race." He went on: "The *Venezia* sails from Genoa at three o'clock on the day following this race. You will be escorted to the boat, and you will arrange to sail aboard her. If you fail to do this, you will be rearrested. You may go."

We went. I had to take an Italian cop with me on the Fiat, and another rode with Gazzini. We were halfway back to Alessandria—moving all out, because the race started at two o'clock—when I remembered something:

I wouldn't have enough money to buy a passage on the *Venezia*—unless I did something good in the race.

Even if I did, I wasn't going to sail and leave Lucy behind. I'd rather go back in the jug.

The Miller was back-marker in the line-up; I'd entered late, and I hadn't lapped at a speed that would qualify for a better position. The machines were set in rows of three, the fastest in front; and mechanics were standing by, waiting for the one-minute signal before they started up the motors.

Gazzini was to give me the usual signals from boards at the pit, and he'd flag me in for refueling on the fortieth lap. I'd had no time for anything except to change into driving kit, check the model over and read a good-luck cable from Kinnaird.

Everywhere was color and excitement. The crowd was packed in the grandstand, and behind palisades edging the road. This might be the last race until the war was over; the men on the front cars were there to make it a good one.

The sun burned down, and I found myself tense and strung up. My abdominal belt seemed to bite my middle, and the safety-strap cut across my thighs. I forced myself to take it easy, and tried to wipe from my mind worries about Lucy, passage money, my escort of cops. I reminded myself that I was there to race and show some of them the way home. . . . Then the arm of the starting semaphore lifted in the one-minute signal.

Gazzini and his mechanics push-started me, then shoved the auto back into place with the motor roaring, and I was all set. He patted my shoulder, yelled good wishes, then dived away with all the other mechanics, and left twenty cars howling on the road, the sun catching their paint through the smoke they made.

I SNICKED into gear and watched the semaphore. It worked on a rope, and would twitch up a shade before it actually fell. I was going to start on that twitch, jump some of the machines ahead and get on the tails of the fast ones—men like Tazio Pagello, Italy's ace, on an Alfa-Romeo; Otto Henrich, a champion German road-race driver, on the Mercedes. And there was Borzacchi, a rich amateur on a twin-motored *Fabricala*. And that was a car! It had a motor front and rear, and he sat between them. It was an experimental model, and the thing was terrific.

Those three were together in a row near the front, and those race-wise boys were the men I wanted to ride with, making their race-tactics my own.

THE tip of the semaphore suddenly jerked. I let up the clutch, and my rear wheels spun for grip before they kicked me away. I had the Miller streaking to the outside of the road while the red arm was still coming down.

I shot past two rows of cars before they'd moved a yard, wheel-hubs skimming the front of the stand, the crowd on its feet for the start, and yelling. Spectators jumped back from the palisades, scared that I'd catch the fence; then I was up where I wanted to be, and already the front rows were traveling.

I was almost kissing wheel-hubs with Otto's Mercedes when we all came to the first turn—a left-hand corner with a stone-mason's yard on the outside. I gave the Miller all she'd take, and stayed with them as I went around the outside of the curve.

Two hundred yards ahead was a right-hand turn over an iron bridge. I had Otto and the two Italian cracks with me, wheel to wheel. I'd either got to get ahead, or be crowded out for the bridge.

I held the throttle wide when they braked, shot by, made a straight-through gear-shift, then stood on everything—and the Miller went onto the bridge in a lovely clipped turn that left the German and the others at my tail.

Now I was nicely set. There were six cars ahead, five Italians and a silvery Auto-Union, setting the pace with a dog-fight. My plan was to stay there until they had sorted themselves out, and the three cracks seemed to have the same idea, because they sat on my tail and didn't try to pass.

We went off the bridge into a long curve, then hit that fast stretch where the road formed an embankment. The six were tipping at 150 m.p.h., all along the straightaway, shifting position all the time. They slowed for the hairpin turn at the end with blasts of flame coming from their exhausts, and went through in a heap, with me taking their dust and smoke as I followed, a hail of stones from their back wheels hitting my radiator guard.

The road curved onto another iron bridge, recrossing the river. There was a bend with giant elms edging a ditch on its outside; then the road straightened in the stretch back to town.

The pace-makers went down that in a tight bunch, the Auto-Union's tires skimming doorsteps. In the home turn, one of them tried to pinch inches, hit the corner too fast and started to slide.

He shot across the road, broadsiding at a sandbank. I saw him catch it, and saw the underside of his auto as it keeled up, with spectators at the fence above yelling—ducking, running for their lives!

Then I was through the turn and going past the grandstand. I'd started last, and I was coming round with only five ahead at the end of the first lap, which was not so bad. I stayed there, watching what happened in the dog-fight in front.

The German on the Auto-Union was a devil with magnificent nerve. The Italians were like wild men. I could see that something was bound to go; and two laps later an Italian put his outside wheels on the grass verge along the raised straight.

I saw his rear tire kick black earth as the wheel spun for grip and didn't find it. His tail started to slide out, and I yelled into the wind, the way you always do: "Hold it! For God's sake—hold it!"

HE couldn't hold it. His tail slashed suddenly, and the machine spun off the road, pitching to the field below. The tail hit first, and crumpled, digging into the soft earth. The car reared, pirouetting for the fraction of a second; then the speed sent it somersaulting in great splashes of dust, and the sound of its crashing came through the noise of my own machine as I went by.

I put from my mind what I'd seen. I wouldn't look at his smoking wreck when I cleared the hairpin, nor at the other one jammed across the sandbank on the home corner—nor at the crowd where still another had slugged through a fence by the first iron bridge.

Three wrecks inside four laps—and another Italian dropped out of the dog-fight with smoke slashing in bannerets from the louvres of his motor hood. He'd put a con' rod through his crankcase.

That finished the dog-fight, and it put me in fourth place. The Auto-Union took the lead, and lifted the pace, now that he wasn't hampered by close-riding cars. I sat where I was, with the three cracks still behind me. The Miller had a lot in hand, and the machines ahead weren't getting away.



Knowing she was there, was like having the champagne again.

Ten laps ran out—twenty, and I was still sitting fourth. Here and there, autos were pulled off the road, broken by the pace or by bad judgment. There were two more wrecks, one on the second bridge, but the machine had bounced clear of the course.

Thirty laps—then I heard a growing scream through the shriek of my blowers, and Otto suddenly took his Mercedes past, jumping me. At once Pagello followed, his car a howling shape of scarlet, and while I was yet putting my foot right down, Borzacchi shot up with them.

They had the fastest cars in the race, and knew it. They'd been waiting until other machines put themselves out and left the course clearer, and now the three

cars were starting to warm up for the real fight.

That was okay with me, if I could stay on their tails until I felt ready to make my own challenge. The Miller was behaving beautifully, and she stayed with them all right as they started to peg back the machines ahead. The leading Auto-Union was the toughest to pass, and he hung with me for a clear lap before he dropped away; he'd spoiled the tune of his machine in the opening laps.

The three cracks traveled in a tight bunch. On the straights I had to lift the Miller to her limit to hold them. . . .

Then I saw Gazzini signaling me in for replenishment next time round, and they were being flagged from their pits too.

THEY were smart, those three. They'd worked up enough lead over everything else in the race—bar the Miller—to refuel and get away again and still be in front. Over the final distance of twenty laps they'd get down to real work.

We came to the home turn and wheeled for the pits. I slid up, braking hard, ignition off. We had to change all wheels and tank up, and I left work on the car to Gazzini.

I climbed out and made for the pit counter, and found my escort of cops helping out: one had a bottle of champagne and a bucket; the other had a towel—lemon, fresh driving-gloves and clean goggles. I stuck my head in the bucket, and the champagne came frothing down through my hair, stinging the stone-cuts on my cheeks and jaw; but it was good—cold and refreshing.

I swabbed off, used water to swill the dust from my mouth, then sucked the lemon while I shuffled my shoes in the sand they'd spilled on the road for me. Gazzini and four mechanics were working like madmen over the car; then he was yelling, and I started back—helmet on, goggles, gloves—into the cockpit, snapping over the safety-strap as the car came off the jacks.

The crowd was shouting, and I caught Gazzini's voice. Away ahead I saw Otto—and Pagello and Borzacchi—already clear of their pits, cornering at the end of the grandstand straight. Then Gazzini and the mechanics were push-starting the car. The hot motor stalled—stalled again—suddenly roared; and I was into it once more, with twenty laps to go, and three cars ahead.

Those three would now be going absolutely all out. Faster than before we'd come into the pits, when I'd been able to hold them only by using pretty well everything the Miller had.

If I now hit every corner at the limit, if I worked to clip inches, if I opened wide down every straight and flogged the motor for acceleration, then I might just hold them. But I didn't think I could come up with them, let alone pass.

Only—a race is never over until the winner is home, and so I went after it with all I'd got. I had to, anyway, because I needed some of that race money.

Each time I went by, Gazzini showed me how many laps were left. The figures clipped down, and the three cracks stayed out of sight ahead. Gazzini showed me fifteen—fourteen—thirteen; and then, in the hairpin turn, I saw Borzacchi's twin-motored job jammed into a great palisade of railway sleepers.

It was smashed and smoking, with men clambering over the fence and officials running. He'd come too fast to the turn, and had kept straight on instead of going round. On every lap I felt that was liable to happen to me, I was driving so hard.

I KEPT at it, chasing the two in front, taking chances and bringing them off, with the cockpit like an oven now, and the sun blazing down, with grit in my mouth and ears, and my brain starting to ache from the drilling screech.

Twelve laps—eleven—ten—nine; and now there were very few cars left in the race. I had the corners to myself, and used all the road as I came to them. I clipped the turns so closely that people ran back each time they saw me come, and each time I was a bit closer to the fences.

Eight laps—seven—six—five—four; and suddenly I knew I was tiring.

I found myself clenching my teeth on the corners. I had cramp in stomach and hands. My judgment was going, so that my tires screamed on the curves because I didn't put the car through them just right.

When Gazzini showed me that there were three laps to go, I knew it was no use. I was still flogging myself and the car, but I knew that the men in front were just too good. I still gave it everything, but down inside me I knew that it was no use.

Then, on that lap, I noticed the crowds yelling at me, and waving. Spectators

THE SMOKY ROAD

were leaning over fences, hanging out from the balconies all the way down the home stretch, bending from windows and sweeping their arms, urging the Miller on.

The crowd on the home corner was wild. I could see men shouting at me as I went through the turn and glanced at the pit. Somebody was standing on the pit counter, waving Old Glory—waving like mad!

Lucy!

Lucy swinging the flag above her head, dancing with excitement—Gazzini and an Italian army officer with her, both waving!

She saw me look, and she almost fell off the pit-planks as she waved me on—and then I saw a red car cornering in the turn ahead, and knew it was Pagello.

Seeing Lucy, knowing she was there, was like having the champagne over my head again. The cramps went; the tiredness went—and everywhere the crowds seemed to have gone mad and were waving me on.

Through the curve, screaming at the bridge—and I caught Pagello at the far side. Smoke showed a sick motor, and he was looking back, watching for me. He lifted an arm, sweeping me ahead, mouth open and shouting as I passed.

Then I knew what it was all about. There was only the German in front. If Pagello was out of it, they wanted me to catch and beat him.

With Lucy there to watch, I'd do it—or break something.

I went down the raised straight, with the Miller going as she'd never gone before, and in the back of my mind I was thinking about Lucy.

Maybe she had been released under open arrest, like me. Maybe she'd have to go back to jug if she hadn't passage money. But if I caught Otto, there'd be money enough to take us both home.

Into the hairpin—through it—down the home-stretch; and the crowds were wilder than before—men bawling, women screaming for me to go still faster, hats and bunting and arms waving—sending me on to where a blur of dust hung on the smoky road ahead.

That, I knew, was Otto.

ON the home turn I splintered the inside palings with my wheel-hubs, and Gazzini's board told me I was entering the last lap. Lucy was holding the flag, not waving—just watching, crouched and tense.

I saw the sun flash whitely in the dust ahead as Otto placed the Mercedes for the turn. I was a quarter-mile behind him as I followed over the bridge—howling through the long curve onto the fast straightaway for the last time.

I couldn't tell if I was gaining, but I saw him hit the hairpin—and I saw him skid! Dust and stones shot like a wave from the torn road-surface, and I yelled into the cockpit, because I knew that skid would slow him.

HE was still clearing the turn when I went into it, holding my speed until some instinct told me that longer would be fatal—straight-through gear changes, braking with the car kicking under me, tires screeching—then *Whoom-m-m-m!* said the exhaust as the Miller kicked the turn behind and left speed-spume flying.

Otto was still straightening his auto for the bridge, and there was not ten yards between us when he found his speed and held me off. Then I saw that I'd lost a tire-tread from my off-front wheel.

The breaker-strip was showing. That meant a blow-out any moment, and I prayed the tire would hold, and not burst when we took the home corner, because it was there that I'd win or lose the race now.

Otto would cut it close. I'd have to corner outside him, go around him while he was still in the turn. If the tire went, or if I skidded, then it would be curtains, all right.

The crowd along the home-stretch had stopped yelling. The people at the windows and on the balconies were quite still—just watching.

That last turn came up, and Otto eased out for it. I held the center of the road. He wheeled for the corner, square across my track. The crowds at the fences became one gaping mouth as they gasped when it seemed I must ram him; then I was braking—braking and changing down, all but nicking the tip of his tail as I shot past and threw the Miller into the turn with everything screaming.

I felt her start to slide. I took weight off the brakes and stamped the throttle wide. If the rear wheels bit the road, I'd shoot straight; and if they didn't, they would aggravate the skid and kill me in the crack-up.

They bit—threw me level with him. I saw him look, his mouth a slit below black goggles. I saw his head bend as he asked the white Mercedes for what

he needed to win. . . . Then he was falling behind, and the Miller was pitching herself ahead as the black-and-white finishing line across the road slashed up—slid to meet me—slipped under my front wheels as the checkered flag whipped down.

That front tire blew out a hundred yards beyond the line, but it didn't matter then.

TWO hours later I was sitting on a cot above Gazzini's garage, easing off the cramps, feeling clean and relaxed after a shower. Lucy was sitting on the side of the cot, with iodine and swabs on a chair; she'd been treating the cuts that stones had left on my face.

I'd collected checks for five thousand bucks, winner's money, plus bonus money, plus starting money, so there was no need to go back to the jug.

"I really had a perfectly wonderful time after I was arrested at Modane," Lucy was telling me. "You see, the commandant of the frontier guards used to be an attaché at Washington. He and his wife insisted that I be their guest overnight!"

She'd been having a wonderful time, while I'd been in a cell, worried about her! The commandant and his wife had brought her down to Alessandria in time for the race, bringing the baggage on the trucks which had first picked it up. Lucy hadn't been able to get through to the pit until near the finish, when she'd seen how things were going.

"I wanted to let you know I was watching," she said, "and sort of wave you on."

The commandant had fixed it for her to sail on the *Venezia*, using his influence so that she needn't pay for her passage until after she arrived in New York, because she was still broke. The trucks were taking the baggage down to the boat, and she had nothing more to bother about.

She was very pleased with herself, because she believed that she had done all that she had set out to do. But I couldn't forget the arrangement I'd made with Pepin in Paris. She hadn't made out in the way she thought; I'd deceived her about it, and that took the edge off everything for me.

I'd won the race. I was going to be guest of honor at the banquet in the evening, and Lucy would be there. Everyone in sight was pleased with me, and Kinnaird and his mess would stage their

whale of a party when they got the cable I'd sent. Everything should have been tops with me—but I felt lousy because I'd cheated Lucy.

She straightened out the iodine and the swabs on the chair, and it suddenly got quiet. The town was noisy outside, but the quiet in the room was close. She put everything straight; then she spoke without looking at me.

"By the way, I never used that man's trucks, you know!"

"Trucks?" My heart took a dive.

"You sent that Pepin to me, didn't you!" she said accusingly. "I guessed it, and he admitted it, finally. He's mailing your money back to you."

That left me with nothing to say. She knew the way I'd interfered, and this was my finish.

"I didn't need him, because I arranged a deal with the owner of the garage in Rue Monsigny," she said. "He gave me transportation for the baggage, in return for a ten-per-cent interest. I'm to send his money when I get home."

SHE fiddled with the things on the chair.

"So I have come through, all on my own," she said quietly, after a bit.

She stood up. I thought she was going to walk out on me; but suddenly she whirled round, her voice rising.

"I thought you were rooting for me!" she exclaimed, smiling now. "I made it! Aren't you pleased?"

Her eyes were alight, and she was laughing.

"Aren't you mad at me?" I asked, and came off the cot.

"Mad?" She laughed again. "Mad, no! Why, I think you've been absolutely swell!"

Suddenly everything came right.

"I think you were darned nice about what you tried to do for me in Paris," she said. "And I think you're a grand driver," she went on, "and I think it's grand that we've both come through with what we started out to do!"

Sure, it was grand! She'd made out all on her own—all the way!

You bet it was grand—and we were going home together, on the same boat.

I reminded her of that, and she laughed—laughed so that her long lashes closed and made you wait for her eyes to come peeping through again.

And the boat would take nine days to get across.

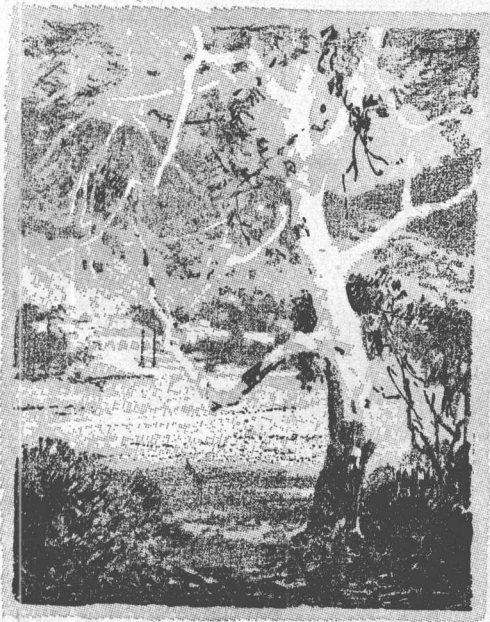
Nine days!

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

DEATH ON THE DOORSTEP

By GORDON KEYNE

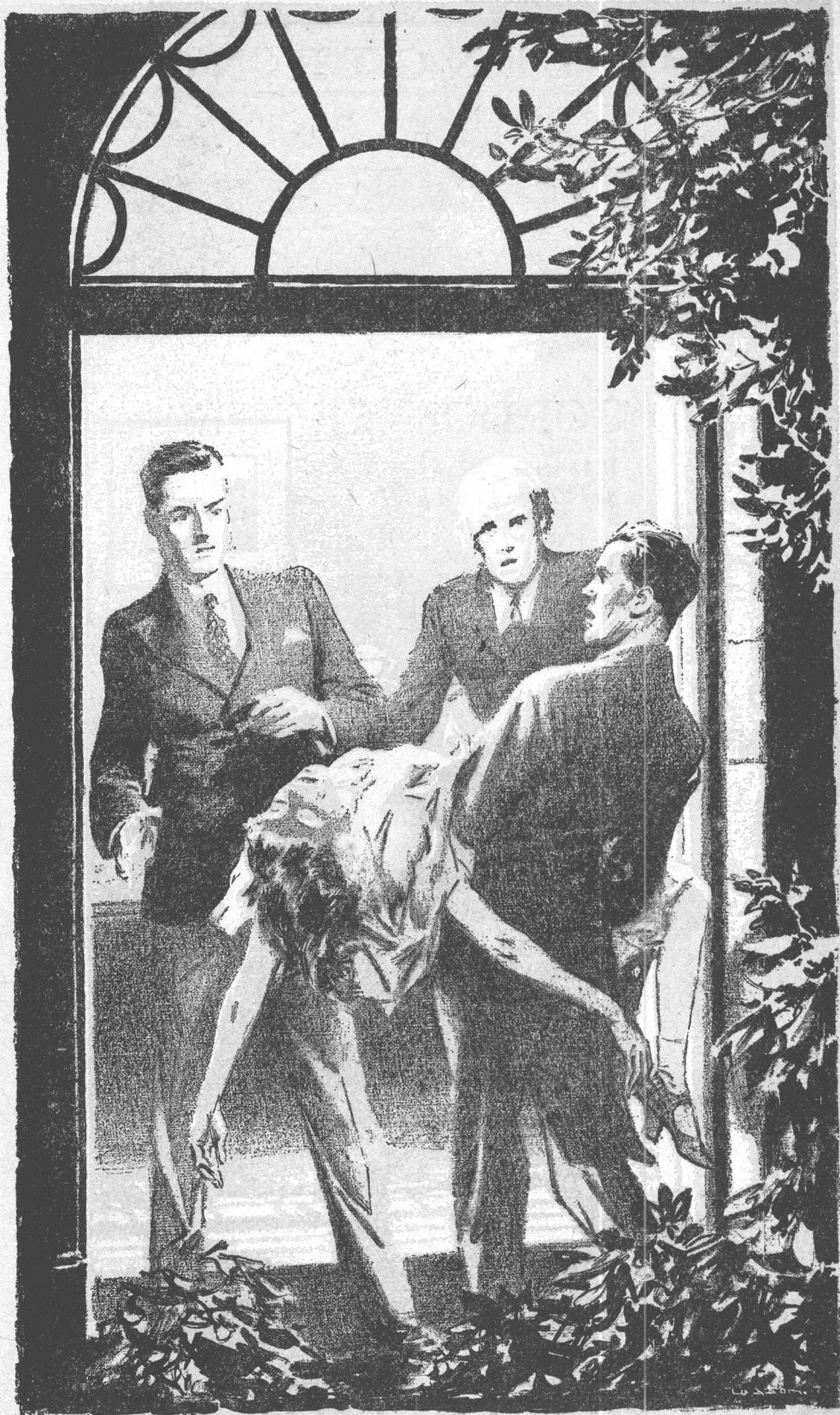
*Who wrote "Gunpowder Gold"
and "They Lived by the Sword"*



Illustrated by Percy Leason

HE WAS DROWNED IN THE DESERT!
AND HIS STRANGE MURDER SET
IN MOTION A DRAMATIC SERIES
OF NO LESS PERPLEXING EVENTS.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



"I—I found her outside," Thompson stammered excitedly.

DEATH ON THE DOORSTEP

By GORDON KEYNE

*Who wrote "They Lived by the Sword"
and "Gunpowder Gold."*

THE manner in which I chanced to see the body on the doorstep was in itself a bit noteworthy. Strictly speaking, there was no doorstep. Dr. Morton's house, like most of the smaller places in Pine Springs, was built flat on the desert sand.

Wakening unusually early, about six, I slipped into trunks and sweat-shirt and went out to get the morning paper at the gate. Our cottage was surrounded by a picket fence; this was why we had leased it. My sister Bathsheba saw that fence and babbled rapturously to high heaven. A colonial cottage and a picket fence, amid the adobe, concrete and plaster palaces of this Western resort, warmed her New England heart. I dislike incongruous things, but she brushes aside all such trifles. The house was ours for the season.

Picking up the tightly rolled newspaper, I noticed a car standing across the street in front of Morton's house, as I drank the morning air into my lungs with sheer sensuous enjoyment. Like the sunrise and sunset air of Egypt, that of Pine Springs has an almost indescribable quality; one feels it like a very substance, balmy and mellifluous, grateful to the skin and lungs alike.

This being early October, the sun was just above the horizon, a blazing ball of golden fire, impregnating all things with quivering life. The big tamarisk at the front of the Morton place struck me with sudden contrast under those level rays. Its yellow-green masses held blue ominous shadows; it too came from Egypt, I recollected. Those feathery fronds that changed not with the seasons impacted upon me with a queerly sinister note, as though some dread horror lingered here unseen to be wakened with the morning light.

I dispelled the feeling with a laugh. Rather, it was dispelled by sight of the car across the street. This was a large, expensive, luxurious imported coupé, and its presence was vaguely puzzling.

Dr. Morton was one of the oldest inhabitants. He had been here long before Pine Springs became a winter resort for idlers of great wealth. As a physician, he no longer practised, though he did retain a few patients of long standing. He was a scholar, a quiet, lovable old man, very much a recluse.

I knew him rather well, from our occasional meetings; also, his famous work on the Origin of Rag Paper in China had for years been one of my technical standbys. Much of his early life had been spent in China, where his son and daughter-in-law had died, leaving him one granddaughter. With Kathy Morton, Bathsheba and I were on intimate terms, though not so intimate as I could wish.

A six-foot wall surrounded the adobe house and large gardens. Despite evidently ample wealth, the Mortons lived most simply, with a secretary and a Filipino houseboy. Thus, sight of the rather blatant car at their gate was momentarily puzzling.

Glancing past the car, I saw that the heavy wooden gates stood open. Something inside those gates, on the wide concrete slab in front of the porch, jerked at my attention; and instantly the sense of lurking, hovering horror returned and took tangible shape. The body of a man lay there; and I knew at once that the man was dead.

The statement is not fantastic. I have been a consultant technician to the law in three great cities, and my courses on the subject of Physical Evidence are used by many police-instruction schools.

While often termed a criminologist, I am, let us hope, something more than this ill-used term implies.

As I have often pointed out, there is a distinct sense of death, as there is a distinct sense of emptiness in an abandoned house. A sensitive person cannot mistake a sleeping man, or a sleeping dog, for a dead one; a person acquainted with death recognizes it when he sees it, or more properly, feels it.

BATHSHEBA and I were just back from a year's trip around the world, Bathsheba devoting herself to flirting and gushing, while I put in some hard licks, studying technical police methods from Lyons to Singapore. For the past two months I had secluded myself here in Pine Springs, in order to translate my notebooks into factual pages, leaving Bathsheba to flit about town and enjoy life in her own way.

I wanted no link with publicity. My first impulse was to turn away from the dead man. However, on the chance that I might be wrong, that he might be alive and in need of help, I started across the street.

Pausing briefly at the car and glancing into it, nothing caught my eye except a slight, compact blob of mud on the floor-mat beneath the steering-wheel, and I passed on through the open gates and up to the prostrate figure.

Let me regretfully admit that its position, at the moment, struck me as odd but not significant. The right leg was crossed at a sharp angle across the left leg. The right arm lay across the breast. The left arm was extended above the head and bent acutely at the elbow, as though warding off a blow. The face was that of a young man, weakly self-indulgent, unknown to me.

Possible crime, I must emphasize, was far from my thought. In order to feel the heart, I moved the right arm, and straightened it down beside the thigh. It flexed freely at the elbow, but life was extinct; either *rigor mortis* had not set in, or it was far from complete. Almost mechanically, I looked for some indication of the cause of death, but there was none.

The young man's garments won my attention. He wore a veldt shirt and slacks of heavy blue tussore silk, and a handsome jacket of merino and suède-garb such as is commonly worn for day or evening alike by resorters. The odd thing was the absolute newness of the

garments. The shirt showed its pristine folds; the crease of the slacks was like a knife-edge. The jacket was brand new. The rope-soled sandals on the feet showed no wear.

With a shrug, I rose and stepped across the porch to the door. This was not my affair. I wanted none of it, and would have none of it. Regret over this discovery assailed me while crossing to the bell. Now I must give my evidence, and my time and work must suffer encroachment, though it might still be possible to avoid publicity.

I pressed the bell. After some little time, the door was opened by the secretary, Jessop. I would far sooner have seen anyone else in the house.

I disliked Jessop heartily. He was a small, slightly stooped man of about fifty, with thick-lensed spectacles. Bathsheba called him a prissy fellow, which describes him rather aptly.

"Why, it's Mr. Bodham!" he exclaimed, staring at me in surprise. "Is anything wrong, sir?"

"I hope not." The man's subservient air flecked me on the raw. "You seem to have a caller here—"

Jessop saw the dead man. He let out a startled grunt as though he had been hit under the belt, and his jaw fell.

"Do you know who it is?" I asked.

"Why—why, yes!" he said in sudden agitation. "Yes sir. Young Mr. Devry. He's a patient, in a way, of Dr. Morton's."

Abruptly he broke off. His eyes widened on the body, as though something about it had struck into him with swift dismay. I turned away.

"It's your funeral," I said rather brutally. "Phone the police, and don't touch the corpse."

Ignoring him further, I walked back across the street.

THERE, for the first time, it occurred to me that I myself had touched the body—I, of all people! However, it did not seem in the least important; and I could not undo the mistake now without drawing the attention of Jessop. That clenched hand across the breast might have indicated heart-trouble, I thought. The young man had been trying to reach the Doctor, had keeled over, and died on the spot; this seemed clear.

Indeed, nothing else seemed possible. I had been in this quiet desert resort for a month. Its peculiar nerve-quieting influence had left me composed, utterly

DEATH ON THE DOORSTEP

forgetful of cities and their ways. The brilliant sunlight, balmy yet vibrant air, the mountains behind and the desert vistas before, had relieved all tenseness and high-strung restiveness.

Despite floods of tourists, nothing ever happened here, except the usual murderous highway accidents. Off the main routes of travel, Pine Springs bred a fictitious activity for the sake of the visitors, yet could not break away from its ancient peace, its tranquil trees and moonlight and solitude. Of nights, coyotes howled close to the town, and of days the far vistas of sky and desert were friendly neighbors. Crime did not exist here, except perhaps on the Indian reservation. A police force of eight men and an Indian agent handled anything that might come up.

WHEN I stepped into the cottage, Bathsheba met me with her radiant smile. She was just zipping her sun-suit up to the neck.

"I heard you prowling around, and here I am," she said brightly. "Sit down, and don't fuss. Breakfast is on the way. What's the news this morning? Have the British won the war? What did the market do yesterday? I do hope aircraft stocks went up. Do you want orange-juice and coffee both?"

"Yes," I replied simply.

To Bathsheba, questions are merely a form of conversation, to be rattled off without thought of response. Yet she is an attractive thing. Even my brotherly eye approves her exterior; she is lovely as a Dresden china shepherdess, and has fully as weighty a brain.

Despite our superficial bickering, Bashy and I have always understood each other extraordinarily well, and her butterfly point of view has frequently been of the greatest help to me. A sunnier and more equably tempered person I have never known.

"You might at least read me the headlines," she said cheerfully, as she bustled about the kitchen. "Come, Tom, what's the biggest item of news this morning?"

"Dead man across the street," I rejoined. "On Dr. Morton's doorstep. That is, if you can call it a doorstep."

She stopped short, her blue eyes wide and startled.

"Are you joking?"

"No," I said absently, sipping my orange-juice and eying the newspaper. "No. It's a serious thing. The doorstep, or threshold, has a very prominent

place in primitive or even in evolved civilization. The significance is sometimes very grave—"

"Thomas Bodham!" She meant business this time. "Stop treating me like a child! You don't mean that Dr. Morton is dead?"

"God forbid! He's in bed, so far as I know. But there's certainly a dead man on his doorstep. I called out that ass Jessop and left the matter to him. None of my business. Since I discovered the body, I suppose the coroner will want my evidence."

"Who is the—the dead man?"

"Stranger to me." I did not wish to discuss the thing endlessly.

Bathsheba fluttered. "Why, this is simply terrible, Tom! It can't be possible. They never have any dead people here in Pine Springs! Why, only yesterday Mrs. McManus was saying that the nearest undertaker is at Pretona and it's a great argument for tourists that no one ever dies here! I suppose if there's any danger of death, they take the poor creature to Pretona or Roydron or somewhere. It's rather absurd to what lengths these resorts will go, in the effort to encourage visitors. Why don't you do something about it?"

"I'm not interested in the Pine Springs tourist trade."

"Silly! You know very well that I mean the dead man. That's your business. Mysteries and murders and all that sort of thing. You're famous for things you do with microscopes and queer apparatus. . . . Here's your coffee; mind, it's hot. Why don't you take charge of it?"

I LOOKED up from the paper, "Give me some cream, and I will."

"Don't take that attitude, Tom. I mean the dead man."

"Do you want me to drag him in here for breakfast?"

"Please, Tom—I don't like you a bit when you assume that cynical air. It's not you at all." Bashy was flushed and serious, and with a sigh I abandoned the newspaper. "When you put on this horrid blasé mask, you're not a nice man. Other times, you're simply grand. Now be yourself. Think of Kathy and poor Dr. Morton; you should save them trouble here."

"Now, Bashy, lower your sights," I began. "They're in no trouble. There's no crime or mystery, no police matter, nothing to save them from—"

Memory checked me, memory of the dead man's singular position. She did not notice it, however, and I hurried on:

"I don't want to be hauled into the thing as a friend of the family. Let the cops cart the man off. He's just some patient trying to reach the Doctor, and keeled over before getting to the house. I have more important stuff on hand. The work of the Singapore police among the Malay and Chinese criminal societies has some fascinating angles. Then I must check on those curious cases in Cairo, so oddly related to the Bombay murders of last year—"

BATHSHEBA sat down and reached for the front section of the paper.

"Very well, Tom. But Dr. Morton is a darling old man. Kathy's an angel. You should help them. . . . I wonder what the man's name was."

