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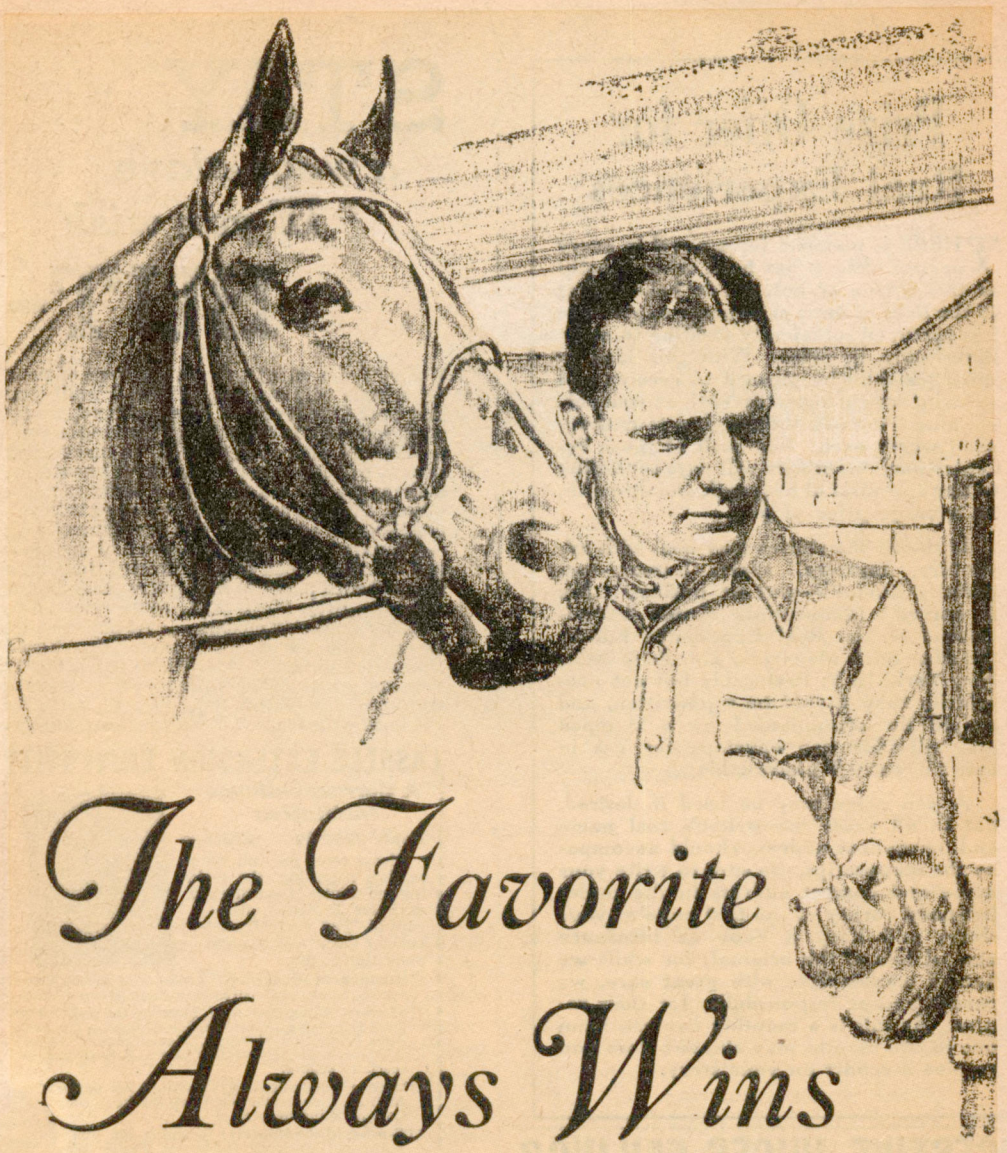


The Favorite Always Wins

That distinctly American institution the trotting horse here provides a specially attractive story.

By HUGH PENTECOST

MR. GEORGE RAYMOND was really three people. First of all, he was a kindly, courteous gentleman in his late sixties, fastidious in his relays of white linen suits. Secondly, he was a bank president. And thirdly he was a colonel—a Kentucky colonel. Mr. Raymond played all three rôles to perfection.

There was one week in the year, however, when he was strictly *Colonel* Raymond—the week of the Lexington Trots. For that week Colonel Raymond deserted his broad lawns and pillared front porch for the leather-upholstered armchairs of hotel lobbies, and for drinks which were definitely inferior to those made by Jason, his own major-domo. For that week he departed from his own table, his fine linen and old silver, and at meal-times during that week the Colonel could be found down under the

stands, dipping hunks of bread in bowls of Kentucky burgoo. Finance and business were forgotten in "hoss talk."

It was always a source of irritation to the Colonel that he was expected to go to his office at the bank at all during that week. If the Colonel had had his own way, he would have been down at the Fair-grounds, hanging over the fence with the rest of the rail-birds, watching the morning workouts and the racing of horses against time. That gave a man a chance to do a little experting—to show off his real knowledge of horseflesh.

BUT business was business, and the Colonel had no out. He must appear at the office, go through his mail, and pray that nothing would come up to detain him a minute longer than the time required for this morning routine. Today in particular Colonel Raymond wanted to get away. The two-year-old division of the Kentucky Futurity was to be trotted, and the Colonel had ideas. He was more than annoyed when his cashier came in with the announcement that someone wished to see him.

"Name of Weston, sir," said the cashier.

"Weston? Weston! Damned if I know any Westons. Did he say what he wanted?"

The cashier smiled a thin smile. "He's not the talkative kind, sir. But he *did* say you'd known him some years back. He'd have been wearing short pants then, I reckon."

The Colonel sighed. "Show him in."

Young Mr. Weston was ushered into the Colonel's office. He was tanned and lean, with clear blue eyes. His jaw was square, and it was jutted forward aggressively. As he stood in front of the desk, an odor of horse and stable was wafted in the Colonel's direction. This was perfume to the Lexington banker. His scowling scrutiny of the young man relaxed. Then he thumped his fist down on the edge of the desk.

"Doug Weston—by all that's sacred!"

"That's right, sir," said Doug Weston.

"Well, I'll be damned! You *were* wearin' short breeches the last time I saw you."

The Colonel remembered him—remembered him well. Old Ed Carmichael of the Roman Hills Farm had picked the kid up some ten years ago, a stray waif following the trotters around the country. Old Ed, whose horses were named after the leaders of a great empire, had

"About that farm, Mr. Weston—" Doug faced her, anger in his eyes.

taken a fancy to the boy. The Colonel remembered seeing Doug, perched on the seat of a specially built sulky, sending old Ed's Caligula or Nero or Octavius around the track with all the skill of a veteran reinsman. Old Ed had watched the boy, highly pleased.

"He's got trot in his head," old Ed used to say. The Colonel remembered that. Old Ed's judgment of horsemen had never been tinged with sentimental-

ity. And what old Ed had thought of the boy had been shown at his death two years before. He had left the Roman Hills Farm to young Doug, lock, stock and barrel.

"Well, Doug, what can I do for you?" the Colonel asked.

"I want to borrow some money," said young Doug.

"Well, now—" The Colonel reached for his wallet. "If fifty would be any service, Doug—"

"No," said young Doug. "I'm not aiming to borrow from *you,* Colonel. I want to borrow from the bank."

"Ah," said the Colonel. "And how much did you aim to borrow?"

"As much as the freight'll stand," said Doug, unsmiling.

The Colonel tugged at his goatee. "Well, suh, to borrow from the bank, you got to have security."

"I have it," said Doug. "The Roman Hills Farm. You know it well, Colonel. That's why I came to you—so there'd be no delay. You know the place and what it's worth. There are a dozen horses go along with it. I want to mortgage the lot for the most I can get."

"Hmm," said the Colonel. "Of course the Board would have to—"

"I can't wait for that," said Doug Weston. "I own the property free and clear. I want to get as much as you'll let me have this morning; I can't wait for a lot of old buzzards to go pawing the place over."

"And what do you want the money for, Doug?"

"That's my affair, Colonel, meanin' no disrespect," said young Doug. "How much can you let me have?"

The Colonel did some rapid calculating. "We're allowed to loan only thirty per cent of the value at a forced sale," he said. "That is, outside the city limits. I can't give you even that much without consultin' the Board. Say—two thousand dollars? Would that do, Doug?" He saw a wave of disappointment pass over the boy's face.

"It'll have to," said Doug.

"When do you figger on payin' it back?"

"Next week—or never," said Doug.

The Colonel hesitated. Then he shrugged. "Well, I reckon you know what you're doin', Doug."

"Yes sir. I guess maybe I do. I'd like it in tens and twenties."

A FEW minutes later Doug Weston had his money. The Colonel, business done, fell into a little "hoss" talk.

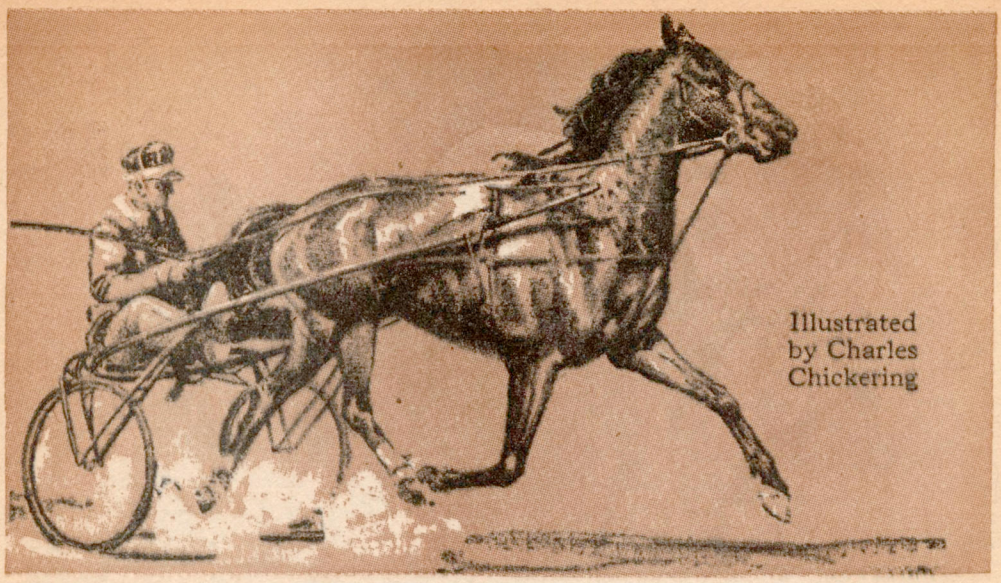
"You teamin' anythin' here this week, Doug?"

Young Doug was stuffing the bills into the inner pocket of his coat. Excitement blazed up in his eyes. "Yes sir, I am. I've got one entered in the Transylvania Thursday."

"Oh," said the Colonel. The outcome of the Transylvania was a foregone conclusion. John Lombard's Volometer was a heavy favorite; and in trotting races, the favorite always wins.

"If you want a real hot tip, Colonel," said Doug, "put some cash on my horse —Hadrian II. He'll be about eight to one. He's set to win."

"Now, Doug, you're dreamin'," said the Colonel. "Volometer is just about the greatest trotter in the circuit today, if not the greatest."



Illustrated by Charles Chickering

Doug Weston laughed, and it was a young, reckless laugh. "I'm risking everything I've got on it, sir," he said. He strode out of the office.

"Doug! *Wait!*" the Colonel called after him. Then the Colonel swore. The damned fool of a boy was going to bet that money on his own horse! And there was only one horse in the race—Volometer! The Colonel had done his experting, and he knew.

THE Colonel raised his glass. "To your very good health, suh—and yours too, Miss Gay."

Big John Lombard nodded over the green fringe of mint to his daughter. "Congratulations, darling," he said.

Gay Lombard smiled. She had that special beauty that comes with dark hair, dark blue eyes, and a fair complexion. "Thanks. But it's rather a joke." She turned to Colonel Raymond. "Every year when the new colts are foaled, Colonel, Father gives me my pick of the lot."

"And a damn' good picker," said John Lombard. "I think you'll agree, Colonel, if you saw the Futurity this afternoon."

"Magnificent," said the Colonel dreamily. He was thinking of a horse.

"But it's still only a gag," said Gay Lombard, "because after I've picked one that's the end. Joe Nichols breaks and trains and drives him. The colt's no more mine than any other horse on the place."

"They're all yours, my girl," said John Lombard, and meant it. "You can take 'em where you want to."

Big John was well named. He was huge; his hands were big; the structure of his gray head was massive. His voice boomed. It was said that his rages, when they came over him, were awe-inspiring. Gay was the apple of his eye; had been ever since he'd retired from business ten years before, with a fortune as big as everything else about him.

"And we'll take the three-year-old event tomorrow," he said. "And the Transylvania on Thursday. A good week for us, Colonel."

The Colonel frowned. "No chance of your scratchin' Volometer?"

"Scratching him!" John Lombard's voice reached every corner of the hotel taproom. "Why, damn it, Colonel, Volometer's going after Dean Hanover's record for the fastest three heats trotted by a stallion."

The Colonel studied his julep. "Did you ever hear, suh, of Hadrian II?"

John Lombard nodded. "One of the Roman Hills Farm entries. What's the boy's name who inherited the place?"

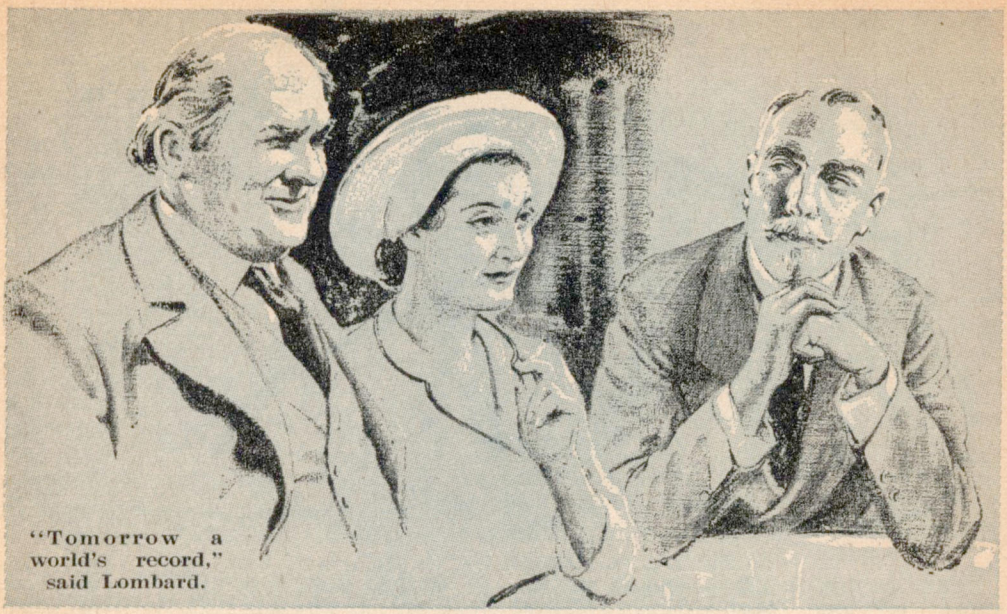
"Douglas Weston," said the Colonel. He turned his glass slowly in his hand. "I've heard that Hadrian II is much the same type of horse as the great Greyhound."

John Lombard snorted. "There are points of similarity," he said. "He's gray. He's got four legs and a tail and mane."

"Can he go?" the Colonel asked.

Lombard shrugged. "Colonel, his record is 2:06. That's good trotting. But Volometer's out of his class. He did three different heats under two minutes at Goshen this summer. We're not worrying about winning. We're only concerned with breaking records."

The Colonel looked unhappy.



"Tomorrow a world's record," said Lombard.

"I happen to know," he said, "that Doug Weston has mortgaged his place, raised every cent he can, to bet on Hadrian in the Transylvania."

"Then he's a fool!" said Lombard.

The Colonel did not agree. "He's reckoned to be a smart horseman and a crack driver. Ed Carmichael used to say he had trot in his head. Maybe—"

"Maybe nothing," said John Lombard. "Colonel, you and I know every horseman has a blind spot—his own horse. But figures don't lie. The fastest heat Hadrian ever trotted was 2:06. Volometer's slowest mile in ten races this summer was 2:04. Volometer's worst is better than Hadrian's best. Young Weston's gone sentimental."

"What will happen if he loses?" Gay Lombard asked.

"His farm—his horses—everythin' he has, will go," said the Colonel.

"That's terrible!" Gay said.

"It's not our headache, darling," said John Lombard. "There are still people who remember when you could buy a likely-looking horse off some farmer's hay-rake and turn him into a champion; but today it takes breeding. Look at the pedigrees, and you can pick the winners. They don't turn up by accident any more. Favorites always win. Young Weston's gone soft. It's too bad."

"It's terrible," Gay repeated.

AT any other place but Lexington during the Grand Circuit meeting, the sight of a girl going out the front door of a hotel at five o'clock in the morning would cause comment. But nobody noticed Gay Lombard, because the people who were around at that hour all had the same thing on their minds: Horse! At the track at the Fair-grounds, the smart boys and the sentimentalists would both be leaning over the rail, analyzing the workouts. The trotters would be churning up the red dust; the drivers, braced on their sulky seats, goggles over their eyes to protect them from the flying grit, would be calling out to their horses. Along the fence, old-timers would dream of other great days—dreams of Guy Axworthy, locked forever in an earthy stable at Walnut Hall farm; of Peter Manning, grazing now in peace on a Pennsylvania hillside; of Greyhound, who had trotted the fastest mile in the history of the sport only two years before—trotted against that ghostly enemy Time, in the amazing speed of 1:56 flat; of Billy Direct, who on the same day did the third heat of a race against flesh-and-blood opponents in 1:58.

The drivers on the track were not concerned with memories. Today the three-year-old Futurity; tomorrow the Transylvania. Already the wise ones were whispering: "Watch Volometer!" If conditions were right,—if the track was fast and the red-white-and-blue weather-vane should droop from the masthead, indicating a lack of wind—perhaps history would be made.

Gay Lombard, approaching the rail, heard those whispers. Volometer had just left the track, she learned. He had been clocked in 2:02½—great time for

an unpaced performance without opposition.

"He's set!" the wise ones were saying.

But Gay Lombard hadn't come to see Volometer. She had come to look at a young man driving a gray horse who by all logic didn't rate.

Then she saw him. The gray horse had been coming down the back stretch at a leisurely pace. Now, nearing the turn, he began to go. Gay felt her fingers grip the top of the fence-rail. Hadrian looked awkward at that distance. But as she had one head-on glimpse of him at the turn, she saw that his feet moved in a right line to the front. His action was rhythmic and steady. He was coming fast now, and Doug Weston's hands held the reins spread wide. Just as he came abreast of Gay, his whip cut sharply at the air, and his young voice, eager and proud, shrilled above the pounding hoofs.

"Go it, good horse!"

Hadrian II wore no blinkers, and Gay caught the look in his eye. One ear was cocked back for the sound of Doug's voice, and she knew instantly that here was a horse who loved to trot. There was none of that strained, desperate effort to give all the driver asked for. . . .

Only the most practiced can guess at speed. Gay realized the gray horse was deceptive. His stride was long, while Volometer's action was much shorter and faster. But the gray covered ground —plenty of ground.

GAY turned away from the fence and headed toward a cluster of barns at the far end of the track. These were the sections rented out to the less opulent owners—barns shared by two or three outfits. Long and low they were, with Dutch-doored box-stalls under the sloping protection of the roof.

Here the neatness, the perfection of arrangement, was just as obvious as in her father's fancy stable. There weren't the same luxurious accessories, but harness was highly polished, blankets neatly folded, the paint on sulkies mirror-bright. Over the door of one empty stall, Gay located Hadrian's name.

Outside the stall an old man was soaping harness which hung from an improvised hook of baling-wire.

"Is this where Mr. Weston keeps his string?" Gay asked.

The man nodded and went on sponging his harness. Next to the empty stall a little bay mare looked out at Gay inquisitively. Over the door was its name, "Cornelia." Beyond Cornelia were "Marcus" and "Fabius."

"Do you work for Mr. Weston?" Gay asked the old man.

"Sort of."

"I was anxious to see Hadrian II. I've heard a lot about him."

"He'll be in soon," said the old man.

"HAVE you worked for Mr. Weston long?" Gay asked, to keep the conversation alive.

"I reckon I have. And for Ed Carmichael before him, and for Mr. Carmichael's father before that, as well." He stopped sponging and looked out across the turf toward the track.

"You must have seen a lot of trotters."

"Seen 'em all," said the old man. "An' all the drivers too—Pop Geers, and Tommy Murphy, and John Dickerson, and Doc Tanner. All of 'em." He sighed. "I seen Dan Patch, and Lou Dillon, and old Axworthy, and Hamburg Belle. I seen 'em all."

"You're lucky," Gay said. "What sort of horse is Hadrian?"

The old man rubbed at an imaginary speck on one of the harness rings. "A good horse," he said.

"Has he got a chance in the Transylvania?"

The old man blew on the brass ring—polished vigorously. "Nobody thought Cresceus could beat the Abbot—but he did. That was in 1901. Before your time, I guess."

"Just a trifle," Gay smiled.

And then they saw the gray horse jogging toward the barn. Doug Weston was still on the sulky seat, but his legs were dangling down. A trotter is a very different animal from the high-strung running horse. He is not easily excitable. Gay had seen the great Greyhound, king of them all, being cooled out at Goshen after a winning effort. There was no fenced-off paddock in which he was walked. He picked his way calmly through the hundreds of people who crowded around to look at him at close range.

Hadrian II, his gray coat dark with sweat, came to a stop beside the old man. He reached out his nose and gave the old man a push.

"Here, you black-hearted limb of Satan!" the old man shouted, but his fingers were gentle as he rubbed the gray face.

Doug Weston slid off the sulky seat and came around to the horse's head. If he saw Gay at all, he gave no sign. There was a stop-watch in his gloved hand.

"Thirty and a half for the last quarter, Mike." He slapped the wet gray shoulder. "Good horse," he said.

Mike moved with practiced efficiency. The sulky was wheeled away, the harness removed, and the big horse cross-tied. Mike went to work with a metal scraper, removing sweat—and while he worked, he made a mystical whistling noise between his teeth, interrupting this from time to time by bloodcurdling threats of dire consequence to Hadrian. The gray, turning his head as far as the tie-ropes would permit, persisted in giving the old man a shove whenever he came in range.

Doug Weston spoke to Gay. "He's like a puppy," he said.

Gay nodded. "I came out specially to look at him this morning."

"Did you see him go?"

"Yes."

"Thirty and a half for that last quarter," Doug said. "He'd already done three miles at a pretty fair clip."

The old man had finished sponging off the gray coat now. He slipped a faded blue cooler over the broad back, unhooked the tie-ropes, and began to walk the trotter slowly up and down in front of the stable. The gray kept nudging and pushing and fumbling at Mike's coat-sleeve with his lips. The old man swore and whistled, alternately, but there was deep affection in the touch of his hand on the arched neck.

"His sire was a good horse," Gay volunteered.

Doug Weston looked at her, his blue eyes sharpening.

"Centurion, 2:02¼," Gay said.

Doug's jaw advanced a trifle. "His grandsire was no slouch."

"I know," said Gay. "Aureleus, 2:03 on a half-mile track."

Doug dug in the pocket of his jacket. "Cigarette?" he asked, passing a crumpled package.

"Thanks."

He struck a match on the heel of his shoe and held it for her. "You know trotting," he said.

Gay smiled. "Maybe I was just showing off," she said. "I looked up Hadrian's pedigree last night. I heard he had a chance to win the Transylvania."

"A chance!" Doug snorted.

"If there were any use betting on a long shot in trotting races, I'd be down on Hadrian," Gay said. "But Volometer's too good."

The Weston jaw moved forward. "Volometer's a good horse. But we're loaded for bear."

"You'll be taking Volometer's dust if you can't do better than 2:06."

"We'll do better," Doug said.

"*Have* you done better?"

"Never needed to, to win," said Doug. He glanced at the gray, ambling in the wake of the old man. "Records don't tell you everything. Records don't tell you the size of a heart." He pulled on his cigarette. "We don't aim to take any dust from Big John Lombard's bit of fancy-work."

"You sound sure of yourself."

Doug looked back at her, his eyes bright. "I'm so sure that I've put everything I own on the big fellow's nose. If you want to make yourself a dollar or two, you'll do the same."

"But Volometer—"

"My dear girl," said Doug patiently, "because the Lombards, the Bostwicks and the Shepperds have a lot of money doesn't mean they raise the only trotting-horses in the country. Watch, tomorrow, and you'll see."

"Maybe I will buy a couple of tickets on Hadrian," Gay said. "Just in case."

Doug laughed again. "Smart girl. Excuse me."

He left her to join the old man and the gray horse. Gay turned away toward the hotel for breakfast. She was smiling. Where else could a young man meet an attractive young girl who made brazen advances—and not even ask her name? Only in the world of horse!

Big John Lombard was in an expansive mood. He had just bought a round of drinks for himself and Gay and Colonel Raymond, after having set them up for a dozen or more acquaintances at the bar. He settled back in the leather arm-chair in the taproom with a sigh of content.

"The best two-year-old, the best three-year-old; and tomorrow a world's record," he said.

It was just then that Doug Weston walked into the taproom and started toward the bar. Several people waved and called to him, and he was halfway across the room before he saw Gay and her father and the Colonel. He stopped in his tracks, and Gay felt suddenly cold

as she saw his frown. Then he swung about and went on to the bar.

Colonel Raymond leaned forward and drew Lombard's attention to him. "That's young Weston—owns Hadrian II."

Big John looked. "Nice put-together kid," he said.

"He knows horses," said the Colonel.

"Not well enough," said John Lombard. He heaved himself up out of his chair. "I feel like being a good guy," he said. He didn't see the restraining hand that Gay held out to him. He went over to the bar and stood beside the boy.

"YOU'RE Doug Weston, aren't you?" said Big John. "I'm John Lombard. I've heard about you."

"Hello," Doug said, slowly. His lips moved in a tight smile. "Naturally, I've heard of you, sir. A fine race your colt trotted this afternoon."

"Thanks," said Big John. "I hear you think you've got a chance against Volometer tomorrow?"

"I think I have," said Doug.

"Everyone says you're a good kid," said Big John. "I don't mean to butt into your business, but I think I ought to tell you something."

Doug didn't say anything, his eyes on Big John's red, good-natured face.

"We've been pointing for the Transylvania all summer," Big John said. "Volometer's ready—not just to win, son, but to set a new record."

"Yes?" said Doug.

"You're just battering your head against a stone wall," said Big John. "They say you're banking on winning. You can't make it, son."

"That's my risk."

A tinge of annoyance crept into Big John's manner. "Damn it, you're riding for a fall, kid. Withdraw your horse. Put him in the second race. He's a good horse. You can clean up with him there."

"I'm aiming for the jackpot," said Doug. "I'm figuring on starting a breeding-farm of my own. I need real money."

"You're not going to get it in the Transylvania," said Big John.

"We'll see."

"Hell!" Big John exploded. "You're being stubborn. Don't you read the records? Volometer is seconds faster than your horse—he can have an off day and still win!"

Doug held his glass to the light as if searching for something in its amber depths. "How much do you know about horses?" he asked.

"Don't be sorry for me until after the race tomorrow," said Doug Weston.

"What's that?" Big John's voice filled the taproom.

"Do you make friends with 'em?" Doug asked. "Do you sleep in the straw with 'em? Do you know what goes in their heads—and in their hearts?"

"Good Lord!" Big John raised amazed eyes.

"There's more to it than records," said Doug quietly.

Big John lowered his voice, conscious of keeping his temper. "I wanted to do you a favor, boy. I wanted you to know we're going all-out tomorrow."

"Me too," said Doug.

Big John turned abruptly and went back to the table. He was ruffled. "A stubborn young mule," he said.

Gay stood up and walked over to Doug Weston.

"Hi," she said, and leaned her elbows on the bar beside him.

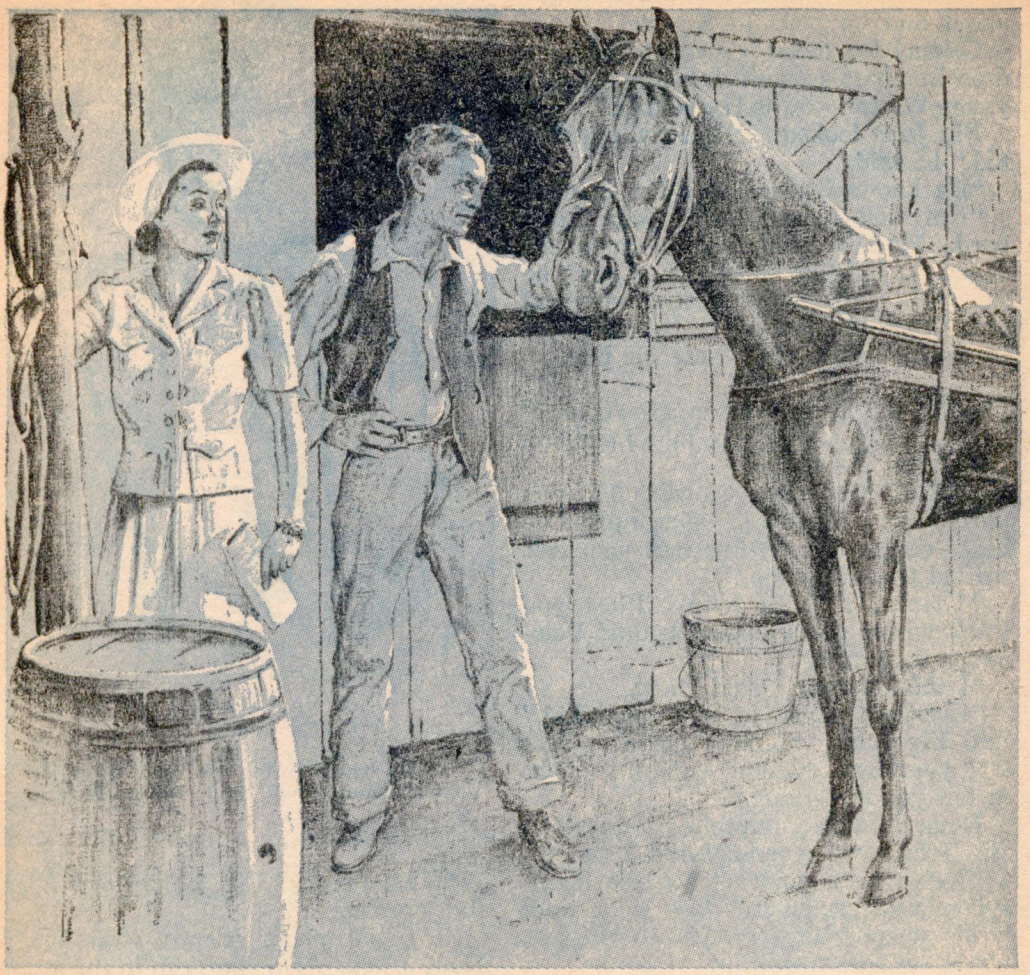
"Hello."

"I know what you're thinking."

"Yes?"

"Yes. You're thinking that Big John Lombard's daughter came to your barn this morning to snoop."

The Weston jaw tightened. "That's what I think."



"It isn't so," Gay said—but Doug only shrugged and was silent.

"I heard what you said to Father about a breeding-farm. What are you planning?"

He hesitated. "Roman Hills is pretty well run down," he said finally. "It was left to me—but no money to run it with. Hadrian and I are out for that tomorrow. We need new fences, new roofing, and a couple of good brood-mares to go with Cornelia—and money for stud fees. And we're going to get it."

"I wish I thought so."

Doug gave her a level look. "Don't be sorry for me till after the race tomorrow, Miss Lombard."

"I'll never be sorry for you, Doug Weston," she said; "you wouldn't like it."

He stared at her. Then, "Cigarette?" he asked in a gruff voice. He held the crumpled pack toward her.

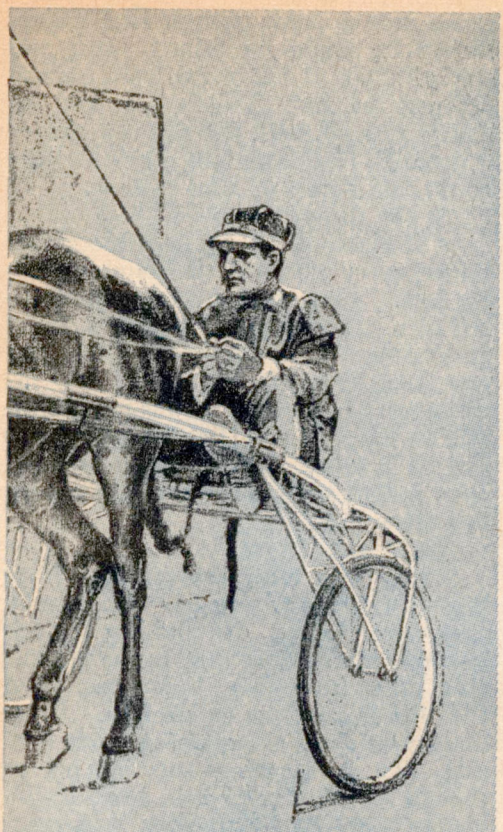
GAY LOMBARD clutched the leather purse which matched her green linen suit, as if it held everything she owned in the world. Big John, beside her in the front-row box, would have been dumfounded if he'd known that the purse contained two pari-mutuel tickets on a gray horse named Hadrian II.

The sun hung hot and heavy over the Fair-grounds. The first heat of the first race, an affair for pacers, had been run off, the chief interest in it being the use of the new starting-barrier.

"It's going to revolutionize the game," Big John was saying. "No scoring. They went off the first time."

It was not to be tried in the Transylvania, because it was considered unfair to the more valuable horses who hadn't been trained to its use. The starter, in the judges' stand, his hand on the bell, was looking down the track. Conditions were perfect—a fast track and no wind. Could Volometer do it? That was the only question. Could he trot three heats in faster time than Dean Hanover had done—2:00¼, 2:00¾, 2:00¾?

A rumble ran through the crowd. From the entrance-gate came the first contend-



"You black-hearted limb of Satan!" the old man shouted; but his fingers were gentle as he rubbed the gray face.

er for the Transylvania, followed by the others—Gypsie Maid, and Canopener, Axbury Lad and Sweet William, Hadrian II and Corona—and Volometer! Every eye turned to the sleek black trotter with Joe Nichols, in the Lombard racing colors of purple and gold, at the reins—every eye except two pairs, one belonging to an old man who sat in the Lombard box, tugging at his white goatee; the other to a girl who grasped at a green purse. They were watching a big gray horse with a long stride, ears laid back in mischief; and his driver, in a cherry-red shirt, the visor of his cap pushed forward almost as far as his jaw.

PAST the stands went the horses in a warm-up whirl—down to the quarter-pole, and then jogging back again. The tall gray was awkward, his gait almost a shuffle.

The Colonel leaned forward and touched Gay's shoulder. He seemed to know she was watching too. "He doesn't pull himself together till it counts," he said. "He moves straight ahead when they really go."

Gay nodded. She had seen that for herself. Hadrian was clowning now, ears swiveled back, tail switching in Doug Weston's face. She saw Volometer go past, a black machine rolling forward as though on wheels. A ripple of applause greeted him. Big John Lombard's cigar was tilted upward, and his eyes glistened. They never left the black horse. Joe Nichols had his orders. He would be driving by the watch. He wouldn't be concerned with the others.

"I hope these plugs set a pace for him in the beginning," Big John said. "It would help."

THE bell in the judges' stand clanged. "All right, boys, take 'em down the track. Let's get off clean. You, Weston, you're on the pole. Keep that gray hoss back till the others come into position. Take him well down."

Doug tipped the brim of his cap with his whip-hand in acknowledgment. The horses ambled stiff-legged down the track. A hundred yards they would go, then wheel and start coming in a thunder of hoofs and a swirl of dust. If they were all moving right, all in position—

"Slow! *Slow!*" the starter shouted.

Hadrian II was turning; and Doug, leaning far back, was holding him down. The big gray gathered momentum. Canopener swung in beside him—then Gypsie Maid, then Volometer on the outside. The rest were in the second tier.

"Slower!" the starter pleaded. "You're not giving 'em a chance behind you! No! No! No!" Corona, in the second tier, had broken. The horses swept by and almost to the quarter-pole before they could be halted and brought back.

"Take it easy, now," the starter ordered. "Take that gray hoss way down, Weston. Give 'em plenty of time."

Like dogs stalking around each other waiting for the fight to begin, they circled into position, gently eased by the reinsmen. Again Hadrian started.

"Slow now! Easy now! Keep that black horse back! Nichols, you're coming too fast! *Keep him back!*"

Joe Nichols, his feet braced, was trying with all his might to check Volometer, but the black horse was flying. He was a good length ahead of Hadrian as he sped past the starting-line. Again the bell clanged. The crowd sighed as the horses were pulled in once more and turned back.

"Easy does it!"

They start. Corona rears and plunges.

"Slow!"

Corona has come down to earth—he's moving fast—he's up in position. The horses in the first tier are running like a team—gray and black, bay and chestnut.

"Go!"

IT would take only two minutes, perhaps less, to trot that mile. The onlookers sank back in their seats as, square and true, seven trotters made for the quarter-pole. Hadrian II, on the rail, swung his long legs in a rhythm as steady as if he were going to music. He had pulled away at the start, one ear back for Doug's voice, the other cocked forward. The black horse had come fast too—fast enough to maneuver across in front of Canopener and Gypsie Maid. Doug must have felt his hot breath on his neck as they rolled into the first turn.

"Time for the first quarter," the loudspeaker droned, "twenty-nine seconds flat."

A mutter of excitement through the stands. A fast quarter—too fast, perhaps. It would certainly kill off the field. Could the great Volometer himself stand such a pace?

Gay Lombard and the Colonel had their eyes riveted on the gray horse in front. He must falter under this terrific drive; yet there was no sign of it. They were moving toward the half-mile post now, seeming to travel slowly as they went away from the crowd. Through the rails of the fence the sulky-wheels gave the curious illusion of turning backwards, as if they were pulling desperately on the side of Time. Hadrian still churned forward in the lead with the black horse second, Corona third, and the rest strung out behind.

"Time for the half—58½!"

"God!" said the Colonel harshly.

Cherry-red, purple and gold. If anything, the gap between the gray and the black was widening. Gay found herself murmuring: "Dear Lord, make a miracle happen! Make it happen!"

Then a shout: "Look at Corona!"

The bay horse, his neck and sides streaked with lather, shot forward on the outside. Past the unwavering Volometer—up to the wheels of Hadrian's sulky. Gay saw that Corona's driver was stretched far back, pulling desperately, and she knew what was coming. A second later Corona's threat was over as he broke into a wild, uncontrolled gallop. Before he could be reined down and started again at his proper gait, he had fallen to the rear. And the gray and the black came on, with the gap widening—widening. Hadrian's long stride had the power and thrust of steel pistons.

"At the three-quarter—1:29!"

As if signaled by an invisible cheerleader, every person in the stands rose to his feet. They were coming round the last turn. Gay focused her glasses on the gray horse and the cherry-red shirt. She saw Doug Weston's lips parted over his white teeth in a smile. It was happening. Still on the pole, and Hadrian a good two lengths in front. Doug's hands held the reins spread wide, and she could see his lips move now.

"Go it, good horse!"

A roar rose from the crowd. Doug Weston's smile broadened. No wonder they were yelling. He and the big fellow were giving their dust to the unbeatable, the invincible Volometer. And then the smile froze on his face. A wet black nose came alongside—a horse trotting like a machine—moving up as though Hadrian were held back by invisible weights. Volometer was making his bid.

Gay wanted to close her eyes, but she couldn't. She knew what would happen now, what must happen now. Doug's whip would swish over the gray ears. The big horse would give more than he had—a break, and disaster.

Volometer swept past the cherry-red driver—past the straining gray. They could hear Joe Nichols' triumphant *"Eee-yah!"* As he went by, he turned to look over his shoulder with the fine disregard of the reinsman for the dust he leaves behind him.

FOR a second the gray horse seemed to rock. But there was no swish of a whip. Instead, Doug was leaning back slightly, holding Hadrian steady, making no effort to equal the heartbreaking finish of the black horse.

It was all over. Gray and black went on to the quarter-pole again before they were checked and turned. And then, as they approached the judges' stand:

"Winner of the first heat—Volometer!" Dead silence from the crowd. They all knew that. "Second, Hadrian II; third, Gypsie Maid; fourth, Axbury Lad; fifth, Canopener; sixth, Sweet William; seventh, Corona. Time—" A tantalizing pause. "Time—1:59!"

Thunder from thousands of throats. Volometer was on the way. His first heat was ahead of Dean Hanover. If he could come close in the next two, there'd be a new record.

"That," said Colonel Raymond, "was one of the finest damned pieces of drivin' I ever saw."

"Nothing to it," said Big John Lombard. "Driven by the watch—exactly as we planned."

"I wasn't talkin' about Nichols, suh," said the Colonel. "I was talkin' about young Doug Weston."

Big John looked in astonishment at the Colonel's back. The Colonel was following Gay down the aisle.