"Devry," I said absently. "Here, listen to what Lee Shippey says in his column—"

"Devry?" Bathsheba fairly exploded. "Tom! You knew it all the time! You say it's Devry? Nathaniel Devry?"

"Good Lord!" I gulped my coffee and rose. "Can't I even read the morning paper in peace? Yes. Jessop knew him."

"Why, everybody knows him here!" Bathsheba gawked at me. "Nathaniel IV, they call him—you know, the Devry family of Baltimore, the multi-millionaires, the Fabulous House of Devry, as a magazine article called it, only two months ago."

"Oh!" I had heard of that family, naturally. Everyone in America had heard of them. "Hadn't occurred to me it was that family."

"They have a place here!" cried Bathsheba, enjoying herself now. "That enormous house up on the mountain slope. Nathaniel III and his family are there now. You must have heard of the young man, Tom. He's famous for his wild parties and his hard drinking, and the scandals he has caused!"

"I don't read the scandal sheets," I broke in. "You may be right, Bashy. So what? None of my business. This makes it more emphatically none of my business. If you're right about the corpse, it's not a death—it's an event! I want nothing to do with it."

Bathsheba drew down her brows at me. "Why did you lie about not knowing him?"

"I don't lie, charming she-sister! Didn't think about his name. Didn't

care. Don't care now. Don't expect to care. Now are you satisfied?"

"No," she said. At times, Bathsheba has an astonishing gift of penetration. "You did lie. You're worried. There are things about it you haven't told me."

"Suit yourself," I retorted, and went to my study.

To myself, I admitted that my sister was right. Odd little things stuck in my mind, such as the position of the corpse, the newness of the garments, the blob of mud on the car floor; things that somehow struck me instinctively as unnatural, like the waving of a bush on a windless day. Why? I refused to ask myself the question or seek any answer.

The only thing in connection with the entire matter that worried me, was how this grisly morning sight would affect Kathy Morton. That had been a shrewd thrust on Bathsheba's part. She must have, I reflected, some suspicion that I thought a lot more of Kathy than I was willing to admit to anyone. And so I did.

Resolutely shoving the whole thing aside, I spent an hour at intensive work on my notes, and so absorbed was I in my work that when Bathsheba appeared I had forgotten the morning's incident.

"They want you, Tom," she said. "The coroner has come from Roydron and an officer is here to get you."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "The dead man, of course. Yes, I'll be right out."

A LOCAL officer was on the porch, cars were in the street, and as we started across a small crowd was visible in the Morton grounds. As we approached, the officer identified those whom I did not know; the local police chief Bishop, the county coroner and assistants, a spare, nervous man with tear-streaked cheeks who was Nathaniel III, father of the dead man, and a few others. The body was of course covered over. Then there were Kathy and her grandfather, with Jessop and the Filipino houseboy.

Kathy was naturally troubled and anxious. Dr. Morton was giving evidence to the coroner's panel, and Kathy came to me with a quick greeting.

"This is a terrible thing! Does Bashy know about it?"

"More or less," I said. "Was this man a friend of yours?"

"No; only a slight acquaintance."

Kathy had none of Bathsheba's radiance. She was dark, a dusky glow in her

DEATH ON THE DOORSTEP



tanned face, her dark eyes very vibrant and alive. Usually quick to laughter, she was now grave and steady, her high-boned features eloquent of the restraint that means strength.

Dr. Morton's words caught my ear, his low, gentle voice agitated: "A coronary lesion—thrombosis. No, I cannot account for his position, sir; perhaps a spasmodic muscular effort in the instant of death. I did not need to disturb the body. Death was quite evident."

"As he was a patient of yours, in a way, will you be prepared to vouch for the cause of death?"

"Absolutely," said Morton. "It was obvious. I treated him five days ago."

The Doctor, I saw, was much agitated. He was one of those old men who seem to deserve the word saintly. Long snow-white hair fell about delicately carved features of tremendous strength—jutting nose and chin, chiseled as by Buonarotti, yet all imbued with a surpassing tenderness, a gentle wisdom. He glanced at me, smiled and nodded, and the coroner dismissed him.

I was then taken in hand. My testimony was simple and brief. The police, who had finished their work with camera and tape, lifted the covering from the body, momentarily.

"Yes," I replied to the question. "That's the man."

"Do you know him?"

"Never saw him before, to my knowledge."

"The body is just as you first saw it?"

"Yes," I said, as they covered it from sight again.

"That's all, Mr. Bodham. You'll be available for the regular inquest, of course? This is merely the preliminary hearing."

Bathsheba had ordered me to bring Kathy over for breakfast. Since Dr. Morton was talking with Nathaniel Devry III and Jessop, Kathy readily accepted, and we crossed the street together to the cottage.

As I held the gate open for her, an odd fact suddenly impacted on my brain. Perhaps it had been delayed by my absorption in Kathy, for I am not ordinarily such a downright nitwit.

I had told the coroner, heedlessly, that the body was just as I had first seen it. This was true. And this was the singular thing—that it *was* just as I had first seen it! However, the matter was of no moment, I reflected. The coroner or Dr. Morton had replaced that right arm across the breast. It might even have reassumed that position itself, with advancing *rigor mortis*; so I thought no more of it—until later.

Chapter Two

ON the second day after the preliminary hearing, the actual inquest took place. I gathered that the delay was to enable certain relatives to arrive from the East. In the interim, I also heard—from Bathsheba, since I did not read the numerous newspaper spreads—a host of details regarding the wild life and reckless career of young Devry.

The coroner, very decently, held the inquest at the local police station, to save all witnesses the trip to the mortuary at Pretona. I arrived to find highway police controlling traffic and the street outside the police- and fire-station packed with people, augmented by the batteries of photographers and reporters from Los Angeles. The death of Nathaniel IV was no national calamity, but it was a national news item.

The Fabulous House of Devry, as the newspapers had come to call it, was to be well represented. I had come with the Morton party, and was talking with Kathy on the outskirts of the throng when an enormous green limousine drew to a hissing stop at the white strip before the station. A young Chinese in livery hopped briskly out and opened the door.

The spare, nervous man whom I knew to be Nathaniel III emerged, and assisted two heavily veiled women to the cement—the mother and sister of the deceased. News- and camera-men and the crowd surged forward, but the police checked the onrush. The three vanished inside the station. Then a fourth person left the car, escorted by a man whom by his manner I took to be a family lawyer.

A fourth person? Heavens, no! Wherever that woman was, no one else existed. She was one of those people who fill a room, a hall, a street, with their personality, and who dwarf any and everyone around them. She was obviously of great age. She had a hawk-like face such as the mummy of Rameses the Great exhibits, and a great dome of a head, over which thin white hair was drawn severely back.

A queer old-fashioned cape about her shoulders was held together with a chain of strung jade—the deep emerald gem jade, only to be had by fabulous wealth. Her hands were gaunt but steady, her step firm and elastic; she faced the yawping camera-men with scornful silence, her black eyes unwinking.

Kathy pressed my arm.

"Miss Devry, Tom! *The Miss Devry*—doesn't she look like a legend, a myth, a person of fable and story?"

I grunted. "She looks like an old woman who's hard as hell. The Miss Devry who's head of the family and runs the whole business organization, eh? I've heard of her. If you knew young Devry, I suppose you know all these people?"

"I only knew him slightly, Tom—an acquaintance, no more," she said gently. "Grandfather knows them intimately, though I don't think he's ever met them. They all come into his book, you know. Miss Devry's father, the first Nathaniel, founded the fortune. All that should interest you a lot."

"You know it doesn't," I said. "Sorry, but facts are facts."

"That's one thing I like about you," she rejoined in her quiet way. "You're really yourself," she added, and pressed my arm again.

I KNEW, of course, that Dr. Morton's great opus, "Economic America in China," was in course of production and had been for many years; two volumes had been published, and he was working on other volumes. This voluminous history of the China trade dealt wholly

with commercial aspects and was foreign to my interests.

"Who's the man with Miss Devry—looks like a lawyer?" I asked as the two disappeared.

"Peterson," she replied. "Her secretary."

He stuck in one's memory. Long bony jaw, thin hair, sunken eyes, a servile manner. "*Uriah Heep* with a clean collar on," I commented, and Kathy gave a soft laugh.

"Not bad, Tom, not half bad! But come on. There's Grandfather waving at us to get in."

I wormed a way through the press. We followed Dr. Morton and the irritating Jessop through the corridor of the police-station, and into a large room set aside for the coroner's use. Lack of room precluded the admission of any except the witnesses, officials and jury. Dr. Morton, Kathy, Jessop and I took the front chairs of a crowded little cluster assigned the witnesses. The Devry family sat behind us; indeed, Miss Devry was immediately behind Dr. Morton.

THE formalities were few and simple. Legal identification of the corpse, which was not present, had been covered in the usual manner. I was called, and gave my evidence.

I had previously reflected whether or not to mention any change in the position of the body, and decided against it as immaterial unless some reason showed up to change my decision. When I was dismissed, James Jessop was called. He was obviously nervous, but spoke with great clarity, verifying my brief statement, and stating how he had phoned the police and had summoned Dr. Morton to look at the body.

"Can you tell us anything that might aid in establishing the time of death?" asked the coroner.

Jessop shook his small, ugly head. "Nothing."

"Suppose you tell us the movements of the household that night, Mr. Jessop."

"Where shall I begin?"

"At dinner—who was present?"

"Dr. Morton, Miss Kathy Morton, and myself. Oh, yes—and Mr. Thompson! He comes two or three days a week to do typing for us. Sometimes when we work late he stays for dinner. That night we wanted to finish Chapter VI of Dr. Morton's work, since it was highly important that certain books and papers borrowed from the university—"

"I hardly think we need much detail, Mr. Jessop," broke in the coroner. "Just the main events of the evening. When you retired, who might have visited the house, and so on."

"No one visited the house," said Jessop. "Mr. Thompson left about nine. A little later Miss Kathy brought the Doctor his usual tray of biscuit and sherry. At ten, after getting the radio news, Dr. Morton retired. I stayed up quite a bit, perhaps an hour, preparing the next day's research notes. It takes time to get the documents correlated with—"

"Quite so, Mr. Jessop. Please tell me what visitors came during the night."

"None, to my knowledge," said Jessop, with his queer negative jerk.

"Why do you qualify? Wouldn't you have known?"

"Not necessarily. My quarters are in the cottage in the rear; some little distance."

"How far?" came the query. "Just approximate it."

"I'm trying to recall the number of steps to the house. Close to a hundred and twenty feet. Let me see—I should say between a hundred and fifteen, and a hundred and twenty."

"Thank you. During the night, you heard no arrival? You heard no car? You heard nothing of unusual import?"

Jessop respectfully dissented to each question.

"After your work in the house was finished, what did you do?"

"I got a glass of milk in the kitchen. Then I went out to my rooms, took a shower, went to bed, and read for a little while. I know I turned out my light precisely at twelve. I try to keep exact hours; it is a matter of habit."

JESSOP was dismissed. Kathy testified briefly and Dr. Morton followed. The gentle old man was impressive. His profile was not unlike that of Miss Devry in its strength and decision, but his was marked by an old-age benignity and hers was decidedly not.

"You have said that the deceased was a patient of yours. Will you explain this statement, Dr. Morton?"

"I gave up my practise years ago," Morton replied. "One evening young Devry brought my granddaughter home from some social affair. He had a heart-attack while there. I looked after him, advising that he consult his physician. He scoffed at me and asked me to prescribe for him. I did so. Several times

after that occasion he dropped in to see me, asking me to have a look at him. I must say frankly that I only did so in the hope that I might persuade him to give up the use of alcoholic liquors."

"Then you considered him in the light of a patient?"

"Yes. I had treated him within the week."

"Did death, in your opinion, result from natural causes?"

"I signed the death-certificate on that assumption. There is no question of his thyroid condition and heart lesion. Any excitement at all might have caused his death."

"May we assume that the deceased, feeling an attack coming, might have attempted to reach you and that death overtook him as he reached your house?"

"Yes. That is my own assumption. I can think of no other reason for his call during the early morning hours."

"Can you tell us approximately when death occurred? Within the usual limitations."

"In my opinion, which can only be an opinion, somewhere about three o'clock."

MORTON was dismissed and replaced by the police surgeon, a local practitioner named Gregg, a young, decisive and obviously very able man. He differed slightly from Morton as to the time of death, placing it at about two o'clock, due to the body's temperature; a juror's question elicited his explanation that a corpse will cool at the rate of one degree per hour. As to the cause of death, he agreed with Dr. Morton.

"There was no wound, no indication of a contusion of any sort."

"Would you be able to state positively that the deceased died from natural causes?"

There was a momentary silence.

"No," replied Gregg. "I could not so state unless I had handled him as a patient. But I accept without hesitation the opinion of so eminent a physician as my confrere Dr. Morton, whose experience and knowledge so far transcend my own."

It was gracefully said, and as pretty an example of professional courtesy as I could remember; like all courteous things, it eased the tension and gave the room an almost pleasant atmosphere.

Gregg was dismissed, and the movements of Devry during his last night on earth were followed. Nothing of inter-

est developed until a gawky youth named Elmer Nockett came up. He was the parking attendant at the Isle of Araby, a night-spot located a mile outside the city limits. Devry had spent the evening here. Nockett stated that Devry, who was a regular patron, had left the place at about one-thirty in the morning.

"Did you notice anything unusual about Mr. Devry that night?"

"He had been drinking, of course; he always did. He seemed normal to me. He wasn't drunk."

"Perhaps he was so drunk as to seem quite normal?"

Nockett hesitated on this, and finally admitted the possibility.

"And he left the place alone?"

Nockett hesitated again. "No," he said reluctantly.

"Come, Mr. Nockett! Let us have everything. Who was with him?"

"Rose Wong. She's a singer at the Araby. He was taking her home."

ROSE WONG was called, and was brought in, having arrived late. She had the peculiar eerie charm of higher-class Chinese girls, and the gravely serious manner of her race. One conjectured that when she smiled, she would be a very fascinating young woman. The delicacy of her complexion reminded me of a mellowed parchment page before an amber light.

"You're employed at the Araby, Miss Wong?"

"I sing there," she stated in a low, musical voice.

"Are you an American citizen, Miss Wong?"

A flash glittered in her eye, as though from anger at the implication.

"Yes. So is my father. So was my grandfather."

"Can you tell us anything that might throw light on the death of Mr. Devry?"

"Nothing. He drove me to my home. I got out and stood for a moment talking. He did not leave the car. He seemed quite well, but—I'm sorry to say it, but I must—as though he had been drinking a good deal. I said good night and went in."

"What time was it, if you know?"

"I know, because I leave the club at one-thirty sharp, when I cease work. It could not have been later than one forty-five when we parted."

"Was he in good spirits, apparently?"

"He seemed to be, yes."

"Can you add anything that might throw further light on this affair? Please think, Miss Wong. Is there anything that you consider we ought to know?"

She sat quite relaxed, hands palm up in her lap. She shook her head slowly, looking down at her hands, and replied in the negative. I knew instantly that she was lying. The Occidental, assuming that inability to maintain another's gaze is an indication of falsehood, looks his man in the eye when he lies. The Oriental, more conscious than are we of the importance of gestures, is elaborately careful of his hands and body and face when he lies. And Rose Wong lied, but no one else there knew it. She was dismissed.

Formalities ensued—corroborative testimony of no interest. I sat next to Dr. Morton, as it chanced. I thought of the old Devry woman behind us, of the Devry fortune; of the curious chance that had turned the black sheep to the company of a Chinese girl. The matter, I thought, was being handled with great delicacy, for it was obvious that Devry must have been infatuated with this Rose Wong.

Odd, this Chinese thread in the Devry affairs! This poor devil, lying twisted on a doorstep—and suddenly, with rapid sequence, the thing flashed across my brain. I had moved the right arm. When the body was found, the arm had been moved, or had moved, back so that the hand was across the breast. The crossed leg, the hand over the head, the other hand across the breast—

"Good God, Morton!" I muttered, low-voiced, to the old man at my side. "He might have been murdered, after all! You must know what his position meant!"

Dr. Morton half turned to me. I shall never forget the look in his face—the pallor of those chiseled waxen features, the startled light that leaped in his eye.

"His position?" he murmured.

"Of course. The Sign of Death—the White Lotus society!"

FOR a moment his eyes were fixed upon me; agitation filled them, an agitation so appalling, so infinitely pathetic, that it actually checked my voice. His hand fell upon my arm, and he whispered softly:

"Not now, Bodham! Not here. Impossible to discuss—never dreamed you'd know—yes, yes, we must talk this over."

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"Very well," I assented quietly. "Suppose I run over to your place—when?"
"Tonight. About eight."
"Right."

He sighed, and relaxed. I leaned back; the coroner was instructing his jury that they should bring in a verdict of death due to natural causes, unless they saw some reason to the contrary. The six men rose and filed off into an inner room, and a buzz of tongues at once arose around us.

I paid no heed, for I was following and enlarging upon the sudden train of thought that had led me to speak so impetuously to Morton. It was information upon which I had come in my Singapore researches. The White Lotus society had been repressed there with iron hand. It was a secret guild of criminals that once extended from China down to the Straits. In my notes were the passwords, signs and other details of the society's inner workings. The position in which Devry had been found, was known as the Sign of Death.

Therefore, one of two deductions was certain. He had not fallen in that twisted position by any chance. Either he had been murdered and placed in that position, which I had to admit was unlikely; or else he had died naturally and been placed in that position after death.

I WAKENED from my abstraction to find that Miss Devry, who sat directly behind us, was leaning forward, and Morton had turned to speak with her.

"I want to thank you," she was saying in a rich, throaty voice, "for your kindness in this matter, and for trying to rescue my grandnephew from himself. I am Edna Devry."

Morton half rose, but her hand impatiently detained him. "Sit down, sit down," she went on. "Don't make a fool of yourself with politeness, Doctor. I was hugely relieved to hear those instructions to the jury—now we're saved a final scandal which I had dreaded."

Morton murmured something I did not hear. She laughed harshly.

"Don't look so shocked. I dare say I'm older than you. If I can stomach the thought, you certainly can. The boy was wild as a March hare. That he got his comeuppance in a natural fashion, is certainly a relief."

Recalling what little I had read about her, I could see how the woman had earned her reputation as a tyrant. She was imperious, arrogant, both by na-



ture and position. Under those shaggy white eyebrows, her sloe eyes twinkled with a grim mirth that was actually Mephistophelian. She obviously took delight in shocking those around her; there was nothing of the *haute dame* in her make-up, except her air of command. She had both the gutter instincts and the genius of a Napoleon.

BEFORE more could be said, the coroner's jury filed back into the room. Their verdict was simple; death from natural causes. Tension was broken. The case was ended, and the room began to empty.

I was looking about for Kathy when a hand caught my arm. The fingers gripped like iron. I turned, and was amazed when I found Miss Devry at my side. That claw of hers could hurt.

"Young man, I want to have a word with you," she said abruptly.

"You are very kind," I began. She cut me short.

"Fiddlesticks! You're a famous man. I know who you are. You know me. Now come along home with me. I want a word in private with you; I'll send you home later. And keep your mouth shut until we're in private. Peterson!" This to the secretary beside her. "Stay here and look after all details, and take a taxi home when you're through. Come along, Bodham."

I caught Kathy's eye. She flung me a smile of understanding, and a nod. Peterson flung me one sharp, lightning-swift look that stuck in my memory. Then I allowed Miss Devry to push off and made pretence to be escorting her; actually, she had me in tow like a child.

Now, I am not a child. My first impulse was to resent her manner very actively, but I repressed the impulse. In my experience, pliancy has won far more than self-assertion. I am none of your fictional sleuths with piercing gaze and a diabolic know-all brain. I am twenty-eight, average in size, brown hair and eyes and mustache and a big nose; as Bathsheba has said, I have a face like a bent elbow.

So I let Miss Devry propel me and said nothing. I was conscious of her tre-

mendous mental force, her personality, and I could sense a certain hostility. I am sensitive to such impressions, and they have served me well, as in the curious Philadelphia episode of the limping man, which turned me from legal study to that of criminology.

Outside, cameras clicked and newsmen vociferously demanded a statement. Miss Devry totally ignored them.

Chapter Three

THAT ride to the Devry estate up on the shoulder of the mountain was no pleasant one. I was introduced to Nathaniel III, who with his wife made a superbly colorless pair, and to their daughter, Mrs. Audrey, who put back her veil to display an arrogant, selfish face devoid of either beauty or grief.

Mrs. Devry maintained a monotonous sniffing which drove the old dowager to fury.

"For the love of heaven, Viola," she snapped, "save your tears to impress the public! You've let the boy gallop around like a maniac without wasting a thought on him—so at least be consistent."

Neither Devry nor his wife made any reply. Evidently these people had an acute disregard, perhaps even hatred, for one another.

Leaving the streets of the town, the big car cautiously negotiated the turns of a winding, climbing road. Broad sweeps of masonry and long retaining walls came into view. The house stood upon an enormous cut sliced into the sloping flank of the mountain itself.

We came out on a great slab of cool jade-green cement, at least an acre in extent. In the center was a spacious fountain and tiled lily pool, overhung by tall palms transplanted and set at varying angles. The house was at the back of this ledge, against the naked reddish granite of San Jacinto. In any other setting it would have seemed gargantuan; here it was dwarfed by the immensity of the mountain behind and above, and the outspread desert reaches below, for it had a view of the town and all the upper Valley beyond, across to the sandy hills that rimmed the horizon.

"Come along, Mr. Bodham." Utterly ignoring the others, Miss Devry led me into the house and straight to a front corner room whose balcony commanded all that glorious view. "This

is my own room, and when I'm here, thank God, nobody dares disturb me. Sit down, sit down!"

She settled herself in a chair beside a huge flat-topped desk, lit a cigarette, and inhaled thinly.

"All right, speak out," she commanded. "Why did you tell Morton the boy was murdered, and what does the position of the body mean? Out with it!"

With a start, I knew instantly that she had overheard my incautious utterance. She smiled grimly at my expression.

"Yes, I've ears like a cat, and a damned good thing it is, sometimes," she snapped. "Answer!"

I leaned back in my chair and helped myself to a cigarette.

"Don't go too fast, Miss Devry," I said quietly. "I'm not one of your family, kindly remember. I did not tell Dr. Morton the young man was murdered, though possibly this was the case. I merely suggested it. The thing is none of my business, and I've only a few fragments of fact on which to build."

"Trot out your fragments, then," she barked. "After all, you did pretty well with a few fragments in the Cushing case."

I regarded her with frank amazement.

"How did you hear of the Cushing case, Miss Devry? It was never made public. It was one of the few private cases I have ever handled, and was hushed up immediately my report was turned in."

"I hushed it up," she said calmly. "Your report was turned in to my agent. Cushing was general manager of the Sunbridge Mills, as you know. They form one of our sub-properties. And now, if you think you've sparred sufficiently for time to collect your thoughts, go ahead and answer my question. And don't lie."

I smoked for a deliberate moment, refusing to let her take command. I have a horror of snap judgments and ill-considered statements. While I have no more pride than the next man, I do, after all, have a reputation to sustain.

"I SUPPOSE you never heard of the White Lotus Society?" I then asked.

"Not to my knowledge."

"It's one of the numerous Chinese secret societies—not in this country, but in China and Malaya, where it has been suppressed. It has an elaborate system of signs and grips, not only for recognition but for general purposes. The posi-

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tion in which the body of Mr. Devry was found, is known as the Sign of Death."

"I'm glad it has some meaning," she observed with a rather gruesome matter-of-fact air, "other than the convulsions of an alcoholic fool. Go on."

"That position could not have been due to chance," I said, unhurried. "Chinese in this country know nothing of this society, as a rule. Either he was murdered and left lying there for someone like Dr. Morton to see—someone acquainted with such matters—or else he was found dead by someone who knew the sign, and who so arranged him, perhaps from some grimly fantastic whimsy. I take it he himself had no knowledge of China?"

"He had no knowledge of anything except his animal desires," she said flatly. "If—"

SHE checked herself and looked upward, past me, with such a glare of ferocity that I turned instinctively. Thus I had my first sight of Loren Andrey. He stood on the upper of the two steps leading down into the room, so that he seemed gigantic. In reality, he was no taller than I, a fraction under six feet. He must have been a handsome fellow naturally, but now his face was hot and dark, as though flushed with ill-temper; black heavy brows bristled above puffy eyes. I judged him to be in his early twenties. He wore pajamas and dressing-gown.

"Hello!" he said. "Didn't know you were here."

"Go on back to bed," said Miss Devry, in a tense, menacing voice.

He turned and walked out of the room. Then she spoke, as though more to herself than to me.

"Loren Andrey is one of those things that crawl out from under a flat stone and marry into the homes of the wealthy. Ugh! Well,"—and now she turned to me, herself again,—"do you actually think that Nat died quietly and that some waggish friend tied him up like a pretzel?"

"I don't know what to think, Miss Devry. The jester hardly waited around until morning!" And I went on to tell her how I had moved the arm from the breast, and how it had resumed its position before the preliminary inquest. At this, her black eyes fairly blazed with interest and a keen, intelligence. For the first time, she seemed entirely human.

"Good, Bodham, good!" she exclaimed. "Why should the arm have been replaced? Unless, as you suggested, the position of the body was meant as a signal for someone in the Morton household."

"That's the point. Dr. Morton seemed startled by my impulsive words. I'm to see him this evening."

She puffed at her cigarette. I noticed the apparent fragility of her bony hands, which in reality possessed astonishing strength. She spoke abruptly.

"If it was a sign, it was meant for Morton or that silly ass Jessop, his secretary. What do you think?"

I shrugged. "I don't know what to think. Why anyone should want to disturb either man with such a symbol is beyond me. Jessop, I recall, seemed startled when he saw the body. . . . No—I had already moved the arm. Morton, however, would be more apt to have recognized the sign."

"You seem rather honest, Bodham," she jerked out. "Regarding this position of the body—you think chance should be ruled out?"

"I can't assent thoughtlessly, Miss Devry. Chance has too often served me well. Yet, if you'd read Emerson, you must realize that Chance, so-called, follows some immutable law of mathematical sequence beyond our comprehension. There are other factors—"

"Never mind throwing up a smoke-screen. You simply don't want to commit yourself; I don't blame you a particle. You say that this Sign of Death is not well known?"

"It might be known to any student of Chinese symbolism, but only if he had dipped into the lore of Chinese secret societies. I suppose you're going to ask who might have done it. No use, Miss Devry! I don't know, I don't care, I don't want to bother about it. To me, this is less important than my own work."

"You may change your mind about that," she barked. "You were about to mention other factors. What are they?"

LEAVING my chair, I went over to the window, a huge sheet of plate glass that filled the entire wall except for the entrance to the balcony. Below us to the left nestled Pine Springs, like a child's toy village.

The winding Indio highway hugged the southern foothills. My eye followed it out toward the city limits. At this

distance, Morton's adobe house and walls blended with the desert sand, but my own white-painted cottage was distinct; close to it was a tiny splotch of red. I knew Bathsheba was at work on the rose-bushes, in her atrocious crimson slacks. Far on beyond, past the city limits, lay the Isle of Araby night-spot.

I BECKONED to Miss Devry, who rose spryly and joined me.

"The young man," I said, "left Araby, over yonder, and drove back toward Pine Springs, passing Morton's house on the way. He took Miss Wong there," and I pointed toward the town on the left. "When he left her he was apparently all right. Had he been stricken then, he would probably have made every effort to reach the nearest doctor. If he had come almost home here, before feeling an attack, he certainly would have come in and telephoned Dr. Morton. Thus there is no apparent reason why he should have driven out to Dr. Morton's house for medical attention. Do I make the point clear?"

"Quite. Suppose he drove out there for some other reason?" She vented a dry chuckle.

I gave her a look, and she had the grace to apologize, in her own way.

"Never mind, young man; I'm talking about Nat, not about Miss Morton. Where could he have been going in that direction, otherwise?"

I shrugged her question off. "Since the Indio road leads into a transcontinental highway, he might have been going to Skaneateles, for all I know or care. His family should know better than I. After all, my interest is transient and my knowledge scanty."

She took my arm and cackled out a laugh of real amusement.

"Now you're huffing and puffing, but you sha'n't blow my house down, Bodham! We know he didn't go back to Araby, but did he go farther? Is there any other night-spot in that direction?"

"None, I think. There is, of course, the Kubla Club, five miles out—the big swank gambling-place," I rejoined thoughtfully. "Suppose he headed for there? That would explain it. Let us say he came back here, then started for the Kubla!"

"You're ahead of me," she cut in. "What makes you think he came back here at all?"

"His clothes. They were absolutely fresh and new; not a wrinkle in them.

He was not at the Araby all evening in those clothes, on a warm night, dancing and dining. So he must have come back here, changed, then started to visit the Kubla."

"Now I'm one ahead of you. He did not come back here at all!"

"How do you know?" I demanded.

"Do you remember passing the little porter's lodge by the gate? The only way to get here! A night guard sleeps there; the gate's closed at night. The guard has told me that Nat did not come in all night."

I glanced at my watch. "Good Lord! It's noon and past. I must be off."

"Not yet," she said calmly, and looked me in the eye. "You don't give a damn for me and my money, do you?"

"If you want to put it that way," I said, and smiled to relieve the words.

"You'd be surprised to know how much I like it too. Now, Bodham, be frank: You can use money. Every man can, no matter how much he has. Plenty in my own family would sell their own souls to get more money. So be frank, and don't hedge any further. You believe that Nat's death involves both mystery and what the detective stories call foul play."

"I've no definite reason—"

"Don't hedge," she broke in. "Reason or not, you so believe. If that should be true, I want to cover it up, keep it concealed, have no publicity."

"That's impossible, if there's an autopsy and the death proves not natural."

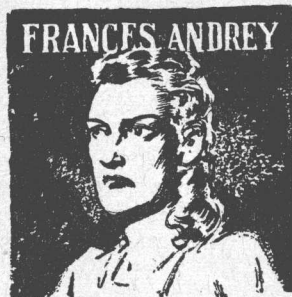
"Then damn the publicity!" She almost screamed the words, in a blaze. "Whoever killed that boy goes to the chair, by God! Worthless he may have been, but he bore the name of Devry, and nobody murders a Devry with impunity while I'm alive!"

"Don't jump at conclusions," I retorted. "If it was murder, let the police handle it. I don't want any—"

AGAIN she cut me short, and most astonishingly. She came close to me, putting one hand on my arm. In a flash, she had changed completely. For one moment I had the curious experience of sensing what this flaming woman must have been in her youth, as all her undimmed spirit leaped out at me in passionate appeal. Her voice was gentle now, incredibly gentle and tender.

"Bodham, there's only one person in this world whom I respect and love—never mind who it is. Something you've

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said makes me afraid for this person, not for myself. I need help dreadfully; not police help, but yours. I know your reputation. I know what you can do. Name your own fee. Make it large, what you like; but help me, help me!"

I was shaken by her sudden deep sincerity and earnestness.

"You really think that if this were murder, it might be repeated?"

"Yes," she said, her black, alive eyes intent on me. "Yes. Nat was not important enough to be hated by anyone; but others *are* important. Will you help me?"

I came to an abrupt decision. "Very well. Suppose you arrange for a private autopsy at Pretona, immediately. If it shows death was not from natural causes, I'll take the case."

She swung around, stepped to the desk, and took up a house telephone.

"Send Mr. Devry here immediately," she ordered.

She picked up a cigarette, lit it, and had barely put down the match when the somewhat futile and hesitant Nathaniel III appeared in the doorway.

"Nathaniel! Drive at once to Pretona. See the undertaker, or mortician as they're called nowadays, who has charge of the body. Give him a hundred dollars. Tell him to have a doctor perform an autopsy at once for me, and to bring the report here by tonight sure. I'll pay the doctor, of course. It's imperative that you handle the matter—"

"But Ednal!" broke in Devry, his jaw falling. "I— This is not necessary—"

"For God's sake, stop blatting at me!" she flung out. "You must go yourself to give the necessary permission. Go! And have the spare car brought around for Mr. Bodham."

Devry left, and she turned to me.

"I'll let you know as soon as I get the report. Remember, it's a promise you made me! Anything else you want?"

"Yes," I rejoined, taking out pencil and paper. "I don't like reticence.

You've admitted a fear for certain relatives whom you do love. Now, if you please, give me the names of all the family here—I'm a bit confused on this Andrey person. Tell me every one who's in this house, except the servants."

An impish glee came into her eyes; then and there, as I now know, she resolved to withhold one or two secrets from me. At the moment, I thought she was merely enjoying her own bile, for she sketched every member of her immediate family in pure vitriol.

"Nathaniel III: son of a rascally father, ineffective, wishy-washy, amounts to nothing. His wife Viola is a nonentity. They're a well-paired couple. Their son Nat is dead. Their daughter Frances you met on the way here. She married Loren Andrey. She's like her mother, colorless and selfish and weak. Loren Andrey is handsome in a way, but devilish weak also—a goodly apple, rotten at the core, as Marlowe wrote."

"Shakespeare," I corrected her.