THE horses do not go back to their stables between heats. They are cooled off in stalls under the stands, where the curious public can see them, and speculate as to their chances in the next brush.

It seemed as if everyone in the park were trying to jam into the narrow alleyway in front of those stalls, all stampeding for the same spot—Volometer's stall.

There were only three people to look at a steaming gray being sponged off by an old man who whistled mysteriously between his teeth as he worked. The driver of the gray, in cherry-red silks, stood at the horse's head, his back squarely to the crowd. Gay and the Colonel, and a tall, gaunt man with a lined face who wore a green-and-white driving shirt and carried a whip in his hand.

"Weston!" the stranger said.

Doug Weston turned. His jaw was out, but his eyes were bloodshot and moist at the corners.

"That was real driving," the stranger said. "Made me feel good. I liked it." And he strode away.

"Thanks, Mr. Dwight," Doug said, after him.

The Colonel squeezed Gay's arm. "Doc Dwight, Miss Gay—greatest driver of them all." Then he stepped forward. "Well, son—"

"Well, he was just too good for us," Doug said.

"There are two more heats," said the Colonel.

Doug shook his head. "Volometer is a great horse, Colonel. A *great* horse. Reckon I didn't count on that. He'll be too good for us in the next heat. I'm hoping he'll take that record—he's a great horse."

"Nothin' wrong with this-here critter," muttered old Mike. "2:00¼—clocked him myself. His fastest mile by pretty near six seconds."

"You showed yourself a horseman, Doug, when you didn't try to match that finishin' spurt. You know your horse. You know your stuff. You've got trot in your head! That—that, by God, was magnificent, young man."

"He was doing his best, sir," Doug said. "I couldn't ask for more." The gray horse whickered low and nudged anxiously at Doug, who swung an arm suddenly across the gray withers and pressed his cheek against the wet neck. "Damned old fool! He—he thinks I'm sore at *him!*"

The Colonel cleared his throat and turned away. It was not in the tradition to watch a man when he was close to breaking. But Gay spoke, presently, in a matter-of-fact voice:

"About that farm, Mr. Weston—"

Doug faced her, anger in his eyes.

Gay hurried on:

"Would you consider taking in a partner?"

"A partner! Who?"

"Me," said Gay.

The Weston jaw lifted. "I don't need any Lombard money!"

"I haven't any Lombard money," said Gay. "But I have a horse—Troubador, the two-year-old champion. I have the money he won in the Futurity. That's Troubador's money. I'd like to come in with you at Roman Hills. I like your style, Mr. Weston. You're not all stopwatch and cold figures. You feel about horses the way I feel. You're concerned with what goes on inside. I want in with you."

Doug glared. "I'd have to look over the colt first," he said.

"That's satisfactory," said Gay. "He and Hadrian should win us some races. The Futurity money would help with the fences and the roofing. We'd split fifty-fifty. By next year there should be money for stud fees."

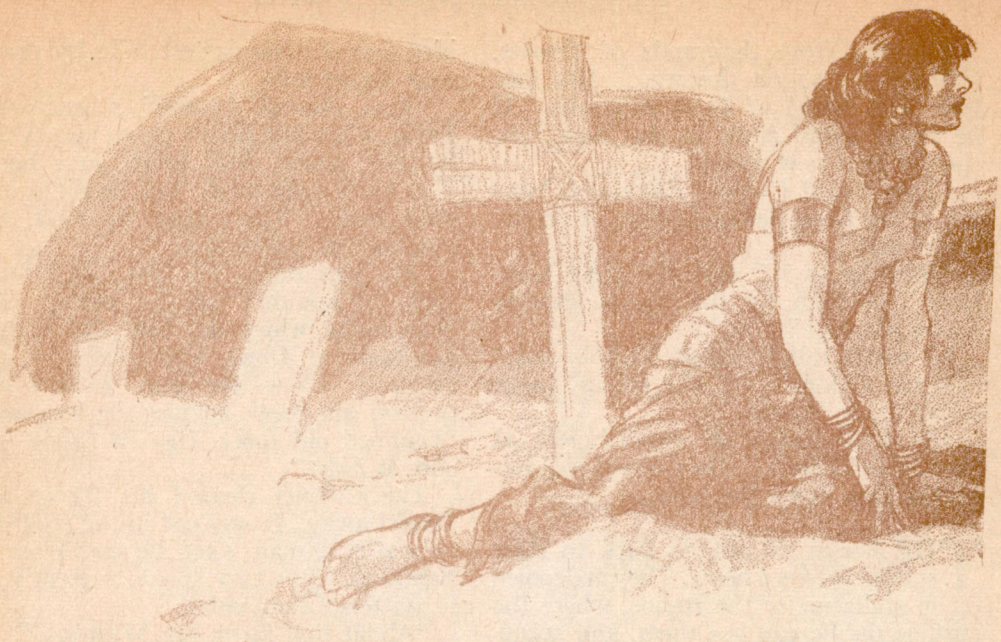
Doug drew a deep breath. He reached in his trouser pocket. "Cigarette?" he asked. His voice wasn't quite steady.

BACK in the box with her father, Gay said:

"I'm going to be married, Father."

"Sure you are, darling," said John Lombard absently. His eyes were on the track. He had a stake-horse in the third race.

Gay smiled. "But my man doesn't know it yet," she said.



GREENBACKS

The able author of "Caravan Treasure" offers a colorful story of North Africa in 1940.

FROM time to time I have managed to accumulate a few dollars at this business of story-writing. Slowly I have placed dime on dime; then a queer mental twist, that is really a form of claustrophobia, turns my shoes toward the desert, and I have scattered the major portion of my hard-earned savings in the Sahara.

These journeys—I have really traveled as far as Timbuktu—have brought a few unusual adventures.

One contains a certain element of tragedy, but the interest of the story lies in the trouble brought to a little Saharan community by money from the United States—dollars put to base service by the agents of a Continental power who found them useful in their cunning work of propaganda and spy activities.

The oasis was not unknown to me. I had visited it two years previously when making for the Hoggar. One rides by express to Blida, then on a slipshod line as far as Djelfa, the chief town of the Ouled Naïl tribe. Djelfa is *le balcon du Sahara;* and here the autobus takes up the work of transport.

To avoid the intense heat of the day, the bus makes a night-drive southward through Laghouat and Berriane. The sandy wastes between the oases contain no habitations beyond an occasional nomad's tent, and the passenger sits in gloom, staring at the treeless stretches brought into momentary view by the high-powered searchlights of the autobus.

Here begins the true Sahara, running southward for fifteen hundred miles.

The bus on which I traveled landed me at the small hotel a little after midnight. The Arab boy, who always slept on the warm sand beside the route till awakened by the thunder of the approaching bus, took my valise. A cunning, gossiping fellow, this boy. His name was Solum, and from Solum one could hear the latest chatter about the new lady friend of the caïd—for half a franc, if the seeker was white; for a cigarette-butt, if the inquirer was a native. Years before, an Englishman returning from an unsuccessful Saharan expedition, had bestowed on Solum a shooting-costume tailored in Saville Row. This outfit the Arab wore night and day. He looked like the devil. . . .

Following me across the sand to the hotel, Solum muttered something about American guests, but I took no notice of his remark. The Arab is complimentary about Americans, for he thinks all travelers from the United States are rich.

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

OVER AFRICA

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

The little *hôtelier* was a strange, mystical man who had fled civilization. Immediately after the war he arrived at the oasis, purchased a strip of sand from the *Pères Blancs*, and with the assistance of half a dozen Arabs, built the tiny hotel. He catered to whites, and so, for five months of the merciless summer, he had no clients. But he remained, refusing to return to France for a vacation, sleeping on a *lit Saharien*,—a bed of sifted sand enclosed by planks,—on which, without sheets or covering, he fought the dreadful nights.

Garbed in crumpled pajamas, and wearing those wide-soled desert shoes that give one the foot-spread of a camel, he now welcomed me.

HE served me a supper of cold mutton and dates, chattering, as I ate, of the small happenings in the oasis since my last visit. He seemed nervous. He did not mention other guests, and I was half through the meal before I tested the truth of Solum's muttered statement with a direct question: Were there really Americans in the hotel?

"Oui," he answered; and as he uttered the word, he stepped close to the table and placed a stubby finger on his lips. He glanced along the dark corridor, then in a whisper explained the reason for the sudden lowering of his voice. In the nearest cubicle were an American and his wife.

There was, he thought, a possibility that the man was awake and listening. He was ill, very ill. Tapping his chest with his forefinger, the hotel man murmured: *"Poitrine, monsieur; très malade. Pas d'éspoir."*

I wrestled with the mutton, suddenly aware of an atmosphere of mystery. The *hôtelier*, curiously poised, regarded me. I used the spur of silence; and presently it was effective. The *hôtelier* stooped, placed his mouth close to my ear and whispered: *"L'homme est vraiment Américain; mais la dame, avant le mariage, était Allemande."* He paused, so that I might thoroughly understand the premarriage situation of the couple, then, throwing a certain element of astonishment into his whispering, he added: *"Maintenant elle est Américaine!"*

Well, if one stops to consider, it does seem surprising that the marriage ceremony can transform a foreign woman into a citizeness of the United States. Of course, to the hotel man, his racial hate made the transformation more remarkable. I was amused by the look of won-

der on his face as he cleared away the supper things. . . .

I slept badly. I rose a little before five and sat myself at the open window. It was a hot, clammy morning, presaging a blistering day.

The small hotel occupied a position between the Arab cemetery—a huge stretch of sand dotted with pathetic hillocks on which were the shards of mourning—and the *Quartier* where resided some threescore Ouled Naïl females of assorted ages. The Ouled Naïl has a monopoly of the entertainment business in the Sahara.

SITTING at the window on this hot morning, I thought that the White Fathers, the original owners of the hotel site, might have taken over the piece of sandy ground with the sentimental idea of keeping a barrier between those who slept in "hideous solitude" and those who dozed in brown caressing arms. I was building up a picture of a bearded missionary proclaiming the necessity for such a separation, when around the corner of the hotel building came a white woman in a flowered dressing-gown, heading straight for the narrow entrance that led into the heart of the *Quartier*.

For some twenty yards that lady was clearly in view. In type she was one of those tall, vigorous breeding women who were with the Hun army of Attila sweeping down through Lombardy on Rome —blonde amazons with bountiful breasts over which slid immense plaits of flaxen hair. Thighs like thrusting pistons that fought the hobbling skirts. Here was one of them come to life in a small oasis in the Sahara!

Breathlessly I watched her disappear through the narrow passage. My startled mind answered my query. The hotel man was a bachelor. There were no guests outside the American, his wife and myself. Obviously I had been staring at the lady who had been transformed from a German to an American by the simple ceremony of marriage.

In the intense silence of the desert morning I watched for her return. She appeared at the end of five minutes. Moving up the slope with an effortless stride she disappeared around the corner of the building. Listening, I heard her footsteps in the corridor and the soft closing of the door of the chamber occupied by herself and her sick husband. I was immensely puzzled. What business would take this woman to the *Quartier* in the dawn-light?

Four hours later I was taking coffee in the little dining-room when she entered. Her surprise was noticeable.

I rose from my seat and bowed. Coldly she acknowledged the salute. She seated herself and spoke sharply to Solum. He was to serve her quickly, and also take coffee to her husband.

The plastered wall immediately behind her chair was tinted a crude indigo-blue, and against this her fair skin and flaxen hair showed up in a startling manner. She seemed one of the Lorelei let loose in the great sands.

Clumsily I broke the silence. I said, and it was a very stupid remark, that it was my second visit to the oasis.

"Why make a second visit to a wretched cluster of hovels and a few date-palms?" she inquired.

Slight was the Teutonic accent. Her blue eyes were accusative. I wondered if I had committed a sin by returning to the oasis. . . . Awkwardly I talked. I said that I liked the desert. It appealed to me. Also I had a small commission to write an article on the fertilization of the date-palms.

"How long are you staying?" she asked.

"About a week," I answered.

She considered my answer in silence; then she rose suddenly and sailed from the room. Her manner of leaving suggested to me that the sooner I wrote my article and took myself away, the better pleased she would be.

AFTER breakfast I walked through the narrow lanes of the *Quartier*. The little ladies in their colorful rags sat in the sunshine, dappled by the palm-fronds stretched from roof to roof to lessen the glare. The girls were very polite. They smiled and saluted, and one slim thing informed me in French that she recalled my previous visit to the oasis. When she addressed me, I remembered her. Her name was Zuleika.

A strange, seemingly boneless girl, possessing, so one would imagine, the flexibility of a contortionist. Her face was pointed, foxlike, tattooed faintly with blue lines on forehead and chin. High cheekbones and eyes that were cups of India ink; small-footed, and with curiously pathetic hands—hands that approached a gift nervously, as if experience had taught them that it would be withdrawn before they could clasp it.

Her movements were slow but definite. The other women of the *Quartier* walked with the insolent step of the immoral,

What business would take this woman to the *Quartier* in the dawn-light?

jingling their coin necklets and cheap bangles, but Zuleika's jewelry clung to her throat and breast as if it would hide her *metier* from prudish listeners.

She had a little history. A young Frenchman named Dufau, on his first trip to Africa, possibly gorged with the romances of Pierre Loti, had taken the young Zuleika from the *Quartier* and placed her in a small mud-house with a flat roof on which one could sit through the heavy nights and watch the big white stars. The girl was but sixteen then.

It must have been pleasant for that young man while it lasted. Alas, the news of his philandering drifted back to his stern parents in Provence, and an angry father rushed down into Africa, climbed to the roof of the mud house, and blew out the little flame of romance. Papa gave Zuleika a sum of money in exchange for her lover; and when the money was exhausted, the girl returned to the *Quartier*—returned with a sort of aura around her.

Now, as I walked through the narrow lane, Zuleika ran after me. She wished to speak to me beyond the hearing of her sisters. It was a private matter and, so she whispered, one of great importance.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Will you," began Zuleika, turning the liquid eyes beseechingly upward, "be good enough to change some foreign money into Algerian francs?"

"What kind of foreign money?" I demanded.

"Doh-lars!" she whispered. "Doh-lars *américains*."

"United States dollars?" I cried. "Let me see them!"

She thrust a small henna-stained hand into her bosom, retrieved a red silk handkerchief, unrolled it, and exhibited to my astonished gaze five crisp ten-dollar bills!

"Where did you get them?" I demanded, and Zuleika shrank. That, she whispered, was none of my business.

Speechless, I examined them. To my eyes, they were genuine. So spotlessly new, so different from the soiled, smelly currency of Africa. Childishly I touched those bills. They were sweet to me.

"Where did you get them?" I demanded, and Zuleika shrank back from me, a little afraid.

She shook her head. She could not tell me how she had received the money. That, she whispered, was not my business. The bills belonged to her, and the question of the moment was whether or not I would change them into Algerian francs. There were no branches of the *Banque de l'Algérie* or *Compagnie Algérienne* within four hundred kilometers of the oasis and she needed money for a sick grandmother. She added that the Arab who ran the little store had told her that each ten-dollar bill was worth three hundred and seventy-five francs.

I agreed regarding the exchange value of the greenbacks, but I regretted that I could not purchase them. I had not sufficient funds, and if I had, there were difficulties. The French Government had commanded that all dealings in foreign currency should be made through proper banking channels and reported immediately.

Zuleika pleaded. I could have the bills at a lower figure than the quoted rate for the dollar. She would accept three hundred and twenty francs for each bill.

Again I expressed my inability to buy.

"Trois cents chacun!" she cried. She stamped her foot angrily, and pushed the bills at me.

I shook my head, excused myself and walked away from her. A great wonder was upon me. The trade of the *Quartier* was purely native; and no American, lured there by the promise of witnessing unusual dancing, would spend fifty dollars on the dancers. Furthermore the only American in the oasis was the sick man at the hotel, who, according to the proprietor, had not left his bedroom since his arrival.

Wrestling with the mystery, I visited the little store, the proprietor of which had quoted the dollar rate to Zuleika. A *mutilé de guerre* was this Arab. He had had both legs amputated at the Somme, and he wore the ribbon of the *Légion* as a recompense for his bravery. A stout supporter of the French was he; a fierce

hater of German and Italian intrigue in Africa.

Carefully I brought the conversation to the subject of change. I mentioned that I had turned dollars into Algerian money at Algiers. Thirty-seven francs and sixty centimes for one dollar.

"If one could buy dollars cheap," I said, "and sell them to the bank—"

"I wouldn't," interrupted the Arab.

"Wouldn't what?" I demanded.

"Buy those ten-dollar bills from Zuleika," he said quietly.

"But they look good," I said.

"They are good," he agreed.

"Then why," I began, "shouldn't—"

He had taken up the Koran which lay beside him, and he halted my query with an uplifted hand. Now he read a passage from the Book, translating the words into French, his voice deep and musical:

"'And if we pleased, we would surely put out their eyes: yet even then would they speed on with rivalry in their path: but how should they see?'"

I was puzzled and remained silent.

"It is from the sura *Ya-Sin;* the sura that Muhammad called 'The Heart of the Koran'," said Yousouf, and turned away to speak to a fat Arab.

I waited for a little while, but it was evident that Yousouf did not wish to converse further with me, so I left the shop.

Thinking over the quotation from the Koran, I wandered back to the hotel.

The registration-book, kept for police inspection, was lying open on the dining-room table when I entered. The hotel man had just entered the particulars concerning myself which I had made on the slip the previous evening; and lacking a blotter, he had left the entry to dry in the sunshine.

Hurriedly I turned the page. I glanced at the particulars of the American and his wife. They ran:

Antonio Zanichelli, né à Caltagirone, Sicily, 9, Mai, 1896; nationalité, Américain; domicile, *Delaware Avenue, Reyford, N. Y.,* Etats-Unis.
Frieda Zanichelli, née à Heidelberg, Allemande, 14, Juin, 1913; nationalité, Américaine par mariage.

In my room my mind wrestled with that name Antonio Zanichelli. *Flick, flick, flick,* went the pages of memory—changing the Antonio to Tony. Tony Zanichelli—Tony Zanichelli of Reyford. Surely I had heard or read something of Tony Zanichelli! He had been in the papers! For what? *For doing what?*

Now I saw the headlines: *"Tough Tony Zanichelli, the Sicilian Snatcher, beats the G-men!"*

The Sicilian Snatcher! Clever are those newspaper boys, bright tagsters.

I dropped into a chair, somewhat stunned by the discovery. In the next room was the gangster! He had fled to the little oasis in the desert, and for company had brought the strapping Lorelei he had picked up somewhere in flight.

I was so unnerved by the discovery that a knock at the door made me leap madly to my feet. It was only Solum informing me that *déjeuner* was served.

I LUNCHED alone. Zanichelli and his wife were served their midday meal in their chamber. Solum, wearing his discarded shooting-outfit, whispered that this was unusual. Madame Zanichelli usually ate her meals in the dining-room. It was evident that the lady wished no conversation with me.

Well, I had enough to occupy my thoughts—the crisp ten-dollar bills of Zuleika, and the strange quotation from the Koran: *"And if we pleased, we would surely put out their eyes."* Whose eyes?

An hour after lunch, while sitting in the mean shade of a thirsty palm, I saw Frieda Zanichelli leaving the hotel by the sandy road that led to the Military Post. Immediately she was out of sight, the *hôtelier* beckoned to me. Monsieur Zanichelli would be pleased if I could visit him. He wished to speak to me.

The Arabs assert that the Angel of Death makes a special paste of a color that no artist can reproduce, and that the Angel rubs this paste on the faces of those booked for the Long Journey. It was on the features of the man in the bed: A green-yellow tint relieved only by the glittering black eyes that regarded me intently as I moved to the bedside. Death, the Great Snatcher, was carrying off his human imitator, Tough Tony Zanichelli—the Sicilian Snatcher.

The gangster put his demand quickly. Would I send a cablegram to his brother in Reyford?

"Why can't your wife send it?" I asked.

"Private stuff, fella," he snapped. "Don't want her to know."

"The hotel man could send—" I began, but he stopped me with what reporters are pleased to call "a burst of profanity."

"This unnersized Frog'd rush to the aut'orities!" he cried. "Course they'll know 'bout it if you send it, but they

won't know I'm sendin' it unknownst to my wife. Get me? If he ran to them wit' the message, they'd know I didn't trust 'er."

"Lots of men don't trust their wives," I stammered, fighting to avoid the task.

Again he swore fiercely.

"Listen, fella," he said, and he got his breath with difficulty. "I'm washed up. Mil'tary doc' comes here this mornin' an' gives me a couple of weeks, wit' luck. Now I'll spill the truth: The wife's a German. These Frogs is death on Germans. I don't want to get her in bad wit' these mil'tary guys when I slip off. Unnerstan'? If she doesn't know, she doesn't. They can't hustle 'er roun', or give 'er rough stuff."