She cackled gleefully. "Wanted to see if you were listening! There are distant relatives, no others close. My secretary, Peterson, lives in the house, of course. He's a sly fellow; great ability, but uses what he gets from me to play the market. Always wins, too. Small sums only, so I say nothing. It contents him, and he's actually of great value to me. Works off his slyness in little things, and can be trusted in big things."

THIS was a new sort of philosophy to me, but I did not argue the point. There was nothing more she could or would tell me regarding the family, so I took my leave, shook hands, and went out to the waiting car.

I was rolled home in great style, but scarcely appreciated the novelty. This confounded case had begun to grip me. I had let myself go into it a little with Miss Devry, and had fallen into her ambush; now I found myself waylaid by unwelcome mystery.

I resented this. It threatened to interfere seriously with my immediate ambitions. I had to get my notes into shape, my book readied; it was to serve as the thesis for my Ph. D. Once I had that degree, I was in line for an excellent position at a large Eastern university—I could even consider marriage. So I wanted no cases to investigate now.

UPON reaching home I kept nothing back from Bathsheba. She has for long had full charge of the family exchequer. Now, for the first time, she confided that our trip abroad and the vagaries of the stock-market had played the devil with our finances.

"I haven't wanted you to be troubled, Tom," she concluded. "You thought we had plenty of money; but money makes its own home, my good man! Let me strongly urge that you become strictly commercial, take up Miss Devry's offer, and charge her plenty, because our funds really are getting low. And when I say low, I mean *l-o-w*."

"I'll not put in my time on futile mystery," I compromised weakly. "If an autopsy shows there was murder, well and good; I'll take the case. Let it go at that. Going out this afternoon?"

She was. She and Kathy Morton were bound for the Tennis Club to watch the matches. I had hoped to go also, tennis being my great obsession in the world of sport and my sole exercise, but I had other things on hand now.

Since recognizing Devry's posture as the White Lotus Sign of Death, I had been eager to get at my notes. Now I plunged into them, and for three solid hours worked over them. The result was failure; I found absolutely nothing having any bearing on this case.

Doorstep or threshold—death at night—death on the doorstep—I exhausted the arcana of the White Lotus, seeking some connection with this affair. I found only one thing, but this was highly important. The right hand should have been clenched on the heart. When I found the body, the hand had been relaxed and open. Whoever had left the body there, had neglected to clench that hand.

The deduction was clear. Devry's body had been arranged by someone who knew the Sign of Death inexactly, probably at secondhand. This immediately ruled out any Chinese source.

I was still at this task when Bathsheba summoned me to a cold supper,

which I abominate. However, she was in a gale of high spirits combined with a certain triumphant tenseness, which I have long learned to associate with some exultant inner knowledge. She was about to tell me something. And strange as it may appear, this pretty butterfly sister of mine had often turned up some surprisingly valuable bit of information.

"Now, darling," she began, "just draw up your bib and pull down your tucker, and don't make faces at the food. It's cold, but it's good. When you hear what I've found out, you may be glad that I wasn't slaving in the kitchen all afternoon."

I waited with resignation. Bathsheba's method of imparting her knowledge is rather exasperating. She rattled on about the tennis matches while I ate; and by the time I lit a cigarette over my coffee, she was telling how she and Kathy had separated after the matches to do some errands, agreeing to meet at the post office. Since Pine Springs has no postmen, the inhabitants call twice a day at the post office, for their mail.

"And after I ordered the groceries I dropped in at the Bamboo Bar for a cocktail. Who do you think I saw sitting there, in a dark corner?"

"Mussolini," I ventured, dumping my ashes.

"Tom! Don't use your saucer for ashes. Here's an ash-tray. Guess again. Who?"

"Only Mussolini would justify your build-up, Basy. I'll bite. Who?"

"Jessop!" she intoned dramatically.

I laughed. "Oh! So the secondhand Jessop is a secret drinker, eh?"

"He was not drinking." Bathsheba loosed her bomb. "He was carrying the torch. I could feel the flames the length of the bar. And you could have picked me up with a whisk-broom! Think of Jessop having a girl friend! Why, it just isn't possible!"

"My dear Bathsheba," I said kindly, "although I've been a good brother to you for years, it's evident I haven't been a good mother. The facts of life are still hidden from you. Believe me, although Jessop may be secretary to a Chinese scholar, spray his throat before retiring and look like a startled frog, there may still burn, deep down inside, a flame perhaps less pure than hot. At such times it's not ladylike for you to—"

"But, Tom! I'm serious!" she exclaimed. "When such a man as that drags a girl—I didn't know her, incident-

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tally—into a bar for cocktails, when he should be browsing over his typewriter, it deserves investigation.”

“So does Dr. Morton, with whom I have a date,” I said, glancing at my watch. Much to her dismayed disgust, I walked out on her protests.

I dressed carefully, and not for Dr. Morton’s benefit either, and started out. I was at the gate when Bathsheba summoned me back to answer the telephone. Miss Devry was on the wire.

“Mr. Bodham? I must see you at once,” she commanded.

“Sorry,” I rejoined. “It’s impossible. I have an engagement with Dr. Morton. Would the morning do as well?”

“Yes. I’ll send the car for you at eight. Will that suit you?”

“I’ll drive myself, thanks. What’s up? You haven’t had any report yet?”

“Yes, I have,” she barked. “And I hold you to your promise. You were right about that investment. The stock was very badly watered.”

Upon this, she hung up abruptly.

The meaning of this enigma struck me like a blow. She had been too cautious to speak plainly over the phone, of course. She held me to my promise; therefore the autopsy had revealed murder. The stock very badly watered. . . .

Why, of course! Impossible as such a thing was in the desert, Nathaniel Devry IV had been drowned.

Chapter Four

WHEN Kathy Morton opened the door, I kissed her. It was just one of those things.

What the consequences would have been, had not Dr. Morton opened his study door at that moment, must remain in doubt. I was thunderstruck at my own audacity. Such a thing had never before happened—at least, where Kathy was concerned. My confusion at the old Doctor’s appearance quite prevented me from noting her reaction; however, Morton had seen nothing.

“Come in, Bodham, come in,” he exclaimed with energy. “I was expecting you.”

He was puffing furiously at one of the thin brown paper cigarettes he was constantly rolling. I entered the study; he banged the door shut after me and waved me to a chair; then he began a nervous pacing up and down past his long flat-topped table-desk.

I was rather unhappy over the news I bore. He had certified to natural death in a case of murder; I reflected that it would upset him terribly, and shrank from informing him.

“BODHAM,” he began, “over and above my acute dismay at the discovery of that poor lad dead at my door the other morning, I was troubled by something that eluded me. Not until you spoke to me this morning, did I become conscious of what it was—that damnable symbol!”

“Then you didn’t recognize it?”

“No. And now I don’t see how I failed to perceive its significance.” He dropped wearily into a chair and pressed his cigarette into an ash-tray. “And I have—I have the feeling that I may have made a ghastly error, Bodham. Was my diagnosis correct, after all? I’ve almost determined to go to the police with this. The other matters were not so important, but this—this means the threat—” His voice trailed off into silence.

“What other matters?” I asked. “If you’ve been threatened—”

“No, no, you misunderstood my words,” he broke in.

I had not misunderstood them. However, since he had broken the ice himself, I determined to speak.

“You were right in suspecting an error in your diagnosis, Morton. The boy was killed.”

His head jerked up. “How do you know?”

I briefly ran over events since the inquest, concluding with Miss Devry’s message about the post-mortem. He sat silent, as though overwhelmed by what I said; then he began to roll another of his brown-paper cigarettes.

“I’m really glad that you’ve brought all this to a focal point,” he said slowly. “Do you think it will become public?”

“Yes. Murder is a crime against the State. If this turns out to be murder, as I assume it will, then it’ll be a scandal-sheet holiday. Don’t worry about your mistaken diagnosis. Dr. Gregg, a skilled police surgeon, did not doubt you were right. No one would think of tapping the lungs in such an examination, here in the desert. And drowning leaves no exterior evidence after the suffused—”

He cut me short. “Drowning! Do you realize what you’re saying? Drowning, here in the desert—yes, it’s conceivable: He might have drowned acci-

dentially in a swimming-pool . . . but his clothes were dry, Bodham!"

"More," I added, thinking aloud, "they had not been immersed. They were brand-new and fresh. They certainly had not been worn all evening. If he went home and changed into them, then he did not drown in a swimming-pool. If he drowned first, he would not have gone home and changed."

"YOU'RE being led into fantastic and absurd realms," he cut in with abrupt decision. "Utterly absurd, Bodham, if you'll pardon me. Do you know the real meaning of the Sign of Death as used by Chinese criminal societies?"

"That the dead person had been assassinated by the society."

"Not in the least," he said bleakly. "Or very rarely. It's a warning of death to come."

I smiled. "You mean one corpse would be a warning that another corpse was coming?"

"Certainly not. The mere suggestion shows to what fantastic lengths you've gone," he said with an unwonted asperity. "Either a lay figure was used, or a painted figure of a man in that position. The doll or painting was sent the prospective victim as warning of death to follow."

I was forced to accept his dictum. After all, the Singapore authorities had not covered these secret signs with too great exactitude; also, the sign as used in Malaya might well fail to correspond with the same sign as used in China.

"Do you mean," I asked, "that you think this secret society is threatening you?"

"That would be utterly fantastic," he said, and sighed. "I don't know what to think. Kathy might be the one threatened."

"And that," I retorted, "is more utterly fantastic than any fool proposition I might make! Come, Morton; I believe you're evading me. You've already mentioned other matters and threats. Granted that what you say is possible, that you might be threatened—don't you think you should confide in me, and help me to protect you? After all, Doctor, I think a great deal of you and of Kathy, whose happiness is involved."

"I believe you do, my boy," he said gently, and regarded me with that ineffable, saintly smile which expressed such tenderness and beauty of spirit. "And I'm glad you do. Yes; I confess

frankly that I'm evading you, and shall continue to keep my own counsel unless forced to speak. I know nothing that would help solve the mystery of Devry's death, believe me. I have no more idea than you, who killed him. Yet it was probable that the Sign of Death, the warning, was meant for me."

I could not fathom this paradox. I ran my eye around the room. Books and papers were heaped everywhere, but in exceedingly orderly fashion. On the book-shelves were priceless Chinese porcelains and bronzes; against one wall was a case filled with manuscripts, neat rolls fastened with ivory pins. Morton followed my gaze and my thoughts as well, for he shook his head slowly.

"No, Bodham, there's nothing here to justify such a warning," he said with finality.

"So you refuse to trust me," I said bluntly. "If you're afraid of anything," I went on, "why not move Jessop into the house? You have plenty of room here."

He broke into a little laugh. "Jessop's an old woman, Bodham. Andreas, the Filipino houseboy, sleeps in the room just off the kitchen; but he's no use in a pinch."

"Didn't Jessop, at the inquest, mention some chap who does typing for you?"

"Frank Thompson, yes. A good boy; graduated from college last year and has a job here. Does my typing of nights. Ambitious, hard-working young fellow. Known him for years."

"Then why not get him here? Give him a room, and you'll have a guard right in the house. I'll lend you a gun; no permit will be needed for that precaution. This way, Kathy'd be spared any alarm, too."

"Not bad, not bad," he agreed with a nod, and reached for the telephone.

THOMPSON, I gathered, required little urging. He promised to be there in ten minutes with his bag, and Dr. Morton hung up with evident satisfaction.

"Splendid suggestion, Bodham; I admit it relieves my mind. Suppose we have a glass of sherry—eh? A little earlier than my usual libation, but Kathy won't object, since you're sharing it. She'll join us, in fact."

He went to the door and called her name. I spoke swiftly:

"Before she comes, tell me quickly—have your researches brought out any-

thing in the background of the Devry family itself that might account for the death of young Devry?"

He stared at me now, as he had that morning when I mentioned the Sign of Death.

"What—what on earth gave you that idea, Bodham?"

"Come, Doctor, I'm tired of evasions," I said impatiently. "You know the appalling record of crimes due to family hatred. On the surface, the Devry family would seem fertile ground for seeds of violence. The old dowager treats the others with contempt and dislike, and they're not a lovely crowd, by a long shot. You're working on a period that covers the activities of the original Devry in China, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes," he murmured abstractedly. "You know, I was in China myself for many years, as a physician. No, Bodham, no; there's no such incident as you seem to suspect. Nothing worse than can be told of any great mercantile family. Nothing to be remotely connected with the death of this young Nathaniel Devry."

"There's no reason to suspect that he was killed by the White Lotus people in revenge for some ancient injury done them by a Devry?"

"No, none whatever." He seemed uneasy and anxious, to my eye.

"Very well, then that's out, Doctor. We must assume that the Sign was meant for you, I suppose. Aren't you going to reconsider your decision about trusting me?"

He turned to me with a pathetically bewildered air, backed by grave dignity.

"Believe me, Bodham, I should like to do so; yet I'm not sure—not sure. There are so many queer things, unbelievable things!" He seemed to be talking as much to himself as to me. "The letter with the stamp that was never issued—the antique bronze coin—no, Bodham, I implore you, don't press me. Not now, not now! I may decide to confide in you, but—"

"I'm not trying to worry you, Doctor, but to get help in this affair," I said quietly. "Let decision wait, by all means. Have you any family tree of the House of Devry? I haven't read up on the clan, and find it difficult to establish the old lady. How does she come to head the family, while the Nathaniels are running around footloose?"

At this, his eyes lit up. He produced from his huge flat-topped desk a neatly



inked genealogical chart, and spread it out for me. His long, delicate forefinger traced the emergence of Edna Devry as he talked.

"One of the most remarkable women alive, Bodham! A combination of Semiramis, Hetty Green and Cleopatra—in their purely constructive angles, you understand. Her father, the original Nathaniel Devry, was born in 1808. He went out to China at fifteen as an apprentice writer or clerk, and before he was thirty, he had a fleet of clipper ships in the tea and silk trade. But never mind all that."

His finger traced the lines, paused.

"Here! He married in 1860; he was then fifty-two. Edna Devry, your old dowager, was born the following year, on March fourth. To celebrate the fact, Devry sent to the incoming President, Abraham Lincoln, who was inaugurated on that day, a magnificent ivory chest filled with fine teas and rolls of silk."

HE glowed with the enthusiasm of the research scholar as he detailed the story of the Devry empire. In a day when women were not supposed to dabble in business, Edna Devry had devoted herself utterly to this empire. I gathered that a love-affair had gone wrong or something of the sort, for Morton was vague about some things; however, she was evidently the only child of the original Nathaniel Devry who had much gumption. One sister had died. Another had married a man who took the name of Devry—he became Nathaniel II. A brother had existed; but from the dates on the chart, I took for granted that he had died as a young man.

The first Devry had died. Nathaniel II took over—and according to Dr. Morton, Edna fought him until he died suddenly. The whole inheritance had been split up. She, beginning with her own share, built anew to restore the unity of the whole. As Morton put it, she gripped and gripped with claws of

steel, until across the years she had drawn back all the severed portions.

"And now, today, she has everything in her own hands," he concluded. "She is the House of Devry. The others have absolutely nothing. Newspapers, mills, ships, real property—everything is hers alone."

I concluded that Morton was mistaken in this, but let it wait until some points about that family tree were cleared up. I had started to question him about certain things that drew my attention, when the door-bell began to ring. It rang again and again, accompanied by an angry *bang-bang*, as though someone were kicking at the front door.

Morton straightened up. "Kathy!" he called sharply at the open door into the hall. "Andreas! No, it's his night off. Kathy! For heaven's sake, answer the bell, child!"

There was no response. No sound of footsteps came from the hall. Suddenly I realized that Kathy had not answered the previous call, when Morton had spoken of a glass of sherry.

"She must have gone out," I said. "Permit me, Doctor. I'll answer the door."

I went out to the front door and swung it open, hearing an imperative call from outside as I did so. A man stood there; in his arms, with blood streaming from her head, was Kathy.

Chapter Five

THE man at the door was the typist Frank Thompson. "I—I found her outside," he stammered excitedly.

I took Kathy's senseless body from him and carried her to the study. Dr. Morton had appeared; calmly, quietly, with a dreadful stillness, he directed me into a room beyond, which had been his consultation-room in earlier days.

Here I placed Kathy on a leather couch, perceived that the blood came from a wound above the right ear, and then was pushed aside. Dr. Morton took charge with a cool poise and deft skill eloquent of the inner man, giving me and Thompson curt directions; we brought all he required, and stood by while he cleansed the wound and dressed it, pausing now and again to use his stethoscope. The hurt was a cut sufficient to bring blood in quantities, but I was thankful to see a swelling, which roughly indicated there was no fracture.

"Can't be certain," Morton said to our questions, examining the hurt with his delicate fingers. "Thompson, will you have the kindness to telephone Dr. Gregg and ask him to get here immediately? The telephone's in the hall."

Thompson disappeared.

"Why do you want Gregg?" I demanded. "Anything alarming in her condition?"

"No," he said. "On the safe side—professional habit."

HIS poise was beginning to shatter. The shock had hit him terrifically. He lowered himself into a chair and sat holding Kathy's wrist, fingers on pulse, eyes gripped to her face with frantic tenseness. His lips were moving, and disjointed words, little more than gasping whispers, came from him.

"Singleton, the dastardly scoundrel—threats—would he harm her, then—"

His voice trailed away; but those words left me in the icy grip of conjecture. I sat motionless, thankful that he had forgotten my presence.

Until now I had taken for granted that Kathy had suffered some accident. His words hinted at far more, especially when coupled with his fears that the Sign of Death was meant as a warning. Some man named Singleton, then!

"The old man knows—definitely. I must make him tell me!" I thought in swift alarm. Thompson came in at this instant, with word that Gregg had been located in the movie theater, and would be right out. I stood up.

"Come along, Thompson. Outside. Show me where you found her."

As we passed through the study, I snatched up a flashlight from the Doctor's big desk, and Thompson accompanied me outside. My first thought was to ask in what position he had found her; he dispelled any significance with a word. She had been in a crumpled heap, face down. There was no Sign of Death here, thank heaven!

He showed me the spot, on the path around the corner of the house. As he came up the front walk, he had seen her lying in a patch of moonlight. He had seen no one else, no figure moving among the oleanders and shrubs. Closely clipped rye grass covered the ground; neither this nor the graveled path revealed anything at all to my beam of light. The path ran closely along the side of the house. A few feet distant, toward the wall of the grounds, was a

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large clump of dwarf bamboos. As the ray swept their base, something was revealed.

This was a small pot of glazed pottery, containing a box plant, lying on the ground. I examined it and found it cracked badly, but not broken. The plant was partly pulled out of its surrounding earth. I found it loose, but held in the pot by a mass of roots. Caught by the plant stem and swung, it would have been a deadly weapon.

"Look—look!" exclaimed Thompson. "There's where the pot came from!"

In the wall, about three feet from the ground, was a small arched embrasure. Another beyond the study window contained a similar potted plant. This one was empty. Bringing the fallen pot to it, I found that the pot fitted exactly into the circular ring of dust in the niche. So much for that. Ten feet along the wall was the second window of the Doctor's study. I walked down to it, found it open, and verified the fact that these two windows opened from the study. Conscious that it was a crime and no accident, I realized that with only wire screens and Venetian blinds to interfere, anyone standing here could have heard every word uttered by Morton and me.

This instantly shed light upon the happening. Kathy had been outside the house,—for whatever reason,—had seen someone standing beside the window here—the spot was in moonlight; and upon investigating the intruder, she had been struck down. The springy grass close to the wall revealed nothing.

It was safe to assume that whoever had stood by the wall had pressed closely against the adobe bricks, so I turned my ray on the edge of the wall beside the window. The adobe was friable and scratched easily, revealing a deeper color beneath the gray top surface. Almost at once the ray picked up two deep scratches, waist high, as though made by a person turning hastily from his eavesdropping.

Swift exultation seized me; here was visual evidence of the criminal who had twice struck at the same point, and it restored my confidence. Here was something for me to do with, at last!

A CAR came roaring up, halting outside. I turned to Thompson.

"There's Gregg. Bring him inside, will you? Then run across the street to my house, like a good chap, and fetch my sister. Tell her what's hap-

pened, and ask her to come over at once."

Thompson departed. I lit a cigarette and settled down with my back against the wall. My first shock and anxiety for Kathy had been dissipated by the knowledge that she was not seriously injured. The important thing now was to unearth her assailant, and to lose no time about it. I meant to have the truth out of Morton, about Singleton and the threats; meantime, granting that this assault was linked up with the murder of young Devry, I had best get about my own business, which meant checking over the few known facts.

YOUNG Devry had been drowned, either by accident or by design; improbable, yet true. He was left on Morton's doorstep wearing fresh clothes; whence had they come? He was not drowned in those clothes, assuredly.

Fresh clothes. Fresh rope-soled sandals, practically unworn. The car devoid of any clue—was it too late now to search for fingerprints? If it had been murder, I might assume the killer far too clever to leave fingerprints, since such a carefully thought-out crime planned to look like natural death argued no fool behind it. The motive of the killing must have been far more than a mere desire to threaten Morton.

That Mercedes car stuck in my mind. I thought back to the blob of mud under the wheel on the floor. Good Lord! Mud! That in itself was practically impossible in Pine Springs. Everything here was desert sand; even garden soil, as I knew to my cost, had to be brought from elsewhere.

Mud, then! And a most important clue. There had been no mud on Devry's rope-soled sandals. I had a clear mental photograph of the body as it lay there. No mud on the sandals. Therefore the car had been driven here by the murderer, not by Devry—probably driven direct from the scene of the murder. For we must assume murder.

Singleton? Name him so, in default of a better, until I got the truth out of Dr. Morton. He was someone who knew what the Sign of Death would signify to Morton. Searching for a person who had this knowledge would be absurd; anyone might have it—Jessop, from his secretarial work—or Rose Wong.

But one thing did seem logical—that the murderer had returned here tonight to listen at Morton's window. He must

have known, therefore, of my appointment with Morton.

Suddenly, I recalled Edna Devry's oblique way of telling about the post-mortem, as though fearing to be overheard, perhaps by members of her own household. A possibility there! Had Loren Andrey or some other member of that household been listening, and heard me tell her of the appointment?

Or Jessop. It was not hard to picture him slinking along the path from his quarters in the rear and pausing to eavesdrop. I must find out where he had been this evening. With his spare stooped form, his ridiculous small head and birdlike ways, he fitted in as an eavesdropper. Perhaps; but not as a murderer, I was reluctantly forced to admit.

With a sigh at the conflicting reflections, I came to my feet. Using the flashlight, I examined the scratches in the corner brick by the window.

They seemed to have been made by the sidewise pull of something with two pronounced protuberances; the adobe between the two heavy scratches was also lightly scraped. Some one object had evidently made this mark.

I placed myself against the wall; the mark was waist-high. There was the answer—a belt-buckle! Not Jessop's, for I was much taller than he. No ordinary belt-buckle, either. Into my mind flashed a mental picture of the belts so commonly affected by the Pine Springs "dude" cowboys, the ornate silver-bossed belts of imitation or real Indian make. Such a buckle, with its silver or turquoise studs, had made this mark. Not easy to trace, of course; but the buckle would keep microscopic adobe evidence of having made this scratch.

SOMEWHAT cheered by this definite clue, I walked to the rear of the grounds. My light showed a frame structure, the abode of Jessop. It was quite dark, and my knock brought no response. The door was locked to my hand, and this was a trifle surprising. Crime being a rarity in Pine Springs, doors are seldom or never locked.

Reflecting that a look around the quarters of the repulsive little Jessop might well reveal some curious things, I turned away and hurried back to the front of the house. Bathsheba's voice had reached me from the road. I found her coming up the walk with Thompson, and we passed into the house together.

From the smiles with which Morton and Gregg welcomed us, I knew all was well with Kathy.

"She's just come around; the wound is superficial, and she'll be fit as a fiddle in the morning," Dr. Morton said, rather optimistically. "Good evening, Miss Bodham. I know Kathy will be glad to see you. She's in her room. Ah, Thompson! Come along, my boy, and I'll install you. Back in a moment, Gregg."

I TURNED to the local physician. "Did Kathy know who or what hit her, Gregg?"

He nodded. "She heard something, went outside, saw a man's figure around at the side. She called out; next thing she knew, he was rushing at her. She doesn't know what hit her—he must have acted quickly. No description, except a hat pulled over his face. A stranger, quite tall. Morton doesn't want me to get the police in. I'll treat it as an accident, eh?"

I assented, and told him what the weapon had been. He whistled softly.

"Apparently a bungling job; a glancing blow. With such a weapon in the right hands, Mr. Bodham, we'd have a hospital case at least. Well, don't hesitate to phone me if any complications ensue, though I don't think they will."

He departed, Morton joining us and seeing him to the door. Thompson, who had left his car at the gate, went after his bag. Morton and I retired to the study, and the old physician produced glasses and decanter of brandy.

"You were looking around outside?" he asked. I nodded, and told of my findings. "And by the way," I added, "where's your secretary this evening?"

"Jessop? Oh, on Andreas' night off, Jessop goes into town for dinner and takes in a movie. Kathy and I snack alone. Jessop should be back by this time. Poor old fellow, he'll be sick over this; he adores Kathy. He's been with me since she was six or seven years old."

Thompson, having brought in his bag, came into the study and stood staring at us. He was a square-cut young man, a good clean type, nothing ornate.

"I never think of things at the right time," he observed bumblingly. "I'll bet a dollar I saw the car that fellow drove away in!"

"What fellow?" I demanded

"The one who hit Miss Morton. As I was on my way here, by the turn of the road leading out from town, Nat Dev-

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ry's Mercedes passed me, going for town like hell."

I regarded him skeptically. Devry's car, I knew, had been detained by the police at the Plaza garage until the inquest should be over; was probably still there.

"You're a remarkable person, Thompson," I said dryly, "if you can tell anything about an approaching car at night. That is, unless its headlights were out and yours were on."

"His were on all right, Mr. Bodham. I knew it by the cut-out, and got a flash of the car as it passed me. Devry had a cut-out on his exhaust and damn the cops! This Mercedes has a peculiar deep throaty roar; I'd know it anywhere."

Having resolved to corner Morton here and now, I seized the opportunity to get rid of Thompson. Besides, he might get information of value.

"Your news may be important," I said. "I wish you'd do something for us. Drive in to the Plaza garage now, and see if the Mercedes is there. If it is, see whether anyone took it out tonight. Do you mind?"

Far from it. He was delighted, and departed promptly. Dr. Morton regarded me frowningly.

"Even if it were the Mercedes," he commented logically, "need it have been driven by the man who hit Kathy? Or has the car some significance that I don't know?"

"Your argument is right," I admitted. "I wanted to get Thompson away so I could ask you a few questions, Doctor."

He stirred uneasily. Before he could voice any protest, I hurried on:

"What you said earlier this evening, and your mutterings about threats and someone named Singleton," I let drive inexorably, "make me positive that you know more than you've told me. Have you any idea who might have been listening at this window tonight?"

"Of course not," he began. "It's as mysterious to me as it is—"

"Then I not only urge but demand that you give me all the information possible," I cut in. "If the position of Devry's body was meant as a warning, as you say it was, then I must know the whole thing. For example—who's Singleton?"

For a long moment he stared at me. At last a sigh broke from him and he came to his feet.

"Bodham, I don't know who Singleton is," he said in a helpless and infinitely pathetic way. He went to a little cannonball safe in the far corner of the study, pulled open the door, and came back with a small tin dispatch-box. He placed it on the desk and sat down wearily.

"I don't know. I'm not even certain that he has anything to do with these terrible things. I muttered the name, yes; for the past five years the fear of Singleton has grown and increased in my heart. Just as his diabolic brain intended!"

With a key worn on his watch-chain, he opened the tin dispatch-box.

"YOU'VE never seen the man? You don't know who he is?" I asked incredulously.

"No. He has communicated with me only by letter or telephone. I have his letters here, and memoranda of the telephone conversations, except for the first few."

"Do you mean, sir," I asked sympathetically, "that—well, blackmail?"

He paused, and pursed up his lips.

"If so, it's the most curious sort of blackmail I ever heard of, Bodham. As you know, I'm devoting the last years of my life to finishing my 'Economic America in China.' The field is tremendous. I've already issued two volumes; Jessop and I are now completing the third and fourth, and there'll be three to come. A detailed survey of American business enterprise in China, from the earliest days of the tea trade, is more compre-

hensive a subject than most people would recognize.

"This Singleton," he went on in his gentle way, "is a scholar of no mean ability. He has sent me invaluable information for the book. Also, he sends me another sort of information, insisting that I incorporate it. I cannot possibly do so. After all, my work is an economic survey, not a compendium of muck-raking."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "He wants you to publish scandalous information? Is the stuff true?"

"Yes—to both questions," Morton rejoined. "Whoever Singleton is, he has amazing sources of information. I have gone to considerable trouble to verify some of his statements. More, the man is a scholar. His very threats are astonishing things."

"One minute, please," I intervened. "Does this scandalous information have any one focal point, or is it general-aimed at American business methods in the Orient?"

"All of it," said Morton, drawing a deep breath, "concerns the Devry family."

This was a facer. "Then could he be one of the family?"

"Not at all, in my opinion," Morton said, so positively that I tried a fresh tack.

"Threats, eh? What can he threaten you with?"

"Everything imaginable, from lawsuits to physical violence. At first I took it all seriously. Later, as year after year nothing happened, I put him down as a crank, and tried to forget him. If I—"

"Wait, please!" I exclaimed swiftly. "This very fact, Doctor, may be of the greatest importance in revealing his identity. Are you sure none of Singleton's threats materialized?"

"Absolutely none, at least until recently. His communications are irregular; sometimes nothing comes for six months; sometimes several come at once. Always the same insistence, always some threat; usually a vaguely hinted and indefinite threat couched in some curious fashion. They are all here—you may inspect them for yourself. I believe your appeal was well founded, and I shall tell you all I know."

HE handed me the tin box as he spoke and I glanced through it. Here were typed sheets and photostats, documents, engravings, legal papers, a little packet of letters.

"Only recently, you say?" I glanced up sharply. "Then one threat did bear fruit?"

"I fear so." He took a folded paper from a desk drawer. "I had been studying this only today; the envelope is lost. It came two days after my last telephone talk with Singleton. It speaks for itself, though I am frankly puzzled by the coin."

The folded paper, when opened, showed a large bronze antique coin glued in the center; it was otherwise quite blank. With it was a slip of paper with a line of typing:

"Death will be laid on your doorstep."

MORTON leaned over and took a letter from the top of the pile in the dispatch box.

"This had come, just previously—I think a week before. It was posted at New Orleans, as you'll note, in September. It came, then the telephone call, then this note with the coin—and last, the murder of Devry."

"Devry was hardly murdered merely to serve as a warning," I said.

Morton touched the letter in my hand. He had a vague, bewildered air.

"I don't know, Bodham. Look at this letter, sent through the mail with a stamp that was never issued! As though the man were impressing me with his infernal ability in every way! It threatens me with death unless my fourth volume shall contain the material he wants published. . . . I won't do it; nothing shall make me do it!"

His voice died off into helpless perplexity. I laid aside the letter he indicated, whose stamp meant nothing to me, and the paper on which the coin was glued. Then Morton went on again:

"That devil seemed to know all about my work, right from the start. He knew I was not including his material in my second volume or in my third. He insisted that it be included in my fourth, on which I am now working. He threatened me with death before November first, unless it were so included. November is only three weeks away. You see? This time he means business."

Again he forgot me, and rolled a cigarette with uncertain fingers. I glanced at the little packet of letters, which were in their envelopes. Curiously, they had come from all over the world. A singular thing caught my eye and I looked more closely. Three had come from Cairo, from Oslo in Norway, and from Buenos

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Aires; the postmarks were respectively dated September 12th, September 23rd, and September 15th—all 1938! I looked at them again, greatly astonished. That they could have been posted by the same person was impossible. Yet they were all addressed in the same typescript.

Others of the letters, several of them, had come from Shanghai or Peiping during the year 1936. It was only by a happy chance that I noted these things, for I made no careful examination of the letters at the moment.

Among the other papers were several antiquated receipts for opium from the factory at Maçao; each bore the English notation "*Bill as molasses,*" and signed with the flourished initials "N. D. II."

"Opium-running, eh?" I commented. "The usual dynasty of wealth doesn't run to seed until the third or fourth generation."

"True," Morton agreed dully. "The moral fabric of the House of Devry seems to have disintegrated early."

"If you don't mind, Doctor, I'd like to take this coin, the letter last arrived, and two or three of the other letters home—to study over tonight," I said.

"If you like, of course," he rejoined. I picked out what I wanted and pocketed them. "Take the whole box," he added.

"Not now. Safer with you, perhaps," I said. "Tomorrow I'll give the afternoon to a careful examination of the box and everything in it. Is there any more you can add to the evidence? I gather from my cursory survey that Nathaniel II, who must have been Miss Devry's brother, was an unscrupulous rascal. Some crank named Singleton knows a lot about it and wants the world to know the details. Eh?"

DR. MORTON sucked at his cigarette thoughtfully, as though not entirely agreeing with me.

"Unscrupulous, but powerful; a very strong man," he said. "Not a petty rascal. He died, I remember, shortly after the first Nathaniel passed away."

"Tell me this," I asked, "what does your instinct tell you this man Singleton is after? Instinct, your sixth sense! Do you honestly think he's taking such work and trouble merely to force publication of forgotten scandals? It must be a means to some end, rather. Instinct, Morton! What's this motive?"

"Recognition," he promptly replied. "Yes, that's the word! I hadn't thought of it before as a motive!" Then his face

fell. "Therefore Singleton can't be this murderer, Bodham. It doesn't tie in with his character. As I see it, he's a disappointed and frustrated scholar who hasn't been able to get his own work published. There are many like him. He has never carried out any threats before this, so this can't be his work."

I SHOOK my head, at this.

"Wishful and faulty thinking, Dr. Morton. I must disagree with you. It is quite logical that he has come to want publication so insanely, with such terrific tension as he sees the chances slipping, that now he wouldn't stop at murder. Have you any means of communicating with Singleton?"

"None, unless he makes contact with me by telephone."

"When did he last telephone you?"

"Three weeks or so ago, just after the arrival of the letter from New Orleans threatening death. I told him point-blank that I could not and would not publish these abhorrent things in my work. He rang off abruptly. I afterward found that the call had come from a public booth in Indio, and realization of his nearness sent a chill through me. Later came the coin and its accompanying threat."

I picked up the typed slip. "*Death will be laid on your doorstep.*" Now the meaning of the warning struck home.

"Your words prove my point," I said slowly. "Your absolute refusal drove him to desperation. Now he sees the opportunities fast fading, as your volumes approach completion. Former threats were not carried out. But this time, our frustrated friend comes to grips with himself and does carry out the threat."

Morton refused to admit my argument. "No, Bodham, no! The letters have been full of demands for recognition; he wants public credit for his work. I must admit that the material he supplied would cause a sensation if published. He seems to want it known that John Singleton is striking at the Devry family. Therefore, even with hatred as a motive, it isn't logical that he should murder one of that family, merely to impress me."

The old man seemed trying to convince himself. I did not care to argue further; nor was there any opportunity. The telephone rang. Thompson was phoning from downtown and wanted me.

"The Mercedes was at the garage, Mr. Bodham. The night man said it hadn't

been taken out, but I felt the hood and it was hot. He got mad and said it was none of my business and to get the hell out of there. What shall I do now?"

"Come back and keep an eye on things here tonight. Thanks very much."

Morton scarcely heard my report.

"Bodham, I'd like to go into everything with you," he said slowly, a shadow deepening in his eyes. "Tonight, I'm too weary to do it. Let us say, tomorrow afternoon or evening."

"Very well, it's a date," I said sympathetically, touched by the wistful pathos of his fine features. "Ah, here's Bashy!"

Bathsheba walked in; the clock was just striking ten. I asked after Kathy.

"Oh, she's quite herself, Tom, and she wants to see you. Go right in."

"By all means," Morton added, smiling. "Tell her I'll be in shortly to say good night."

AS I entered Kathy's room, I felt suddenly shaken: in a wave of sickening apprehension, I realized how different all this scene, how different the entire world, would now be, had the assailant's blow been a trifle harder.

So strongly did this feeling overcome me that as I reached the bed, I found myself dropping on my knees beside it, with my arms about Kathy's shoulders.

We said nothing in this moment of silence; yet we left nothing unsaid.

Presently I drew back a little. Tremulous, half laughing, half shaken by emotion, Kathy held me against her, touched her lips to mine, and spoke softly:

"Tom, you silly goose, there are tears on your face! I'm all right, really."

"I know. But it hit me like a blow—to think of what might have been—"

"Well, it's not; so forget it. Not that I want to forget it myself! It's taken a long time to get you where you are now, Tom—where we both are."

"I've only known you a couple of months," I said fumblingly. "I didn't know you'd feel the same way I do, that you could be sure about it."

She laughed a little, joyously.

"What do you take me for? A mid-Victorian angel who needs a diagram and blueprints to know what love is? Anyhow, you haven't said the conventional thing, my dear, and I'd love to hear you say it."

I neglected none of the conventions.

Hearing Bathsheba's voice uplifted more shrilly than usual, I recognized the signal and departed, upon a last kiss.

Regaining the study, I was abruptly called to the immediate environment by finding Jessop here. He had just come in, with a brief-case under his arm, and goggled at us in agitated excitement.

"I hope she's not badly hurt, Dr. Morton!" he exclaimed. "There was no fracture? Who did it?"

"We don't know that. No, she's not much hurt, Jessop," said Morton, and smiled at me. He must have guessed why I had been detained. I like to think that he did guess. "Are you just back from town?"

"I came back a few minutes ago, sir," Jessop replied. "Good evening, Miss Bodham—Mr. Bodham. Excuse me. I'll get a drink of milk."

Ducking his head to Bathsheba, he passed us and departed to the kitchen. Into my mind came a thought that made me smile, a sentence from one of the letters of Maurice de Guerin: "*Can anyone mention a man who has committed a bloody crime after drinking a bowl of milk?*"

"Come, Bashy, it's getting late," I said, and we departed.

From the hall, I glanced back. Dr. Morton was standing beaming after us, the dispatch-box in his hand. I never again saw the contents of that box, and it was my last glimpse of Dr. Morton in this life.

Chapter Six

ONCE home, I dived into my study and laid my booty under the table lamp—the letters, the coin glued to its paper. Nothing was written on the paper. The coin seemed Greek or Roman, showing a man's head; I could make nothing whatever of it, and so laid it aside and took up the letter bearing the stamp that was never issued, as Morton had termed it.

This also puzzled me. It was the Michigan Centenary stamp, issued in 1935. The seal of Michigan in the center was blue; the rest of the stamp was purple; it looked quite ordinary to me. However, I know absolutely nothing of numismatics or philately. I opened the door and called to Bathsheba:

"Bashy! Will you be good enough to try and get hold of Lincoln, long distance? The Naval Base number is written on the pad by the phone."

My elder brother Lincoln is a full lieutenant in the navy. He commanded

a destroyer now at San Diego, one of the old World War destroyers being reconditioned for use, because of the European conflict and its possibilities. We had been down at San Diego two weeks previously to have a visit with him, and his help might avail me now.

Lincoln had no sympathy whatever with my chosen field of work; but at coins and stamps he is a genius, with large collections of each, and an amazing knowledge of them. Knowing that he could assuredly enlighten me on these heads, I turned to the letters themselves while waiting.

The definitely threatening letter with the supposedly unissued stamp was a mere note. It was typed and unsigned like all of these communications, and I did not need to refer to any typewriter classifications to see that the machine was one of the old Hammonds with interchangeable type-rolls. This note read:

You have until Nov. 1st to include material in your Volume IV. Will telephone you soon. Unless I have your assurance of compliance, I will strike; and my stroke means death. This time the threat is positive and my intention definite. I will endure no further refusals. Look for precise details on exterior of letter.

I looked over the paper and envelope for said details, and found nothing except that the letter had been canceled in New Orleans late in September.

Below the note were drawn, with pen and ink, ten little figures of soldiers. Each had the right leg extended in an exaggerated goose-step. Beneath these were typed the words: "This month must be first again." Nothing else! I held the sheet to the light. An ordinary letter sheet of good quality bond paper.

The reference to details, and the marching figures, were cryptic. There were no details. What the figures meant, I could not see. I was frowning over this when Bathsheba called to me that Lincoln was on the line.

I had intended describing the stamp and coin to him, but before I could broach the subject, he said eagerly:

"I was about to call you myself, Tom! Got orders tonight. Leaving in two days; rumor says we go on to Manila. Can't you drive down tomorrow? May be the last chance to see you and Bashy in a long time. I can arrange for shore leave tomorrow afternoon and evening, if you can come."

"Right," I said. "We can get away from here by nine or ten. Meet us for luncheon at the Grant at one o'clock. Can do?"

"Can do plenty good," said Lincoln, and hung up.

BATHSHEBA, apprised of the morrow's trip, twittered delightedly and went to brew a pot of tea for a nightcap. I returned to the other letters in my study. These were the three mailed from Oslo, Cairo and Buenos Aires within ten days of one another. Superficial examination with a glass showed that the typing on all three envelopes would probably prove to be from the same Hammond; all had been written by Singleton, therefore.

There were two possible explanations, the Cairo and Buenos Aires letters having been posted within three days of each other: Either a group of persons were bedeviling Morton under the corporate name of Singleton; or else this Singleton was using one of those international letter-mailing services—"Fool your friends and get a reputation as a world traveler!" Via steamship stewards, letters written in advance can be posted, for a small fee, from various ports. This would be a more logical conclusion than the former, I decided.

These letters contained no threats. The enclosures they had contained, I knew, must now be in Morton's dispatch-box. One typed note read:

I enclose further proof in relation to the mystery in the Devry family during 1886 and 1887. The attached copies of the chief accountant's letters speak for themselves. I have given you full proof that Nathaniel Devry II was not a Devry, was not the son of N. D. I at all, but was an adopted son. These enclosures clinch that fact with further evidence. You *must* publish them and assign credit to me.

The Cairo letter indicated purely business, not personal, scandal; nobody would care a hang today, I thought (and again was wrong in my conclusion), whether Nathaniel II were an adopted or natural son, but here was a beautiful black eye on the Devry fortune:

I am sending under separate cover notarized photostats in support of the fact that Gow Luk Toy, the last of the old Hong merchants in Canton, loaned Nathaniel II in 1888 200,000 specie

dollars without bond or written note. And that Nathaniel II later repudiated this claim, which is still carried on the books of the Gow family. That N. D. II was dishonest, unscrupulous and utterly callous will be quite clear to you and to your readers.

The third letter had carried an enclosure which related to opium shipments. Unluckily I glanced only at the first page and went no farther.

BATHSHEBA came in with the teatray and I laid all these matters aside. She settled herself, and gave me a questioning look as she poured.

"About tonight, Tom: whom do you suspect?"

"I suspect Morton's Filipino boy," I rejoined. "He's undoubtedly a dacoit chieftain. I've just satisfied myself that Kathy was struck with a left-handed cricket-bat wielded by a cross-eyed Swede named O'Reilly. But since the Filipino was on his night out, and has no cricket-bat, I'm flatly up against it. Whom do you suspect?"

She gave me a reproachful glance. "Now you're making fun of me. Of course, I'd rather think it was that horrid little prissy Jessop. I haven't liked him since I saw him snoodling in that bar with that woman, whoever she was. Anyone who's so crackery one place and oatmeal another—well, I've always said so, anyway!" she concluded triumphantly. "And that reminds me, Tom: Don't work so hard on this case that you let all the blood go to your head."

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

She surveyed me with her bright, gay smile. "Silly! You'll need some around the heart. And you don't even know what her name is."

I girded myself. I felt it coming. "Whose name?"

"Don't look blank. Kathy's name."

"What do you mean by saying I don't know it?"

"Well, you don't! I didn't either, till the other day. It's not *Kathy*, but *Cathay*. And if she isn't in love with you, I'll go to Manila with Lincoln! I've known for a long time you were in love with her. And you'd better do the right thing by her, brother mine!"

"Oh!" I said. "Well, my good woman, if that's the way you feel about it, I'm off to bed. Thanks for your tea. I'll be up early in the morning, and off to clean up a few things here. Back and

pick you up around nine, and we'll beat it for San Diego. Good night."

"Tom!" Her voice gripped at me as I reached the door. "Tom! What about Kathy?"

"Oh, we settled all that tonight, she and I." And I grinned at her. "You were just about an hour late with your good advice, but I appreciate it all the same. Ta-tal!"

She caught up a book, and I barely dodged it. Although it was my precious presentation copy of "Sino-Iranica," I went my way laughing. Nothing mattered tonight—nothing! The world was made anew for Thomas Bodham. . . .

I wakened at six, shaved, and slipped into my clothes, and ducked out to seek breakfast in town, intending first to take a glance around in search of a muddy spot. In the back of my brain I was trying hard to visualize the man Singleton, from the vague outline I had of him; but the drowning of young Devry had to be cleared up, and I felt that the blob of mud in the Mercedes was going to bulk large in the solution.

Water was no novelty in Pine Springs, but mud was rare; outside of house gardens it seemed to have no existence. Tiring of a vain search, I drove into the Plaza garage, and noted the gorgeous Mercedes on the floor. Luckily, the attendant knew me, as I had been in here frequently.

"No hurry," I said. "I'm going across to get some breakfast. Fill her up at leisure, chock full—gas and oil and water. Better check the tires too. I'll be back after breakfast. Mind if I look over that Mercedes?"

"Help yourself," the attendant invited.

SO I did, quite literally. I got into the Mercedes and worked fast. The mud was still on the floor, but now broken up into a brown smear of dust. I gathered this up, and with it a small cottonwood leaf that had been in the mud and was still stuck to it. Snapping open the glove compartment, I took a swift look. . . . Cigarettes, license wallet, a handsome flask—and one thing more: a house key on a thin silver chain. Perhaps the key to the Devry house, perhaps not. On impulse, I pocketed it. Since I was to see Miss Devry at eight, I could hand it over if it was a key to her mansion. If not, it might be valuable.

I climbed out, walked around the car, saw there was no rear compartment, and then went across the street to a restaur-

rant. I climbed on a stool and ordered breakfast. As I opened the paper I had brought along, I caught the voices of three young fellows who were ranged on stools beyond me.

"She's no quilapo," said one, positively if cryptically.

"Then what was she doing coming out of the Desert Inn at three o'clock Tuesday morning?"

"That don't signify. I tell you, I know Rose Wong—she's no quilapo!"

Rose Wong—three o'clock Tuesday morning—an hour after young Devry had died, according to Dr. Gregg's estimate! I swung off the stool. The three were just paying their check when I approached them.

"Tell me something, since I overheard you: What the hell is a quilapo?"

They looked at me, burst into laughter, and walked out without reply. I turned to the girl behind the counter, resumed my stool, and asked her the meaning of the word. She shook her head.

"Guess I'm too old, Mister; been out of high-school four years now. I can't keep up with the kids."

So. . . . Rose Wong had been at home before two, by her own testimony. But now—she had left the Desert Inn, whose expansive grounds front on the center of town, at three o'clock! Something to think about, there.

It was still short of eight o'clock when I passed the Devry gate house and drove on to the mansion after a salute from the guard; but Miss Devry was waiting for me in the breakfast-room. She handed me a cup of inky French-roast coffee, and demanded whether I had discovered anything.

"Perhaps," I said, showing her the key and chain. "This was in your grand-nephew's car. Is it a key to this house? Does it mean anything to you?"

"No," she said, giving it an indifferent glance. "But here's the post-mortem report of the Pretona doctor."

From her manner, I inferred there was more to come. Taking the paper she handed me, I eyed it rapidly. The physician had made one statement of great interest: the lungs of Devry were filled with water, indicating death by drowning. A postscript stated that the doctor would await word from her before reporting his findings to the authorities.

"I sent the boy's father up there last night to give that doctor a piece of my mind, and five hundred dollars to keep



his mouth shut," Miss Devry went on. "As usual, Nathaniel bungled it. The doctor refused to take the money. And now I suppose we'll have police here, and newspaper men, making life miserable for me."

I explained that the physician had no choice. She consented finally to let me tell the Pine Springs chief of police myself.

"But," she went on, "I want some definite action out of you, Bodham. You're taking over this thing to prevent a recurrence of such things, remember."

"I'M no Sherlock Holmes," I shot back. "You're not afraid for yourself?"

"Poppycok!" she said with a sniff. "I'm afraid of nothing. They're all afraid of me. If they so much as looked twice at me, I'd clean them out like a nest of field mice."

"Who?"

"My family, of course."

"But they've nothing to do with this affair!"

"Don't jump to conclusions, Bodham. I know my family. There's not one of them who wouldn't eat their own young."

"Might one of them have come down through town last night to hit Kathy Morton over the head with a flower-pot?"

She looked at me steadily for a moment, and the blood drained out of her face.

"Cathay Morton?" She pronounced the name as it should be pronounced, and not as *Kathy*. I noted it, because I had so recently learned what that name actually was. "Was that girl hurt last night? Then what are you doing here, babbling with me? What happened?"

I told her briefly.

"Either the house was visited by a sneak-thief," I added; "or someone who knew of my appointment with Morton was listening, had come for that purpose. Did you mention the appointment to anyone?"

"No," she snapped.

I told her about the Mercedes. "Could anyone in this house, Miss Devry, have been listening when you phoned me?"

"I wouldn't put it past any of them. That's why I spoke guardedly," she said grimly. "If there's anything in the Mercedes business, the most likely one is Loren—though he may have gone out to that gambling-club, and not to Morton's. He asked yesterday if he could have the Mercedes, and I refused. It would be like him to go and take it anyway."

"You can't mean that your family has only what you let them have?" I asked, amazed.

"They haven't a cent, beyond what I give them," she fairly barked. "None of them has the brains to earn an honest penny. I've pensioned them off. I give 'em just enough to go to hell with in their own way. Tell me what you learned from Dr. Morton."

I complied, laying particular stress on the name of Singleton; apparently it meant nothing whatever to her. I told of Morton's labors, of the threats against him, and why; nine out of ten writers would have been glad to use such sensational material as Singleton furnished, but Morton was actually protecting the Devry family, by his scholarly scruples, and I wanted Miss Devry to know it.

Under the circumstances, I did not feel inclined to spare her feelings, if she had any. I told how Singleton was linked by the Sign of Death to the murder of young Devry, then sketched the information given in the letters sent Morton. At this she evinced a keen but oddly callous interest that lacked any emotion.

"It is all quite true," she commented with a certain satisfaction. "Go on."

A MENTION of Nathaniel II being an adopted son, however, brought a flash of life into her hawklike features.

"So he knows that, eh? Let me set you straight, Bodham; the word '*adopted*' does not give all the facts. This man came to China, wormed himself into my father's confidence, and married my sister. At my father's insistence he took the name of Nathaniel Devry in order to perpetuate the family line, and was later legally adopted."

I recalled the genealogy Dr. Morton had shown me; and having a fairly good photographic mind, brought up the picture of the word (*Adopted*) after the name of Nathaniel II.

"He was a clever, unscrupulous blackguard," Miss Devry went on, "and his whole brood were like him. I got you into this case because my grandnephew, after all, bore the name of Devry, and I

would let no one murder a Devry with impunity. It may be that my brother—"

She broke off short, her lips tight.

"Your brother?" I said, puzzled. "You mean Nathaniel II—who married your sister and was adopted? A curious tangle there—"

"I MEAN nothing of the sort," she barked. Vivid emotion leaped into her face. "My real brother, my blood brother, detested mercantile life, detested everything around him, and disagreed violently with my father. He signed away his birthright and disappeared to live his own life."

"What name did he take?" I inquired. "And what was the name of Nathaniel II before he took the name of Devry?"

"All that is none of your business, Bodham," she said icily. "Keep other names out of the affair. The name of Singleton is nowhere involved, if that's your notion. No such name has any connection with the family.

"Nathaniel II," she went on, "was what we used to call a polecat, when I was younger. He made trouble between my brother and my father; he encouraged it, kept it boiling. His game was to shove the real Devrys out of the nest. My brother cleared out. I didn't. After my father died, this blackguard tried to contest my legacy. I went after him and beat him. Luckily, he did not live very long himself. I've been winning ever since, and have stayed on top."

"Then why do you think your brother might have had something to do with all this?" I asked.

"Possibly this man Singleton knew him, knew his story, and detested the other side of the family. That might be his reason for wanting publication of these scandals."

"Not likely," I said. "Your brother himself certainly wouldn't want them published."

"Bosh! Why shouldn't they be made known?" she snapped with energy. "Let Nathaniel II be shown to the world for what he was—a rascal, and no Devry by blood! Let his worthless offspring stew in the juice of his iniquity; do 'em good. Morton is wrong; he should accept and publish these facts. I shall see him today and take a hand in this thing myself. Hm! Today's Friday, and Nat's funeral is tomorrow. Must go to Los Angeles for it. Whining ceremony before they can ship the ashes East; pretence and nonsense, great waste of time."

"You still want me to work on the case?" I asked. "I'll gladly withdraw—"

"You're on it; stay on it. Now that the police must be drawn in, make the best of a bad bargain. If this Singleton murdered Nat, grab him and jail him before he can murder anyone else."

With this, she summarily dismissed me, refusing to utter another word. Indeed, she had the air of one who regrets having said too much.

I am not the unerring sleuth of fiction who sees all and knows all. As I drove away, the rueful comprehension of my own bungling smote me. Miss Devry had revealed what I should have unearthed for myself from the Devry genealogy in Morton's study. Even the note sent Morton telling about the adoption of Nathaniel II had to me seemed unimportant. Now I knew better. The mystery of Singleton, I felt, was dispelled. It seemed clear he was the missing brother, or a friend of the brother. Miss Devry's hatred for the remainder of the family was no longer puzzling.

With this conclusion, this assumption which was to prove so utterly and dreadfully false, I went joyously ahead. If that hard-shelled old dowager had only confided to me the truths she knew, the whole course of life and death would have been altered. But she kept silent one moment too long.

Chapter Seven

MY interview with Miss Devry had been short and fast, if not sweet. Elated as I was upon my departure, the thought of Rose Wong recurred to me. Best run down that young lady at once, I thought, and proceeded to do so.

She had a rented room in a cottage just off the Indian reservation. She was asleep when I called—it was not quite eight-thirty—but appeared in five minutes, attractively dressed in sport-shirt and sharkskin slacks. She joined me on the veranda of the cottage, and I came to the point with blunt attack.

"Miss Wong, I knew you were lying the other morning at the inquest, when you said there was nothing more you knew. Now we must know the truth, and I believe it would be easier for you to tell me than tell the police."

She regarded me steadily, without a trace of any emotion.

"I kept back nothing that had to do with Mr. Devry's death," she said.

"True, perhaps. But Devry did not drop you at your home at the time you said. You didn't reach home until three o'clock, or after. You were seen leaving the Inn. Now, either talk to me and have no more publicity, or I'll inform the police, and they'll come after you. I might tell you Devry was murdered. It's not yet generally known."

FOR an instant I thought she would keel over; but almost at once she calmed herself, and now spoke without restraint.

"I—I didn't mean to do wrong. I thought it would only be terrible to have such things printed. He didn't bring me here at all. He drove around for a while, refusing to come here, and finally stopped at a house on the Drive. He wanted me to go in with him for a drink. He said the house belonged to a friend who let him use it at times. He had a key on a silver chain. I knew it wasn't a drink he wanted. I refused. He became pleading, then insistent."

She paused, wet her lips, then went on:

"There was a big cottonwood tree at one corner of the yard, and I thought I saw a man standing there—not in the moonlight, but under the shadow of the tree. This frightened me. I opened the door and jumped out. Nat followed me; he had really been drinking a lot, and was actually drunk. He ran after me. He—he was very unsteady—"

Momentarily, her voice failed.

"So you ran for it?" I said.

She nodded. "Yes. I ran hard. He kept after me, cursing and shouting at me. I ducked in among the houses—this was at the foot of the hill, where the mountain creek runs. I followed it on into the Inn grounds. The gate was open. He had stopped following me then. I waited until I was calm again, then came on through the grounds to the main street and so home."

No hesitation now, no more evasion!

"Did you hear anything behind you—anything like a struggle?"

"No," she said promptly. "His voice ended all of a sudden. There was a splash. I thought he had fallen into the creek, and—and it made me laugh, even if I was frightened. I'm sorry. I didn't know he was murdered."

"Nobody knew it," I said; and after she had described the house, I left.

Driving back, I stopped at a drug-store and telephoned Austin McManus,

whose real-estate properties lay in the vicinity of that house. When I got him and described the place, he identified it at once. It was not one of his houses, but a private property that had been leased for the season to a Mrs. Irene Welson, of whom he knew nothing.

Hopping into the car, I drove straight for the house in question, and *en route* came to a sudden halt. Here was the creek of which Rose Wong had spoken, a tiny stream that meandered down from the hills behind. At this point it was narrowly confined between cement retainers—a cold little stream, knee-deep. The cement retaining-walls were cobbled, and rose six inches above the ground, no doubt to keep the stream confined in time of flood. A bad obstacle for a drunken man on a chase, even in moonlight.

I drove on to the house. Rose Wong had mentioned a man under the cottonwood tree; a cottonwood, a big one, stood there in the corner of the yard. A cottonwood leaf had been embedded in the blob of dark mud that could have been left in the Mercedes only by the murderer. And in my pocket was the key on its silver chain, the key of this house.

As I walked up to the house from the car, I saw that a rose garden was being laid out toward the cottonwood tree; piles of earth, half dispersed over the ground, were still there. I rang the bell.

Mrs. Welson opened the door. She was a pleasant little woman of perhaps forty, still evidencing great youthful beauty. At my request to speak with her, she studied me deliberately and then admitted me into a living-room that was cheerful and ultra-modern in its furniture and appointments.

HAVING no time to waste, I came straight to the attack.

"Mrs. Welson, you were a friend of Nathaniel Devry."

"A friend?" She showed just the proper amount of slight surprise. "I knew him slightly, as one knows so many people in a place like this."

"Are you in the habit of letting casual acquaintances use your house as a place of assignation?"

Her face went pale, then deepened to a fiery red. But she kept her poise.

"Mr. Bodham, if that's your name, I don't know what you're driving at."

"I think you do, Mrs. Welson," I said sympathetically. Sympathy is always ef-

fective after attack. "I suggest that you take a few moments, collect yourself, and then tell me the whole story. I am investigating for Miss Devry, and this will be much better than having to tell the police."

"I have nothing to collect myself about," she said defiantly, walking into the trap. Having said this, she was committed to answering my questions without further reflection.

"Then you admit you knew him?"

"Of course. I have said—"

"And when did you see him last?"

"I don't remember," she replied, looking me straight in the eye.

I smiled. "Come, Mrs. Welson! I regret having to call that a rather clumsy falsehood. You must credit me with some intelligence. You do know where you last saw him. If he hadn't died, I might believe you had forgotten where and when; but knowing he was dead, you've thought over the matter in every detail. Where was it you saw him last?"

FEAR and agonized suspense were in her pleasant eyes by this time.

"At—at the Isle of Araby," she jerked out. She was beginning to break down.

"What night? He died early Tuesday morning, you remember. Was it that same night?"

"No. The Saturday before."

"And you gave him this key then?" I held up the silver chain and key. At sight of it, her face became like death.

"No, no!" she persisted. "I didn't give it to him. He— I must have dropped it. He must have picked it up."

"Then you recognize it. A doorkey on a chain is not easily dropped or lost, without being reclaimed, Mrs. Welson. Come, tell me—you gave it to him on Saturday night?"

Fright was stamped in her face; she was pitifully nervous, frantic before the approach of more questions. I decided to take a long shot in the dark and see what developed.

"Shall I tell you why you gave the key to Devry, Mrs. Welson? You knew he wanted to bring Rose Wong here. You were more than willing. Why? In the hope of photographing him in some compromising situation—either you or the man who was waiting outside. A chance to blackmail the Devry family, —or was the murder actually planned by you?"

Her eyes widened in acute horror that could not have been assumed.

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"Murder!" she gasped. "No! He wasn't murdered! He died from heart-failure!"

"Not at all," I told her. "It has now been shown to have been murder."

She broke into deep body-racking sobs, her face buried in her hands. None the less, I knew she was a woman of resolution; it was time to give the finishing blow. I left my chair and crossed to her. On the table beside her was a pile of magazines. My eye fell on them. The top one bore the yellowish tab of an addressographed subscriber.

That name gave me what I wanted.

"Now, Mrs. Welton, there's no use of further denials," I said gently. "I already know all about it. Mr. Jessop has told me everything."

At this, her face lifted. She stared up at me, eyes wide and fixed, a gasp of terror and dismay escaping her.

"He—what did he tell?" She caught her breath, and then drove on rapidly: "Yes, I let him have the key. There was nothing wrong about that. He said he wanted to use the house—he had no liberty at home. I was sorry for him. He said that he wanted to drop in with some friends and have a card-game. . . . And I was going out of town, anyway."

"Where did you go?"

She gathered herself together, with an effort at defiance.

"I drove down to Roydron and I can prove it! I was at the North Hotel!"

"So you took that much care, eh? You knew it was no innocent boyish party. And when you got back, you found Devry was dead. Who was the man waiting outside? Who was this man who murdered Devry? You know as well as I do."

"I do not!" She flashed up into sudden life. Her agonized protest rang true. "I was gone, I tell you! I didn't return until next day! How could I know who was outside?"

"Are you prepared to swear that it was not Mr. Jessop, but someone else?"

NO use. She was over the hump by this time, and getting back her normal resolution.

"Of course I am, so far as I'm prepared to swear to anything that happened while I was a hundred miles away!" she shot out. "How do I know anything about it? It's true that Mr. Jessop is a friend; I've met him several times. If he had anything to do with this, how would I know it?"

"Very well," I said, and turned to the door. "Your argument is sound—so far. What you and Jessop planned, is something the police will have to elicit, I fear."

Her armor could not be pierced. She answered with a defiant sneer about the police, and with a bow I left her.

Outside, I walked over toward the cottonwood tree. The earth, that had obviously been imported for the formation of the rose-garden, was a darkish mold. I took a sample, knowing it would match with the mud taken from the Mercedes; then I climbed into my car and drove off.

One thing now remained to do, and I headed for Police Headquarters. I was getting action this morning, and getting it with a vengeance. When I reached Headquarters, I found that Chief Bishop had just arrived for the day, and was taken to his office.

I HAD seen the Chief at the inquest, but I had never met him. Bishop was by no means the abysmal brute policeman of detective classics. He was a large, quiet, cultured man with so pleasant and amiable a personality that one did not at once realize the force and ability of his character.

"I've heard of your work, Mr. Bodham, and have hoped to meet you," said he, as we shook hands. "Not professionally, of course. We don't have any serious crime in our town, and don't want any."

"You've got a handful already," I said dryly, and handed him the post-mortem report.

He knew his business. Before I had more than started my story, he got the desk-man on the interphone and ordered the Mercedes brought from the garage for investigation and possible fingerprints. Then he listened attentively until I had finished.

"We've never had a murder in Pine Springs," he said almost plaintively. "I'm sorry about this. We'll still hope it's not murder. Except for that shenanigan with the corpse, this might be a normal accidental drowning. Let's have everything you've picked up."

He called in his secretary, and I went over the case in detail. Young Devry's spick-and-span clothes still puzzled me; but Bishop made light of the fact.

"We've got a good fingerprint man," said he. "Dobbs is right up to the latest tricks. Most crooks don't yet know that

prints can now be brought up from fabrics. We may get something from those clothes. Now, Bodham, how far may we count on your help?"

"All the way," I said. "Miss Devry has retained me to find Devry's murderer. I'm off to San Diego as soon as I leave you, but I'll be back tonight or early in the morning."

"Then suppose you tell me what you think about the assault on Miss Morton last night. You mentioned it in passing. That's something we haven't heard of."

I went into that briefly; there was not much to tell; and whether Dr. Morton would want the incident investigated by the police, I did not know. The only tangible evidence was that scratch on the adobe wall outside the window. The possibility of the Mercedes having been used by someone connected with the assault, was also worth noting down.

"I'll find out quick enough who took it from the garage last night," said Bishop. "Do you lay this happening and Devry's murder to the same hand?"

"It's possible." I had not, of course, mentioned Singleton, or Dr. Morton's revelations. This I must clear up with Morton himself, before going farther.

"About this man Jessop," said Bishop: "Did the Welson woman confirm your theory that Jessop had been in a blackmail scheme?"

"No. It wasn't a theory—just a shot in the dark," I admitted. "Jessop apparently is in love with this woman. There's nothing to prove he was the man under the tree the night of Devry's murder. He's not the type to murder anyone."

"Did he have any alibi that night? I think he testified at the inquest."

I nodded. "No alibi. He was in bed, asleep. He has a cottage of his own. You might have Mrs. Welson kept under observation, also her house and telephone."

"I'll check on the lady," agreed Bishop.

SO much had transpired that it was difficult to realize the hour was not yet ten when I halted the car in front of our cottage. Bathsheba was across at the Morton gate, talking with Kathy.

Except for a silk turban about her head, hiding all traces of her injury, Kathy looked her normal self.

"Don't mind me, children," said Bathsheba.

I kissed Kathy and found that all had been quiet in the Morton home.

"Well," I said, drawing Bathsheba away, "tell your grandfather that I've been called away—but I suppose Bashy has told you, eh? All right. We may get back late tonight, so I'll see your grandfather in the morning, and we'll go into matters. All ready, Bashy? 'By, Kathy! See you later!"

We were away at last; but we were not away from the Devry case. We had to go through town to reach Pretona and the San Diego highway; on the outskirts, I swung out to pass another car. Bathsheba let out a yip.

"Tom! There's that woman now—in that car! The woman who was with Jessop at the Bamboo Bar!"