He had me there, but I didn't know till later that his sentimental plea was a trick—a cunning trick.

"I'm dyin'!" he cried. "An' all I'm askin' you is to send a message that I'll pay for!"

Watching his yellow-green features, I had a mental picture of the little cemetery for whites. It was far out on the plain, enclosed by a mud wall some five feet in height, and against this wall a slow-moving dune had crept till its sandy nose had surmounted the wall, and from this peering snout dribbled grains of sand that made endless trickling noises for the eleven whites who lay there—ten French soldiers, and a nameless Englishwoman who had come to Algiers to study the Moslem religion, had drifted down into the desert, and had died penniless and unknown.... Well, there would soon be another tenant to make the round dozen.

ROUSING myself, I put a question. "What will be in the cablegram?"

"Nuttin' as'll hurt you!" he snapped.

I felt wretched. I didn't like to mix myself up in the affairs of a gangster who had fled the American police; yet the poor devil was dying, and he wished, so he said, to protect his wife from trouble after he was gone. That was commendable. Reluctantly I agreed.

He lifted himself on his elbow and pushed a notebook toward me. "Write it down," he ordered, and weakly I took the book and a pencil.

"'Pietro Zanichelli, Towanda Street, Reyford,'" he began.

"Got that down?" he asked sharply. "Now say this: 'Come quick, I'm dyin'. Ship to Marseilles, cross to Algiers, take car down here. Don't fail me.' Sign it 'Tony,' wit' the name o' this joint."

From the manner in which he dictated the message, I knew that he had thought of it for days—weeks, perhaps.

From an immense leather wallet stuffed with currency, he took a five-hundred-franc note of the *Banque de l'Algérie,* thrust it into my hand, then fell back on the pillow. He tried to speak, but failing, waved me out of the room.

QUITE a business, getting that cablegram off! No message had ever been sent to the United States from that little office. Over the wire the Arab clerk talked with Laghouat regarding the rate for a direct message. Laghouat talked with the Algiers office, and I sweated as I waited. At last a charge was fixed, and the pathetic appeal to Pietro Zanichelli in far-away America went winging on its way.

Now there was nothing wrong with that message, but I was clutched by a great fear as I made my way back to the hotel. I wondered what would happen if Pietro sent a reply. How could Tony receive the message without the knowledge of the flaxen-haired Lorelei? Would I, having entered into the plot to keep the call to Pietro a secret, be forced to keep a reply from her sight?

Solum did something to increase my uneasiness as he served the evening meal. I was again eating alone, Madame Zanichelli preferring to eat in the company of her husband; and Solum seized the opportunity to ask a favor. Glancing along the corridor, fearful that the proprietor would arrive from the kitchen, the Arab took from his pocket a pouch made from the skin of a serpent, and from this he produced a folded-up bill which he laid beside my plate.

"Voulez-vous le changer pour pauvre Solum?" he whispered. *"La mère de Solum est malade. Elle a faim."*

Startled, I unfolded the bill. It was a soiled brother to the five crisp ten-dollar bills that Zuleika had shown me that morning!

What the devil was happening in the little oasis? Hotly I questioned the Winchell of the wastes. Where did he get the bill? Was it given him by Monsieur or Madame Zanichelli?

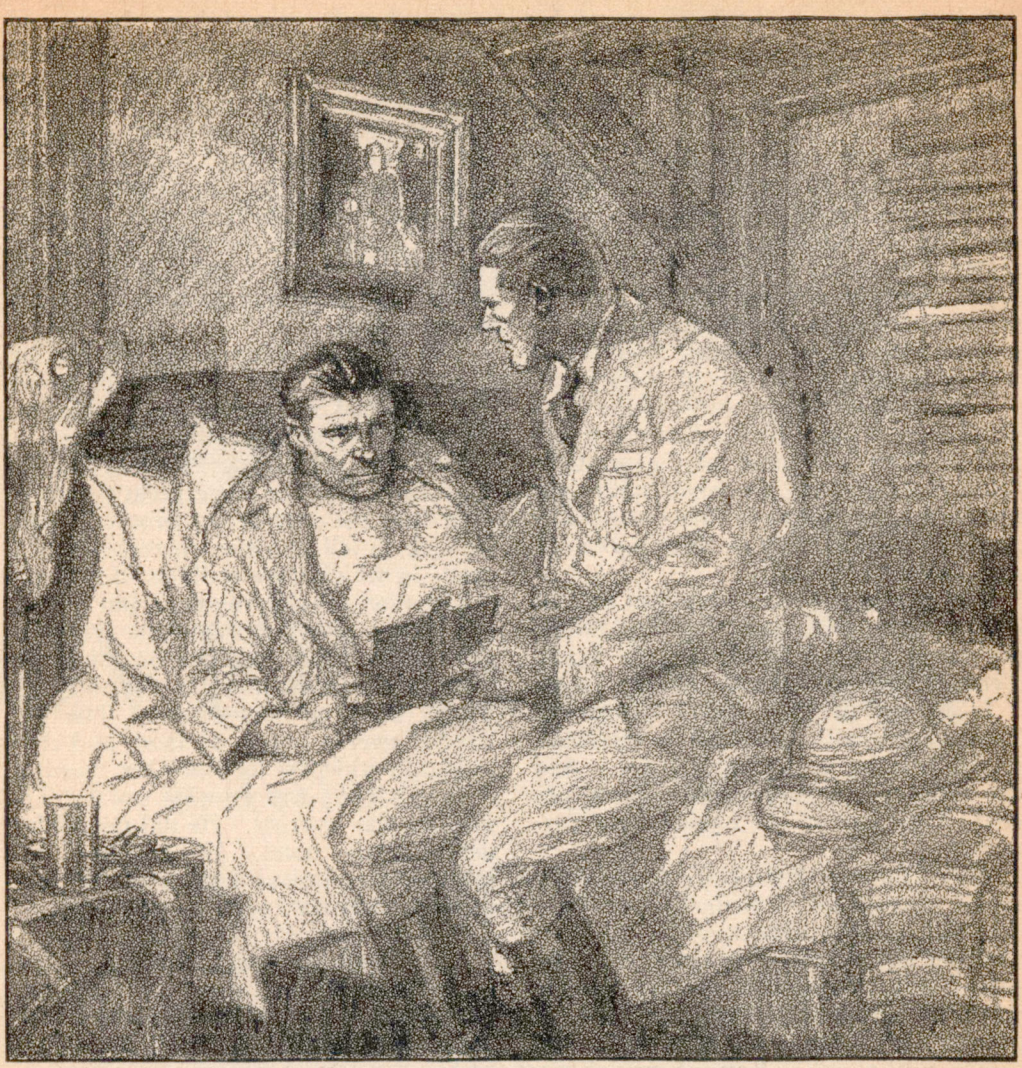
This he denied emphatically. The Zanichellis had given him small *pourboires,* but always in Algerian currency.

"Then where did you get this?" I cried.

"From a man," he answered.

"An Arab?"

"Non, un blanc."



"Listen, fella," he said. "I'm washed up. . . . Now I'll spill the truth."

The *hôtelier* shouted from the kitchen, and Solum ran, leaving the bill on the table. My curiosity was great. Under ordinary circumstances an American ten-dollar bill would not be seen in that oasis for a year, but here I had seen six in one day!

When Solum returned, I suggested that the possession of the bill might get him into trouble unless he had a full explanation as to how he came by it. The whites of his eyes became more visible as I hinted at official inquiries.

At last he unbosomed himself.

Amazed, I listened to the story that came from his thick lips. Skulking out in the wastes was a deserter from the Foreign Legion. The fellow hid in the dunes during the day, but in the night he approached the oasis to obtain food. Solum, waiting the arrival of the bus, had spotted the renegade creeping across the sands in the moonlight. The boy had spoken to him. Possibly Solum, a cunning gossiper, had suggested to the fugitive that the suppression of news about his nearness to the oasis might be worth paying for. This he denied; but he admitted that the deserter surprised him by offering a ten-dollar bill if he would keep his mouth shut.

MY excitement grew. A deserting Légionnaire had an American ten-dollar bill to hand out for silence!

"And where does he get his food?"

"From the *Quartier,*" muttered Solum.

"From what person in the *Quartier?*"

"Zuleika. She sneaks out with bread and cous-cous."

"But the ten-dollar bill! Where did that come from?"

Solum shook his head. Terrified by the manner in which I had received his story, he picked up the soiled bill and rushed to the kitchen.

I COULD not sleep that night. Queer things were happening in the oasis. Tough Tony Zanichelli was dying. I had observed his flaxen-haired wife making a secret visit to the *Quartier* in the dawn-light. Out in the sands was a white renegade from the Legion; and this white man and the girl who carried food to him were possessed of American money!

Toward daylight the words of the Arab shopkeeper tripped forward as if I would find in them a solution of the mystery. *"And if we pleased, we would surely put out their eyes: yet even then would they speed on with rivalry in their path: but how should they see?"*

Why would anyone wish to put out the eyes of other persons? Why? A whisper came from a corner of my brain. *Because they are spies! Enemy spies!*

I sat up in bed, startled, amazed. Frieda Zanichelli, American by marriage, might still be a German patriot. And the renegade in the sands! Forty per cent of the men of the Legion were Germans!

Was Madame Zanichelli the distributor? Surely not Tough Tony. Tony was sick, dying; concerned only with a farewell visit from his brother before he passed out. Tony was not the type to worry about international intrigues. A gangster, a kidnaper, but not a spy. Certainly not a spy. But, suggested my brain, Madame Zanichelli might be stealing Tony's hoarded money and using it for German purposes in the oasis! I thought of the big pocketbook of the gunman. It would be easy for Frieda.

I sat at the window in the dawn-light and watched the entrance to the *Quartier*. The lady from Heidelberg did not appear.

The next day passed without incident; but on the morning of the second, while Madame Zanichelli was away from the hotel, came a reply to Tony's cable. I carried it to the sick man.

He was too feeble to open the envelope. He motioned me to do so and read the message. Short and concise, it ran: *"Sailing Marseilles Calabria tonight keep fighting. Pietro."*

Tony made a movement with his hands suggesting that I should destroy the blue-tinted sheet. I tore it up and carried the pieces from the room. I thought the oasis was becoming extremely interesting.

Solum crept around from the rear of the hotel and again begged me to change the ten-dollar bill. He offered it at two hundred and fifty francs. I refused the offer, but I gave him ten francs as a present. I intimated that I would purchase any interesting news that he gathered.

Madame Zanichelli returned to the hotel. I rose from my chair and saluted her. Her nod was frigid. My presence in the oasis was not pleasing to the flaxen-haired Frieda.

The desire of Tony to see his brother brought a new problem to my mind. Tony showed no fear of death. He had the gangster's swagger about leaving this world; then why bring Pietro across the Atlantic? Had he some great secret to pour into the ears of his brother? Did he wish to tell him the whereabouts of a cache in which were millions of dollars?

I was overstaying my time, but I could not leave. Solum brought me scraps of news. The deserter hiding in the dunes met Zuleika each night in the shadows. There were no love-scenes. The girl handed over a parcel of food, and they talked in whispers for some ten minutes.

Tough Tony was growing worse. The *hôtelier* was worried. He did not wish a death in the hotel. He suggested the military hospital at Laghouat, but Madame fiercely combated the suggestion.

LATER that day Solum brought me a report on the deserter. An Arab who owned many camels had spoken to him about a possible purchase. The Arab had reported that he was not a Frenchman. He thought he was a German. The shopkeeper, Yousouf, had advised the camel-owner to have no dealings with him, but to make a report to the Post. The *chef-de-annexe* should be informed of the presence of the renegade.

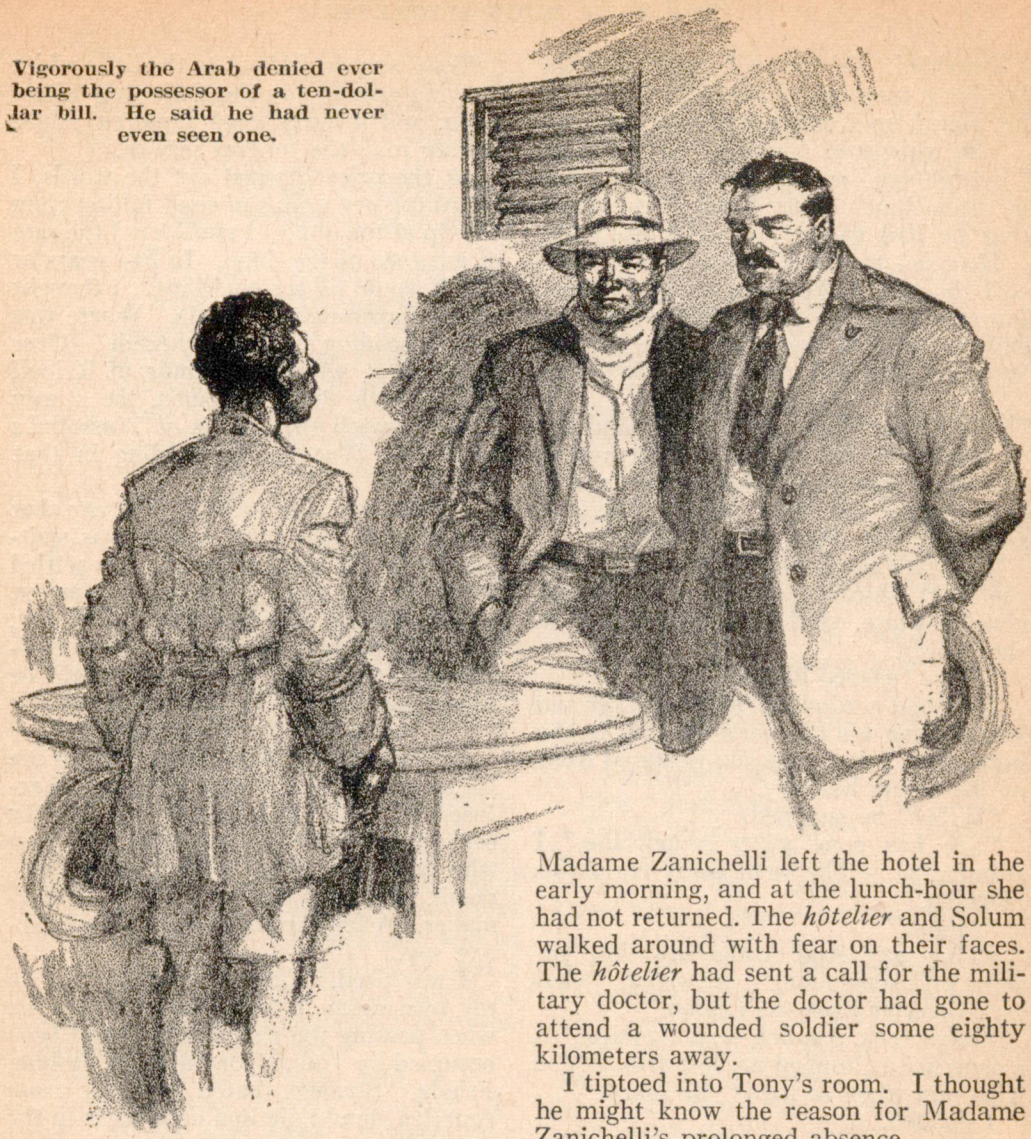
The military doctor came from the Post—a bright young man. Leaving the hotel, he asked if I was a friend of the sick man. I shook my head.

"Il va mourir," he said quietly. Then, after a pause: *"La dame est allemande, monsieur?"*

"Américaine par mariage," I said.

He smiled softly, saluted, and walked away. Like the *hôtelier*, he thought the transformation somewhat surprising. The French are conservative about naturalizations. The naturalized Frenchman is never quite a Frenchman in the eyes of the native born. . . .

Days passed slowly. The *Dépêche d'Alger* carried the telegraphed news of



Vigorously the Arab denied ever being the possessor of a ten-dollar bill. He said he had never even seen one.

the arrival of the *Calabria* at Marseilles, but I was unable to get the news to Tony, for Madame Zanichelli clung to the hotel. To me she seemed nervous and uneasy; yet I was sure that she was not grieving over the imminent death of her husband.

Now I pictured Pietro debarking from the boat that had brought him across the Atlantic and rushing to the Marseilles-Algiers boat that would bring him across the Mediterranean. I was pleasantly thrilled at thinking that I had helped to get Pietro to Tony's bedside. Of course Tony was a gunman, a criminal fleeing from justice, but that little cemetery far out on the sands was a lonely place. Tony would be there in a day or two, to listen through the long years to the dry sand dripping from the nose of the creeping dune threatening the enclosure. . . .

Now on the day that I expected Pietro at the oasis, strange things happened. Madame Zanichelli left the hotel in the early morning, and at the lunch-hour she had not returned. The *hôtelier* and Solum walked around with fear on their faces. The *hôtelier* had sent a call for the military doctor, but the doctor had gone to attend a wounded soldier some eighty kilometers away.

I tiptoed into Tony's room. I thought he might know the reason for Madame Zanichelli's prolonged absence.

He grinned when I questioned him.

"I'll bet a grand she's caught a wire Pietro sent from Algiers," he muttered. "Go and see, fella."

Tony had guessed the truth. Frieda had met the messenger with the telegram from Pietro. I got a copy of it, and hurried with it to the hotel. Pietro had wired that he had hired a fast car and would be at the oasis that evening.

"Can't hold out," gasped Tony. "I'm waiting for the bell, to flit. I'm—"

He slipped off for a few minutes, and I thought it was all over. But Tony was Tough Tony to the end. His eyes opened, and he motioned me to lean down so that I could hear his words.

In his hands was the immense leather pocketbook. *As I stooped, I noticed that it was empty!*

"Swear that—swear that you'll give Pietro a message!" gasped the gangster.

I nodded. Of course I would give the brother a message. I put my ear close to his mouth so I could catch the whisper.

The whispered message was startling. I straightened myself and stared at him in astonishment; the dozen or so words that he had gasped out frightened me.

He tried to speak again, in an effort, so I thought, to keep me to my promise, but words failed him. He grinned feebly, gave a gasp and lay quiet. The Sicilian Snatcher had met the Grand Snatcher.

TWO hours later a cloud of sand appeared on the trail to the northward. Out of it came a powerful car that roared down upon the little hotel. The sole passenger was Pietro Zanichelli.

The *hôtelier* pushed me forward to tell the short, thick-set man that he had arrived too late. I think I was clumsy in the telling.

"*Jesu!*" gasped Pietro.

He stood motionless, eyes—darker and keener than his brother's—taking in the hotel-man, Solum, the sun-blistered front of the desert hostelry.

"Wife?" he snapped.

"She has gone away somewhere," I stammered. "She went away early this morning."

"Alone?"

"They say—the Arabs say that she went with some man," I answered. "German deserter from the Legion."

Pietro took a quick step forward. A strong hand clutched my left arm. "You with him when he died?" he asked.

I nodded.

"He wouldn't have sent for me unless he wanted me to do something," he said. "Did he tell you? Last word, message, anything? Spit it out!"

Then I did something which I have since regretted: In a whisper I repeated the dying message of Tough Tony—the dozen words that I had promised to convey to his brother.

I thought they would have startled Pietro, but they didn't. Perhaps he had been in the habit of receiving surprising orders. He considered the words in silence, his black eyes searching my face; then he dropped my arm and suggested by a motion of his head that he would like to see the body of his brother.

The *hôtelier* led him to the chamber where Tough Tony lay. I stood in the dusk that was creeping over the sands. I felt that I was a fool. Why had I promised to repeat to Pietro the last words uttered by his brother?

Tony was carried out to the little white burying-ground on the following afternoon, and a burly good-humored White Father read the funeral service.

As the priest droned out the words, I heard the dry grains of sand falling from the tip of the dune. I considered the rate of advance of the dune. In five years or less it would fill the enclosure. I thought of the flaxen-haired Frieda. Where was Frieda heading with the renegade? Over to the east where the sands of Tripoli mingle with those of Tunis, the sturdy French watch the tactics of Mussolini's outposts. Was Frieda heading in that direction?

Pietro had little to say. The car that had brought him from Algiers was waiting for him after the burial. He settled all debts in a quiet gentlemanly manner, shook hands with the *hôtelier* and myself, and stepped into the car. A most businesslike fellow was Pietro. I thought he would say something further about the dying message of Tony, but he didn't.

At the evening meal Solum offered me his ten-dollar bill at half its value. I refused it. I did give him five francs for some further gossip regarding the man who had gone away with Frieda Zanichelli. He said the man was a trouble-maker. A few Arabs thought him an active spy.

I was tired. Curiously, when going to my own room, I found myself tiptoeing when passing the chamber that had been occupied by Tough Tony and the dashing Frieda. Strange that a gangster from America should die in a little oasis in the Sahara.

The roar of the bus awakened me. I heard voices, then the *slap-slap* of the *hôtelier's* sandals in the corridor.

He rapped loudly on my door. Would I please get up and speak with the new arrivals? To my question as to who they were, he shouted: "*Police! Sûreté américaine! Venez vite!*"

There were two of them, clean-shaven young Americans, and to me they were human sections of the good old United States transferred to that huddle of mud houses and date-palms—two honest and purposeful sections.

SLOWLY they rose from their chairs and shook hands. They told me their names—Joe and Steve. They were, they assured me, plain-clothes men.

We sat there in the little room and talked till daylight. Of course it was the cablegram I had sent that put them on

the trail of Tough Tony. They had been instructed to follow Pietro.

They had ridden with him on the *Calabria* to Marseilles, but there the cunning Pietro had played a trick on them. They were twenty-four hours behind him at Algiers. And Pietro had hired a fast car, while Joe and Steve had taken the train to Djelfa and then the bus.

"BUT if you had tipped off the French authorities, surely they would have helped," I said.

Steve rubbed his big head and glanced at Joe. "We didn't want Pietro," he said. "It was Tony we were after. And—well, I'll tell you. There was a fine reward. Quite a lump. Big company in New York got nicked for a hundred grand by Tony. We didn't want anyone sitting in on that reward."

Joe spoke. "You didn't see the brother cleanin' out the dead man's pockets, I suppose?" he said.

I grinned. "There was nothing to clean out," I said. "His wallet was empty."

"No?" cried Joe. "Why?"

"I think the lady gypped him," I said. "Someone always gyps the gypper."

"We've got the numbers of all the bills," muttered Steve.

I glanced at Solum in his shooting-suit standing in the doorway. In French I asked Solum if he wished to show his ten-dollar bill.

The Arab surprised me. Terror had clutched him when he heard the words *"Sûreté américaine."* Vigorously he denied ever being the possessor of a ten-dollar bill. He said he had never even seen one!

"What does he say?" asked Steve.

"He wants to know if you would like coffee," I said.

"Sure!" cried Steve. "Tell him to bring a gallon of it."

I transmitted the order to the startled Solum, and questioned the two as to their future duties now that Tough Tony had escaped them.

"We'll get proof of his death an' some dope about him. Mebbe we could pick up some o' the greenbacks he stole. Mebbe he chucked some around in this dump."

"Mebbe," I agreed. "Would you buy them back?"

"Sure," said Joe. "We want proof."

So after breakfast I took the two through the *Quartier*. I introduced them to Zuleika, and acted as a go-between in the purchase of the five ten-dollar bills. Joe and Steve paid out three hundred and seventy francs for each bill after they had checked the numbers. They were bills from New York, that Tough Tony had stolen.

They got a copy of the death-certificate, and they visited the little graveyard, walking around the newly made hummock like a couple of heavy-footed hounds at the burrow of a fox that had escaped them. That evening they climbed aboard the northbound bus. . . .

Three weeks later I was back in Algiers. In the modest *Hôtel de l'Oasis* I sat reading the *Echo d'Algier*, when my eyes fell upon a telegraphed report of a double murder at Tozeur, an oasis near the Tripolitan border. It ran:

> *A Spahi sentinel hearing firing close to the lines, called out the guard. They found the bodies of a man and woman who, while evidently creeping toward the Spahi encampment, had been fired upon from the rear and killed. Papers found on the man show that he was a deserter from the Foreign Legion, named Appenrodt, thought to be a secret agent. The woman carried an American passport. Before marriage her name was Frieda Kromwitz, and her birthplace, Heidelberg, but she had contracted a marriage with a person of the name of Antonio Zanichelli and thus acquired American nationality. She is also thought to be an enemy spy. The authorities are puzzled over the killing. The weapon found near the bodies is one unknown in Tunisia. It is a sort of sawed-off shotgun used by American gangsters. The couple are suspected of spying activities near the frontier.*

I HAVE a legal friend in Algiers. I called on him next morning, and to him I related the complete history of the Zanichelli affair, withholding till the last the words of the message that I had delivered to Pietro.

"But what are you upset about?" he asked.

"The message I gave him," I answered.

"What was it?"

"Just these words," I said. "Tony when dying whispered: 'She gypped me of everything; tell him to get after her and square it.'"

"You're not inculpated," he said. "You didn't do anything criminal, but you could—you could hang—"

"Hang?" I shouted. "What do you mean?"

"Hang a good story on it," he said, smiling.

TWO FRIENDS

THIS is the inside story of what, to date, stands out as the first engagement in North America of the present World War. More than a hundred huge bombing-planes were involved, yet the battle was fought on the ground. And not a line about all this appeared in the newspapers. Cockeyed, isn't it?

The story comes from several sources. One is a big, able chap, who wears the uniform of the New York State Police, and who usually manages to convince the unwary that he is both awkward and stupid. They carry him on the rolls of the Black Horse Troop as Lieutenant Edward David. His friends—they are legion—know him as "Tiny."

A wealth of additional detail came from a tall and handsome fellow, whose name is James Ashby. His debonair appearance and his elegance of manner have earned him the nickname "Duke"—and also have been the undoing of a considerable number of the ungodly, all of whom were rudely surprised to learn that the languid playboy is one of the ace special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice.

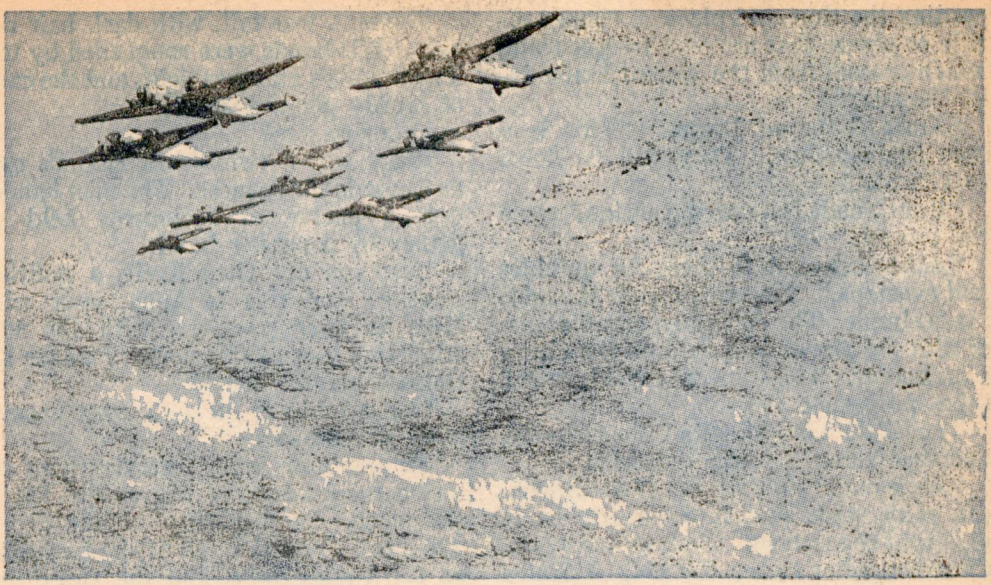
Then too there is a clear-eyed Canadian girl, who was chosen by fate to play an important part in the drama.

To tell the story properly, it is necessary to go back to a time not long after that fateful Sunday when the Prime Minister of England faced a microphone and declared that a state of war existed between Germany and Great Britain.

A man who went under the name of Mark Braun sat in the living-room of an inconspicuous brick-front house on a quiet street in Washington. He had occupied that house for five years; and the fact that his neighbors had only vague ideas regarding his business, and only hazy mental pictures of his personal appearance, served to indicate how unobtrusively he had lived the life of a retired merchant, and how undistinguished were his features. His frail body, his stooped shoulders, and his almost servile manner when in public made him resemble one of the almost countless aged Government clerks always so much a part of the Washington scene.

Inside the house, Braun was a changed man: there he was a man of action, a man of brains, and a man who gave curt orders, which he expected to be obeyed implicitly. Some of these qualities were visible this day, as he sat listening to an equally undistinguished-looking man.

"They will pass what they call a Neutrality Act," declared his visitor. "That has been on the cards since the hour—"



In this spirited novelette Tiny David of the State Police and Duke Ashby of the F. B. I. deal with a crisis on the Canadian border.

By ROBERT R. MILL

Braun's gesture showed impatience.

"We know that. I am a busy man. If that is all—"

The other man leaned forward.

"A moment, please, Herr Braun. I have more definite information. The new law will permit the sales of arms and munitions. Trust the dollar-grabbing Americans for that. But they think they are playing safe, and maintaining their neutrality, by refusing to permit American ships to carry them."

Braun's face darkened.

"You are sure of this?"

"Very sure," came the calm reply. "My information comes from a most reliable source. The law will provide that all sales must be made on a cash-and-carry basis, with the buyer taking title to the goods in this country."

BRAUN'S clenched fist was shaken. "The swine! With our shipping driven from the seas by the damned British pirates! Neutrality! Bah! They cloak it in fine-sounding words, but they have managed to bar the Reich from their resources, and to dump them into the laps of the cursed British."

He gained control of his emotions as he began a rapid inventory.

"Guns? We have them. Thanks to the Führer. Many of our people grumbled, but we of the Party know that he is all-wise. Ammunition? We can hold our own. Gasoline? Admittedly we were weak there, but again the Führer has provided. Already Russia is with us. Rumanian aid is only a matter of time. The British swine have staked all on their sea blockade. It worked before. But not now! Airplanes?" A thoughtful frown crossed his face. "That is where this war will be won—in the air. We have supremacy now; but—how will their cursed new law affect the sale of airplanes?"

"I understand they will be treated just as other war materials. They will be bought, paid for, and then delivered to some American port. There the purchaser will take title, and provide transportation." The little man's tongue licked his lips. "Rich food for our U-boats."

"You fool!" Braun made a whip of the words. "Do you think they will try to sail with them from American ports, where there is no wartime secrecy regarding sailings, and no censorship? They will be shipped from Canadian ports, or perhaps even flown across from Canada."

The little man made a gesture of resignation.

"Herr Braun is right, as usual. But there will be technical difficulties re-

garding the time and place of change-of-title to planes that are on a freight train, which crosses from the United States into Canada."

"Train!" roared Braun. "This is a race against time. They will be flown to Canada."

"But Canada is a warring nation," came the protest.

"*Ach!* Leave it to them for quibbles and evasions." He was deep in thought. "It is simple. The American manufacturer flies the planes to a field on the Canadian border. The Canadian Government takes possession there."

The little man digested that slowly, and then voiced a feeble objection:

"They might do that, but if the American pilot steps foot into Canada he is violating the letter of the law, and if the Canadian pilot enters the United States he faces being interned. I do not see—"

"They push them across!" roared Braun. "Each swine stays on his own side of his sty. Then the Canadian swine fly them to Canadian ports. The cursed convoys take them across." His face was darkened with anger. "Go, Karl! I must think."

WHEN he was alone, he produced a map of North America. The back of a magazine was his ruler as he drew lines that connected Buffalo, Baltimore, New York and other industrial centers where airplanes are manufactured, with Montreal and Quebec.

The various lines, as they neared the Canadian border, either crossed, or came very close to each other, in one section of Northern New York.

Braun discarded the first map in favor of a detailed map of Northern New York State. His finger moved over the district where the lines met, hunting the nearest settlement of any size.

"North Point!" There was triumph in his voice as he repeated the name.

He then turned to the telephone. His first call reserved a seat on the afternoon plane to New York. His second was a request for a compartment on the Montreal express leaving New York that night. When the calls were completed, he rubbed his hands complacently. . . .

Five days later he was back in the brick-front house. His face mirrored satisfaction as he entered the living-room and took a seat behind the desk. From time to time he glanced at the clock. Then a bell tinkled, and he arose to admit a man and a woman.

The man was tall, with dark hair and eyes. His hands were roughened by toil. The woman's hair was light, and she came of sturdy peasant stock.

"Your papers?"

There was a twinkle in Braun's eyes as he made the request. The man handed over a packet of documents held together by a rubber band.

"Ah, you are Otto Kreit, a political refugee; and this is Anna, your wife. Here is your passport, with the visa admitting you to this country under the German quota. Good!"

The twinkle in Braun's eyes became more pronounced.

"In this newspaper interview you describe the horrors of life in the Reich, and decry the brutality of the Storm Troopers. You also tell of the hardships on the voyage here, and the abuse you suffered from the Nazi crew. Very good."

Braun examined a letter.

"I see that one of the organizations formed here to aid refugees helped you smuggle your money out of the Reich. Excellent."

Braun rubbed his hands together.

"You have been here three months. It is time for you to settle down. You and your wife will motor through Northern New York. I will be with you part of the way. We will go over what is to be done. There must be no slip-up."

The man called Otto Kreit spoke for the first time:

"Yes, Herr Braun. We leave—"

"In the morning," said Braun.

The three stood up. Their right hands were upraised.

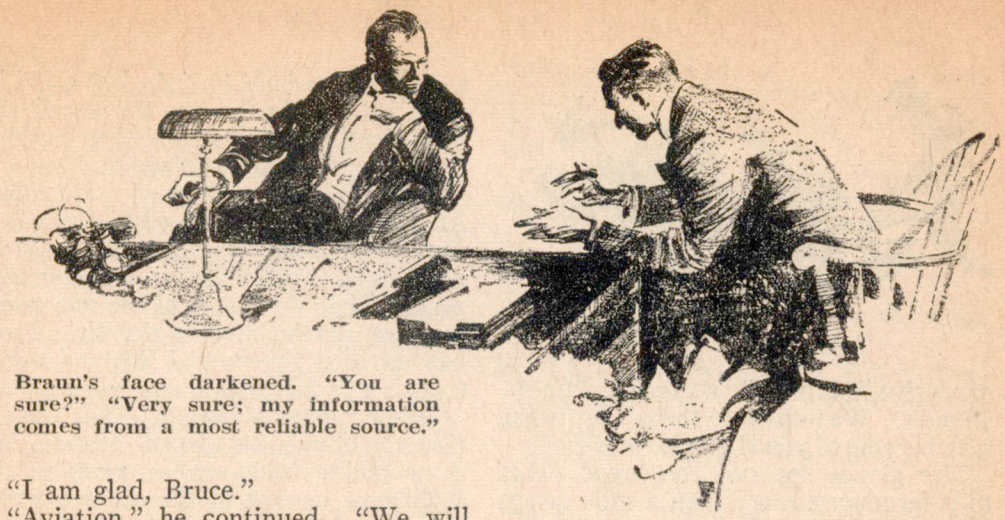
"*Heil Hitler!*" came the chorus.

BRENDA GEORGE sat on the porch of the farmhouse, gazing down a narrow lane that wound its way through broad fields to the main road which, in turn, led to North Point. The green fields and the flower-covered porch made a vivid setting for the brown-haired, attractive girl, who sighed as she looked at two great elms which gave the place its name, Two Friends Farm.

The sigh was repeated as she sighted a distant cloud of dust. That would be Bruce, her brother.

The dust became a small sedan, which halted before the house. A young man with close-cropped curly hair, stepped out. He said diffidently: "I've taken the King's shilling, Brenda."

She needed courage for her reply:



Braun's face darkened. "You are sure?" "Very sure; my information comes from a most reliable source."

"I am glad, Bruce."

"Aviation," he continued. "We will train right here in the Dominion. It'll be ever so long before we have a chance to get across." His face clouded. "This will be rough on you, Brenda. You think you will be able to carry on here?"

She weighed each word carefully.

"I am willing to try, of course. But this looks as if it will be a long pull, and I'm afraid Two Friends will suffer. Suppose we have a chance to sell?"

He drew back in surprise.

"Sell Two Friends?" The question evoked a flood of memory. The old place had belonged to his family for four generations. His mother had died here. His father had left from here when he went out with the Princess Pats at the time of the last war. His voice faltered a trifle. "You know, Brenda, I'd counted on having you and Two Friends to return to. Buck a chap up, no end."

He gazed fondly at the countryside.

"Our cows, good Canadian cows, sleep and give their milk in a Canadian barn. But we drive them over an invisible line to pastures that are in the United States. Our house is in Canada, but our overseer lives in the small house which is across the line."

His eyes were dreamy.

"Can't you see, Brenda? The jolly old place is sort of a symbol. It proves that that even in a mad world there are two nations that can live side by side as friends. Two Friends? Why, even the name is appropriate. Whenever I hear it I forget all about the two elms, much as I love them. I think how we have lived here, true Canadians, but also sharing many of the interests of the people in the United States."

He broke off with a self-conscious chuckle.

"Regular old Dominion Day oration, wasn't it? But to get back to the practical: even if we wanted to sell, I doubt if we could find a buyer."

"But we can, Bruce."

He whistled softly.

"Yes," she continued. "A man and his wife motored past this afternoon. They are political refugees from Germany. The place reminded him of his home near Kassel, so he stopped. We had quite a talk. He ended by asking me what our selling-price would be."

"Just talk. Refugees have no money. Poor devils!"

She shook her head determinedly.

"This one has. Apparently he belongs to a prosperous middle-class family. They mistrusted the Nazi régime almost from the start. Some organization formed in the States to help refugees made it possible for him to get most of his money out of the country. He showed me several of the letters they wrote him."

Bruce parried with the objection:

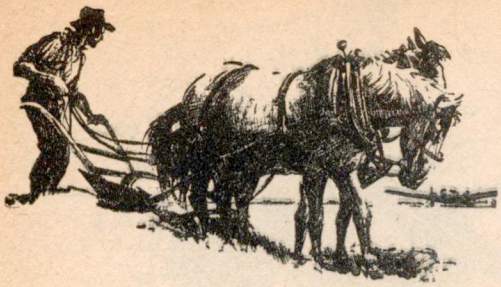
"Then he must have a United States visa. In order for him to live here, he would have to go through all sorts of red tape."

"I told him that, and I showed him roughly where the line runs through the place. Tears came into his eyes and he spoke in broken English. I won't attempt to imitate it, but he said:

"'That little house is the one we want. The big house is much too grand for Anna and me. All we want is a little place, where in time we will be able to realize that we are really free. And enough land around it so we can breathe. We are country people.'"

THE youth, who had been deep in thought, spoke:

"Perhaps you are right, Brenda. I may be gone for years. Conditions will get worse here; labor will be scarce and



expensive." His smile was grim. "Facts, Brenda! We must face them. But what is to become of you if you leave here?"

Her glance spanned the broad fields to a farmhouse more than a mile away.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cochrane want me to come with them. They are old and alone. I'll be—"

"I say!" he exclaimed. "How long have you been planning all this?"

Her smile drove back the tears.

"For days, silly! I watched you looking at that picture of Dad in uniform. I knew it was coming. It was my job to get ready. But the refugee was a gift from heaven. He and his wife are just the sort of people who should have Two Friends. Just think what it will mean to them."

He nodded assent. "Poor devils! When are they coming back?"

"Tonight."

"We will put it up to Jack Nelson. He knows property values, and will name a fair price. If your refugee meets it, Two Friends is his. Anybody who has escaped from the Nazis deserves the old place. By the way, Brenda, what is his name?"

The girl examined a bit of paper.

"Otto Kreit," she said. "And his wife's name is Anna."

"*EXTRA! Neutrality Act passes! Read all about it!*"

The strident cries carried to the living-room of the brick-front house in Washington. Braun went to the door, motioned to a boy, and bought a paper.

Back in the living-room, a look of triumph crossed his face as he read the story. Arms and munitions, including airplanes, would be sold on a cash-and-carry basis, with the purchasers taking title to the goods in the United States.

The morning papers the following day brought additional cause for jubilation. Great Britain and France had at once placed orders for airplanes. The planes, the story stated, would be flown to Canada, then shipped to Europe. Various writers pointed out that the law could be complied with by landing the planes at a field along the border, and then pushing them over the line into Canada.

Braun smiled with grim satisfaction. At first the deliveries might be made anywhere. Many of the ships would be used right in Canada for training purposes. Then the tempo of the war would increase, particularly in the air. From hard-pressed France and England would come a cry for planes, and more planes.

Braun rubbed his hands. That was the time the blundering officials of these fool democracies would realize what he, the intelligent servant of the ordered State, had sensed from the first.

North Point was the most logical border spot on the direct flyway between the United States industrial centers and the leading Canadian ports. The town housed customs and immigration officials of both countries. There were accommodations available for the many workers that would be necessary. Sooner or later the blind fools would realize all that.

Then they would come running, seeking what they needed. They would find it, just as he had. A farm with broad level fields on both sides of the border. Almost perfect landing-fields, which needed only lights and markers. The farm was conveniently near to the village, with its officials and necessary living-quarters, but sufficiently remote to make its protection comparatively easy. Made to order to suit their purposes!