I had paid the car no attention. Now I slowed and looked into the rear view mirror at the car behind. It was a light sedan. The woman beside the driver was no other than Mrs. Welson. And the man driving the car was Peterson, Miss Devry's secretary.



Chapter Eight

AS we twisted over the cut-off and headed for the south, I paid scant attention to Bathsheba's light chatter.

The letters, the personality of Singleton, the queer mass of futile menace and vain but vindictive strivings at publicity centering about gentle old Dr. Morton, fascinated me. The coin glued to a sheet of paper, with no obvious message, plucked at my imagination. The definite threat, with its line of marching figures and the cryptic sentence beneath them, rose before my somewhat photostatic brain with nagging insistence.

"I don't know that I'd like California as a steady thing," Bathsheba observed. "Glorious sunshine and cold nights would get monotonous in time. Here it's almost November, and no real Thanksgiving weather at all!"

"Isn't the weather; it's the turkey," I commented.

She sniffed. "So you think! I just don't know what President Roosevelt was thinking of, to change the dates all around! Not that I blame him a mite. If I could do it myself, I'd change the calendar all around and make it sen-

sible. I don't see why on earth the fiscal year should start along in the middle of the real year, anyhow. It mixes everybody up. And then the taxes come due in March—that's just plain silly. Either the taxes should come due the first of the year, or we should change the first of the year around to March—"

"Holy smoke!" I exclaimed, jamming on the brakes. They squealed; Bathsheba did likewise, and the car came to a stop in the middle of the highway.

"TOM BODHAM! Have you gone out of your senses?" cried Bathsheba, straightening her hat. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." I grinned and released the brakes. "Just thought of something."

We went on again. I heard not a word of what Bathsheba was saying, and small wonder. For her nonsense about the calendar had flung a sudden white light on that cryptic sentence beneath the line of little marching soldiers.

"*The third shall be first again!*" Taken in connection with those soldiers on the march—that was it! March! The old Roman calendar had begun with March. The English legal year had begun in March until in 1750 it was changed to January first. "*The third shall be first again*"—that was it! The name of March entered into this puzzle, somewhere and somehow.

Elated by this discovery, I whirled Bathsheba down to San Diego in record time, and when we reached the hotel, Lincoln was there to meet us. It was one o'clock, and we went directly in to lunch.

Over the table, Lincoln did most of the talking, for once. The Navy, if not the country at large, was imbued with the certainty of war coming in the Orient, and Lincoln was filled with this delusion. He was a thin, dark and rather serious sort, weighted by the thought of a wife and two children whom he had left back East; just now, however, he was filled with an unwonted gayety, for if he went to the Orient, his family would probably be sent after him, as it would be a two-year assignment.

So, today, we found him much less serious than usual, giving full vent to his droll if caustic inspirations. Bathsheba ate hurriedly and then departed to do some shopping, promising to meet us at two, which was manifestly impossible.

"We'll be in the cocktail lounge," I told her. "I'll put my puzzles up to Lincoln, and we'll wait for you there."

"So you came down to get something out of me, did you?" observed Lincoln, when she had left us. "I might have known it! You and your bits of twine caught in the murderer's little toenail!"

"Never mind, Link," I said amiably. "There are worse crimes than murder—far worse! Suppose we adjourn to the lounge and relax over the right sort of a drink to follow this meal, and get the agony over. It may amuse you, at that. It's right up your alley."

Lincoln worships the Navy, has happily large ideals, and regards my profession as a somewhat infantile occupation for little minds. This time, however, I had hit his hobby interests, and he listened with interest as I laid my problems before him. He looked over the letters and envelopes, studied the coin on the paper, and shoved the latter at me with a twinkle in his deep eyes.

"What do you make of this thing yourself, Tom?"

I shrugged. "I'm ignorant of coins, and you know it. The paper is a stout rag paper, not watermarked. It could be traced to some maker, if worth the trouble of doing so."

"You're a queer bird!" he said, with a chuckle. "Offhand, I'd say there's only one obvious thing here: The coin is glued to the paper in order to hide something, or to protect something under it, or both. Why not take it off the paper and have a look?"

"Quite true; but I wanted you to see it just as it is," I evaded. Actually, this obvious conclusion had not occurred to me, any more than it had to Morton.

"Well, it's an unusually large bronze coin," he said, eyeing it. "For example, the Napoleon silver five-franc piece weighs 382 grains and is slightly larger; yet this must weigh all of five hundred grains. A coin, let's call it a penny, of Antiochus Epiphanes, dating from about 160 B.C. Not rare, and of no particular value. Now for the secret!"

HE began to separate the coin from the paper, very carefully. I watched, with a thrill of anticipation. If something were written underneath, it might well confirm my theory about the name of March entering into this case. The paper came clear, and I seized upon it eagerly. Writing! The first actual handwriting of Singleton! It was a fine, clear writing, and read:

"*Publish Singleton or the thunderbolts will strike!*"

Silently, Lincoln showed the reverse of the coin, which bore on the obverse the head of Antiochus. Here, in the center, was the figure of an eagle, holding thunderbolts. This figure had been delicately pricked out in gilt by Singleton, to make it strike the eye immediately, and the gilt had been protected against rubbing by gluing the coin to the paper. Thus the coin emphasized the threat of the words, and illustrated it.

MMORTON had said this coin was but lately arrived. The poor condition of the paper, however, and the discoloration everywhere except in the circle formed by the coin, showed that it had been a long time put together. Probably Singleton had prepared it long in advance—another evidence of vacillation.

"Your Singleton has a devious brain," Lincoln commented in his caustic way. "A curious and frustrated juvenile brain, delighting in queer, involved things. And I should say your client has an equally childish brain. One man puts up involved puzzles; the other doesn't even know they're puzzles, or doesn't try to solve them."

This, I had to admit, was close to the truth. Dr. Morton had wasted no time trying to solve the puzzles handed him by Singleton; he had just disregarded them with a calm disdain.

The conclusion in regard to Singleton became further emphasized when we tackled the letter with the supposedly unissued stamp, upon which Lincoln put his instant attention.

"This is a rather remarkable thing, Tom," he said. "True, the stamp was not issued in this bicolor form; all the same, it's quite genuine. Alter the color of a stamp, and it will still go through the mails—as a rule. A good deal of ingenuity has been expended by cheap rascals in changing the color or shade of stamps, in order to make them valuable to collectors."

"It can be done by chemicals," I put in, and he nodded.

"Yes; as a result, it can always be detected. The quartz ultra-violet lamp has put a final clincher on such efforts, thanks to fluorescence. However, look at this stamp. That central Michigan seal was not changed by fumes or acid—the entire stamp would have been affected. Now, there's one way, and one way only, in which the shade or even color of a stamp can be altered beyond any detection. Thus far, it's not known

to the confraternity of forgers and rascals. I unearthed it myself."

He paused, as though loath to inform even me of his philatelic discoveries.

"In certain parts of the world, such as this portion of California," he went on slowly, "sunlight contains infra-rays more powerful than elsewhere. Most dyed fabrics, for example, will fade swiftly here, if exposed to sunlight. So will stamps. But not only do they fade, but they will even assume strange tints, as the yellow or red content is acted upon. Had this particular stamp been kept in midsummer sunlight a few days, it would turn into a pronounced blue. It was obviously fitted with a mask which allowed only the central design to turn blue, thus producing a bicolored stamp—which, in all truth, was never issued by the Government."

"Arguing cleverness and careful preparation on the part of Mr. Singleton," I deduced. "Frustrated and hesitant he may be, vacillating and negative—but he's not wasting work deliberately."

"Curious that your client, whoever he is, should have noticed the stamp, yet allowed his interest to die there."

"The man concerned," I said, "the Dr. Morton to whom these letters are addressed, is an old man. He noticed the stamp, true. It was meant by Singleton that he should notice it, obviously. Why, Lincoln, we've already uncovered the clue! A message under the coin, naturally presupposes a message under this stamp! Tear the stamp off!"

BUT Lincoln caught my hand as I reached for the envelope.

"Not so fast, Tom—careful, old boy! If you remove a stamp from an envelope, ten to one the stamp is ruined. It tears. But if you remove the envelope from the stamp, then you preserve the stamp intact and the envelope tears. An elementary bit of philatelic lore. Many a valuable stamp has been ruined before this fact was learned. In this case, we want to preserve the envelope—"

As he spoke, he had been wetting the stamp, dipping his finger in his glass and getting the oblong bit of paper well soaked. He let it rest for a moment, drawing my attention to the large size of this stamp, which would permit quite a message to be concealed by it.

A tentative effort—another, and he wet the stamp anew. It began to come more easily. Typing showed as it stripped away. A moment more, and it

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was completely gone, to reveal four lines of typing which it had barely hidden:

Unless you publish
the proof that NII
was Hugh March, not
you but Cathy dies

"Good God!" I broke out. "She's the one threatened, then! And he never discovered this, never let me know, never let me suspect. . . . Perhaps he wasn't sure himself—why, here's the proof that the blow over the head was actually an attempt to kill her! That devil Singleton isn't vacillating any longer!"

LINCOLN was staring blankly at me. I glanced at my watch; two o'clock! We had to wait here until Bathsheba returned. She had said two. This would mean three, at earliest.

"Link, we'll have to push off as soon as Bashy shows up," I said abruptly. "We had meant to have the evening with you, but that's impossible. I must get back to Pine Springs in a hurry."

He nodded. "So I gather. You can't shove off till Bashy shows up, and she's not shown up yet, so why not let me in on it? Woman in it somewhere, by the wild look in your eye. Who?"

With an effort, I forced down my excitement. The puzzle was clearing up. The name of Nathaniel II, before his adoption into the Devry family, had been Hugh March. My deductions were right. Hugh March!

"This threat is definitely against Kathy," I said. "That's why I must get back there; the thing's imminent, dangerous! She must be guarded until I can run down this Singleton devil." And I went on to tell him about the case.

I had just concluded when Bathsheba appeared, laden down with pasteboard boxes. When I announced that we were leaving immediately, she cried:

"But Tom! I'm absolutely exhausted from tramping around that big store and making decisions! I want a highball!"

"Then grab it and we'll get off," I said impatiently. "While you're getting it, I'll hunt up a phone-booth. Can't take any chances now. I'll phone Morton and make sure Kathy is well guarded till we get back."

I located a booth and put in a long-distance call for Dr. Morton's number. Instead of the usual quick connection, there was a delay which irritated me. At length came the cheerful statement: "Here's your party! Go ahead!"

"Hello!" I said. "Is this you, Morton?"

"Who are you?" came the response in a strange voice.

"Confound it, this must be the wrong number!" I exclaimed. "I'm calling Dr. Morton at Pine Springs!"

"This is Morton's house," came back the same voice. "Who are you?"

"Morton's house? Then who the devil's speaking? This is Tom Bodham, and I want Dr. Morton."

"Oh!" The voice held quick relief. "This is Chief Bishop, Mr. Bodham. Where are you?"

I was startled. "At the Grant in San Diego. What are you doing at Morton's house?" A frightful conjecture seized me. "Is something wrong? Is Kathy—"

"She's quite all right," broke in the Chief. "But I've been moving heaven and earth to find you, Bodham—"

Five minutes later, I stumbled out of the booth and made my way back to the cocktail lounge. My emotion must have shown in my face, for Lincoln came to his feet with a sharp exclamation, and Bathsheba gasped as she also rose.

"Tom!" she cried. "You look like a ghost—what is it? Tell us quickly—something's hurt you."

"Yes, it has," I said, and drew a deep breath. "Dr. Morton was murdered early this afternoon."

Chapter Nine

THAT was a fast, wild trip back to Pine Springs. It was nearly dark when I hopped out of the car before Police Headquarters, sent Bathsheba on to look after Kathy, and was shown into Bishop's private office.

The Chief was looking worried. He plunged into the midst of things without preamble.

"Miss Morton found her grandfather's body on the library floor, about two-thirty. It was at this time Gregg got the telephone call, went over, found the death not natural, and summoned me."

He lighted a cigar and leaned back.

"Who was with her when she discovered it?" I asked.

"Andreas, the Filipino boy." Bishop spoke in his rather staccato way, but with a grim manner. "Now, get this: During luncheon, Dr. Morton suggested that she and Andreas drive to the Motor Vehicle Department office, to check up on the renewal of the boy's license as

chauffeur. As it proved, the trip was not necessary. Morton obviously cleared the house for a certain purpose. Miss Morton found the body on her return. When she and Andreas departed, Jessop had remained at the house."

"So Jessop was the last to see Dr. Morton alive?" I asked.

He grimaced. "Far from it! Jessop went to town about one. Says he got the mail, then went to Mrs. Welson's house and sat around on the porch waiting for her. Drove back home about two, not having seen her. Garaged his car and went into his own quarters at the rear. Came out when he heard a determined ringing at the house bell. Went around house. Found Loren Andrey and the Devry chauffeur, the Chink, on the front porch."

"The chauffeur? Why?"

"Dr. Morton had phoned Miss Devry asking her to send Andrey and someone else down at once. Said he was to have a meeting with Singleton and wanted two witnesses there."

"Singleton!" I exclaimed. "A meeting! How do you know all this?"

"Miss Devry sent Andrey. He told me. I called her back and confirmed it. And by the way, she doesn't know yet that Morton is dead. Nobody knows; I've kept it secret till you got here."

HE went on: Jessop, it seemed, spoke with the two callers. As Morton had not answered the bell, they concluded he was asleep and refused to wait longer. Jessop went to the gate with them and saw Miss Morton returning. Loren Andrey seemed peeved at having come on a useless errand, and drove off. When Miss Morton came, she went in the house, discovered the body, and had Jessop telephone Gregg.

"And the cause of death?" I asked.

Bishop screwed up his face, examined his cigar, and looked at me resignedly.

"Believe it or not, drowning!"

This jolted me. "Again! So he expected to meet Singleton, wanted witnesses—and was killed none the less! Why did he want witnesses, after clearing the house himself? It doesn't make sense. I suppose you believe in Singleton's existence now?"

"Bodham, I'm not sure about anything," said the Chief sadly. "The last man we know to have been with Morton in life was Peterson."

Here was another facer. "How does Miss Devry's secretary get into this?"

"He drove into it. Andrey told me that as he and the Chink chauffeur neared the house, they saw a car leaving; Peterson and two other men were in it. You see, all this happened like a string of firecrackers—*snap-snap-snap!* One leaves; another comes. I called Peterson. He admitted it readily. Nothing secret about it. He was planning to buy a lot adjoining the Morton property. And the two men with him were Ed Parks and Gil Stuart."

"Their names are vaguely familiar," I commented.

BISHOP grinned. "Ought to be! Plastered on real-estate signs for miles around! They give Peterson complete backing. In fact, they saw Morton alive after Peterson left him."

I was puzzled by this, until the Chief explained and laid before me a rough sketch. It showed Dr. Morton's house, which fronted my own cottage on a short dead-end road just off the highway.

The two real-estate men halted their car outside the boundary wall, not turning in. Dr. Morton was walking in the garden, said Bishop, and Peterson talked with him, the real-estate men sitting in the car. Morton and Peterson went into the house; presently they came out, and after a moment or two Peterson returned to the car. The other men saw Morton after Peterson rejoined them.

"How do you know they did?"

"They're both trustworthy," said the Chief. "Also, they were listening to the car radio as they waited. When Peterson rejoined them, the two o'clock KFI news program had just begun; the announcer was still speaking. They drove on to the end of the road, took a look at the lots; Peterson asked a few questions and picked the lot he wanted to buy. While they were doing this, Dr. Morton must have been murdered."

"Yes? How can you be sure?"

"They drove away, past the Doctor's house and turning into the highway. Loren Andrey, who was approaching, saw them as they passed him."

The time sequence was really quite simple. Peterson and the two real-estate men had departed at two o'clock, getting a glimpse of Morton in the garden as they drove off. Morton must have gone into the house at once, and called Miss Devry at three minutes past two. She was positive about the time.

Loren Andrey, at her request, had hopped into the car and driven down

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here with the Chinese chauffeur—a matter of ten minutes at most. He had raised nobody; Jessop, arriving, talked with him. He departed, and Miss Morton had come home almost at once. The time of the murder, then, must have been immediately after Morton's phone call to Miss Devry, and before Jessop's arrival.

"It's rather absurd," I said, "because drowning takes a bit of time. Was there any sign of a struggle?"

"None at all," Bishop replied. "I almost jugged Jessop on suspicion; he actually had the shakes. Loren Andrey, however, had seen him come home, remember."

I nodded, frowning over the puzzle. "How do you know the exact time Morton telephoned Miss Devry?"

"That was a lucky break!" Bishop replied, beaming. "Morton wanted to check the time with her, on account of Singleton's visit, and didn't have the right time himself. The old lady swears by an electric clock that's one of her chief pets. She gave him the time. Morton said that Loren Andrey could easily get there before Singleton was due, and rang off. . . . What's the matter, Bodham? You look as though you didn't believe it."

"I believe it, but don't like it," I said. "It's phony about Morton being worried over the time, too."

"Phony? Why so?"

"He has a very fine watch, one of those Swiss things with a split second and stopwatch arrangement and several dials. He was proud that it never varied; he'd have been more likely to tell her the time than to ask it."

"You couldn't tell that old hellcat anything," said the Chief confidentially. He shoved a carbon of a stenographic report at me. "I had both sides of our phone conversation taken down. Look at the language she used!"

I glanced over it, and smiled. "Sure she doesn't know Morton is dead?"

"I warned Peterson, under pain of obstructing justice, to say nothing. Parks and Gil Stuart won't talk. Nor Gregg. Nor Miss Morton and those there."

"Andrey and the Chink chauffeur?"

"Don't know anything about it."

"Then I'll drop up and brace Miss Devry," I said. "I have a hunch that her brother is this mysterious Singleton."

"The hell you say! I didn't know she had a brother!"



I sketched, rapidly, the story of the elusive original Nathaniel II. Bishop agreed that in the shock of the news Miss Devry might well drop some information of value; he put the police car at my service, with one of his men to drive. At the door, I halted and turned back, asking whether he had obtained any information from the Mercedes car. He called for his fingerprint expert, Dobbs, who brought in the enlargements of some prints.

"One set belongs to Devry," explained Dobbs. "Some belong to Rose Wong, as we expected. Some are unidentified—probably from garage helpers. But I've traced this set, half a dozen in all, to Loren Andrey."

"How do you know?" I demanded. "You haven't booked him?"

Dobbs grinned. "Naw! I collect prints. Just asked him for them, one day awhile back. Got Rose Wong's that way too. Most people get a kick out of having their prints taken."

"Then Andrey might have taken the Mercedes, that night Miss Morton was hurt."

"Not might, but did," Bishop threw in. "Admitted it. Drove out to the Kubla Club and dropped a hundred dollars at the roulette table; drove one of his friends home. Has a perfect alibi. He just isn't the one who hit Miss Morton, Bodham."

I WAS forced to agree, not without satisfaction. "He really didn't fit into our picture. He might have some of the characteristics, but could not be Singleton."

Bishop grunted. "You still think both killings the work of one person?"

"Yes. Same method of killing. Same dry clothes. Same absence of direct evidence and positive motives."

He dissented. "To me, Devry was drowned from expediency. He was drunk, probably helpless. Chased the girl to the stream and fell over it. Singleton catches up and dunks his head. I scouted around there this morning and found a scuffed place where it happened. So that was accident, you might say. The other was not."

"Find any footprints there? Or in Morton's garden?"

He shook his head. "Nothing there of any clarity. Morton's garden? Nope. Gravel path, rye-grass. Nothing happened there anyhow. He went in to telephone Miss Devry and was killed in the house."

"Just the same, might he have been drowned in the garden?"

"No. That's the very point, Bodham. No standing or running water there. There's an old empty alabaster bird-bath in the garden, but it's dry."

"Yes, I remember it," I said. "Disused, by its looks."

"The Filipino said it hasn't held any water for a couple of years; pipe's choked up or broken. That leaves the bathrooms in the house. In my check-up I saw no signs of splashed water or scuffed walls, no sign of struggle, no evidence of water being flung around."

"Suppose Singleton had doped him first? Hypodermic?"

"That'd leave a mark; and his body was examined, believe me! No bruises, no crack over the head," he went on mournfully. "Look here, s'pose you drop by Gregg's office and see what he thinks about the doping angle! He might put us wise to something that could have been used in the time Singleton had at his disposal."

"Good idea; I'll do that. But with everything pointing to Singleton as murderer of both men, why do you doubt the fact?"

"Hunch!" Bishop shrugged. "Suppose No. 2 knows Singleton killed Devry and got away with it as a natural death; and he, No. 2, has an airtight alibi for that killing. He kills Morton the same way, hoping we'll think it a natural death also. If we found it to be murder, it might open up the Devry case and would be laid to the same killer; and, with his airtight alibi in the former instance, No. 2 would be beyond suspicion. How does it sound?"

I GRINNED. "Involved but interesting, Chief. Only it's hard to believe in two murderers where there ought not to be even one!"

"Yes—a nice clean-cut average homicide, husband-kills-lover or bandit-shoots-in-get-away—well, you could savvy that. It'd be natural. But this sort of mystery killing is out of place in Pine Springs!"

I left, and the driver took me first to see Dr. Gregg.

The medico had a penthouse office and bungalow; this, in Pine Springs, meant the roof of a one-story building. His office at the head of the stairs was dark, so I turned to the bungalow. He hailed me from the door as I approached, and shook hands heartily.

"Come in, glad to see you. Damned shame about poor Morton! What's behind it?"

"The more we figure, the less we understand," I said wryly, dropping into a chair in his living-room. "I dropped in to see if you could suggest how Morton might have submitted so tamely to being drowned."

AS I sketched the problem, he wrinkled up his face in thought.

"Nope. If the murderer had used a drug that would hit so hard and fast, he might as well have gone the whole hog and used it to kill Morton. No evidence of hypodermic puncture, no marks of strangulation or skull contusion. The man was drowned; that's all."

He mixed a drink, for which I was grateful. Grateful enough, in fact, to give him the odd story of Singleton as I had it from Morton, not mentioning Miss Devry's missing brother. With what I had unearthed, I assumed Singleton to be a case of inferiority complex gone wild, but Gregg shook his head.

"A neurosis isn't so easily bounded as all that, Bodham. Such psychiatric analysis is apt to lead a layman into a *cul-de-sac*. No neurosis is simple; you mustn't overlook the possibility of mixtures. With human life at stake—"

"And, if we put any credence in Singleton's warning beneath the stamp, there *is* a human life at stake!" I exclaimed warmly. "Since that crack on the head didn't kill her, he'll definitely try—"

I broke off abruptly. It came to me like that, between two words!

Gregg stared at me in astonishment. "What's the matter? Isn't the whisky good?"

"It's Jessop!" I broke out. "Singleton is Jessop—of course! He had the weakest alibi, in both cases. He sleeps alone in his shack. He could have gone to the Welson house, killed Devry, and brought him back as a ghastly demonstration to Morton. A dead Devry to back up all his threats, in this mystery which concerns the Devry family alone! He's worked for years with Morton,

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and knows all about his work and his books—”

“But hold on!” protested Gregg.

I brushed his words aside.

“Last night he knew I was coming over to talk with Morton. He was supposed to be in town. Instead, he was at that window, listening! He’s the one who struck down Kathy!”

“Easy, Bodham!” Gregg exclaimed, an amused glint in his eye. “Wait, now—”

“Don’t interrupt,” I rushed on excitedly. “I remember, now; when he came into the house, he knew all about Kathy having been hit. He even asked if there had been a fracture! You see? How could he have known, unless he were the man who hit her?”

“Because I told him,” said Gregg.

I gaped at him, thunderstruck. He went on, with a quiet smile:

“He was sitting in the same row with me at the movie house. I climbed over his knees going out. I had to come back to excuse myself to my guests, so I told Jessop to come out to the lobby. He did so. I told him of the emergency call, and offered to take him out to the Morton house. He had a lady with him—refused my invitation, and said he’d take the lady home and then be out.”

I departed, not too happily, and the police car whirled me up toward the Devry mansion on the hillside. Gregg had knocked Jessop out of the box, and so beautifully that the memory stung.

MISS DEVRY was waiting for me. She was in no amiable mood, as she conveyed to me on the spot, in a voice like a file. As yet, neither she nor anyone else knew of Morton’s death.

“Well, Bodham! What did you turn up on your wild-goose chase?”

“The identity of Singleton, for one thing.”

She stiffened. “Bosh! No such person, Bodham. All nonsense!”

“Not at all, Miss Devry. You may be shielding him deliberately—”

“Bodham, have you gone mad?” she broke in furiously. “Why should I shield him?”

“Because of what took place today at Morton’s house.”

“Well, what the devil took place?” she demanded. “Dr. Morton phoned me he had an appointment with this Singleton. I thought he was under some delusion, and still think so. Andrey didn’t even see him. What took place, then?”

“This time,” I said, “your brother overreached himself.”

She was almost spitting fire. “What in God’s name has my brother got to do with all this, or with Singleton?”

“Your brother is Singleton; that’s all.”

She regarded me with a pitying snort. “So you’re really insane, are you? And expect me to share your delusions?”

“The police share them, at least.”

“What are you driving at?” she snapped. “My brother had nothing to do with the death of Nat Devry.”

“Perhaps not. But he had everything to do with the murder of Dr. David Morton.”

As she looked at me, her face changed. It became old and drawn and haggard, a gray waxen mask, in which the eyes grew large. Her voice came in a whisper.

“Murder—you say he was *murdered*—”

She crumpled up in the chair. I sprang to her side, found that her heart was all right, and poured her a pony of brandy from the open tantalus. The first taste of it brought her around.

I had not dreamed she would take the news of Morton’s death so hard. She demanded fiercely to know everything that had happened, and sat in frozen silence while I told her.

Then, for a moment, her eyes closed. I thought she was going to faint again. Instead, she opened her eyes and gave me a challenging look.

“Bodham, you’re not the fool I called you. It’s all my own fault. God forgive me, I should have told you earlier!”

“What?” I asked.

“That David Morton was my brother.”

Chapter Ten

SO there the secret was out—the secret that might have changed everything had I known it sooner. Nor was this all. Miss Devry now poured out the entire background of her own story, of Morton’s, of the family history. This woman of iron broke down completely; she became a querulous whimpering woman, holding back nothing. She even went into her own tragic destiny, a typically mid-Victorian affair, an engagement of a year or more to some young man who had died before the wedding.

It was upon the story of March that I seized eagerly. It would be amplified, I knew, by the papers in the tin dispatch-box; but here, in brief, I sifted the important details from her flood of words.

Nathaniel II—later to become David Morton—had gone from quarrel to quarrel with his father, who wanted a commercial heir and not a physician in the family. Hugh March came into the business from nowhere. The family were living in Canton at the time; young March had showed up in Canton, married Eliza Devry—and disagreed violently with Nathaniel II. The latter plunged into drinking and gambling, in a wild and desperate effort to shame the hard old Nathaniel I. The father refused to be shamed; instead, he kicked out the boy, after giving him a few thousand dollars.

March had a hand in it. And after that, the interloper Hugh March assumed the legal name of Nathaniel Devry II. . . .

Edna Devry never ceased to combat March. Years later, she tracked down her brother, who refused outright to have anything to do with the family. Without his knowledge, she secretly supplied him with funds, enabling him to retire and settle down at Pine Springs, twenty years ago, with the grandchild who represented his entire world.

Singleton? More cryptic than ever. There were no other Devry children of her own generation, said Miss Devry. She knew absolutely nothing about any Singleton. Another pony of brandy, and she became somewhat more herself, demanding to know what was being done about the murder of Morton.

I TOLD her what Bishop had already done. She was no longer defiant; her face stamped with a numb misery, she nodded to anything I suggested.

"Are you certain," I asked her, "that the man who telephoned you was Dr. Morton?"

"I had no reason to think otherwise," she rejoined. "Of course, I had never spoken to him on the telephone before. I suppose I couldn't swear to it."

"Did the voice sound like that of anyone else?"

"No," she said reflectively.

"Did Morton say anything, make any remark, tell you anything, beyond what you have reported to Chief Bishop?"

She frowned, shook her head, checked herself. "Yes! Wait! He did mention that Peterson had given him a letter from Singleton—he said Peterson had just been there."

"I'd like to speak with Peterson, Miss Devry, if you don't mind."

She acceded with apparent relief.

Peterson appeared, exuding cordiality and servile good nature. We spoke about Morton's death; he showed the proper evidences of shock, the proper interest in my wanting to ask a few questions. My respect for him grew momentarily. The man had his parts.

"JUST how did you happen to go in to see Dr. Morton? Did you know him?" I asked. "Any shred of information, you know, may help us to unravel this frightful tangle."

"I've been thinking of buying a place here, that I might come to some day when I retire," he said, with a sidelong glance at Miss Devry. "I had looked at the lot beyond Dr. Morton's place, and had worried about the soil, whether it were too sandy to grow tomatoes. I have an ambition to grow tomatoes; it is really a great hobby of mine. So, as we drove past the house and saw him walking in the garden, Mr. Stuart suggested that I ask Dr. Morton, who had been here so long. I did. He showed me some of his shrubs, discussed the soil, and I came away."

"And the letter?" I asked.

He regarded me blankly. "Yes? What letter, Mr. Bodham?"

"The one you gave Dr. Morton."

"Oh, that letter! I had completely forgotten it!" His face cleared, and he laughed in confusion. "Yes, when I stopped for the mail, there was a letter for Dr. Morton in our box. I discovered it later on, when I was sorting out the mail here at the house."

"And that was your real reason, perhaps, for going to Dr. Morton's house?"

Peterson looked puzzled. "No, no! I put the letter in my pocket, meaning to take it back to the post office. Then I forgot all about it until I was talking with Dr. Morton in his garden. It was just a letter—I'd not have paid it any attention had he not seemed so shocked when he tore it open."

"What was the letter like? Where from?"

"I really didn't notice, sir," Peterson stated.

"You say he seemed shocked?"

"So it struck me, sir. I paid no attention, of course; it was none of my affair. I thanked Dr. Morton for his kindness, and went out to the car, and that was all."

That was all for Peterson, indeed. I got rid of him, and turned to Miss Devry.

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"You see?" I told her. "Morton called you three minutes later. The letter was from Singleton, announcing a personal interview. Morton told you so, asked you to send Audrey and someone else—two witnesses. He appealed to you in his agitation and dismay. Now you cannot doubt the existence of Singleton."

Miss Devry was doubting nothing. She appealed to me to spare no money, no expense; she wanted rewards offered. She begged me to have Kathy guarded.

"She must be watched day and night, Bodham! She's definitely in danger."

"Why should she be in danger?"

"Bodham, you're hopeless! She's the heiress to the Devry millions, of course."

The light broke upon me. I stared at her, and at last found words.

"Is this what's behind all your queer ways? Yes, yes—you hate the rest of them; you knew Morton was your brother—so this explains your silence! You made your brother heir to your fortune, and his granddaughter after him?"

"Exactly," she shot out with a defiant glare. "She's the only true Devry alive!"

I would get into no argument. Already I was thinking ahead, wishing I had known these things long before; what a bearing all this might have on the present and future!

"Who knows of this?" I demanded sharply. "You and the lawyer who drew up your will—and who else?"

"No one, of course," she declared positively.

"Bosh!" I snapped at her. "Look—use your head. You think no one knows, eh? Where has the will been kept since your lawyer drew it up? In his office files, no doubt?"

"Not at all," she rejoined. "The senior partner died two years ago. I don't approve of the junior partners. I sought another legal firm, and transferred my personal business to them. But I kept the will myself. It's in my safety-deposit box at home, in Baltimore."

"NOW we're getting somewhere," I exclaimed. "You've given others access to that box, of course? Careful, now! Don't lie to me, Miss Devry! Don't hold anything back!"

"You impertinent— Confound you, Bodham, I suppose you're right," she replied. "Yes. The will is in a sealed envelope, so I've never worried about anyone's seeing it. I've sent clerks to the box—the company lawyers who handle my income-tax; my secretary, Peterson;

my nephew, Nathaniel III—occasionally he handles some charity matters for me. It's about the limit of his capacity."

I leaned back and drew a deep breath. "All those people! And you think nobody could break into a sealed envelope and seal it again—or use a new envelope! Do you know what I think of you?"

She sat for a moment gazing at me, then nodded.

"You're right, Bodham. I'm a damned fool, I guess."

I broke into a laugh. "Miss Devry, I didn't say that. You've got me there. Let me use your phone, will you? Then I must get back to Chief Bishop and have a bite of supper."

WHEN I phoned the Morton house, I was answered by the man Bishop had left there; he called Bathsheba. She told me Kathy had gone to sleep upon a sedative from Dr. Gregg, and all was well. Bidding her await me, I rang off, said good night to Miss Devry, and shortly was speeding back to Headquarters.

Bishop was awaiting me. When he heard my news about the letter from Singleton, his eyes bulged; but upon learning Morton's identity, he threw up his hands.

"Well, that's one for the book, Bodham! Apparently the only man who could have helped us with Singleton is dead."

"Did Morton have that letter in his pockets?"