But they would be late. For more than a month the man called Otto Kreit and the woman known as Anna had been installed on the farm. They lived in the small tenant-house, and the main house was closed. Even now the large north field had been seeded with a strange and dreadful crop. Only certain final preparations were lacking.

Braun consulted a timetable. Those final touches were nothing to leave in the hands of the willing but unintelligent Kreit. He, Braun, must keep ahead of the stupid tools of democracy. . . .

The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, pushed aside the newspaper with the glaring headline:

ONE HUNDRED PLANES BATTLE OVER NORTH SEA!

"Yes, Director?"

The question came from Special Agent James Ashby, who had just entered the office, and who stood looking at the

large American flag hung on the wall behind his superior.

"Sit down, Duke! . . . What are you working on at present?" the Director asked.

Duke Ashby shrugged. "Nothing much of anything, sir. I've been putting in a bit of time in the laboratory."

"Good," said the Director. "Keep yourself clear. I'll have a job for you on the first."

Ashby restrained his impatience.

"The war in the air has speeded up," the Director explained, "and England and France need planes. They're negotiating for a transfer-field near North Point in northern New York."

A bitter smile crossed his face.

"Deep secrecy, of course. Probably not more than five hundred persons know about it. But we can't help that. On the first, you take a run up there."

"Yes sir," said Duke Ashby.

"The usual things," the Director continued. "Check on any suspicious characters, and keep your eyes open for new arrivals." He smiled. "Give you a chance to look up your old friend."

Ashby's face showed his pleasure.

"Yes sir, I'll be glad to see Tiny David. If I may make a suggestion—"

The Director tossed a copy of a telegram to him.

"I've already asked Captain Field to assign him to this job."

Duke Ashby stood up.

"We should get some action, sir. Trouble seems to follow Tiny David."

OTTO KREIT rested on the handles of his plow, in the end of the north field at Two Friends. An observer would have been justified in surmising that this was a peculiar job. Otto had been at it for five days, but only two furrows at the far end of the field had been turned over.

A short distance down the lane that led to the field a car was parked. It contained three men: one was an official of a large airplane company in the United States, The second was an officer of the Royal Air Force, whose civilian clothes failed to conceal the fact that he was a soldier. The third man was a North Point real-estate agent.

The airplane company official spoke:

"It is just what we want. But can we get it? Who owns it? And will they try to hold us up?"

The real estate man answered:

"I don't think we'll have any trouble. A man named Otto Kreit just bought it recently. He is a political refugee from Germany. I feel sure we can do business with him."

The car started forward.

Otto Kreit, who had been watching the visitors, clucked to his horses, and they moved ahead. The car drew alongside.

"Whoa!" called Otto.

"Nice place you have here," said the airplane-company official.

"Ja." Otto's face expressed his pleasure. "A goodt place. Not like Chermany, mit de Nazis."

"Ever think of selling?" asked the real-estate man.

THERE was a puzzled expression on Otto's face.

"Sell? *Nein.* Ve just come here. Ve like it fine."

"Suppose we make it worth your while?" the local man persisted. "I mean that we would pay you a good bit more than the place cost you."

Otto shook his head stubbornly.

The R.A.F. officer shrugged. "It would turn out that way! Made to order for us. Hardly any grading necessary. We could have the field in shape in two weeks. The other places you showed us are impossible."

The American business man said: "I understand you are a political refugee?"

Otto nodded assent. *"Ja.* Ve have a bad time, Anna und me. You by de house come, and I show you what the newspapers, they tell about me."

"I would like to see them," said the American. He plunged on boldly: "We want this field for the British Government. It will be used to deliver airplanes, which will go to Europe to fight Hitler. This field is very good for airplanes. If we get it, we will start deliveries right away. That will mean lots of trouble for Hitler and the Nazis. Do you understand?"

Otto nodded.

"Ja." A look of hatred crossed his face. "You vant this place to help beat Hitler. Ve move here because it is just like de Vaterland, almost. But we vant much to have Hitler out. He is not Cherman." He raised his voice. "Anna!"

The blonde peasant woman appeared, and she and her husband conversed in rapid German. The woman protested. The man redoubled his arguments. The woman surrendered with a gesture.

"We know what you paid Bruce George for this place," the real-estate

man asserted. "We will give you that, and five thousand dollars more, because you have to find a new place and move. Tell your wife. Five thousand dollars is a lot of money."

There was another long conference in German.

"Goodt," said Otto then; "ve move if it helps beat Hitler. Now ve by de house go, and have some schnapps. I vant that you should see vat we go under mit dem Nazis."

The American business man winked at his companions. "Fine!" he declared. "We want to hear all about it."

CAPTAIN CHARLES FIELD, commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, was in excellent voice. His target, Lieutenant Edward David, was not up to his usual standard. Mr. David's brand-new suit of imported tweeds failed to give him the confidence he usually obtained from his uniform.

"Just like something out of a men's fashion ad!" murmured the Captain, appearing a bit dazzled by this splendor.

Mr. David smiled unhappily. "Just a little number I picked up in Montreal, sir."

Captain Field snorted. "Selling dumb Americans things like that is no way to increase the friendly relations between the two countries." Then he appeared to reconsider. "But it's just the thing for this job: You can pose as a chorus man out of work. That should go over big in North Point."

Mr. David thought of several possible answers, but prudence prompted him to be content with: "Yes sir."

Captain Field warmed to his task:

"You'll be in good company. That bird Ashby is bound to show up in some trick costume. Probably a loud-patterned Shetland jacket, and contrasting slacks in doeskin. That's all right by me. The natives over there have had a hard winter, and they rate some amusement. But get this:

"There is a war on. Most of this spy stuff has about as much foundation as your excuses. But there will be all kinds of chances for a man of your ability to get into some real trouble. In fact, I've made a little bet that this job will be your downfall. Don't disappoint me."

At that point Mr. David beat a strategic retreat. He collected his baggage, entered his personal car, and drove to North Point. There, in a room at the leading hotel, he found Mr. Ashby.

They pummeled each other enthusiastically for a minute. That ritual completed, they sat side by side on the bed and recalled incidents that had occurred on cases they both had worked on in the past. Then they turned their attention to the job at hand.

"I checked in this morning," Ashby explained. "As usual, they call us a little late. My only accomplishment to date is that I met the Mountie in charge hereabouts."

He consulted a card. "Inspector Cedric Hardcastle. But don't let the name and an occasional 'Fancy that!' fool you. Cedric is an able citizen."

"I know him," Mr. David declared. "If I was in a tight place, and could pick my company, Cedric would be among those present."

Ashby smiled. "He said much the same thing about you. Then he explained the layout. One side of the main street here is in Canada, the other in the United States. Away from town, the line winds around like a snake. Hardcastle says the best plan is to forget all about it, take care of anything that turns up, and worry later."

"We always worked that way," Tiny David asserted.

"Good," Ashby declared. He produced a map. "Hardcastle and I divided the country around the transfer-field into three districts. We will each take one. It's largely a matter of roaming around and asking questions."

A twinkle appeared in his eyes.

"In the movies, this would be a deep hush-hush job. But you know as well as I do that's the bunk. Before night the whole town will know that a Mountie, a trooper, and a G-man are looking the town over. We might as well cash in on it, and get any information that the law-abiding have to offer."

"I'd sooner work that way," Tiny David admitted. "Let's give a steak a workout, and then get started."

LESS than a mile east of Two Friends farm there is a thickly wooded hill known as Bear's Head. Mark Braun had another man came to a panting halt about fifty feet from the summit. Below, and off to the west, were the broad acres of Two Friends, where workmen were busily engaged in erecting floodlights and direction-markers.

Braun, using the foliage as a screen, surveyed the scene with satisfaction. His companion, a short, thick-set man, prod-

ded about in what appeared to be dense vines on the side of the hill.

"Good!" he declared. "Here it is." He parted the vines carefully, and disclosed the entrance to a small cave. Then he and Braun entered, pulling the vines into position behind them. Braun's flashlight illuminated the scene.

"Here we are!" Braun picked up the ends of a braided pair of wires that emerged from the earth. "They did a good job." He indicated a package he had carried. "We will hide the batteries over here." He completed the task. "Now, even if they find this cave, there will be nothing to arouse suspicion."

He turned to his companion.

"We will go over this once more, Hans: You are to return to Presnow. It is far enough away to be safe. You will be notified a day in advance. Then you will return here at night by the route we have learned. You will wait until the planes have been pushed over the line into the north field. Then you connect the wires to the batteries. After that, you make your way to Syrchester, and join Otto Kreit. Is that plain?"

HANS KRUBER nodded solemnly.

"Plain enough," he admitted. "But a botch job, and done with unnecessary risk. Both fields should have been mined. There are other ways of exploding the charges."

Braun struggled to keep his temper.

"The north field is in Canada, and so is this hill. If airplanes are destroyed there, that is an act of war, and justified. The same act in the United States would be plain sabotage. It might bring the United States into the war; and even if it didn't, it would make the swine hate us more."

There was a gleam in his eyes.

"But this way we will accomplish a double purpose. The cursed British will lose as many planes as they would in a major battle. But even more important, it will happen close enough to serve as a warning to the United States that they are playing with fire when they sell munitions of war to enemies of the Reich. It may even mean the end of such sales."

He grew stern.

"We could not rely on hidden triggers. The swine are not total fools. They will search for things like that. You have been trusted with an important task. You know the price of failure."

Hans Kruber nodded assent.

"I will not fail, Herr Braun."

A footprint attracted his attention.

They made sure they had left no traces of their visit to the cave. Then Braun parted the vines cautiously. He stiffened with surprise.

Below him, and off to the left, where a road wound its way around the hill, a coupé was parked. Beside the car stood a large man who was staring appraisingly at the wooded slopes.

"Be quiet!" Braun warned.

The big man shrugged; then he began a careful search for a trail that would lead to the summit of the hill.

THROUGH the leafy screen Braun watched him apprehensively. The big man moved with an agility that was at variance with his size, and he walked with the steady gait of the veteran woodsman. Now he had located the start of the trail, and he showed every indication that he would ascend it.

Braun saw him drop to his knees and examine the ground carefully. Then he stood up and entered the trail, where the foliage swallowed him up.

The man at the entrance to the cave swore softly.

"He is a woodsman, that cursed cop! And clever. The position of this hill with relation to the field attracted his attention. Then he saw the marks we

left on the trail. He will be able to follow us here."

Braun produced a short and ugly-looking automatic.

"He must be taken care of. Get ready, Hans."

DUKE ASHBY drove slowly on beyond the transfer-field until he came to the entrance of the adjoining farm, the mailbox of which bore the name, *"G. W. Cochrane."* A short distance along the lane brought him to the house, where a brown-haired girl answered the bell.

Ashby removed his hat. "Miss Cochrane?"

The girl's eyes twinkled. "No."

"I beg your pardon." He was a bit uncertain, and he felt a vague sense of disappointment. "Mrs. Cochrane?"

She took pity on him.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cochrane are in North Point. I am Brenda George. I live with them."

His eyes had completed a neat job of classification. She was a stunning girl. The rather tight gingham dress she wore did more for her than silk could do for the average girl. She was Canadian, of English stock. There was good blood there, and breeding.

He decided on frankness.

"I am James Ashby, of the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Her eyes widened. "A G-man!"

"Something like that," he admitted. "You probably know that they are going to use the next farm as a transfer-field for airplanes purchased by Great Britain and France."

She nodded assent. "Of course. But what do you want to know? You see, Two Friends once belonged to us. That is, to my brother Bruce and me. Bruce is with the R.A.F. now."

A puzzled expression crossed his face.

"But I thought it was bought from—"

"You are quite right," she interrupted. "The Government bought the field from Otto Kreit, a political refugee from Germany. We sold it to him less than two months ago. I understand he made five thousand dollars by living there a few weeks." Her smile was honest. "Being human, I resent that; and anything that I might tell you probably will be prejudiced."

He studied her closely.

"Just what can you tell me, Miss George?"

The girl hesitated. "I'm afraid the whole thing will sound silly," she admitted. "It is a series of seemingly unimportant things."

"Suppose we sit down here," he suggested. "I'll appreciate it a lot if you will tell me everything. Never mind how unimportant it seems, and start at the very beginning."

There was a thoughtful look in the girl's eyes as she began:

"To begin with, this man Kreit appeared out of a clear sky, and told us that he must have the place because it reminded him of his home in Germany. We finally came to terms, and he moved in almost at once. But after he and his wife were there, the love he had professed for the place didn't seem to prompt any great amount of labor on his part. He did start to plow the north field, which we had always used for pasture; but he didn't do more than two or three furrows in a whole week. And he made no effort to take care of the garden we had planted."

Ashby was leaning forward eagerly.

"That's the sort of thing I am interested in, Miss George. Please go on."

"The next thing that attracted my attention," the girl continued, "was when I visited the store in North Point. I made a remark to the clerk that I hoped he wouldn't miss the business from Two Friends too much. He laughed, and told me that the new owners were splendid customers. He even showed me their bill for the week. I admit I glanced at the total, and it was much too large for just two persons. It wasn't as if they were stocking up for the future. The things they bought were perishable.

"Then I happened to be up late one night. Mrs. Cochrane is quite old, and she often has a bad night. I was coming from her room, when I happened to notice a number of tiny lights flashing in the north field at Two Friends. There must have been at least five or six of them. But I saw Kreit and his wife nearly every day, and they never said anything about having any company. On the contrary, they always stressed the fact that they were quite alone in what to them was a new country."

"HOW long ago did you see these lights?" Ashby asked.

The girl pondered.

"It must have been about three weeks since I saw them the first time. I noticed them several nights after that. And one night, when I was standing at the window of my room, which looks out

"We can't take chances with Americans. Take him into the cave."

toward Bear's Head—that's the hill over there—I saw the same sort of light twinkling up there."

"Did you say anything to Kreit about the lights?" Ashby asked.

"No," the girl admitted. "It didn't seem important at the time. But then we learned that the Government was trying to buy Two Friends. Kreit had seemed so anxious to get the place that I was sure he wouldn't sell. But the very next day I heard that the Government had the place, and would start work almost at once. I went right over, intending to say good-by to Mr. and Mrs. Kreit, but they had gone. The only person there was a man who said that he was an official of a big airplane company in the United States."

"Have you heard where Kreit and his wife went?" Ashby asked.

The girl shook her head.

"No. Nobody seems to know for sure. He said something to Jack Nelson, the real-estate man, about going to visit some friends in the Middle West, but he didn't give any definite address. Apparently he just collected his money, packed up and left."

Ashby produced paper and pencil.

"Suppose you describe Kreit and his wife, Miss George."

The girl pursed her lips as she began a careful description of the couple. When she had finished, Ashby nodded with satisfaction.

"That's splendid, Miss George. Ever so much better than the average description we get." He smiled. "I'm signing you on as my full-time assistant. What you have told me may not mean a thing, but on the other hand it may be very important. It certainly is worth a careful check-up." He rose.

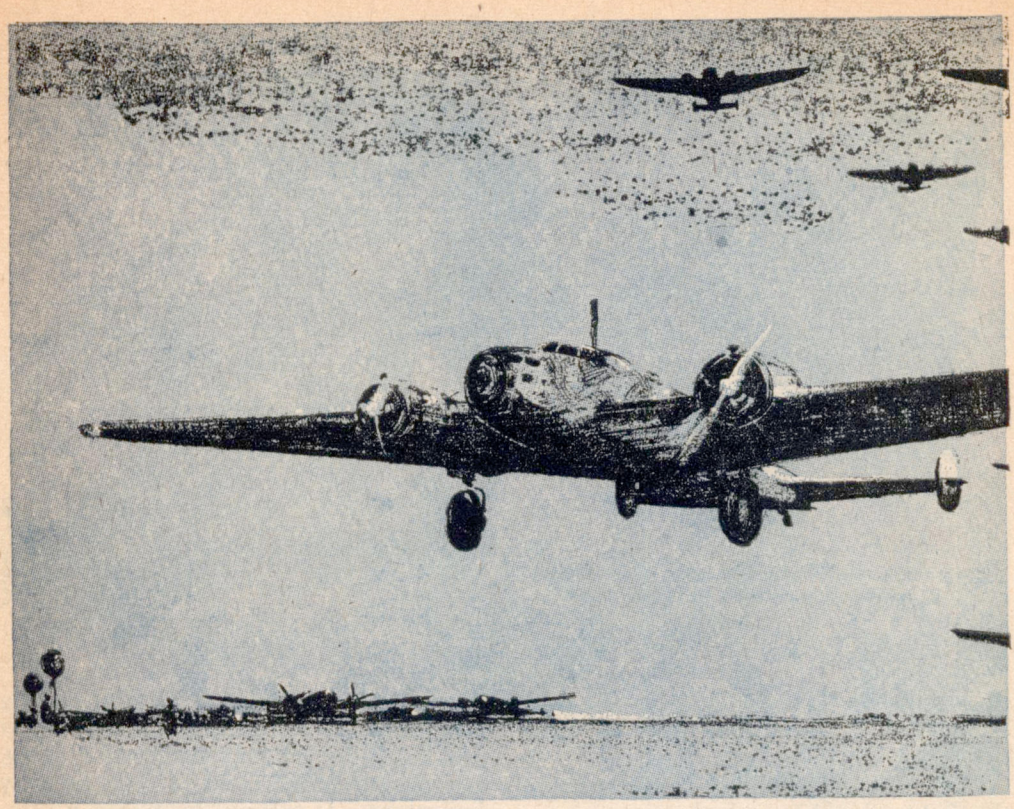
"If you will walk down to the car with me, I'll show you just how much importance I attach to your story." He fell into step beside her. "I can't have secrets from my assistant, you know."

ASHBY threw open the door of the car. Cautioning the girl to be silent, he pressed a switch on the steering-column. After waiting a short time, he spoke a cryptic combination of letters and numbers. He ceased speaking, and pressed the switch again. The answer, also in code, came pouring back.

The special agent again threw the switch to the position for an outgoing message. Using one hand to hold the notes he had taken, he translated the descriptions of Kreit and his wife into the code used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He ended with a request that they be located, and kept under surveillance. That done, he switched to the incoming channel, and heard that his message had been received. Then he closed the switch.

"Simple, isn't it?" he asked. "I was talking to our office in Syrchester. Radio men are on duty there day and night. We owe a lot to radio."

Brenda George nodded enthusiastically. "I never can take radio for grant-



"Five more flights will be right along," the flight commander announced.

ed," she admitted. "It always smacks of black magic to me. And this is the most wonderful thing I've seen. You press a switch, and you're talking to Syrchester. You pull the switch down a little more, and they're talking to you."

"That's right," he agreed. "Halfway down to talk to them." He illustrated the action. "All the way down to have them talk to you. But it has its drawbacks."

He chuckled as he snapped the switch shut.

"Last winter some poor cop in New Jersey took his girl friend for a ride in his radio patrol car. They parked along a lonely road. In some way the switch was accidentally thrown open for outgoing messages. The radio men at headquarters had an interesting hour or two, and they kept a transcript of the conversation."

Ashby was mockingly serious:

"The departmental charges against that cop alleged that the girl did not require information, and that she was not aged, infirm, blind, taken seriously ill, injured, or otherwise temporarily unable to take care of herself. Therefore, it was claimed, the cop had no right to invite her into his car."

His smile reappeared.

"The fact that I remember all this proves how serious an impression it made on me."

Brenda George was laughing. "That was embarrassing," she admitted. "I appreciate the warning. Nothing will tempt me to ride in a radio car."

His face registered mock dismay.

"That's what I get for frankness. But the rules wouldn't apply, because you are my assistant. The information you gave me certainly rates that much. I appreciate it a lot. I'll be back from time to time, if I may."

Outwardly she was very demure.

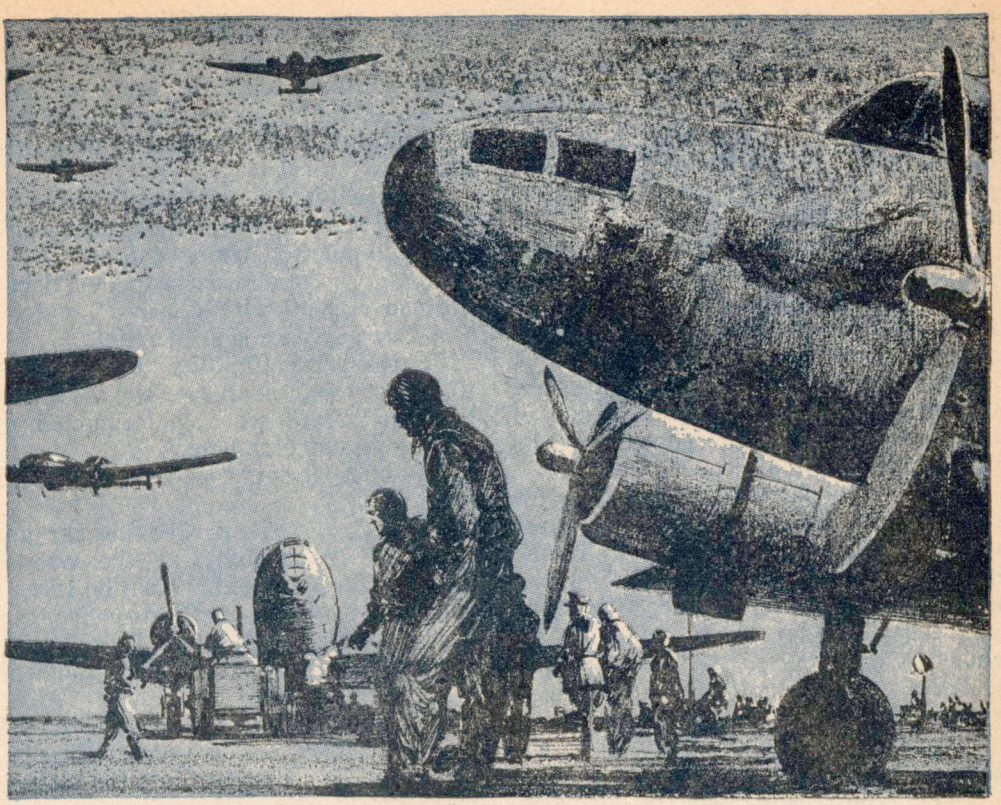
"I know Mr. and Mrs. Cochrane will regret missing you. You must came back when they are home."

"That's a very easy promise to make," he said, as he drove away.

THERE was unusual activity at the transfer-point as Ashby approached. Great floodlights were being put into position. A long line, two feet in width, had been drawn with lime between the north and south fields to indicate the border between the two countries.

Ashby paused beside a workman.

"What's up?"



"We're ready for them," declared the aviation-company official.

The man shrugged. "I just work here. And *work* is the right word. We're going to get half an hour for supper, and then we go at it again all night."

The special agent moved on into the north field. It was easy to locate the few furrows Kreit had plowed, though the ground had been leveled. The furrows, Ashby decided, were so close to the north margin of the field that planes taking off in that direction would be in the air before they reached them.

He dismissed that from his mind, and turned his attention to the general scene. The grass in both the north and south fields had been cut short. Ashby dropped to his knees and examined the sod. He repeated the procedure at various places in the north field. Try as he might, he was unable to find any evidence of digging.

There was a thoughtful look on his face as he walked to a shed, where there was considerable activity. Seeking out the foreman, and identifying himself, he indicated a truck that stood near by, with the motor idling.

"I would like to borrow that truck," he said. "And you'd better call all your men away from that north field."

The foreman gave the necessary orders.

Ashby's face was grim as he seated himself behind the wheel of the truck, and fumbled with the unfamiliar gear-shifts. Then the truck moved forward, and Ashby drove back and forth over the north field, determined to cover virtually every foot of the ground.

HE had driven over about half of the field when a man ran out, shouting.

"I say! What's the big idea?" demanded Inspector Cedric Hardcastle of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Ashby grinned. "Just taking a little ride."

"That lorry is as heavy as a plane. Top-hole way to hunt booby-traps. But this is our side of the line. You're a blasted alien. No end of a fuss if you get blown up with that Government lorry. Pile out, laddie."

Ashby surrendered to the inevitable. He stood by anxiously while Hardcastle completed the coverage of the field. Then he met the Mountie at the line.

"Get out, you alien!" Ashby ordered.

Hardcastle yielded. Ashby repeated the procedure in the south field. Again they met at the line. Ashby reported the information he had obtained from Miss George.

"Lights in the north field and on Bear's Head," said Hardcastle thoughtfully. "Odd, what?" He fumbled in his pocket. "Here is a description of Kreit's car, and the license number. May be a bit of help. Jotted it down because I detected a slight odor to windward of that refugee chap."

They were frankly worried as they returned to the hotel, where the clerk, in answer to their questions, declared he knew nothing of Tiny David's whereabouts. But before they had time to speculate upon his continued absence, they were confronted by the official of the American aviation company, who was plainly excited.

"I've been looking for you fellows for the last three hours," he declared. "Just got word that the first shipment is due in early tomorrow morning. Nearly a hundred bombers in the lot. We want you fellows to get busy and line up enough men to guard the field, and patrol the roads around this section."

Inspector Hardcastle nodded glumly.

"Right-o! It's short notice, but we'll take care of our side of the line."

Duke Ashby addressed the airplane-company official:

"Lieutenant David, of the State Police, is out on an investigation, and I don't know just when he will be back. However, I'll call the State Police barracks, and arrange for a detail of men to be on hand." Ashby's face darkened. "I suppose you know that this is a fine time to tell us about this! The extra men can't be here before early in the morning. They should have been on the job for the last two or three days. For that matter, we should have been here in town checking up long before we did. The dirty work, if there is any, was well under way by the time we got here. But it usually is that way."

"Don't blame me," countered the airplane man. "Greater minds than mine are running this show, and they have considerable gold braid on their sleeves."

"And a jolly mess of things they are making," Inspector Hardcastle added.

They hurried away to find telephones.

SOON Ashby was connected with Captain Field, at the barracks of the Black Horse Troop. He at once made the request for a detail of men.

"It's done," declared Captain Field. "I'll have Lieutenant Crosby round up a detail, and get started right away. But where's David?"

Duke Ashby hesitated.

"He went out on a routine check-up shortly after lunch. He hasn't got back as yet. We didn't have any definite time to meet, but I'm beginning to be a little anxious."

Captain Field's snort was audible.

"He'll show up," was the gruff verdict. Then, in marked contrast to what had gone before, he added: "Maybe I'd better come along with Crosby."

Ashby heaved a sigh of relief.

"That's great, Captain. I don't think we'd better say much over the telephone, but I'm afraid we have stumbled on something off-color here."

"I'll be right over," said Captain Field.

TINY DAVID had parked his car and gazed thoughtfully at the wooded slopes of Bear's Head. Then he turned, and glanced back at the transfer-field, which was plainly visible a short distance away. He stood there for a full moment, debating his course.

The hill, apparently, was out of the range of action, but its commanding position drew it very much into the picture. He mentally estimated the distance to the top, and glanced at the thick growth on the sides. The hill was in Canada, but it was well inside the section he had been assigned to check.

"It's a lot of chasing around," he told himself finally, "and it may mean nothing; but just to make sure, I'd better go through the motions."

He looked about for the trail which reason told him must be somewhere in the vicinity. Sure enough, there it was, a short distance to the right. A footprint at the start of that trail attracted his attention. He dropped to his knees and examined it. All doubts about the advisability of a trip up the slope had vanished when he stood up. The footprint, which was headed toward the peak, was fresh.

He started up the trail with a steady, easy gait that he could maintain for hours. All the while he was examining foliage on both sides of the trail for telltale marks. Soon his efforts were rewarded. A broken branch and trampled grass showed where one, or possibly more, persons had left the trail.

Tiny David went forward, carefully following signs that had meaning only to a practiced woodsman. For him the trail of the climber who had preceded him was comparatively easy to follow. Soon it emerged into a small clearing. The trooper gave an exclamation of sur-

prise as his glance rested upon the ground.

The earth was bare, and baked solidly by the sun that streamed through the opening in the trees. But straight across the clearing were revealing marks which showed that digging had been done there, and that the diggers had made careful attempts to remove all traces of their work.

Tiny David's muscles were tense as he fished in his pocket and produced a large jackknife. He dropped to his knees and began to dig. The knife made a poor tool, and he put it aside in favor of a broken branch. He had uncovered the earth to a depth of about two feet below the surface when the stick encountered resistance. He tossed it aside, and went to work with his bare hands. Soon he uncovered a dirt-encrusted pair of insulated wires.

The trooper whistled softly as he struggled to his feet. He gave up his plan of tracking the climber who had preceded him, and devoted all his woodsmanship to following the path of the wires up the hill. It might mean nothing, he told himself: just wires leading to some camp on the slopes. On the other hand, the transfer-field was only a short distance away. He had a vague sense of danger as he continued the climb, and his right hand occasionally strayed to his hip pocket, where a small revolver met his fingers.

It was comparatively easy to follow the path of the wires, because when they entered the foliage the diggers obviously had taken less pains to conceal their work. Soon he emerged at another small clearing, well up the side of the slope. The telltale marks led straight across that clearing. At the far end the side of the hill was covered with tangled vines.

Tiny David moved across the clearing and approached the vines. His brain automatically telegraphed a warning—but it came too late. A hand, clutching an automatic, thrust through the vines. The heavy barrel of the gun descended on Tiny David's head. His knees sagged and he fell forward, face-downward.

BRAUN carefully parted the vines and stepped out. Kruber joined him. They bent over the unconscious man.

"Canadian," was the gruff verdict of Kruber, who was glancing at the label of a Montreal tailor in the tweed coat.

"No." The objection came from Braun, who had in his hand papers taken from Tiny David's inside coat pocket. He read aloud the street address in the town in which the barracks of the Black Horse Troop are located. "A damned State trooper! If he was a Canadian, we would finish him off. But we can't take chances with these swines of Americans." He bent over and listened to Tiny David's labored breathing. "We will take him into the cave. Be careful with the vines."

It was a difficult job, for the unconscious trooper was no light burden, but they managed it. Then Braun carefully bound the hands and feet of his captive. That done, he inserted a crude but effective gag in the trooper's mouth. Then he reached a quick decision.

"Keep him here with you. I'll get his car. It will attract attention if it stands there. I'll run it up toward Presnow. Let them find it there. I'll take his driver's license and registration-card, to play safe in case I should be questioned. Then I'll get in touch with Louis in Presnow. He'll drive me back in his car."

There was a touch of grim humor as he bent over the unconscious trooper.

"Your visitor won't trouble you, Hans."

INSPECTOR HARDCASTLE and Ashby made a pretence of eating as they sat down to a belated evening meal. The coming of night had increased the anxiety of the special agent, and just before the coffee was served, he pushed back his chair.

"I'm going to call the barracks again," he asserted. "It's time to begin looking for Tiny's car. If anything has happened, the car should give us a place to start."

Hardcastle nodded.

"Get a description of the car," he directed. "We'll put our chaps on it, too."

Soon Ashby returned, and handed a slip of paper to the Mountie who glanced at it, and said:

"Right-o. This shouldn't be hard to find."

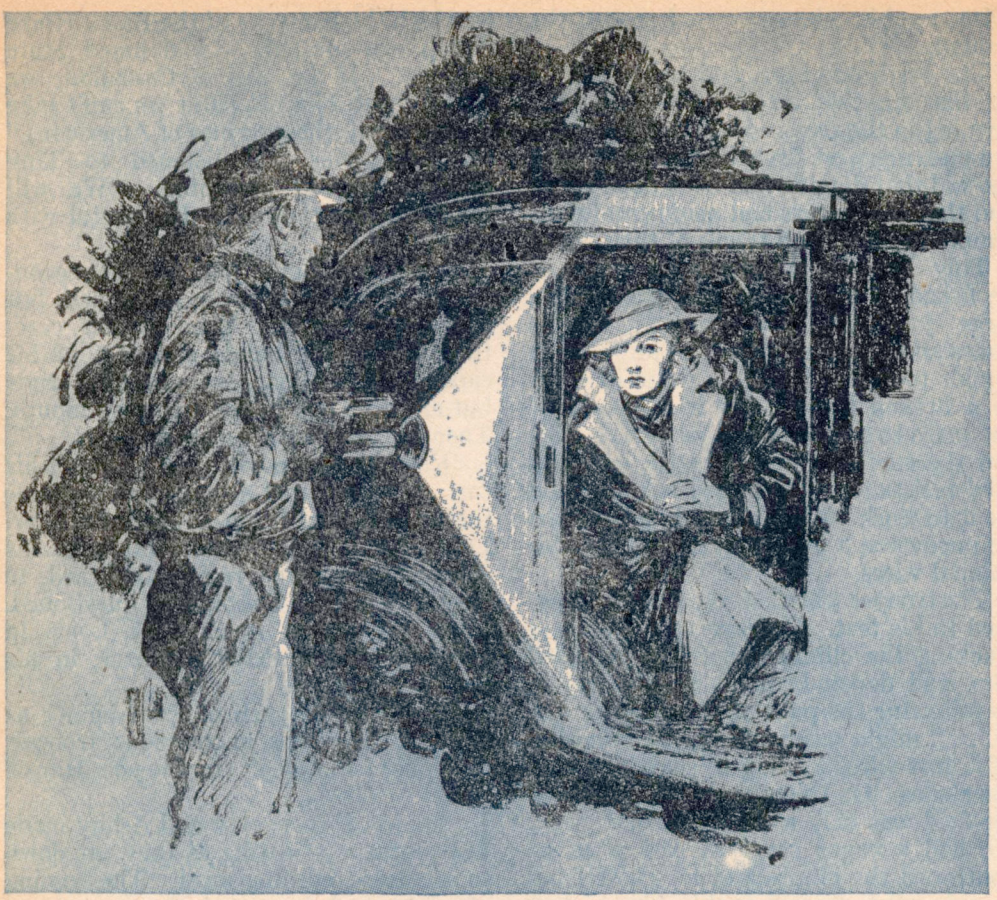
He departed to telephone.

Later the two men sat on the porch of the hotel. Soon troopers and Mounties began to arrive. Sergeant Henry Linton, who had been on duty in a near-by town was among the first of the troopers.

"Any word of Tiny?" he demanded.

Ashby shook his head.

"His car is bound to turn up," Linton declared. Then he turned to Hardcastle: "Guess I'm in charge on our side of the line—temporarily. But this is your show. Where do you want us?"



"Put up your hands!" he ordered. "Don't scream, or I'll kill you!"

Inspector Hardcastle smiled.

"We won't battle about seniority. Best to pool our forces, what?"

Rapidly he outlined his plans. A force of Mounties would be assigned to the Canadian side of the transfer-field. A like company of troopers would guard the United States part of the field. Patrols would be stationed on all roads about North Point, both in the United States and in Canada, with instructions to check on all traffic approaching the town.

Sergeant Linton nodded.

"We'll begin the set-up," he declared. "Then the better minds can take over. Crosby is headed this way; so is the Skipper. They're due in about two hours."

ASHBY and Hardcastle drove to the transfer-field, which was flooded with light. Factory mechanics and groundmen, who had arrived during the night, were standing on their own side of the white line, and swapping jokes with British and Canadian airmen, who had been brought to North Point to fly the planes to a Canadian seaport. Customs and immigration men of both countries were bustling about. The unusual activity had attracted the attention of neighboring residents, and Mounties and troopers were hard pressed as they tried to keep the steadily growing crowd back beyond the limits of the field.

"What kind of crates are you bringing us?" demanded a youthful British pilot.

"Sweet," declared a husky mechanic. "They'll take you there and bring you back, and have enough left over to carry a nice load of calling-cards."

"How are they on speed?" demanded the pilot.

"Hold on to your bridgework when you give these babies the gun," warned the mechanic.

Ashby sought the aviation-company official.

"What time will they arrive?" he inquired.

"They're coming in flights of about ten ships each," the official explained. "There are ninety planes in the shipment.

We've timed it so the first flight will be in shortly after daybreak. We should have them all pushed over the line, and the red tape cut, so they can take off again, by eight in the morning."

Ashby turned away. Snorting, efficient-looking little tractors, designed to help move the planes on the ground, were gathered at vantage-spots near the white line. The special agent returned to his car, and sat behind the wheel, watching the animated scene.

Something was wrong. Ashby was sure of that. The continued absence of Tiny David was one indication. But quite aside from that, he had a vague feeling of uneasiness. His hands smote the wheel of the car as he cursed the present inactivity, made necessary because his station was here at the field.

The special agent looked up as Hardcastle, grave of face, approached.

"There you are," said the Mountie. "Two of my lads picked up Tiny's car. They found it ten miles south of Presnow."

"Any word of Tiny?" Ashby demanded.

"No," Hardcastle admitted. "No signs of a struggle in the car. They're looking for fingerprints, just as a matter of routine."

Impulsively Ashby's hand went to the ignition switch. Hardcastle shook his head mournfully.

"I feel the same way," he admitted. "But it's forty miles away. My lads will carry on. We both belong here."

Ashby settled back in the seat.

"I'll let you know if anything else comes in," Hardcastle promised.

SHORTLY before midnight Captain Field and Lieutenant Crosby arrived with a detail from the barracks of the Black Horse Troop. There was a hurried conference with Hardcastle and Ashby. Captain Field was unusually gruff when he heard the news regarding Tiny David.

"He's big enough and ugly enough to take care of himself," was his verdict. He turned to the Mountie. "Don't want to butt in, but would you care to take a run up there with me?"

Hardcastle managed to conceal his smile.

"You know you're welcome, Captain. But my men are doing all that can be done." His face was somber. "If I'd thought it would have done any good, I'd have been there long ago."

"I guess you're right," Captain Field admitted. "He can take care of himself." The commanding officer emphasized the last statement as though he were trying to convince himself.

"Quite so," agreed Hardcastle, whose left eyelid fluttered a bit as he turned toward Ashby.

THE time passed slowly. Ashby, sitting in the car, glanced at the line of faces visible behind the rope. Men, women, and children had flocked to the field. He slid out of the car as he recognized Brenda George.

"Good evening,—or rather, morning,—Miss George."

He decided that she was even prettier in the flickering glare of the great floodlights.

"You're teaching North Point bad habits," she accused him. "The lights and the noise make sleep impossible. I decided I might as well be in on the excitement."

"With a front-row seat reserved for you," he declared as he raised the rope and indicated his car.

She hesitated at the door.

"I haven't forgotten about that policeman in New Jersey," she demurred.

"The radio is turned off," he assured her. "It stays that way."

They sat silently, as they watched a number of American mechanics, who stayed religiously on their side of the white line, introduce a group of British pilots, who also respected the white barrier, to a game that was played with dice.

Brenda George sighed.

"I was hoping Bruce, my brother, would be among them. That was one reason I came over here. But I came across a man from his field, and he told me Bruce hasn't finished training."

Ashby murmured a conventional answer, and then they were silent again. Looming ahead of them, and faintly visible in the half-light of approaching dawn, was Bear's Head.

Ashby turned to the girl.

"By the way, Miss George, I wish you would tell me all you can remember about seeing lights on that hill."

The girl pondered.

"I only saw the light on the hill one night. It seemed to be about halfway up. It didn't last very long, and it wasn't as plain as the lights in the field."

Ashby was deep in thought.

"One of the State troopers has disappeared," he told the girl. "He was check-

ing in a section that includes Bear's Head. We found his car abandoned south of Presnow, but there has been no trace of him."

Brenda leaned toward him eagerly.

"Have you searched Bear's Head?" she asked.

Ashby shook his head. "We haven't had time," he admitted. Then he reached a sudden decision. "But we'll do it just as soon as it's light enough."

The girl studied the sky.

"There is a trail going up from this side, but I doubt if you'd be able to find it before daylight, and unless somebody showed the start to you." A sudden thought came to her. "But there's an old truck-trail up the east slope, which runs almost halfway to the top, and is good enough for an automobile. I've been over it ever so many times." She acted on an impulse. "I could drive up there with you, and you'd be very near to the spot I saw the light. It should be light enough by the time we get there."

Ashby took a quick look around the field, and scanned the skies. There were no signs of the expected planes. He leaned forward, and turned on the ignition switch.

"This certainly is swell of you, Miss George. You surely are proving to be a very valuable assistant."

THEY drove away from the field, through the town of North Point, and approached Bear's Head from the east.

"You'd better drive slowly here," the girl warned. "The truck-trail is just ahead, and it's rather hard to find." The car moved forward several hundred feet. "There it is," she declared.

Then they began a steady climb up what had once been a clearly defined trail for trucks, but which now was so overgrown that passage was difficult. Soon the headlights of the car picked out a cleared space which obviously marked the end of the trail.

Ashby reached a decision. "Can you drive a car, Miss George?" he asked.

"Yes," the girl answered.

The special agent's face brightened.

"That makes everything easy," he declared. He pulled the car to a halt. "I'll slip out here, and give you directions, so that you can turn around. Then I want you to drive back to the field. Hunt up Inspector Hardcastle, tell him where I am, and ask him to send a few men along to help me. Meanwhile, I'll be seeing what I can find."

The special agent produced a flashlight, and used it to illuminate the limits of the cleared space. "Cut your wheel to the right, and come back," he directed. He walked to the limit of the space. "Come on. You have quite a bit of room."