The Chief produced a list, and we eyed it. No letter had been found on Morton's body.

"He went in from the garden and called Miss Devry; might have left the letter in the study," Bishop said hopefully. "I've waited for you before going over the place. What say we run out there now? Could stand a bite to eat first."

"Suits me," I assented. "Suppose we speak with those realtors, Parks and Stuart? I'd like to hear from them exactly what took place."

Bishop scooped up his phone and arranged with them to meet us in five minutes at the grill across the street.

There, in a booth, we talked—and the two realtors told all I wanted to learn.

Peterson had been dickering with them for the past month on the sale of that lot, they said. Stuart, meeting him the previous evening, had suggested the morning's trip; it had been put off until after lunch. Both of them were positive

that they had suggested to Peterson that he pop in and ask Dr. Morton about the soil for his tomatoes; they had wanted Peterson to get unbiased information.

"We had pulled up alongside one of those square-barred openings in Morton's wall," said Gil Stuart. "We could see Dr. Morton, through an opening in the bushes; he was wearing a real gaudy dressing-gown. I've known him for years, and I called to him. He waved back. Peterson hopped out, walked to the gate near the garage, and went in to talk with the Doctor. We saw them go into the house, apparently. Pretty soon they came back; Peterson stopped and talked, then came along and got into the car. The news broadcast had just come on; we listened to it as we drove along to the end of the road."

"You saw Dr. Morton and Peterson after they had been in the house?"

"Sure. They came out and were walking up and down—we could see them among the bushes. Peterson called good-bye to Morton and came through the gate to the car. We had another glimpse of the Doctor standing there. We could see him through the oleanders; that opening in the outside wall was just like a window, you know."

I nodded. "Yes. At which opening were you?"

"Third from Morton's gate," said Stuart. "We've talked it over together, you see, and we're both quite positive about it. Each of those holes in the wall is about two feet square; a wooden bar across each way. Sitting in the car, we could see through it nicely. The inside path was all visible."

"And you're sure there was an opening in the shrubs through which you saw both men?"

"Positive," said Parks. "We could see them right between those two enormous bunches of white oleanders—they're in bloom now, as you probably know. After Peterson started out, we saw Dr. Morton standing there."

"You might have mistaken someone else for him?"

"In that gaudy dressing-gown? Not much. Besides," added Stuart, "I knew him well."

So that was that.

BISHOP and I went out to the Morton house. Kathy was asleep. I sent Bathsheba home. Then the Chief and I went over Morton's study, into which the officer on guard had allowed no one

to come. My first thought was for the papers in the tin dispatch-box.

The box stood on the desk, empty.

"What the hell did you expect?" snapped Bishop. "Singleton was here; he did the job, and he took the papers, sure! According to what I've heard from you, he had sent them to Morton in the first place. What we need to pin the job on him, is that letter Morton got!"

I was somewhat staggered by the loss of those documents; however, we went at the job carefully. The letter brought Morton by Peterson had vanished. It was nowhere. In the fireplace we found a little pile of paper ash, but it had been stirred about so that no writing could be brought up.

Where had the drowning occurred? This was a puzzle. The bathrooms were spotless and had revealed no fingerprints. No abrasions on the tile—nothing. The washroom off the Doctor's office gave no clue whatever.

"Well, we're doing a damned poor job of detecting!" exclaimed the Chief, dropping at long last on the couch in the study. "Either he was drowned somewhere else, or this Singleton is too damned clever for us."

"What about Jessop?" I said. "We haven't looked in his place yet. Always a chance."

THERE was a light in Jessop's rooms. At our knock, he admitted us; fright was in his peering birdlike face.

"You might be able to help us a bit, Mr. Jessop," said the Chief heartily.

"I hope so, I hope so!" exclaimed Jessop hastily. "We must stop all this, stop it! Stop it before it goes farther!"

His agitation was evident. Bishop shot me a glance and I took the word.

"What do you mean, Jessop? You think there'll be another murder?"

"There's bound to be!" he replied. "They go by threes; you know they do! It's terrible, Mr. Bodham; I can't stand it—my nerves are all gone to pieces."

"No wonder," said Bishop. "I've meant to ask you a few things; this murder drove 'em out of my head. About Mrs. Welson. She told us some interesting things about you, Jessop; very interesting things! That is, about you and young Devry!"

Jessop was backed against the wall, staring at us, his hands shaking.

"I—I'll tell you all about it," he said jerkily, his voice thick with terror. "She

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—she was not to blame. She knew nothing about it. I can tell you the whole thing. I wanted to do it before, and was afraid. I knew you'd trace it to me. I'll tell you everything you want to know."

"Oh!" I said, and hid my astonishment with a laugh. "I suppose you can tell us who John Singleton is, eh?"

"Yes sir," said Jessop, turning to me. "Yes, of course. I am."



Chapter Eleven

DESPITE my bewildered amazement over Jessop's staggering disclosure, I could not but admire Bishop's technique. He had the psychology of the little secretary figured exactly right.

The name of Mrs. Welson was to Jessop like a brick heaved into a plate-glass window, and had about the same result. He swallowed all that Bishop said. He doubted nothing. He was flung into an agony of emotion, from which Bishop, with almost hypnotic smoothness, extracted everything desired. The weak, frustrated, helpless little man was a pitiable object; the idea that he was blamed for Nat Devry's death had shattered him.

Jessop held nothing back, apparently. He had, in a word, found Nat Devry lying half in and half out of the tiny creek, near Mrs. Welson's house, between two and three o'clock.

"And how did you happen to be there at that time of the morning?"

"I was worried about Mrs. Welson. She and I have been seeing a lot of each other—I guess you know that if she's told you—" Jessop paused and licked his lips, miserably. "I was worried. Devry'd been drunk early that evening, when he stopped to see the Doctor."

"You mean that young Devry came to Morton's house the night he was killed? Before he went to the Araby place?"

"Yes. I wouldn't let him see Dr. Morton; he wanted some medicine for his heart, he said. He was going to see a girl; he had the key to Mrs. Welson's house and said she had let him use it while she was out of town. Finally he went away. I worried, and could not sleep. I was afraid he'd get Mrs. Welson into some trouble. About two o'clock I

got up, dressed, and went to the Welson house. His car was in front—"

Briefly, he had found Devry's body, thought him still alive, and drove him out to Morton's place in the Mercedes. A double motive—to save his beloved Mrs. Welson from scandal, and to save Devry. The latter was quite dead, however, and Jessop realized it upon reaching Morton's place. This flung him into fresh terror.

"All I could think of," he chattered on, "was to make it look like a natural death. In fact, I thought it was. He was all mud-splashed and wet. I found a bag in the car with clean clothes, and got them on him. His old clothes are in the bag now; it's here, under my bed. I dragged him up the walk and left him. I didn't know until today that he'd been murdered. I thought it was his heart."

"You arranged his body in the Sign of Death?" I said. Jessop gave me a look and ducked his head.

"Yes. It—it was too good a chance to lose. I thought nobody but Dr. Morton would notice the position. That's why I was worried when you called me, and I saw the arm had been moved. I moved it back again before the Doctor came out. Well, today—what Andrey said—*it frightened me.*"

"Tell us," urged Bishop.

"Dr. Morton sent me to get the mail at one o'clock, and ordered me not to come back until after two."

"Morton did? Why?"

JESSOP shook his head.

"I had no idea. I was afraid to ask questions; he had a queer, nervous manner. I went in town, got the mail, went to Mrs. Welson's house, and she wasn't there: so I waited on the porch till two o'clock and then came back here and went to my room. I heard the front bell ringing and went around the side of the house. Loren Andrey and his chauffeur were at the door. He said that Dr. Morton had phoned for him to come as a witness to a meeting with Singleton. *Singleton!* You can imagine how I felt! Then he told me that Devry's death had been murder; Miss Devry had told him about it. Everything was jumpy inside of me. Then Andrey went away. Almost at once, Miss Morton and Andreas came home, and found the Doctor dead, and I phoned for Dr. Gregg."

He ended abruptly. "What were you going to say?" I asked. "Something frightened you?"

Jessop swallowed hard. "That's it. Whoever did the murder, knows about me. Knows about Singleton!"

That was more than I did, but I kept quiet; Jessop was spilling everything. He went to his bureau and took out a folded paper, brought it to his table between us, and unfolded it. Within were two playing cards—the seven of hearts and the jack of clubs. Jessop pointed to the latter card, which was badly crumpled.

"That was in the clenched hand of Devry when I found him," he said. "It fell out, and I saved it. I handled it, but I didn't handle this seven of hearts; this card was in Dr. Morton's hand when I went to him and found him dead."

"And you said nothing of it? You concealed it from us all?" cried Bishop.

POOOR Jessop actually cringed. "Yes, yes, don't you see? I was afraid! I didn't know what the first one meant; but this made it all clear to me! And I had just learned that the other was murder—"

"Made what clear?" snapped Bishop. "What do these cards mean?"

"Singleton," I put in.

Jessop gave me a birdlike nod.

"Yes. A play on the name; any bridge-player would know. Someone knows that I am Singleton! The murderer knows! You see? He's trying to cast suspicion on me! I am Singleton, but I had no engagement with Dr. Morton today. Someone else—the one who murdered him! I had to tell you, gentlemen; to save myself from this fiend—"

"Then you're the Singleton who sent all those letters and warnings?" I asked.

"Yes, Mr. Bodham."

"Where are they? Did you take them from the box in Morton's study?"

"Yes," he quavered. "I have them here, all safe. They are mine, after all. I haven't been trying to hide anything," he burst forth desperately. "I just didn't know what to do. I was afraid!"

Bishop soothed him as by magic, lit a cigar, and Jessop became more calm.

"I was trying to force Dr. Morton to tell the world the truth about my father," he said. "That was all. You see, Singleton is really my name, my father's name."

"Just where is it tangled up in the Devry family, then?" I demanded.

"John Singleton was my father; he deserted my mother when I was a baby, took all her money, and disappeared. As a boy, I vowed to discover him and make him repay all the pain and suffering

caused her. As I grew up, I devoted myself to this task. It became the one object of my life. I learned that he had presumably gone to China. I went there. I traced Hugh March easily, but not John Singleton—"

"Ah!" The exclamation burst from me. "Hugh March was your father!"

Jessop regarded me with staring eyes. "I have never got legal proof of it, Mr. Bodham. I tried to force Dr. Morton to publish all I did obtain."

"Did you threaten his life?" broke in Bishop suddenly.

"Yes." Jessop was becoming desperate again. "But I would never have harmed him, never! I only wanted to frighten him into helping me."

"With what object?" I drove in at him mercilessly. "Hugh March was dead years ago. Your father took another name and became Nathaniel Devry II—taking a third name. You must have had more of an objective than merely to prove your birth legitimate."

"Wasn't that objective enough?" snapped Jessop waspishly. "The Devrys were really illegitimate—his marriage was bigamous! And I could legally claim part of the fortune my father made; he had stolen all my mother's money!"

Chief Bishop settled back, satisfied. "Blackmail, eh?" he grunted, and chewed anew at his cigar. I knew it was more than that; I could understand Jessop better. He answered perfectly to all the built-up psychology I had identified with Singleton.

"Who else knows that you're Singleton?" I asked quietly.

"No one! Not a soul!" His answer was so swift, so positive, it made me wonder.

"You understand," I went on, "that someone, evidently posing as Singleton, had an appointment with Dr. Morton—and murdered him. You've said yourself that someone must know you're Singleton, must be trying to fasten the murder upon you. Therefore you've confided the secret to someone."

"I have not, Mr. Bodham," he said.

I KNEW in this instant that he lied. Behind the thick lenses his eyelids twitched in the slight, involuntary motion that almost always accompanies a lie. Whom had he told, then? I knew the answer, of course; the woman to whom he was so absurdly devoted. I might have got it out of him, had not Bishop intervened.

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"You've told somebody, Jessop," said the Chief. "Somebody knows about Singleton; and that person is either the murderer of Dr. Morton, or else knows the murderer."

Those words must have hammered into Jessop's soul. He flinched; then his voice firmed.

"No, gentlemen. I've told no one. Someone else has heard about Singleton and suspects I am that man. That's all. Are you going to arrest me?"

"No." Chief Bishop, chewing at his cigar, shook his head. "You're an accessory after the fact of Devry's murder; but I don't think the county prosecutor will go after you on that score. I can jail you on several charges; but I'm not after a record for jailing suspects, I want the man who killed Dr. Morton—that's all. Stay here in your own rooms tonight, keep your ears open, give us any help you can. Agreed?"

"Of course," said Jessop warmly. Bishop's sympathetic friendliness had quite won him, "You can count on me for that. I wouldn't let Miss Kathy be hurt for the world!"

"What makes you think she'll be hurt?" said Bishop quickly.

Jessop's eyes widened.

"She was attacked only the other night, wasn't she?"

"Right," said the Chief, and we left.

BACK in Morton's library, Bishop gave me a questioning look.

"How much of that little rat's yarn do you believe?"

"Most of it," I said.

"You don't think Miss Morton will be in any danger?"

That was exactly what I did think. Jessop's final words had jerked at my memory; I recalled what Miss Devry had said. She had begged that Kathy be protected. In a few words, I told Bishop the truth of Kathy's heritage. He whistled.

"May not be anything to it," I went on, "but young Devry was killed; then Morton, and apparently an attempt was made on Kathy. If it's a question of the Devry fortune, then the murderer is going to wipe Kathy out, be sure of it!"

"Okay, then; we'll act on that basis," said Bishop promptly. "Me, I pick Jessop for the fall guy. That's why I left him at liberty, so he'd tip his mitt tonight. If he's not the one, then the other one may do the same. Can you stay here tonight?"

"Sure."

"Then go home, go to bed, and sneak back here. You may be watched; never can tell. Slip into the house and remain in this room, I'll send my man away, and have him slip back later on, and wait in the garden near Jessop's place. Your sister had better stay in the room with Miss Morton. Sound reasonable?"

I assented. "But we must have some regular guards by tomorrow. There's no question of expense."

"If we haven't got this thing licked by tomorrow," Bishop said grimly, "I'm going to begin tossing suspects behind the bars. That's where the 'suspicion' charge in California helps the right people!"

WE did the thing in style, leaving Bathsbeba to occupy the couch in Kathy's room. Bishop sent his man away with ostentation. Presently he and I, with banging of doors and heavy tread, left the house and went out to his police car, and stood talking loudly for a moment. It was fantastic to imagine that this desert solitude, with the town lights glinting along the slopes of the mountains, and the coyotes howling somewhere across the far foothills, could spawn any creature that might be spying upon us. Fantastic, but—

"See you tomorrow, then!" called Bishop, and went roaring away down the highway toward town. I crossed over to my own cottage. There, with all the solemnity of one who suspects an audience of his most private movements, I got into my pajamas and went to bed—I never left out a motion, absurd as it might seem.

Then, in slippers and dark dressing-gown, I became a furtive plotter and slunk out to the road and across. It was damned silly, all of it, or so I very frankly thought at the moment. Morton's door had been left unlocked; Andreas was in bed; I slipped in like a shadow, reached the library, and stretched out on the couch.

The problem of this murder was sufficient to keep me from sleeping. I went over it step by step, testing every scrap of information, only to come up against a stone wall. Now we had the details of the Morton skeleton, the Hugh March affair, and we even knew all about Singleton; the entire family history of the House of Devry was open before us—and still we knew absolutely nothing about the murderer.

Somewhere in this tangle of Singleton and Devry and March, I knew, there

must be a patent, open clue; an explanation must be under our very eyes; yet we had less in the way of suspects here than we had on the Devry case. This struck me as curious. It suggested that the Devry murder, assuming it as murder, might have been done on the spur of the moment; but that the murder of Dr. Morton was the result of long thought and careful planning. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced of this.

The web of overlapping alibis hardly seemed possible by chance alone. Rather, a puzzle had been deliberately created, a puzzle impossible of solution. All question of possible motive aside, the alibi matter was fascinating. Jessop had the poorest alibi, which argued well for his contention that someone was trying to throw suspicion upon him.

Peterson's alibi was so perfect as to inspire the singular possibility that it might be the one to cover the actual killing. And yet—Parks and Stuart swore positively that they had seen Morton alive in the garden after Peterson left him. They had departed at two o'clock. And we had the unshakable testimony of Miss Devry's electric clock that Morton had called her at three minutes past two—three minutes after Peterson and the other two men drove away.

The windows were open. From afar came the barking of dogs, and the yapping ululation of coyotes answering the challenge with their insane voices. It was the nightly chorus of Pine Springs' oldest inhabitants. Leaving the couch, I stepped to the window. The starlight outside was obscure; the garden was silent. Peterson in the garden! True, he had been with Morton in plain sight from the car. Yet the possibility fascinated me.

Suppose I were Peterson, and Peterson the murderer? How could he have killed the old Doctor, let alone drown him, while walking up and down in the garden? A confederate, yes; then how the devil did the confederate get away, and where to? One could only leave by the highway, or by the open desert running across to the dude ranches and the town buildings. And anyone legging it across that desert would have been observed.

THIS got me nowhere. I went to the chair by the desk, and sank into it. It was this chair in which I had sat while Morton told about Singleton. In the darkness, I could fancy him in his own chair, leaning on his right elbow,

looking at me with that gentle but direct stare of his. It stirred something in my subconscious memory. Rising, I went to the door and swung around as though entering.

I remembered how Morton had greeted me, turning to his own chair, beckoning me to come around the desk and sit beside him. Something odd about it—what? Why, the chair, of course! Odd that the chair for a visitor or secretary was at his right side; at his left, it would have been several feet nearer the door. Why make Jessop or a visitor walk all the way around the long flat-top desk?

The explanation came with a rush: I recalled his manner—why, it was obvious, of course! Morton had been deaf in his left ear; he must have kept it rather secret, perhaps had been sensitive about it. I could check on this with Kathy or Jessop—

At this instant I became conscious of the purring pulse. It was a faint throb, from somewhere outside, very faintly, like the throb of a far-distant engine, or an idling motor.

Then, definitely, I heard the creak of the small garden gate by the garage.

I reached out to the desk; flashlight and pistol lay there ready to hand. Once more I froze, watching the garden, every sense fastened on that path on the side of the house. Bushes and oleanders were dense with shadow in the starlight.

SILENCE. The pulsing throb continued softly. Someone had come in by that gate, was in the garden now, leaving a car outside. Tense, I waited, mentally counting the paces of one coming from that garden gate around to the front of the house. Moments passed. No light showed. Fifty paces—sixty! Still I heard nothing; the shadows remained blank. Sixty paces would have brought the intruder around past me to the front—ah! The garden gate again creaked. Had the intruder departed?

So it seemed. I regretted now that I had not used the flashlight, instead of waiting for him to come close. The throbbing pulse of the motor quickened slightly, then died away and was gone. Whoever had come, was now departed.

What did it all mean? Upon me crept an eerie sense of unreality, of uncanny action that could not be real. Dr. Morton had died in this very room. I remembered the old, stoutly held theory that the spirit of one departed lingers about the spot for days. A chill seized me.

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Then suddenly a car turned from the highway into our little side road, its headlights flared along the garden wall; it halted before the garage gate. A flashing radiance came through the gate; four persons, two of whom held flashlights, entered: Bishop, two of his officers—and a prisoner.

Chapter Twelve

BISHOP brought his prisoner to the front. I let them into the house and turned on the lights, and we assembled in the front room. The prisoner was Peterson—calm, pallid, sharp and deep of eye, perfectly composed.

"We found Mr. Peterson driving without any lights," said Bishop, flinging me a wink. "Here, Mr. Peterson; come over to this table. Empty your pockets, if you please."

"You've no right to take this action," snapped Peterson, but rather with firm poise than anger, I thought. "This is an outrage, whether you're police or not. I've told you that I came here to have a word with Mr. Jessop."

"Yes," said Bishop. "So you came and went, with no lights on your car—"

"Hello!" I exclaimed. "You mean Peterson was the one who was here? I heard someone come in—why, he must have left his car idling in the road!"

"Right the first time," said the Chief. "Sneaked in and sneaked out—why? That's what we're going to learn. All right, Peterson. Empty your pockets."

With a lofty and rather superior smile, Peterson obeyed. The Chief whispered to one of his officers, who went out, then turned to the others and waved his hand at Peterson.

"All right, Joe. Take him into the hall; that's a good light. Frisk him to the skin, and pay special attention to the shoes."

Alone with me, Bishop stirred the plunder on the table with a long forefinger, grimaced, and gave me a look.

"I thought we had a fish, Bodham; not so sure. Nothing here. Did he come into the house?"

"Not near it," I said. "I heard the gate creak twice, that's all."

"Think he went to Jessop's?"

"Absolutely not. I was listening closely—thought he was coming around to the front. If he'd stepped to the door of that shack, let alone knocked at it, I'd have heard him."

Bishop grunted. "I sent one lad out to search his car and to search the road where we picked him up, in case he threw something out. What the devil was he doing here?"

"You ought to know. You grabbed him."

"Yah! We followed him out from town. The lad shadowing Mrs. Welton's house saw him come down there, then drive away after a few minutes; the shadow called me; we followed, and out here saw his lights wink off. He ducked into this road. We eased along, waited, and nabbed him when he came back—still without lights."

I examined the material on the table, tried to read some sinister meaning into the stuff, and found it impossible. A wallet, a cigarette packet, a booklet of matches, a handsome lighter, loose bills and coins, a key-ring, a scarlet silk handkerchief, a fine linen handkerchief of white, two letters containing duns.

Joe brought Peterson back into the room, with a negative shake of the head.

"Do you mind," I asked him, "telling us what you discussed with Jessop?"

"I didn't discuss anything," Peterson stated calmly. "His place was dark, and this house was dark. I realized it was a bit late, and went back to my car and drove off, meaning to come back tomorrow."

"Oh, I see! That's quite natural," I said. "And the car lights?"

Peterson shrugged. "I really can't say—just one of those things we do, Mr. Bodham. We all do things which we'd find difficult to explain, now and then."

"True," I said. "Too true, in fact. And what had you in mind to say to Jessop?"

"Purely a personal matter," said Peterson quietly. "If I'm arrested, gentlemen, I want to know it; I insist that you place me in jail, and take the consequences when my attorney goes to work. If not arrested, I want to know it."

"YOU'RE not arrested," said Bishop. "But maybe you will be. Driving within city limits with no lights—don't get gay, Mr. Peterson. I can jail you in a flash! Put away your stuff. We'll take care of it at Headquarters, if I keep you there."

Peterson, I thought, was insufferably sure of himself. He tucked the red silk handkerchief into the breast pocket of his trimly cut coat, rammed the linen handkerchief on top of it, and pocketed

his other things. Chief Bishop motioned his officer.

"Joe, go fetch that man Jessop, and don't make any noise coming in."

Joe departed. I lit a cigarette, and studied Peterson, who had coolly taken a chair. He too had lighted a cigarette, and he eyed us with defiance. Then he flicked his ashes to the floor—and the gesture startled me.

This servile, soft-spoken nonentity who so humbly obeyed Miss Devry's lightest word—why was he so defiant, so coolly scornful? The answer came with a jolt. He was nothing of the sort. He was putting on a frantic act. Actually, he was in deathly fear—but of what?

Satisfied of this, however, I tried to put my finger on another false note, somewhere about him—manner, dress, words. It eluded me. I sensed something wrong, but could not pin it down.

Jessop was brought in and Bishop indicated Peterson.

"Mr. Jessop, do you know this man?"

"I believe it's Mr. Peterson."

"Do you know him?"

"I've never met him," said Jessop, "though I've seen him more than once."

"Have you any idea why he would be bringing you a personal and important message at this time of night?"

The surprise evinced by Jessop was, I thought, genuine.

"Why, of course not," he rejoined.

Bishop glanced at Peterson.

"Well, now's your chance! Jessop's here. Anything you want to say to him?"

Peterson retained his lofty, disdainful air and made no response.

"So you lied to us!" went on Bishop. "Well, I'll give you a chance to come clean. Why were you here?"

"I've told you," said Peterson. "Make the most of it."

HE was not afraid now. Why? More and more, I was convinced that the answer was in plain sight—where was the false note? As though to emphasize his returning confidence, Peterson went on:

"It's nonsense to talk of holding me for driving with no lights, and you know it. That's not a felony. Many a man forgets to switch on his lights. You're all worked up over the murder of Dr. Morton, and I don't blame you. Let me advise you, however, not to let it carry you too far—"

Suddenly I leaped to my feet.

They all stared at me. Bishop, on whom Peterson's words were making a



definite impression, turned a troubled face to me. I stepped up to Peterson. Yes, I had it now—the white linen handkerchief on top of the other one!

"What is it?" demanded the Chief.

"Notice anything wrong about Peterson's appearance?" I said. . . . "No, you wouldn't, nor would I, just now. He was clever enough to cover up the evidence."

PETERSON eyed me in obviously alarmed suspicion. I reached forward quickly. Before he could stop me, I jerked the linen handkerchief from his breast pocket, and with it the red silk handkerchief. He made one convulsive grab and then relaxed, as I stepped back. I tossed the linen handkerchief at him, and he caught it, watching me sullenly.

"Bishop, notice that even now Mr. Peterson is attired with care and precision," I said. "He's the soul of mild propriety. He dresses impeccably and conservatively. What, then, is he doing with a gaudy scarlet silk handkerchief—a nice big one, such as might be worn with a rodeo shirt by our resorters from Brooklyn? It's completely out of character. He would never think of wearing this handkerchief, which doesn't match his clothes or his personality. Come, Peterson! Why were you carrying this handkerchief?"

"You're right," he fairly snarled. "I wouldn't be found dead with that rag in my pocket!"

"Then why was it in your pocket?"

"It wasn't. It's an old torn handkerchief that was in the car—where it came from, I don't know," he retorted with a sneer. "Look under the seat; you'll find one or two more such rags. I had been using it to wipe the inside of the windshield, where the cold night air condenses moisture."

Bishop's expression of hope and interest died out into resignation. Peterson's words were convincing, his explanation was logical. I was almost convinced myself—almost. The question hit me: How

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had he known the handkerchief was torn? I glanced at it. Yes, it was torn.

Then I saw something else. It was not an old torn handkerchief. It was a new handkerchief, newly torn. It was not a dirty rag; it was clean. I carefully folded it up and pocketed it, and nodded slowly. Peterson had come into the garden—why? He had sneaked here, sneaked out and away—why? I remembered how I had stood at the window, counting those imaginary steps. Sixty of them, before the gate had creaked for the second time. Sixty. That would be thirty from the gate, thirty back to the gate.

"Well," I said, and rose, "looks as if we've been barking up the wrong tree, Chief. Suppose we give our friends a chance to smoke, while you and I step outside for a moment. I'd like to look at something."

Bishop followed me outside. At my request he handed me his flashlight, and I led him around the side of the house.

"Looked like you had something there, for a minute," he said. "With that handkerchief."

"I had, and I still have, but I don't want Peterson to realize it," I replied. "He's a damned clever man; you watch out for him. Keep him locked up."

"Eh? What's the answer? What have you on him?"

"Can't tell you that. Don't know myself, as yet. Now, wait here."

I went on to the rear gate. From it I stepped thirty paces—average walking paces—toward the front of the house, along the path. I halted, and as I brought up the flashlight, my arm was brushed by lantana stalks—the lantanas were trained up about the base of a clump of oleanders.

THE light struck upon the vivid cluster of flowers with their fuzzy, spiny branches and leaves. The light settled; my eyes focused. I called Bishop. He joined me, and I pointed to something.

It was a mere shred, a tiny shred, of crimson silk, where the handkerchief had caught. I detached it carefully.

"What's it mean?" demanded Bishop. "Was he walking along here?"

"Ask me something easy, Chief," I said. "No. He came back here tonight to get something—this handkerchief. What's the answer? I don't know, but I'll find out. Take him in and try to break him down tomorrow, about this handkerchief."

"All right, if you say so," said the Chief rather dubiously. "But I'm going to be busy as hell tomorrow—got a few things to run down. May take me clear to Roydron."

"No hurry," I said, remembering that young Devry was to be cremated on the morrow. "You can hold Peterson, I suppose, for a couple of days?"

"Well, I can if I must," said Bishop. "To be honest, Bodham, I can't quite swallow this handkerchief stuff. He might have lost it when he was walking about the garden with Dr. Morton; but why would he come back for it in this gumshoe manner?"

"That's precisely the interesting question," I said, not daring to hint at the tentative possibility in my mind.

"And how," went on the Chief, "do we know that he came back for it at all?"

IT'S easily proved. Look! And I flashed the beam of light along the clipped grass that came up to the edge of the path itself. "At this season the dew is heavy. You can't walk across this thickly sown grass without leaving streaks—see them?"

Plain enough. Someone had taken a couple of steps from the path, over to the clump of oleanders with the lantana bush about its base—someone approaching it in the starlight from the direction of the rear gate, rather uncertainly.

"None of us did that coming in. You didn't do it, finding the shred of silk—we've kept on this side. There are the streaks you made," said Bishop. "Fetch that light along, and we'll look over his car."

It was outside the gate, with Bishop's car. The Chief peered in and around it, and found nothing of interest in the glove-compartment or elsewhere. From the floor in the rear he pulled up a laprobe and a water-canteen encased in felt, and was putting them back with a grunt when I caught the canteen from him, and led the way along the house wall to the window of Dr. Morton's study, where I had found the scratches. The flashlight brought them out clearly. Against them I fitted the canteen. The two rivets of the strap-clasp fitted them exactly, and Bishop uttered a choked oath.

"What's it mean?"

"I don't know yet," I said frankly. "But I shall. If a scraping of the adobe reveals microscopic hairs of the felt, where someone holding the canteen

slung over his arm pressed it against the adobe—then we'll know how the scratches were made. Peterson, therefore, was the man listening at the window, who hit Kathy over the head."

"And why the devil would he have been holding this canteen?"

"I don't know, but I shall. If those rivet-heads show microscopic particles of adobe adhering, as they undoubtedly will, the proof will be conclusive. Better hold Peterson."

"On what charge?"

"Suspicion of Morton's murder. Before you leave town in the morning, come over here early and I'll show you why he came back for that handkerchief, I hope. Bring Stuart and Parks, the two witnesses, with you."

"My Lord, man! You mean to say you can clear up the murder?"

"Not yet, Chief. Tomorrow morning, I'll show you a new version of the old handkerchief trick. When you get back I'll tell you how the murder was done and who did it—with luck!"

"All right. I'll play ball with you," Bishop said crisply. "Only, I hope to hell you're not opening your mouth too wide, Bodham!"

So did I, to tell the truth!

Chapter Thirteen

ON the following morning, Saturday, I was up with the dawn and across at Morton's house.

Bishop's last words recurred to me as I labored. In effect, I had opened my mouth a bit too wide. I could only trust that my convictions were right, and that the solution of the handkerchief trick might lead on to something more positive. I believed that the canteen might be a clue to the whole puzzle, but it eluded me.

Pacing along through the grass, watch in hand, measuring distances with care, I got my feet soaked in dew. But things were falling into shape. When I went to Jessop's house, I knew just about what I wanted to discover next.

"Thanks, I won't come in," I said, as he peered at me through the screen. "Just want you to help me a bit, if you will. First, was Dr. Morton hard of hearing?"

"Yes," he replied promptly. "He was quite deaf in his left ear."

"That's why the chairs were so arranged in his study?"

"Yes. He was sensitive about it; did not want it known at all," said Jessop. "He would never let anyone sit or stand on his left side, if talking with him. However, he managed it very adroitly—he had been deaf in that ear since his youth, when he had scarlet fever—and no one has ever suspected the fact."

I could have hugged the little rat, but refrained.

"One thing more," I said. "You haven't told me how Dr. Morton was dressed when he was found."

Jessop ducked his head. "It was his newest dressing-gown, Mr. Bodham—the one he got for his birthday, three weeks ago, sir. It came from the Sinologues' Club, in Los Angeles. Very handsome, too; red-flowered silk brocade."

"Sinologues' Club?" I repeated. "Where is it in Los Angeles?"

"I don't know," said Jessop. "I never heard of it before; but the gown came with birthday greetings and a card from the Sinologues' Club. It's not unusual for Dr. Morton to receive tokens of respect and affection from such organizations; or, I should say, it was not unusual," Jessop added sadly.

"Where's the dressing-gown now?"

"In the closet off his study, sir."

"All right. Thanks," I rejoined, and plunged back into the house. I was beginning to get everything straight now.

Andreas was getting breakfast. I told him Bishop would be along; Kathy and Bathsheba were not yet awake. Then, getting the handkerchief taken from Peterson, I started for the study closet.

I was practically certain of what I would find. Peterson's agitation about that handkerchief, his lies—all pointed to one thing. And so I found it. The flowered crimson dressing-gown was of brocade, silk-lined. The material was the exact shade and texture of the gown lining. Probably there had been an entire set—gown, handkerchiefs and socks.

CHIEF BISHOP showed up with word that the real-estate lads were coming. He joined me for a cup of coffee and eyed me quizzically.

"Well, Bodham, have you solved the great mystery?"

"Some of it," I said. "The rest is just around the corner."

"Whistling to keep your courage up, eh?" he said, smiling. "I didn't say anything about it last night, but you were all wet about Peterson's careful dressing. Why, when he was here with Stuart and

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Parks to see Morton, he was wearing a green golf jacket!"

I stared at him. "He was? By thunder, Chief! That may be important! Hello—here are our witnesses now. I want you to play Morton, I'll play Peterson."

I met the two real-estate men outside and they put their car exactly where it had been, so they could see through the wall-opening into the garden. I noted that it gave a view of the lantana, just beyond which Chief Bishop was waiting. He called and waved. I responded, went around by the garden gate, and joined him.

THREE and one-half minutes later, I came back to the car. Stuart drove it down to the gate, halted it, then with his partner accompanied me to where Bishop was standing on the path. He eyed them rather skeptically.

"Well? What did you boys see through the peep-hole?"

"Why, nothing special," said Parks. "We saw you and Mr. Bodham walk back and forth among the trees, just the way we saw Peterson and Dr. Morton walking yesterday."

"That's right," assented Stuart, smiling. "Just what were we supposed to see?"

Bishop swallowed hard, gave me a look, and then nodded genially.

"Well, thanks a lot," he said in dismissal. "Thanks for coming out. You saw only what you were supposed to see, naturally. May want you again later in the day."

They departed, promising to keep the little experiment secret. When their car had gone, Bishop looked at me and grunted.

"Well, it worked! I'd never have believed it!"

"All right," I said. "Here's something more; see if it suggests anything to you. Dr. Morton was stone deaf in his left ear. He never let anyone walk or sit on his left."

Bishop whistled softly, scratched his chin, and slowly shook his head.

"Well, it's a cute little handkerchief trick, like you said. You go ahead and crack this case, Bodham. You're started on it; keep at it. Me, I've got something else to do. Peterson is a smart *hombre*, like you said. He had an alibi for the night of young Devry's murder."

"Yes?" I prompted, as he paused. He shook his head, grinning faintly.

"You stick to the Morton case, Bodham. Give me the Devry case for a change. This is a honey, this alibi; it'll blow off a couple of lids, if true. Now, I'm off for Roydron. May get back to-night, may not. I've got several things to take up with the Sheriff down there. You going to be around town?"

"So far as I know, not," I rejoined. "Before I can get any farther with this thing, I must go in to Los Angeles. I'll do that today. May take Bathsheba in and spend the evening, and make up some of the sleep I've lost."

Bishop grunted, and turned to his car. "Half the town going to L. A. today, looks like! Say, Morton's death is known by now; couldn't keep it dark any longer. In an hour or so, you'll have a flood of newspaper men here. Better take both girls away somewhere."

He departed, waving farewell. Excellent advice, I reflected, and entering the house, found Bathsheba and Kathy up and at the breakfast table.

When I explained what sort of ordeal they were facing, they were instantly for adopting Bishop's scheme and going to Los Angeles with me. Then Kathy exclaimed in dismay:

"But we must see Miss Devry! She called up a few minutes ago, Tom. Said she'd be here in half an hour—that she wanted to see me before she started for the funeral."

I went to the telephone, got Miss Devry, and knowing what she wanted to say to Kathy, arranged the whole matter in two minutes. We would meet her at the Mission Inn in Riverside, *en route* to Los Angeles. All very simple.

IHUSTLED the girls with their packing, got them into my car, and we were off. Kathy was pretty well over the worst of the shock; having Bathsheba on hand was a great help.

As for myself, I had certain things to do in Los Angeles—and if they turned out as I hoped they would, I would have the most essential part of the Morton mystery solved.

And as we sped toward Riverside, I simply could not resist one temptation. Miss Devry would want to tell Kathy the truth in her own fashion. That was all very nice, but after all, Tom Bodham had a reputation to sustain in a gal's eyes. Therefore I determined to sustain it, and to thunder with Miss Devry!

So I beat the old dowager to the gun, and told Kathy who she was.

Chapter Fourteen

SO great was the hue and cry in the press, when the story of the Mortons and the Devrys and the murder and all the rest of it was broadcast in every scandal sheet, that Kathy actually lacked the nerve to return home at once and face it. Nor did I blame her. Bathsheba came to bat and offered to stay with Kathy in Los Angeles until Dr. Morton's funeral was over. This would release me, and after the funeral Kathy could face the ordeal of the press.

I drove back on Monday by myself, to Pine Springs. I lunched *en route*, drove on through town without stopping, and reached home about one-thirty, congratulating myself that I had arrived unseen.

I reckoned without my police chief. Barely was I settled at the typewriter when the phone summoned me.

"So you thought you'd sneak into town and evade me, huh?" Bishop said blithely. "I'm ready for a showdown, if you are. How did your case break?"

"All broken down and ready to go, but not to trial," I replied. "I'm stumped by the fact that Morton phoned Miss Devry at precisely three minutes past two. It can't be shaken. It's too perfect! Had it occurred to you that the clock might have been tampered with?"

"That's possible, yes," rejoined Bishop. "If so, it would throw out a thing or two, but we can't prove it. Dobbs went over the clock; no prints on it at all. It's a big old-time clock, one of the first electrics. No prints on it at all. But wait! I got an idea about that, Bodham! Leave it in my hands for a while. Now forget it; I want to see you and Jessop, if you'll meet me over at Morton's house in twenty minutes."

"All right," I said.

"Before you come, type out the line of stuff you're going to show on Morton's death. Are you sure of it all?"

"Absolutely."

"Then type out the thing in brief to serve as confession. We've got to jump a ways on this. I've unearthed the damnedest stuff you ever heard of, and as soon as we get through with Jessop, we'd better pile right back here and turn on the heat for a confession!"

I had the Morton case in shape, at least; that is, in shape except for any motive, and one or two other minor points, including legal proof. However, my interest lies in solving a case, not in hanging a man.

So I typed out a form of confession that covered all I hoped to prove, and did it rather cynically. A really good mouthpiece can beat out a witnessed confession with ease! Putting it in my pocket, I went over to the Morton house and found Jessop at work in the study, apparently as though nothing had happened. Before we had more than exchanged greetings, Chief Bishop arrived.

"You're going to be interested," he said. "You know where Mrs. Welson, your lady friend, was the night Nat Devry was killed, Jessop?"

"Why—why, yes," quavered Jessop. "At Roydron. At the hotel there."

"Yes. And you weren't with her. But Peterson was," shot out the Chief. "He had a swell alibi—a swell one—he was in his wife's arms. He and Mrs. Welson have been married for several years."

IF this astonished me, it absolutely staggered poor Jessop; the acute misery of his tortured face, its stricken dismay would have touched a heart of stone.

"And you," went on Chief Bishop, "blabbed to the lady. She played you for a sucker, and you fell for it. Now, Bodham,"—and he turned to me,—"that dame is the sister of Loren Andrey, savvy? I've cracked 'em wide open—all except Peterson. And listen to what our Jessop yonder fell into, like a sap."

He began to tick off the names on his fingers. "Andrey and his sister were lousy remnants of a good family, raised to money but lacking any; plenty of that type around these days. Peterson and the sister married, then schemed to get Loren Andrey married to the Devry girl. They got that done. Rather, Peterson got it done. Bodham, you must understand that neither Mrs. Welson, as you know her, nor Loren Andrey are criminal types. They're weak, foolish, out for blackmail or easy money—nothing worse. And now, if you two gents will hop in my car, we'll go down to Headquarters."

"Headquarters?" Jessop let out a squawk. "Why?"

"Because a reception committee is gathering there right now in my private office," said Bishop, and grinned. "Including the county prosecutor. We're going to clear up the Devry murder in jig time; then you, Bodham, are going to clear up the Morton murder—or are you?"

I drew a deep breath. "Chief, after what you've just told me, I have every-

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thing! That motive angle, and time element, were what queered me. I gather that you're about to prove a motive?"

"Boy, I'll prove anything you want to name, but let's get going!"

Having shot his wad and gained his effect, Bishop was now in a rush to get us back to his office. I tried to make him tell me who had murdered Devry, and he refused pointblank. As we got into the car, Jessop paused and faced the Chief, anger in his eyes.

"Is that true?" he cried in a shrill voice. "What you told me about their being married. They're not separated?"

Bishop laughed. "Devil a bit! They've kept it quiet, even secret. You spilled everything to the dame, and she passed it on to the others. So they knew you were Singleton, and who Morton really was—anyhow, this last they had learned already—"

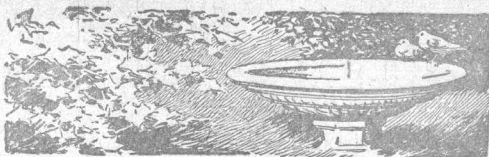
"All right!" broke out Jessop, and climbed in. "All right! I'll tell you plenty, when it comes time! I tried to shield her; but now I'll tell plenty!"

"Okay!" The Chief was sliding under the wheel, and tipped me a wink. "Okay; the time is just ahead of you, Mr. Jessop! Let's go."

* Go we did. Twenty minutes later we were entering Police Headquarters by the rear entrance. Bishop said, with a chuckle, that he had drawn all the flies to the honey out in front, by announcing that the story's break was imminent.

JESSOP was taken in by an officer. Bishop paused, and gripped my arm. "Got that confession written out? Good. We're playing along two lines, remember—you on the Morton angle, me on the Devry case. I'll take mine first. And mind this; I've got the room rigged with dictaphones. Don't need any stenos. It's being transcribed elsewhere, see? One thing more. Dobbs is on an errand that may throw some light on the time angle so puzzling to us. If it does, I'll hand you the results *pronto*. He's not finished yet. All set? Then come on. I'll go into it slap-bang."

Officers and deputy sheriffs were scattered all over the place. We entered the Chief's private office and found it well filled. Peterson sat here, frowning, a guard at his elbow. Mrs. Welson—or Mrs. Peterson—sat with Loren Andrey and Mrs. Andrey. At one side sat Miss Devry; she barely nodded to me. Jessop sat by himself also, looking like a vindictive wasp hovering and readying to



strike. Beside the desk was the county prosecutor, Winred.

BISHOP slid into his seat and spoke most abruptly.

"Mr. Winred, you can decide what action to take after we finish this private hearing. This man Peterson is charged with suspicion of murdering Dr. David Morton. For the moment, I'm passing up this charge, which will be handled by Mr. Thomas Bodham. I'm going to charge Peterson with the murder of Nathaniel Devry IV. Peterson, you're not compelled to speak. Anything you may say will be used against you."

Peterson struck a match, lit a cigarette, and regarded Bishop with a sneer.

"Your absurdity is becoming insanity, Bishop. You know perfectly well that on the night Nat died, I was a hundred and twelve miles away. There are two people who can prove it!" And he flipped his thumb toward Loren Andrey and Mrs. Welson.

"Let's talk about that," said Bishop easily. "Mr. Andrey and his sister, who is your wife. You kept the fact secret. Why? Because you've built up a great campaign ever since the day you discovered the will of Miss Edna Devry and what was to become of her fortune. It told you who Dr. Morton really was, and you went to work. You didn't take these two dupes into your confidence, however. You got Andrey married to Miss Frances Devry—and here's the nub of the whole thing, Peterson. If the bulk of the Devry fortune came to Mrs. Andrey, or even half of that fortune, there was plenty for everybody. Plenty to go around."

Peterson laughed softly. "Now you're getting fantastic, Chief. You start on an alibi, and you end up in the moon!"

"Merely to show motivation, Mr. Peterson. As for the alibi, you and your wife did drive to Roydron that day; so did Loren Andrey. You left here at five and got there at eight, registering at the hotel. Andrey kicked up a bit of trouble over his room, demanded it be changed, acted in a rather objectionable manner. Why? To make sure his alibi and yours would be thoroughly estab-

lished. Then the two of you slipped out and drove back here."

"Let me knock all this nonsense out at one crack," said Peterson with lofty disdain. "It can be found that we did no such thing, very simply. My car was garaged at Roydron. It wasn't used until I returned here next morning. No doubt the others were also."

"No doubt," agreed Bishop with his cherubic smile. "You even had your car greased that night, wheels and all. The odd thing is, Mr. Peterson, that an Eastern geologist named Allan Brent turned up in Roydron a couple of weeks ago and bought a secondhand car; I have here full details on the car. It was left in Roydron, garaged, not used, until the night Nat Devry was killed. Then Mr. Allan Brent showed up about nine o'clock with a friend and took the car out. He returned around five o'clock in the morning, put up the car, left instructions that it be sold and that he would call in a couple of weeks for the money, and departed. He was so sure of himself that he left plenty of fingerprints on the steering-wheel and door panel. And they're your fingerprints, Peterson."

DURING this speech, Peterson had lost his smile. His frown returned; he stared doggedly at Bishop, and said nothing. But Andrey suddenly came to his feet.

"This is all absolute nonsense!" he exploded violently. "Bishop, you're charging me and my sister with all sorts of crimes, and I'll not stand it! If you have any charge against me, I demand that you arrest me and prove everything openly!"

Bishop smiled. "Good bluff, Andrey. If Mr. Winred so decides, we'll do just that. You don't have to stay, if you don't want to hear what's going on. After all, I don't think you or your sister would have gone in for murder. You didn't know what Peterson planned. You thought that your share was merely to hide in the house and get some camera shots of young Devry in a compromising situation—blackmail was all right in your opinion. Sit down!"

Andrey swallowed hard and sat down, blinking. Peterson was watching Bishop now, watching him narrowly, and with a tense concentration. Upon Miss Devry's bony features, framed in her black veil, rested a shadowy smile as though she were enjoying herself.

"My wife," spoke out Peterson abruptly, "can destroy this fanciful story and fake fingerprints you've built up. She knows that I was with her all night."

BISHOP beamed. "Good man, Peterson! You'd even go to that extent, eh? But I doubt whether a court would accept your wife's testimony without a grain of salt. And—" He paused suddenly and glanced at Mrs. Welson-Peterson, who sat with an expression of horrified fear. "And, in fact, your wife has already confessed the intention regarding blackmail; she rightly considered it better to do so, than be charged with murder."

There was an instant sensation. Peterson swore luridly, jumped up, and was shoved back in his seat by his guard.

Bishop went on hurriedly.

"Now let's get it over. Peterson, you got back here, planted Andrey in the Welson house, left him to do the trick—but you knew Nat Devry would never come in that house. Later, you rushed in, dragged Andrey out and got him into your car, telling him Nat had been killed—and you both rushed back to Roydron. —Right, Mr. Andrey?"

Andrey went from red to white.

"Careful! He's trying to make you admit you were on the spot when Nat died!" Peterson snapped.

"Quite needless, Peterson," said Bishop blandly. "Suppose we take up your feelings when you heard of the body having been found on Dr. Morton's doorstep. You were worried. You couldn't understand it. You don't understand it now, because you still don't know who saw you drown young Devry. And the reason which led that witness to cover you up, no longer exists—does it, Mr. Jessop?"

Bishop knew his business; it was beautifully done. Even Jessop was taken off guard.

"No, it doesn't!" he cried out vindictively. "I risked a lot to help you," he added, glaring at Mrs. Welson, "but now I'll tell the truth. You deceived me!"

"Which is putting it mildly," observed the Chief. "Mr. Jessop had worried about what might happen at the Welson house that night. He came down to hang around—he was very deeply infatuated, and acted like any other man in love. He carried off the body of Devry, so that the woman he loved would not receive blame or scandal."

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Peterson burst out in swift words, shaking his hand at Jessop.

"Then you know! If you were there, you know it was accidental! You know it was not murder! I didn't lay a hand on him! He tripped over that water-channel—I never touched him!"

"Except to hold his head down in the water until he drowned," said Bishop coldly.

I expected Jessop to confirm this ardently; he did not. He merely hung his head and looked down at his nervously twisting hands. Then I perceived the weak spot in Bishop's chain of evidence. Jessop would have spoken quickly enough, had he seen the actual deed.

"That," spoke up Peterson, "is a lie! I didn't touch him, and you can't prove I did!"

"You'll discover what proof we have, later on, if Mr. Winred presses this charge," said Bishop. "Now, I think that cleans up the mystery of Devry's murder. Mr. Bodham and I have worked on this whole affair together, and I've left to him the question of Dr. Morton's murder—ah! One moment, please. Come in, Dobbs."

He turned, as the fingerprint expert came in, extending to him several blown-up prints, and then departing. Bishop glanced at the sheets and passed them over to me, in silence. As I saw what they were, incredulity and exultation sent my blood leaping.

"All right, Mr. Bodham," said Bishop.

I was conscious of Peterson's gaze fastened upon me, a gaze of fear and anger and dread suspense. The man's defenses had been broken down, but he was still capable of fight.

"Peterson murdered Dr. Morton," I said, letting him have both barrels at the start. "He left an alibi so perfect that it would have disproved any such charge, had it not been broken down,"—and I tapped the photographs just arrived. "The hypothetical murderer must have killed Dr. Morton after the visit of Peterson and the two realtors. These gentlemen had seen Dr. Morton alive—or thought they had—after Peterson left him, and this would automatically disprove any charge that Peterson had murdered him. If true."

WINRED spoke up with abrupt disapproval of my words.

"Mr. Bodham, I've gone over the testimony. Those gentlemen are reputable; they've sworn to what they saw."

"To what they thought they saw," I corrected him. "As you know, Mr. Prosecutor, no one is infallible on the witness stand. Let me tell you what actually happened. Morton was in his garden; when the visitors hailed him from the road, he waved to them. Peterson hopped out of the car and hurried to the gate and around to Dr. Morton."

I paused. Peterson was hanging on my words with an agony of suspense in his eyes. In the eyes of his wife, the fake Mrs. Welson, was a deeper feeling—a cold and ghastly fear, the fear of one who knows what is coming.

"Now," I went on, "comes the one fact which has not yet been brought out, and which will readily be proven; that Doctor Morton, as he walked down the path to meet Peterson, was no longer in sight of the two men in the car. Peterson knew it. No words passed. Peterson struck the old man with the heel of his palm—a brutal blow to the point of the jaw, but one to leave no outward bruise. Poor Morton toppled over, unconscious. Peterson lifted his frail body—and then drowned him."

NO wonder they all looked incredulous at this. I was timing my disclosures with the sole object of breaking down Peterson's resistance, bit by bit. Nothing else mattered; he was my target now. If I could break down sufficient of his iron self-assurance, then I would have him.

"Among the bushes," I went on, "was an alabaster bird-bath, long disused. It was not within view of the two men in the car; Peterson had figured out the angles of vision very carefully. On the previous night, Peterson had come here, stopping up the bowl and filling the bath with water. Yes, Mr. Peterson, we know all this," I added, as Peterson made a strangled, choking protest. "You struck Miss Morton over the head with your water-container, the desert water-bottle carried in your car. We first credited the blow to a flower-pot, but that was no doubt an accidental upset. A canteen on its strap makes a good weapon, eh?"

Peterson sat like stone, glaring at me. I went on quietly:

"You stripped off the scarlet dressing-gown Morton was wearing. You laid him face down, his nostrils and lips buried in the water of the bowl. Leaving him to drown, you walked back to the path, where you came in partial view

of your two witnesses, the shrubbery nearly hiding you.

"On one turn of the path, you drew the scarlet robe over your shoulder; it conveyed to the men in the car, carelessly watching, the notion that they saw Dr. Morton. On the reverse turn, you showed the green merino golf jacket you were wearing. That was a false note, Peterson, being so far from your usual garb! But it was necessary; you had to wear something that would not be confused in the eyes of the two witnesses, with the scarlet robe of Dr. Morton."

Peterson rallied with a great effort.

"This is all sheer fabrication!" he declared boldly. "You've built up a fanciful story, false in every detail. To do all that you claim I did, would require a great deal of time. And the great thing is that he was seen there, alive, after I had left at two o'clock. He telephoned Miss Devry after then," he concluded triumphantly.

HIS words produced a great effect. Even the impassive prosecutor was watching me uncertainly. But, in the eyes of Irene Peterson as she watched me, lingered that same horrible fear.

"Mr. Peterson," I went on, "I did everything I charge you with doing, and several more things, in less than four minutes. I also fooled those two honest witnesses, just as you did. And all I used was Chief Bishop's uniform jacket over my sweat-shirt. They believed they had seen us both; they were quite sincere, of course. I not only did this, but took the necessary time to telephone—as you telephoned."

"As I did? You're crazy!" shrieked Peterson wildly. He was breaking fast.

"No. You telephoned Miss Devry, pretending to be Morton. You asked her to send two witnesses and so forth; we needn't go into all that now, for I'm concerned with the clever timing of this telephone call. By Miss Devry's evidence, it was at precisely three minutes past two—while we know positively that you had left the Morton grounds and got into the car at two o'clock sharp. Thus you are definitely cleared of any suspicion."

"And," spoke out Miss Devry with acid gusto, "I'd like to see you break down my testimony, Bodham! Just try it! That electric clock of mine is always on the dot!"

She had asked for it, and I let her have it, with a polite bow and a smile

and a wave of the hand toward the photos Dobbs had just brought in.

"Quite so, Miss Devry, quite so. Yet your testimony was most inaccurate. Your electric clock is fastened on the wall; it is an early model, and to set it one opens the glass, as in old-fashioned clocks. There were no fingerprints at all upon this clock; they had carefully been wiped off. But," I added, indicating the photos again, "these enlargements show the prints which had been neglected—prints from the *inside* of the glass! One set of prints made when the clock was altered three minutes in time, another when the same person returned and corrected the clock. The prints are those of Peterson."

That got him. A gasp escaped him, and he sagged in his chair.

"Nice, I call it!" exclaimed Bishop. "Nice! How did you run down that business about the red bathrobe?"

"Dressing-gown," I corrected him. "The handkerchief gave the clue there.

A nice red handkerchief. Some time ago, Dr. Morton received a present, a handsome red dressing-gown, from the Sinologues' Club of Los Angeles. So far as I can learn, no such club exists. But the gown came from a well-known haberdasher. A man, who at the proper time will be identified as Mr. Peterson, bought the gown and had it shipped with the enclosed card to Dr. Morton. A handkerchief matching it, he kept out for himself, saying that only the gown was desired. He used the handkerchief to hang on a lantana branch amid the shrubbery, after carrying Dr. Morton into the house. To those sitting in the car, it seemed that they beheld Morton himself. Seeing the color which they associated with him, it was natural that at this distance they would suppose themselves looking at Morton. It was still there when they all left. Therefore, to them, they had seen Morton after Peterson left him. And this might have remained unchallenged had Peterson risked leaving the scarlet handkerchief there. He decided not to take the risk. He came back at night and recovered the handkerchief—and was lost."

PETERSON made a frantic effort to speak with his old assurance.

"Conjecture! Circumstantial! Presumptive evidence—all of it manufactured to serve your end!"

I handed Bishop the paper I had typed, to be signed.

DEATH ON THE DOORSTEP

"One thing more you forget, Peterson; and that's the curious matter of the deaf man who heard you, and only you!"

That got his attention, and the attention of everyone else. I paused, and deliberately struck off on a side trail of sheer conjecture.

YOU worked well, Peterson: You phoned Dr. Morton in the name of Singleton and made an appointment, insisting that he be alone. You weren't courageous; you wanted to kill only a gentle old man who would be unable to spoil your careful planning, so more of the Devry fortune would go to Mrs. Andrey. Probably Miss Morton would have come next, and then Miss Devry herself. But you forgot one damning thing: The deaf man who could hear only you!"

Peterson's face was ghastly.

"When you wore the robe, as Morton, you walked *away* from the house. In your green jacket, as yourself, you walked *toward* the house. You should have reversed this process if you wanted to escape conviction for murder, Peterson. You made your two witnesses see Morton walk with his right side to the car and his left side to you; that's the mistake that will cost you your life. For Dr. Morton was stone deaf in his left ear and never sat or walked with anyone on that side of him."

That was a clincher. Weak and ineffectual as it really was, as evidence, it hit the imagination. A buzz of exclamations broke out in the room. Peterson shrank back, his eyes flinching.

And good old Bishop, who never missed a trick, stepped right up to bat.

"Look, Peterson, we've got you cold, dead cold," he said in his cordial, sympathetic way. "Now, here's a confession regarding Morton's murder. If you sign it, what happens? You're no worse off, while your wife and Andrey are a lot better off, being in the clear. Refuse to sign, and we must charge them with complicity in Nat Devry's murder. They're actually accessories before the fact—unless you clear them by your confession—and they'll be tried for Morton's murder as well."

I saw him exchange a glance, a nod of understanding, with the prosecutor. Then he went on swiftly, shoving my typed paper and a pen at Peterson.

"Here; sign this confession regarding Morton's murder, where we've got you

cold. That of Devry isn't entirely proven as murder, yet. The State may be willing to prosecute on the one charge alone, though I offer nothing. Then your wife will be out of it. I'm speaking as a friend, Peterson; you know it."

Peterson lowered his eyes to the paper and studied it for a moment. Then he lowered his face on his arms and remained motionless, as though in hopeless indecision. Bishop beamed complacently, made a confident gesture, and another for silence.

Peterson's head jerked up. He looked Bishop in the eye for an instant, nodded, and picked up the pen.

"All right. You've got me, damn you! I suppose I must," he said in surly anger. He poised the pen as though to sign, then glanced up at his wife. "Irene, step into the telephone office next door, call up the attorney I told you about, in Los Angeles, and tell him to get out here and defend me."

The woman rose at once and started out. The officer at the door glanced at Bishop, who gestured him not to interfere, and he allowed her to pass.

Peterson read the confession through carefully, and at length affixed his signature, which was notarized on the spot.

THE crowd broke up amid a babble of voices and great confusion. I found Miss Devry practically on my neck, wringing my hand and for once venting real congratulations.

"I suppose you realize, Bodham," she barked, "that when you marry Cathay I shall be, in a way, your aunt?"

I chuckled. "That's not so bad. If you had a mustache, you'd be my uncle!"

She cackled out a laugh. "Well, I'll need a new secretary. I intend to ask your sister if she'll act as secretary and companion to me. Won't be for long, God knows! . . . I suppose they'll hang Peterson, or electrocute him, or gas him, or whatever it is they do to murderers in this fool State."

"No," I said. She jerked a look at me.

"No? What the devil do you mean? He signed that confession!"

"He could sign a dozen confessions, and with a slick lawyer for a mouth-piece he'd be out of jail before you're out of mourning!"

I was nearly right, at that. In my case-book the name of Peterson still heads an open page.

"The Far Call," a story of the old West by Jackson Gregory, who wrote "Timber Wolf" and "Man to Man," will be our book-length novel next month.

I Was an Altmark Prisoner

The first shell exploded close by while the Graf Spee was still out of sight below the horizon. . . . This saga of the sea in 1940 has such special interest that we are giving over the entire Real Experience Department to it.

By THOMAS FOLEY

ON December 2 the *Doric Star*—Captain Stubbs, commander, was four hundred miles west of Port Loango, on her way from Capetown to Freetown—where we were supposed to join a convoy waiting for us. We were all counting the days and wondering whether we would reach London for Christmas. I was London-born, but had not been home for sixteen years.

As lookout from twelve till two in the afternoon, I climbed up the ladder to the watching-nest on the mainmast. This watching-nest on a ship is a tiny cabin, just big enough to hold one man.

It was a fine day, with the sun shining and a blue, though choppy sea. At one o'clock I heard the time-signal—two bells—to which I replied with the same.

All clear, nothing in sight.

At exactly twenty minutes past one, there was a terrific explosion.

"A U-boat!" Naturally, that was everybody's thought. After the explosion, there was a huge splash about one hundred yards from the ship.

There were sharp commands from the bridge; the gun was manned and slewed round in the direction of the splash.

I noticed, and could feel, that the ship had changed course. The captain was trying to evade the thing that menaced us, whatever it might be. I phoned down to the bridge to report that I had seen flashes of light from a western direction, and told my suspicion that they probably came from the German pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer*.

About two minutes later the air was shaken by another terrific explosion, and the second shell—we knew by now that it was a shell—splashed into the water some fifty yards from the ship.

Of course, we all knew we were in mortal danger. The first shell had fallen into the sea one hundred yards on the port side, the second, fifty yards astern. The German's aim seemed excellent, and it was almost certain that the third shot would be a direct hit.

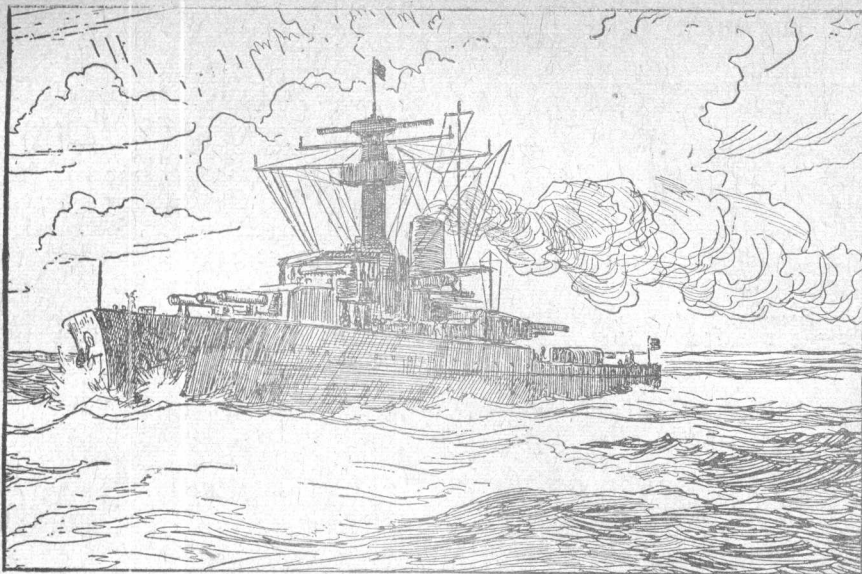
Suddenly, however, the ship began to slow down; then it stopped. The *Doric Star* was a ten-thousand-ton cargo-boat carrying meat, butter, tinned goods and wool from Australia to England. Our only armament was a single 4.7-inch gun, which might have proved a dangerous weapon against a U-boat, but of course it would have been madness to pit this small gun against the pocket battleship's eleven-inch giants. The captain did not dream of risking the lives of his crew without any hope of success. So when our "Sparks" got the German message, "Stop or we fire," the captain gave the order to stop. The maximum speed of the *Doric Star*, with the engines driven to bursting-point, was only twelve knots. The German raider, with a speed of from twenty-seven to thirty knots, could have caught us in no time, and would surely have sunk us.

The next few minutes were full of tense excitement. The noise of the engines had died down, we had stopped, and from the bridge came the sound of the captain's whistle: "Abandon ship!"

There was no trace of fear among the crew. Every man knew exactly what he had to do, and did it. Below me, on deck, everyone was working calmly but quickly and skillfully, attending to the

REAL EX.

For details of our Real Experience



boats. Lifting the receiver, I asked the captain whether I was to come down.

"Yes, at once," replied the captain. He spoke in a calm, unexcited voice.

I slid down the mainmast and hastened to Lifeboat No. 1, which was my allotted station.

"A fine mess this is," I said to the next man, who happened to be the donkey greaser. "They don't care about Christmas, nor about my homecoming after sixteen years!"

I hurried below, in order—according to regulations—to get my necessary belongings: jacket, overcoat, life-belt, etc.; then I hurried back to the lifeboat, which was being got ready, and left my load. Next I rushed back to the storeroom to get some food, bread, tinned meat, milk and tobacco. I took the things to the boat, dashed back again to get blankets, clothing, tools, a chronometer and compass.

The *Doric Star* had four lifeboats. Three of them had already been lowered, and the men sat with oars in their hands, waiting for the command to pull away.

Lifeboat No. 1 was to carry the captain, but he was still on the bridge. It had also been lowered by now, but all the men who had been in it, except one, had come back on board, and there we were, waiting for the captain, and also for the third shot from the battleship, which might sink us any minute now.

Then came the captain's voice:

"I want a man on the bridge!"

I bounded up at once. The second mate, Mr. Willis, ordered me to help destroy the ship's papers, so that they

should not fall into German hands. I was surprised to see what a great lot of papers we had been carrying.

Meanwhile, of course, we were expecting that third shot any instant; and I for one was thinking that if it was fired after all, our work with the papers would be of precious little importance!

All four lifeboats were by now fully equipped, and ready to pull away, and the captain ordered us into our boat.

The *Doric Star* carried approximately sixty-one men—ten able seamen, two ordinary seamen, two deck boys, the chief cook, the cook, the baker, the galley-boy, the wireless operator, the Chief Engineer, about ten engineers, three gunners, a number of auxiliary men, and of course the captain and four officers. Incidentally, the two deck-boys and the galley-boy were on their first voyage.

There was a sudden gust of laughter in our boat. A big wave had given it a big buffet, and many of us knocked our heads together.

Looking back, I am rather surprised that we were able to laugh so heartily over such a trifling thing at that moment, when everyone knew death was only just around the corner. However, our merriment soon abated when we saw that some of our things had fallen overboard.

THE appearance of the pocket battleship was quite sudden—at least, it seemed so to me. At that moment the term "pocket battleship" sounded rather funny to me, and rather surprising. Why, she was a gigantic ship, gigantic and graceful, as she rode the waves. Her general color was gray, but she was camouflaged in white, yellow and green, and she would have been quite an attractive

PERIENCES

story contest, see page 3.



sight, had not those eleven-inch guns been turned in our direction.

The battleship sailed toward us in a sweeping curve from the point on the horizon where I had first seen the flashes. Majestically she moved astern of us. But whatever her position in relation to the *Doric Star*, her guns always slewed round to cover us, and not for a moment were we free from the direct menace of these monsters. The ship approached with terrific speed, and we were already able to see the German sailors on deck.

The guns were manned, while the rest of the crew occupied the same positions as would the crew of a British battleship in similar circumstances. When the battleship was within a few hundred yards of us, there appeared between her funnel and control-tower a large white board bearing the warning in large red letters:

"Stop wireless or we fire!"

We knew that our S.O.S. had already been picked up by two ships, and also knew that one of them was a Greek vessel. We were hoping that they might inform the British Navy where to look for the German raider.

The battleship stopped, and rapidly they lowered a huge motorboat, which was manned by some seventy German sailors. They were still far away when they began to shout, in broken English, "Get back, get back!"

All the men from the boats climbed back on board the *Doric Star*. We lined up on deck and waited. It was a rather uncomfortable sensation to stand facing the black mouths of those huge guns.

The Germans came on board. About fifty of them placed detonators in various parts of the ship. The situation was getting painful, what with guns staring at us from the outside, and explosives being planted under our feet.

Twenty of the Germans came on deck, with revolvers at the ready and bayonets buckled to their middles. They were led by a lean officer, who hastened onto the bridge and in fairly good English demanded to see the wireless operator.

A few minutes passed. We, the crew, looked at the German officer curiously, while he, conscious of the seriousness of the situation, and of his own rôle in it, gazed in front of him with a stern air.

The situation was tense, at least as far as we were concerned. We had all seen the German warning—"Stop wireless or we fire!"—but we had no means of knowing whether the wireless operator had, in fact, ceased to send S.O.S. messages; and we were convinced that as soon as he appeared on deck, the German officer would shoot him dead.

At last the wireless operator appeared. "Are you the wireless operator?" snapped the German.

"Yes."

The German took him aside on the bridge, and for a few minutes the two conversed together.

Next the first mate, Mr. Ransome, on the German's orders, called the roll. The German sailors lined us up, then marched us to the other side of our ship.

There we again stood and waited. Then the German officer came round to us, and in a queer, croaking Teutonic voice, began to speak:

"I will give you ten minutes. Within ten minutes you must get together your blankets, some food and eating-utensils. Meanwhile, the German sailors will place explosives, and after ten minutes it will be blown up."

A brief pause. Then he added:

"You're all coming with me on board the *Graf Spee*."

WE went to collect the things we regarded as necessary or desirable. It did not occur to any of us to give even a single thought to the information that the raider was not the *Admiral Scheer*, but the *Graf Spee*.

What did surprise us was the sudden turn of events. Also, we were rather curious to know what the Germans really wanted to do with us. We had been quite prepared to see our ship blown up, and to die with her ourselves. Alternately, we had regarded it as a possibility that they might leave us to our fate in the lifeboats, so that we might either die of starvation and exposure, or be picked up by some other vessel. But what on earth could they want with us aboard their battleship?

Having collected our belongings, the majority of us, at the command of the German officer, got into the German motorboat. The chief engineer, a seaman named MacManus and I got into our Lifeboat No. 1 and rowed toward the *Graf Spee*—also on the German's command. I do not understand to this day why the three of us had to row across

I WAS AN ALTMARK PRISONER

to the German battleship in our own boat, when all the rest of the crew made the journey on the German motor-boat—which, if I remember aright, did the job in three trips. I certainly had a bad time, for although I was the smallest and physically the least strong of the three, it was I who had to row. My gum-boots kept slipping on the wet bottom, and my hands were injured—though I was not conscious of it at the time.

The distance was considerably greater than it appeared from our ship—so much so that the chief engineer also had to take a turn at the oars. As we approached the battleship, its terrifying dimensions struck me all the more.

ABOARD THE GRAF SPEE

SUDDENLY there was a mighty explosion. We looked around. No, it was not the *Doric Star*. We later learned that there had been an explosion, of undetermined cause, in No. 5 hold.

Another surprise, the gray hull of the German battleship bore the inscription *Deutschland!* Although we had other things to worry about just then, we found the time to be puzzled over this. Which one of the three German pocket battleships was this? The *Deutschland*, the *Admiral Scheer* or the *Graf Spee*? Our puzzlement was heightened by the fact that the tabs on the caps of the sailors who had boarded us clearly said *Graf Spee*. It was only later that we learned how the Germans had interchanged the names of the German ships, or even sailed under the names of neutral ships and under the flags of neutral countries.

At all events, we three climbed aboard the ship, where we were received by a tall angry-looking officer with a black beard who, in fairly fluent English, ordered us to the other side of the ship, so that we should not be able to see the *Doric Star*, which was here screened from our view by the guns.

When we were all on board the *Graf Spee*, the roll was called again. This time the list was read by an extraordinarily tall, clean-shaven officer of about thirty, who pronounced our names so badly that we had the greatest difficulty in recognizing them. At all events, we were all there, none missing.

"Below decks!" came the order.

We all went below. One of the guards asked which of us had any soap,

and of course the majority of us raised our hands.

"Then have a bath," said the guard.

We thought that we were really being given an opportunity to take a bath. I do not know whether the Germans bathe differently from us; certain it is that the bath we got on board the German battleship was very different from what we had been used to. Down there in the bottom of the ship there were no bathtubs, only a lot of hip baths. We were all herded into the room together, officers and crew alike, and had to do the best we could. Our clothes were taken away immediately we had undressed, and we suspected some German devilry. However, they were brought back after a time, and we gathered that they had only been disinfected.

While we were dressing we heard a deafening explosion, which shook the whole of the mighty warship. There were six more similar explosions, and we knew that the big guns of the *Graf Spee* were at work. . . .

Later the Germans also fired two torpedoes, and we heard further explosions, as the detonators placed in the *Doric Star* went off. The "bathroom" at the bottom of the *Graf Spee* had a small porthole. We all crowded to it for a final glimpse of our beautiful ship. We saw how she received her mortal wounds, how she slowly heeled over and sank. It took a long, long time, and I for one felt that the *Doric Star*, strong and sturdy as she had always been, was making a fight for it. Actually, the Germans took four hours to sink her, from first to last.

After our strange bath the Germans informed us that we would have to undergo a medical examination. They marched us through a series of long corridors to the ship's hospital. I was in the first group of fifteen men.

The hospital was a fine large room, spotlessly clean, like everything else on the *Graf Spee*. The beds were occupied by fifteen or twenty German sailors.

The doctor was a tall man with red hair thinning at the top. The "examination" was brief. The doctor asked each man his name and age. That was all. He did not touch anyone, or even take a good look at anyone. Nor was a medical examination necessary, for at that time, having up till then lived on a British diet, we were almost bursting with health. We had color in our cheeks, and did not need a doctor to tell that there was nothing wrong with us.

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Everything on board was of gigantic dimensions, and everything was scrupulously clean; but it was clear that the Germans had been very careful to use the lightest of materials for everything, so that this comparatively small ship should have a speed comparable with that of our H.M.S. *Hood*.

On board the *Graf Spee* the Germans treated us rather coldly, yet on the whole not badly. We never talked to anyone besides our guards; later we learned that the other sailors were strictly forbidden to communicate with us in any way.

Naturally, our greatest preoccupation on board the German battleship was what fate the Germans had decreed for us. I put this question to several of the guards, but they could not, or would not, say anything.

At last, however, one of the guards deigned to reply to my question.

"You'll only be staying on board for another few days."

"And then?"

"You'll be transferred to a tanker."

NATURALLY, we discussed this news among ourselves with much interest and excitement. Finally we came to the conclusion that the Germans were going to transfer us to a neutral ship, so that eventually we would get back to England. This made us very optimistic and cheerful. We had not the faintest idea what was really in store for us. The sailors on the *Graf Spee* treated us coldly, but were comparatively friendly and not unkind, and we could not guess how brutal the Germans could be when they showed their real faces, particularly if they were enthusiastic Nazis. . . .

There were four decks, and we were kept on the third, that is, the second from the bottom. The part where we lived was close to the forepeak, or near bow. The room was about sixty feet by twenty-five, and shaped like the hull.

There were about sixty of us in that room, and despite the apparently large size of our prison, we were rather crowded. There were only a few mattresses available, so that the majority had to sleep on the floor. I was one of the fortunate ones who were spared this discomfort. The heat was sometimes intolerable, and our situation was aggravated further by the fact that we were not allowed to open the portholes without special permission. On one occasion, when we opened them without permission, we got a bad dousing, as the sea

shot into the room. This was no joke,—most of us had but one suit of clothes and a wetting did not improve it. However, despite all that, we received the inrush of water with cheers—it was something to break the monotony.

The *Graf Spee* was traveling at full speed toward her—to us—unknown destination. Obviously, after sinking a ship she had to vanish from the scene as quickly as possible; otherwise the British Navy would learn her whereabouts, and of course she could only be "heroic" with defenceless merchant ships.

We were guarded by a single sailor who stood outside the door with his revolver at the ready and a bayonet at his side. Every now and then an officer would come down to have a look at us.

We were given our first meal on board the *Graf Spee* at six o'clock on the afternoon of December 2nd. It consisted of a large cup of black coffee without sugar, some black bread which tasted sour and was really uneatable, despite the addition of some stuff the Germans said was butter, and some sausage. The Germans said the sausage was "*sehr gut*"—but not one of us could finish his portion.

This was a very poor "tea" after what we had been used to on board the *Doric Star*, and it seemed all the poorer when we discovered that it was not tea at all, but tea and supper rolled together. We discovered this when we were not given any more food that evening.

At about eight o'clock we all turned in, and gradually the room became quiet. At five next morning we were awakened by the sound of a harsh German command, which came blaring forth from the megaphones fitted in every part of the ship. "*Action stations! Action stations! Action stations!*"

Within a few seconds we heard the firing of one of the eleven-inch guns. Of course we all jumped up in great excitement. We had no idea what was happening, but we were hoping that the *Graf Spee* had been caught by our Navy.

There were three or four more shots, one after the other. The ship shivered as if she was going to fall to pieces. There followed a tense silence. The tenseness was in the very air, so you could almost touch it. The *Graf Spee* stopped. An hour passed like this. We knew that this was no naval battle, and our hearts sank. Another hour passed, then another, before the *Graf Spee* shivered into movement again. Full speed ahead it was. We could only guess

what had happened. We only learned for certain at six o'clock in the afternoon when we went on deck to wash. We went to the taps in groups of twenty. I was in the first group. The German guard, smiling from ear to ear, received us; and being unable to speak a word of English, he twisted himself into knots in an effort to make us understand that another British ship had been sent to the bottom.

"What ship?" I asked.

The German shrugged. He either did not know the name, or would not tell.

Later I discovered what had happened. On the way back to our prison I met a tall, lanky lad in civilian clothes. I knew at once that he was British and spoke to him. His name, he told me, was Joe Webb. He looked terribly green about the gills, and at first I thought he was seasick. He was shaking like a leaf, too. However, he was not seasick, but wounded.

"What ship?" I asked. You had to be brief, because you never knew whether the Germans would let you talk.

"The *Tairoa*," replied the lad. "The Germans fired at us because we didn't stop the wireless. I'm not sure, but I think there were two or three dead on board. And I was wounded."

As there was no guard in sight, I asked him to tell me everything. They had had a very similar experience to ours.

"We suddenly heard an explosion," he said. "We didn't know what it was, as we couldn't see anything. Of course we soon discovered that we were up against a German raider. We received a wireless message to stop our wireless, but didn't. Of course, I didn't know about this till later. I was coming up on deck from down below. Suddenly I felt a blow in the arm. I didn't know what had hit me, and it didn't hurt, either. I just went on, but then everything went dark before my eyes, and I felt I was falling. That's all I remember. I only came to on board this ship, and it was here they told me I'd been hit by a splinter, and also that the Germans had sunk our ship and we were prisoners on the *Graf Spee*. We've got another man wounded. He's in the hospital below."

AT eight o'clock we'd been given our breakfast. I was terribly hungry, but the German coffee and bread were so nauseating that I could not eat anything. Then, at midday, we received our first dinner. The guard told us to send two



men to the galley to get the food for all of us. The two men brought back a huge copper containing our rations. Of course, many of us had neither plates nor eating utensils, as these things somehow got lost, mislaid or forgotten during our transfer to the German ship, so some of us had to wait until the others had finished, to use their things.

The dinner consisted of a sort of Irish stew, but there was plenty of it. That was no advantage, however, because it was bad. Everything was bad; throughout my imprisonment by the Germans I never got anything but sour bread, rice, potatoes cooked in some strange way, Irish stew, tinned milk, and black coffee.

Our daily work consisted in opening up the folding tables for our meals, and folding them up again after meals.

On the direct orders of the captain—as we learned later—we were given plenty of opportunities on board the *Graf Spee* for exercise in the open air. This was a relief and a blessing, as our quarters were very hot and stuffy. At the time, however, we did not know what a tremendous concession it was on the part of the captain to let us come on deck for exercise three times a day.

I only saw Captain Langsdorff, commander of the *Graf Spee*, once. That was one morning when we were out near the bow of the ship, and the Germans were holding some sort of inspection close by. Nearly the entire crew of the ship were lined up, and Captain Langsdorff, accompanied by three of his officers, passed slowly in front of them.

Captain Langsdorff was a man of medium height, clean-shaven, smart-looking, with a sort of sad look in his eyes. You could see at a glance that he was an officer and a gentleman, and we all agreed that he could not possibly be a Prussian. As our former chief cook Mr. Underwood remarked: "The fellow looks so decent, he might almost be British."

On one occasion I discovered a queer rite practiced by the Germans on the *Graf Spee*: In memory of each British ship they sank, they placed a wreath of green leaves with a long bow somewhere near the mess-deck. The bow bore the name of the ship concerned.

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I saw the *Tairoa* wreath. I think the placing of the wreath was always accompanied by an elaborate ceremonial. Apparently the Germans were proud of their exploits in sinking defenceless merchant ships. . . .

All the time I was on board the *Graf Spee* I watched the Germans, and I must say I did not dislike them. Their way of being polite was different from ours; somehow it was cold and artificial, or rather mechanical; but they were polite, just the same. It seemed to me that they were always wearing a mask; and even when they smiled, I felt that it was not because they were feeling pleased about anything, but because they had decided to smile, or perhaps because it was in their regulations to smile at certain times.

Another thing that struck me was that the German sailors did not—at least in our presence—talk to each other simply and naturally, as we were accustomed to talk among ourselves, and even with our officers. There was a certain cold formality between them. Whenever they passed each other on deck, they raised their right arms and said "*Heil Hitler!*" They did this a hundred times a day.

The wireless seemed to be going continuously all day. We listened to the German broadcasts,—we could not help it,—but few understood any part of them. Sometimes, however, it was music—including English gramophone records.

There was only one case of near-friendship between one of us and one of the German sailors. Bill Wheeler, one of the gunners of the *Doric Star*, seemed to take a liking to a sailor named Kroner, who spoke good English. Despite the strict ban on conversation between the British prisoners and crew of the *Graf Spee*, they talked and argued a lot with each other. Of course there was a certain reserve on both sides, and there were things they never mentioned; they kept on neutral ground, so to speak.

"When the war is over," said Kroner one day, "we'll have a drink together."

Wheeler agreed, and the two of them exchanged addresses. I wonder whether Kroner was among the casualties on the *Graf Spee*, or whether he and Wheeler will have that drink together some day!

On one occasion I was able to visit the galley of the *Graf Spee*. Everything was clean and bright. I was rather surprised to find that there was apparently a qualified cook there, for as far as my experience of the food went, his only task was to open tins and boil potatoes. I spoke to the cook, observing that he must be very clever indeed to be able to open as many tins as were required here, and to carry out his task with so much good taste. Of course, I did not think he understood what I was saying. To my astonishment, however, he burst into laughter, and said in perfect English, that he had only been appointed cook of the *Graf Spee* half an hour before.

"Why, you're British!" I said.

"Of course I am," replied the cook.

"What's your name?"

"Roy Baker."

"How did you get here, then?"

"I was on the *Travianian*," said Roy. "They sank her and put us on a tanker—"

"What tanker?" I interrupted eagerly.

"The *Altmark*," said Roy. "She's disguised as a Norwegian. I was on board her for two months. The crew of the *Ashley*, *Huntsman* and *Newton Beach* are still there. It's awful."

Altmark. . . . That was the first time I heard the name of the hell-ship.

"A man from the *Ashley* told me—" began Roy. But he could not finish the sentence, for a German sailor who, unobserved by us, had been listening to our conversation, now interrupted, and politely but firmly requested me to leave the galley, as I was holding up the cook and might be delaying the supper.

I reported to my mates the conversation I had had with Roy Baker. For some reason we did not connect the *Altmark* with the tanker to which we had been told we were going to be transferred, for we were still sure we would be transferred to a neutral ship, and would somehow get back to England.

We were all impatiently waiting to get on board the tanker, blissfully ignorant of what we were really longing for.

ON Thursday, December 7th, the master-at-arms came down to our prison.

"Get ready," he said, in his snappy Teutonic style. "We're meeting a tanker today to which you'll be transferred. You may have to leave this ship any minute."

We knew that we were now somewhere in the southern Atlantic.

I WAS AN ALTMARK PRISONER

We packed our few belongings and were all marched to the stern of the ship. Here, after four days' separation, we met our officers again, together with the captains and officers of several other ships. That was the last we saw of our captains and officers. It was only very much later that I heard that they had been landed and released in Montevideo after the *Graf Spee* battle.

While waiting on deck, I got into conversation with the second mate of the *Travianian*. I asked whether he knew what ship we were being transferred to.

"Yes," he said, "the *Altmark*."

"Any good?"

"Horrible!" he said. "I was there for a month, and I was glad to get away. The food's uneatable, the treatment brutal. They rob you and humiliate you. When you're on the *Altmark*, you'll learn what the Germans are really like!"

"What's going to happen to us after the *Altmark*?" I asked my newfound friend.

"Captain Langsdorff said we'll be taken to Germany. The *Graf Spee* will soon be making for a German port—Hamburg, I think. There's only one chance for you people—that the *Graf Spee* is caught or sunk by our Navy; in that case the *Altmark* will undoubtedly seek refuge in a neutral port, and then you'll all be released in accordance with international law."

I asked the young fellow to tell me some more about the *Altmark*.

"Well," he said, "there's the white bread they give you for breakfast. There's only one thing that's worse than that—the black bread they give you for dinner." He waved his hand, adding: "What's the use of telling you? You'll know everything soon enough."

We stood on deck for hours. The weather was fine and warm, for we were near the tropics. There was a fine ripple on the sea.

Suddenly we saw a puff of smoke approaching from the west. Evidently it was the tanker. The *Graf Spee* made for it in a wide, sweeping curve. Then the two ships hove to. Just then I had a chance to exchange a few words with Captain Stubbs, of the *Doric Star*.

"What's going to happen to you, Captain?" I asked.

"They're taking us to Germany," he replied. "At least, they want to take us there. And maybe the *Graf Spee* will get there. Unless we meet the Navy somewhere."

We were now able to see the prison-ship clearly. She was a fine big ship, painted all white. She flew the Norwegian flag and had the word *Norge* painted in huge letters amidships. The name of the ship on the bow was *Songne*. Since then the *Altmark* has had two or three new names and been painted over in four or five different colors.

The *Graf Spee* lowered her motorboat, and one of the German officers told us:

"Say good-by to your officers!"

"Good-by and good luck!" we all said to each other.

The roll was now called. Then photographers from the other ship took photographs of us. Then we, the crews, got into the motorboat. Our belongings were thrown into a huge net, and lowered into the motorboat. And so we pulled away.

As we were approaching the white ship I liked her shape more and more. She had many decks, and her bridges were placed in a rather interesting way. The thing that struck me particularly were the two pom-pom guns on board; they were half covered with canvas. That was the first and last time I saw the guns. They were hidden more carefully later. The motorboat hove to, and we climbed up the Jacob's ladder. I did not know then that I was climbing straight into hell.

ABOARD THE *Altmark*

THE first person I saw aboard the *Altmark* was a young, slim, baby-faced German officer in white uniform. There were two guards behind him. He was in charge of us prisoners. We never learned his name, and we referred to him as "Babyface." He was the man we communicated with most while we were on the ship. It was he who conveyed to us the captain's orders, he who listened to our complaints, he who—very, very frequently—saw to it that the punishments imposed upon us by the captain were duly carried out.

Babyface had been to an American college for several years, and he spoke English fluently. His first order to us was to line up on the starboard deck—the Germans, apparently, had a mania for lining us up. There we stood for about three hours. We were not even allowed to talk to each other. It took all that time for the motorboat to make three trips to get the rest of the prisoners across.

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At last, after three hours of waiting, Babyface in his white uniform stepped out and addressed us with that sharpness and aggressiveness in his voice of which only the Germans are capable.

"You are on a German prison-ship," said Babyface. "We are the supply ship of the *Graf Spee*. You will be treated as prisoners of war, and I must warn you not to expect a life of luxury. I want you all to surrender your matches, revolvers, knives and any other weapons or tools which can be used to do damage. I warn you that if any of you retain anything you've been ordered to surrender, you will be punished."

The guards went round; and the men, hesitantly and with wry faces, began to give up what was required, though of course none of us had revolvers. The only really valuable thing given up belonged to my friend Jack Turnbull. It was a pocket-knife with a wonderfully carved ivory handle, a veritable masterpiece. Babyface admired it greatly, and after making a few complimentary remarks about it, he pocketed it. Then the officer discovered that Turnbull also possessed a pipe-cleaner of similar workmanship and confiscated that as well, tacitly raising it to the dignity of a weapon with the aid of which damage might be done. It was touching to see the lingering look Turnbull gave it as he handed it over to Babyface, and the way he watched it on its brief journey to the German's pocket.

Roll-call again. Then Babyface led us below into our apartments. Down, down we climbed, until we reached the third deck—the second from the bottom. This was E Deck. As we entered our prison, we had now the time for a full realization of what a terrible place this was. And this deck was already occupied by the crew of the *Travonian*.

IT was here I first met Jack Flanagan, with whom I later shared so many jolly hours, sufferings and adventures, and who, indeed, became my "cobach" (Australian slang for "pal"). Flanagan is an Irishman from Liverpool.

Naturally, as soon as Babyface had left us, there began a lively general conversation between the two sets of captives. We told each other about our adventures. In the middle of the conversation I said to Flanagan:

"Got a fag, mate?"

Whereupon all the other fellows burst into uproarious laughter.

"He wants a fag," they guffawed, smacking their legs. "He wants a fag!"

It turned out that what cigarettes they had were long gone, and it tickled them to hear me talk so casually about such a rare and precious thing. It appeared that the boys had been smoking tea-leaves for weeks—drying the tea leaves and rolling them into thin paper. Later I did the same.

About an hour after we came aboard, one of the guards came into the room. That was the only time I saw this particular man, so I never learned his name. There were forty guards watching us prisoners, and we only knew the names of the permanent ones.

Well, this man came into the room, looked round cautiously, then motioned to one of the *Travonian* men. They began to talk in whispers, but I was quite close to them, so I could hear. The guard was asking the other fellow, in English, whether he wanted any cigarettes.

"Of course I do," was the reply.

"What will you give?"

The Englishman thought for a moment; then he said:

"I've got a good shirt; you can have that. How many cigarettes will you give me for it?"

"Two," said the German.

"Two!" cried the Englishman. "Two fags for a shirt!" There was genuine indignation in his voice; yet there was something in his tone which would have betrayed even to a child that he was ready to give in; he would have parted with his shirt for even one cigarette.

"All right," sighed the Englishman. And the bargain was made.

Barter transactions of this kind were made every day. The guards were continually haggling with us, and robbing us right and left.

There were forty-five men in all on E Deck, nineteen from the *Travonian* and twenty-six from the *Doric Star*. As far as we knew, there was a total of 303 prisoners on board; and later, after our release, I was surprised to read in the papers that they had only found 299. Perhaps four of the prisoners had disappeared in some way.

The E Deck was, according to the standards of the *Altmark*, comparatively comfortable. The rest of the *Doric Star* crew were worse off than we, for they were on the bottom deck, which was even mustier than our quarters.

We were so cramped that there was no room to move. There was nowhere to

put our clothes when we lay down, and most of us slept—or tried to sleep—in our clothes. Of course there were no beds or bunks or any proper sleeping accommodation, just a single blanket. Every morning we woke with aching limbs, and it took some hours before the ache went out of them. Our misery was aggravated by the fact that our prison was cold at night, and we were all shivering.

SOON after our arrival aboard the *Altmark* we were given our first meal, which was tea. The guard ordered two men each from among the *Travianian* and *Doric Star* crews to go to the galley. They brought back a copperful of tea and some bread. Each man received three slices of bread, two black and one white. The bread was so inconceivably bad that even the worst I had heard about it now sounded like praise. It was sheer poison. Sailors don't usually suffer with their digestions, and I am as tough in that respect as most; yet when I swallowed the first bite of that bread it made my stomach turn. That was the white bread. I could not imagine anything worse than that, so I took a bite of the black bread. . . . Gosh!

The old-timers—the boys of the *Travianian*—immediately began to swap, selling one slice of white bread for two of black. During the first few days we newcomers were only too pleased to make the exchange, for the white bread was the lesser of two evils. Later, however, I found that the black bread, sour and sticky as it was, was more filling than the white bread, and made the void in my stomach less painful. In any case, the barter business with the bread was soon to stop, as after a time the Germans gave us only black bread.

The tea itself was a very pleasant surprise—the finest tea I had ever drunk. But the secret of this luxurious beverage was no secret to us. The Germans had pinched the tea off the *Huntsman*. I was told that the price of this tea in London was sixteen shillings a pound, and that it required only a few spoonfuls of leaves to make tea for the forty-five of us.

Unfortunately, even this luxury did not last long, for the fine tea either gave out or was stopped for the prisoners.

In the evening we witnessed an interesting and exciting scene. One of the German crew slipped into our prison. From the way he was welcomed by the *Travianian* boys, I knew he was a friend. Later they told me that he had been

coming down frequently, helping them when he could, and bringing them bits of good food and a few cigarettes. In a word, he was a thoroughly human fellow. This time he came with four or five cigarettes, which he distributed among his friends. Just then one of our guards, whom we knew as Fritz, happened to enter the room.

"What's going on here?" he snapped.

No reply. Fritz turned on the other German.

"What are you doing here?" he said in bullying tone. All this was in German, and interpreted to me later by some of the boys who knew the language.

"Nothing," replied our friend. "I came down to have a talk."

"Don't you know that it is strictly forbidden to talk with the prisoners?"

"I do, but I haven't actually talked with them yet. I haven't had the time."

"Really!" said the guard. It was clear from his expression that he was happy to be able to get his comrade into trouble. "I suppose you think I didn't see you give them cigarettes. That is a very serious offence. The captain has strictly forbidden us to give cigarettes to the Englishmen. They will teach you to respect the discipline of the ship."

"You are charging me with something I haven't done," protested our friend.

It was all in vain. Fritz did not believe him, for he had actually seen the lad distributing the cigarettes. He said something, and a sharp altercation developed. They shouted louder and louder. Then Fritz said something that must have been highly insulting. Anyhow, the prisoners' poor young friend went very red in the face, and although the other German was nearly twice his size, he flew at him and gave him a terrific punch on the jaw. Fritz jumped on him, and after a short struggle twisted his arms behind him and marched him up the ladder like that. Next morning we heard that the lad had been thrown into clink. There was a court-martial at noon. We never heard anything for certain about the sentence of the court. Some said he was to be executed for striking a soldier, while according to others he was only given fifteen days solitary on bread and water. I cannot say which version is right, if either. At all events, we did not see the lad again.

The first evening we talked for about an hour, mainly about the above-mentioned incident; then we tried to go to sleep. It took a long, long time. We

lay on the hard, dusty floor, packed close together, tossing and groaning for hours. When at last we slept, it was from sheer exhaustion of both body and mind.

At six o'clock the following morning one of the German guards came in and began to shout:

"Come up! Wash, wash!" (It sounded more like "Gom oop, vash, vash!")

I then discovered, in retrospect, that the hip baths on board the *Graf Spee* were a luxury. Here on the *Altmark* washing was a painful business. They allowed us only one quart per man for washing. Of course, that would not have been enough even with proper soap, but what the Germans gave us was a lump of hard gray substance which only dirtied our skin.

We also had a bath now and then. The bath was of the same standard as the wash. We were herded into a large cabin, and there, packed so close we could hardly move, we took our "bath" in a few bucketfuls of water between us. The water was hot, heated by the steam from the boilers, but it was so little that those of us who used the so-called soap had not enough water to clean it off. At the same time, we had to use the same water to wash our underwear, and of course, it was dirty from the "soap."

Drinking water was scarcer still. We were tormented by constant thirst.

WE met the *Altmark's* notorious captain the day after our arrival. Baby-face came down to tell us to go on deck, as the captain wanted to speak to us.

The captain was a small, thin fellow, with an angry face decorated with a goatee beard. He was standing in the bow of the ship, and we all crowded round him. Remarkably enough, we were not lined up. The captain had an ugly scowl on his face as he looked us over. I was a bit slow, perhaps because my legs felt heavy. The captain saw me and turned on me at once.

"Come along, come along," he snapped. "Hurry up. . . . If you don't, I'll teach you—I'll teach you!"

When we were all assembled, the venomous little German looked round with eyes full of hatred.

"As you know," he began, "you are on board a German prison-ship. You are prisoners. Prisoners of war. Maybe that is not your fault, as many of you sailed before the outbreak of war and

were already at sea when it started. You must keep the rules and regulations of this ship with absolute precision, and you must carry out my orders quickly and efficiently; otherwise you'll soon get acquainted with the ship's prison, and I can tell you it's not a pleasant place.

"I hate the British. I hate them with all my heart, and let me tell you that every German hates you just as much. After the last war your government deprived us of our colonies. That is why I can't land you in any of them, but must take you to Germany. But I assure you that after this war we'll get back everything you've stolen from us."

"Perhaps," murmured my friend Sam Flowers, from behind me.

"Germany is going to win this war!" he went on. "The Germany of today is not like the Germany of the past. It is the Germany of the Fuehrer—strong and invincible. Germany is going to win!"

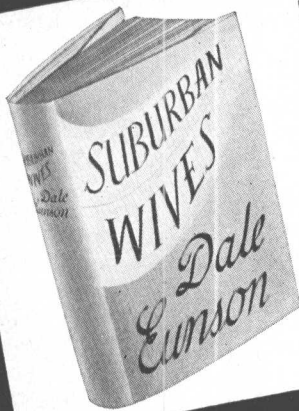
THERE was a sudden burst of laughter and boing from us. Some of the chaps held their sides with merriment. The little German turned pale as death, and was quivering with rage in every limb.

"Your demonstration leaves me cold," he said. His lips were twitching, his eyes glittering, and it was obvious that he was anything but "cold." "Yes," he went on, "I assure you we're going to win this war, and it won't take long before we get our colonies back." His voice rose higher and higher, until he was screaming. He was now jabbering away in German, so the majority of us did not know what he was saying. He grew red in the face; and as he stood shouting at the top of his voice, with his goatee trembling, he looked ridiculous. It was easy to see he was filled with an insane hatred of the British. Later we learned that he had kept it up since the last war; and we ourselves were made to feel it during the next two months! Captain Dau had been in the last war and had been a prisoner of war in the hands of the British, and he vented all the rage of his captivity and also his personal sense of humiliation when Germany lost the war, on us, now at his mercy.

After the Captain's vitriolic address we were marched back to our prison. He never spoke to us directly after that, though he frequently made us feel his cruel power.

This story continues in the forthcoming August issue, with the dramatic rescue in Norwegian waters.

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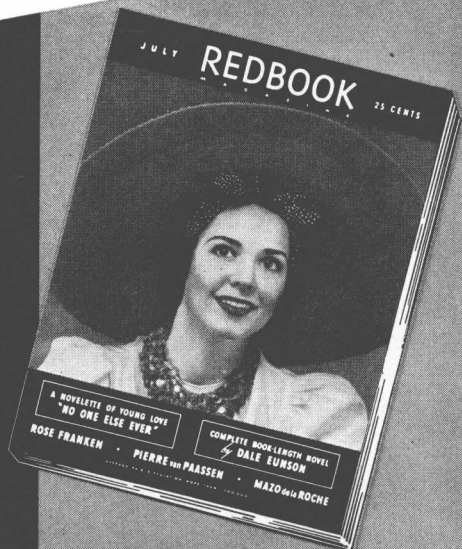
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