He stood with his back against a clump of bushes as the red tail-light of the car approached slowly. "Just a few feet more." The light came slowly onward. "Easy. That's enou—"

The direction ended abruptly as Ashby fell to his knees, partially stunned by a blow that had been delivered by a man who had been hidden in the foliage.

INSPECTOR HARDCASTLE walked briskly across the transfer-field, and came to a halt at the place where Ashby's car had been parked. The Mountie stared about uncertainly.

"Your friend drove away fifteen minutes ago." The information was volunteered by a man from the crowd. "He had a girl with him."

Hardcastle turned to his informant.

"He didn't say where he was going, did he?"

"Nope," came the reply. "He just drove away."

Hardcastle's reply was drowned out by a shout that went up from the far end of the field. With one accord the crowd turned to face a section of sky in the southwest, from which came a faint drone. The drone swelled into a steady hum, which, in turn, became an angry roar. Soon ten black dots were visible against the gray background of the early morning sky. An official shouted an order. All the lights save those used for landing purposes were snapped off.

The black dots, which had grown in size until they were identifiable as huge bombing-planes, circled over the field. Then lights in the wing-tips of the first plane flashed a signal. The nose of the great ship was pointed down, and it came in to a landing, halting well on the United States side of the white line. The rest of the flight followed. Pilots stepped from the cabins.

"Five more flights will be right along," the flight commander announced.

"We're ready for them," declared the aviation-company official. . . .

The half-light of early morning seeped through the vine-screened entrance of the cave as Tiny David struggled painfully back to consciousness. The top of his head was an anvil upon which a hun-

dred hammers were pounding. His mouth was dry and parched, and a crude gag added nothing to his comfort. Lack of circulation in his tightly bound arms and legs completed his misery.

His first attempt to move brought back the memory of his plight. The sight of Hans Kruber, crouching on the ground a short distance away, filled in the blanks in the picture. From the sky above the hill came the roar of many powerful motors.

Tiny David silently swore at himself for his failure. The sound of the motors indicated a vast number of planes. One look at Kruber convinced him that these planes, and the men about them, were doomed. He, because of his neglect to take proper precautions, was powerless to prevent it.

Hans Kruber sat fondling the ends of the braided wires. Occasionally his hands strayed affectionately over the battery near by. The look of anticipation on his face increased as he parted the vines to obtain a glimpse of the field, where the number of planes was increasing constantly.

Tiny David felt the cold needles of terror as he glanced at the man. Here was the professional killer in action. Kruber handled his tools of death with the loving reverence a great artist might bestow upon a fine violin.

The sight of the wires caused the trooper additional remorse. Now there was no doubt about their purpose. They ran to mines which the fake refugee had planted beneath the field. He, Tiny David, had uncovered those wires on the hill, held them in his hands, and had failed to cut them because he was not sure of their use. That fact added to the intensity of his bitterness.

Here he was, trussed up and helpless, like a calf ready for market. Soon brave men would die. Great engines of war, sorely needed by hard-pressed democracies, would be destroyed. And all because of his blunder.

HIS bitter revery was interrupted as Kruber parted the vines for a better view of the field. From the sky came the angry roar of great motors.

The secret agent's thick lips were moist as he counted aloud:

"Eighty—eighty-one—eighty-two—"

Kruber's small, piglike eyes sparkled with anticipation as he returned to the wires and battery. Soon his great moment would be at hand!

The transfer-field was a huge hive in which great motors, some roaring, others idling, provided the tempo for busy ground-men and mechanics.

The huge bombers, as fast as they landed, were seized by tractors and by ground-men and towed to the white line. There the machines fell back, and a ritual was observed. The American crews, keeping south of the white line, pushed the plane until its nose was well in Canada. Then the British crew, also observing the sanctity of the line, took over, and pulled the plane into Canada.

There tractors came into play again. The planes were taxied and towed into long lines, where they awaited the word that all formalities had been complied with, before taking to the air again.

They worked with a will, the American and British crews.

"Coming over!" roared the Americans.

"Let them come!" came the answer.

"All yours!" was the glad cry.

"And what beauties!" cried a British pilot, gazing at a huge bomber with its camouflaged fuselage.

There was a fond gleam in the eyes of the factory pilot, who had stepped from the cabin.

"Just a bunch of push-overs," was his only comment.

Now three long lines of the huge planes were assembled in the north field, under the sod of which were the deadly mines.

FOR Mark Braun, things had not gone too well. There had been no untoward incidents as he drove Tiny David's car to a certain house in Presnow, but there he received a rude shock.

The man called Louis greeted him hastily, and then produced a telegram. Braun tore open the envelope with trembling fingers.

"Aunt Marie will arrive early in the morning," he read. *"Traveling all night by car. Should be in about nine-eight."*

Braun swore fluently in his excitement.

Ninety-eight bombers; due early in the morning! He was in Presnow. Hans Kruber, a trigger-crazy killer, was in the cave. Kruber would not know the size of the shipment. Even if he did, his overpowering desire to kill and destroy might compel him to go into action long before his act would reap the greatest possible advantage.

Braun gave rapid orders. They started south at once, Braun in Tiny David's car, and Louis at the wheel of the second automobile.

They abandoned the trooper's car some distance south of the village, and Braun entered the automobile driven by Louis.

"Faster!" was his terse order.

He sat beside the driver, growling and cursing. Then he arrived at a decision, and ordered curtly:

"Move over. I drive."

A few minutes later he gave silent thanks that the change had been effected. A car a short distance ahead of him stopped abruptly. Two shadowy forms ran toward it. The glare of his headlights told the story.

"Mounties!"

Braun acted automatically. There was a dirt road branching off to the east. He swerved the car, and entered the side road, driving at a furious pace. There was a shout, then a shot, and then silence.

The rest of that journey had been a nightmare. Braun sensed what had taken place. Because of the expected arrival of the planes, the roads leading to North Point were guarded, and incoming traffic would be checked.

Braun kept to seldom-traveled dirt roads. He was going south, but also too far to the east. Neither he nor Louis were very familiar with this section of the country.

Then they had headed west. It was risky going. They eluded one patrol only because a farmer, bound for market in a horse-drawn vehicle, unwittingly blocked the road just long enough for them to escape.

NOW the first light of the false dawn was visible. There was a hum of planes in the distance. Off to the west loomed the dark bulk of Bear's Head. Braun pulled the car to the side of the road, and snapped off the ignition.

"We leave the car," he announced. "Too much risk. Hurry!"

They went forward on foot, avoiding settlements, and ever on the alert for patrols. To Braun, that part of their trip had been a desperate race. Now the roar of the planes was louder. Every minute he expected to see a flash of fire, and hear a deafening roar.

Then they reached the east side of Bear's Head and began the ascent of the truck-trail. Both men were panting. Braun was the least able, physically, but far the stronger in his resolve to prevent Kruber from bungling the job at hand.

"Faster!"

Over and over he repeated the command, using air badly needed by his burning lungs.

There would be time to inflict only one ineffective blow with his bound feet.

They were near the clearing that marked the end of the trail when Braun heard an approaching car.

"Wait!"

The automobile continued its climb.

"Hurry!"

They reached the clearing and hid in a clump of bushes.

The car entered the clearing and came to a halt. A man stepped out. They bent over to avoid the rays of his flashlight.

"Cut your wheel to the right, and come back," the man directed. He approached the clump of bushes. "Come on. You have quite a bit of room."

The man turned his back on them, and stood facing the car.

"I'll take him," Braun whispered. He saw a flutter of white behind the wheel of the car, and almost gave an exclamation of surprise. "You get the girl who's driving."

"Just a few feet more," the man directed the driver. "Easy. That's enou—"

Braun struck. The barrel of his revolver found its mark. The man fell upon his knees. Braun was on him, dealing murderous blows.

LOUIS approached the car and covered the girl with a gun.

"Put up your hands!" he ordered. "Don't scream, or I'll kill you!"

He heard her gulp in terror and surprise.

"Be quiet!" he ordered.

The sound of the struggle between Braun and his opponent became unnaturally loud in the quiet of the early morning. Then the girl spoke. Her voice was tremulous, and she seemed on the verge of hysteria:

"Don't kill Mr. Ashby. I'll do anything you say. But don't kill Mr. Ashby. He's a G-man. They'll follow you forever if you kill him."

"Shut up!" barked Louis.

Braun, who had gained mastery of his victim, swore fluently.

"A G-man! The damned American swine are everywhere! Take the key out of that car, and help me tie this devil."

Louis paused to deliver a warning to Brenda George.

"I'll do what you say," came the resolute answer of the girl. "But don't kill Mr. Ashby."

Her words were lost in the roar of motors, as a flight of bombers glided past the hill, and came to rest in the field on the other side.

Hans Kruber continued his count:

"Eighty-three—eighty-four—"

All his killer instinct urged him to attach the wires to the batteries. But the twisted touch of artistry in his make-up caused him to delay.

The last plane in the flight landed.

Tiny David, helpless on the floor of the cave, flexed his muscles in an effort to restore circulation to his aching arms and legs.

Kruber turned away from the entrance to the cave. His fingers twitched as he reached for the battery. But an angry roar of motors halted him. Reluctantly he returned to the entrance of the cave:

"Eighty-five—eighty-six—"

DUKE ASHBY, down on his knees, fought furiously but to no avail. The first savage blow had clouded his brain so that his body obeyed its commands haltingly. But a host of bitter thoughts drifted hazily through his mind:

He had brought Brenda George into grave peril. . . . He had bungled the job. . . . This was the fate Tiny David had met. . . . Now the field and the planes were doomed. . . . His fault!

He struggled desperately. This man, thanks to the first efficient blow, was his master. Off in the distance he heard the voice of Brenda George:

"Don't kill Mr. Ashby. I'll do anything you say, but don't kill Mr. Ashby. He's a G-man. They'll follow you forever if you kill him." . . .

Hans Kruber returned to the tools of his trade. He attached one wire to a terminal of the batteries. But then, allured by the ever-recurring roar of motors, he returned to the cave's entrance.

TINY DAVID used all his will-power in an effort to bend his knees. The dull pain gave way to numbness; numbness, in turn, was replaced by stabbing pains. He gritted his teeth as he drew his knees up, straightened them out, and then repeated the process. . . .

Braun and Louis worked efficiently as they ripped up clothing with which to bind Ashby. When the arms and legs of the special agent were securely tied, Braun fashioned a makeshift gag and put it into place.

"We throw him in the back of the car," he ordered.

When that was accomplished, Braun gave final directions:

"You must drive them to Presnow. The police will not trouble with north-

bound traffic. Kill the girl if she cries out. You know what to do when you get there."

Louis demurred:

"It is dangerous. We must keep away from the main roads. I do not know the way."

"Silence!" Braun roared. "You have your orders. We can't kill this cursed G-man. His damned country will take action. These two are dangerous here. Get started!"

Brenda George's voice had more than a note of hysteria.

"Don't kill Mr. Ashby. I'll drive you to Presnow by the back roads. I know the way."

Louis hesitated.

"I'll show you," the girl promised. "We're halfway up the east side of Bear's Head now. We drive east to Plainsville. Then we turn north. We pass through Easton, Murray and Le Duc. I'll do whatever you say, but don't kill Mr. Ashby."

Braun gave the order:

"Let her drive. And get started."

He watched the car pull away. Then he ran blindly up the hill. The roar of motors urged him on. . . .

From the cave a voice said: "Ninety!"

Kruber completed his count. He returned to the batteries. He picked up the unattached wire.

"Drop that, you fool!"

The command came from Braun, who stood in the vines at the entrance to the cave. Reluctantly Kruber let the wire fall from his hands.

"How many?" Braun demanded.

"Ninety," Kruber replied.

"You fool! There will be more—nearly a hundred!" Braun bent over Tiny David, who closed his eyes. "Your guest sleeps well. We will leave him here when our work is done."

DOWN on the field, Captain Field approached Inspector Hardcastle.

"Where's Ashby?"

The Mountie shrugged. "He drove away some time ago. Had a girl with him."

Captain Field frowned. "That isn't like Ashby."

"No, Captain," Hardcastle admitted. "It isn't like Ashby."

Captain Field kicked at an unoffending clod of dirt.

"I don't like this layout. I will be glad—"

"There you are! Thank God!"

The aviation-company official, white of face and panting, stood before them.

"The barracks want you on the phone, Captain. And your headquarters want you, Inspector." His voice quivered with excitement. "There's hell to pay!"

AS the car, with Brenda George at the wheel, reached a village and headed north, she explained: "This is Plainsville. We go north to Easton; we should be there in twenty minutes."

"I know that," growled Louis. "What's the big idea?"

The hysterical note returned to the girl's voice:

"I'm just trying to explain. I'll do anything, but don't kill Mr. Ashby."

The car passed a crossroads. An open touring-car, containing four Mounties, pulled out.

"Halt!" came the sharp command.

Louis thrust a revolver against the girl's side.

"Faster!" he ordered.

The open car pulled alongside. A Mountie climbed over the side, and vaulted to the running-board beside the girl.

"Steady, miss!"

Louis' hand with the gun went up. The Mountie reached through the open window and made a futile grab. But Brenda George took one hand from the wheel and knocked the weapon aside as Louis fired.

The car swerved crazily. The Mountie's second try enabled him to grab the gun. He and Louis struggled for possession of the weapon.

A second Mountie vaulted to the running-board. One of his arms encircled his companion, while his hand grasped the frame of the open window. His other hand seized the wheel and steadied it.

"Easy," he cautioned the girl. "Hold on just a moment." He snapped the ignition switch. "Good girl!" he told her, as the car rolled to a halt.

Brenda George's hand slipped from the wheel. Her eyelids fluttered.

"Mr. Ashby's in back!" she gasped. "He's hurt!"

The Mountie was smiling.

"We'll take care of all that, miss." He chuckled, as his hand snapped a switch on the steering-column of the car. "You can faint now; you're off the air."

BRAUN and Kruber stood behind the vine-screened entrance of the cave. Tiny David, watching the two men care-

fully, took advantage of the opportunity to bend his knees again.

"Ninety-eight," Braun counted. He hesitated a moment. "One of those flights is about ready to take off. Now is the time, Hans."

Kruber's eyes sparkled as he darted to the batteries and picked up the unattached wire. Tiny David drew up his knees. Kruber, in his eagerness, dropped the wire. The dynamiter swore fervently. Braun turned.

LOOKING over Braun's shoulder, Tiny David saw a huge hand parting the vines near the top of the cave. The owner of the hands, who obviously was perched above the cave, edged forward. The face of Captain Field appeared through the screen of vines.

Braun, attracted by the rustling of the vines, turned again; now a revolver was in his hand.

As Kruber reached to pick up the wire, Braun saw Captain Field.

The commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop peered uncertainly into the gloom of the cave. There was a rustling noise in the vines at the other side, but it passed unnoticed.

That was the moment when Tiny David was faced with the most momentous decision of his life. The decision was made in a split-second, but to the trooper it seemed like hours.

There was Kruber, bringing the wire to the battery terminal; not far from him stood Braun, his gun trained on Captain Field. Tiny David's gag made it impossible for him to cry out a warning. There would be time to inflict only one ineffective blow with his bound feet. He must choose—Captain Field, or nearly a hundred planes, and hundreds of men!

Tiny David, when he made the decision, consoled himself with the flashing thought that Captain Field would want it this way. . . .

The wire almost grazed the battery terminal. Braun's gun rose, and his arm tensed. At the same instant, Tiny David pulled his knees up nearly to his chin, and his bound feet struck out in a vicious lunge.

Kruber went crashing against the side of the cave, then fell to the ground. The batteries and wires dropped from his hands. Tiny David's feet covered them.

Braun was disconcerted, but only for a fraction of a second. His trigger-finger began to tighten. Tiny David was unable to turn, because Kruber was on his hands and knees, crawling toward the instruments of death. Captain Field's face made a glaring target in the vines.

The bark of a revolver made Tiny David think his heart had stopped beating. . . . Then the cave was filled with acrid smoke and gas. Uniformed men, coming from above the cave, crashed through the vines.

Tiny David peered uncertainly through the smoke. Braun was stretched out on the ground, motionless. A Mountie was hauling Kruber from the cave.

Then Captain Field and Inspector Hardcastle bent over Tiny David, cutting him loose, and removing his gag.

"You all right, Tiny?" Captain Field was almost incoherent. "Can you speak? Are you—"

Tiny David sat up, spitting out fragments of rags.

"I'm O.K., Skipper. But how did he miss you?" Without waiting for an answer, he continued: "I had to choose between you and the field—I took out that bird with the batteries."

Captain Field returned to normal.

"Good chance to get rid of me, eh? Well, Hardcastle fooled you."

Inspector Hardcastle smiled with embarrassment.

"I just happened to be above the entrance to the cave, on the other side. Tiny and the lad with the gun were so interested in Captain Field they didn't spot me. The light was better on my side, and I could see inside. All in the day's work, Captain."

They helped Tiny David to his feet, and half carried him from the cave. Then they sat on a ledge of rock, looking down at the transfer-field, where the great bombers were posed for their flight to the seacoast.

TINY DAVID came back to a problem that had puzzled him since Captain Field's face first appeared in the vines.

"How did you birds happen to stage this third-act rescue?"

"That's easy," declared Captain Field. "We got a telephone call—"

He broke off suddenly as a cry sounded from below, on the trail leading up to the cave.

"Hello, up there!" came the voice of Duke Ashby.

They answered his call, and soon Ashby and Brenda George appeared.

"Thank the Lord you're all right, Tiny," Ashby said with evident relief. He turned to Captain Field. "We met

several Mounties, who were on their way down. They said you had everything well in hand up here."

The special agent became aware of the inquiring glances the three men were directing at Brenda George.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he murmured. "Miss George, may I present Inspector Hardcastle, Captain Field and Lieutenant David." That portion of his face not swathed in bandages was wrinkled in a smile. "Gentlemen, allow me to present my assistant, Miss Brenda George."

They murmured conventional acknowledgments of the introduction.

RETURNING to his problem, Tiny David insisted:

"I still haven't found out what brought up the Marines at just the right time."

Captain Field's eyes were twinkling.

"All I know is that we received a telephone call from Syrchester, telling us to go halfway up the east side of Bear's Head, and to begin a thorough search of the hill from that point. It's all deep, dark stuff. . . . Maybe you'd better explain it, Ashby."

The special agent took up the story:

"I was foolish enough to lead Miss George into a fine trap. They knocked me out easily. But Miss George was clever enough to get word to our office in Syrchester. Tell them how you did it, Brenda."

The girl flushed with embarrassment.

"Mr. Ashby had showed me how his radio worked. One of the men was standing right beside me, but I managed to throw the switch open with my knee. That's all there is to it."

"Nothing of the sort," Ashby retorted. "She put on one swell broadcast. She kept repeating over and over again: *'Don't kill Mr. Ashby.'* That made the radio men in Syrchester sit up right away. Then she managed to tell them just where we had been attacked. That made it possible for Syrchester to call you, Captain Field, and begin the search of this hill, that ended so luckily."

Ashby gazed fondly at the girl.

"But that wasn't all: They were taking us north in my car. They weren't too sure of the roads; and Brenda, while pretending to direct them, gave Syrchester our exact position, our future route, and almost the exact time when we would arrive at any certain spot. The telephone did the rest. The Mounties were there waiting for us. And Brenda had a man with a gun right beside her all the time she was doing it."

Captain Field's face registered mock chagrin.

"She may be your assistant, but watch her—we'll steal her if we can! I'm warning you."

Duke Ashby's reply was lost in a mounting crescendo of noise from the transfer-field. Great planes roared down the runway of the north field, and took to the air. Then they circled about, while waiting to be joined by still more planes.

The great air armada, constantly growing in size, passed and repassed the group on Bear's Head. Soon the last ship had taken off from the field.

The lead plane headed north by east. The motors growled in answer, as the other huge bombers followed. The early morning sun gleamed on the weird markings of the ships. On and on the great bombers flew. Then the sky swallowed them up, and only the distant drone of the motors could be heard.

Duke Ashby turned to Brenda George.

"There they go, Brenda. Without you, we would have lost them. You certainly have done your bit."

THAT is the story, just as it was written when these things happened. Only a few additions are needed to bring it up to date:

The Mounties, after a heart-to-heart talk with Louis, visited a house in Presnow, and cleaned out a real source of danger to Canada. Braun died, but before he died he talked. Then G-men visited the brick-front house in Washington, and rounded up a number of people who had been regular visitors there.

Just the other day a news-story told of the arrest of Otto Kreit, and a woman who described herself as Anna, his wife. The news-item added that the F.B.I. would turn the two over to the Canadian authorities.

The following morning brought a night letter:

KREIT ARREST CLEARS UP CASE STOP RELEASE STORY STOP NEXT WEDNESDAY WE WILL GIVE YOU SWELL LAST CHAPTER STOP SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH IN NORTH POINT STOP TINY DAVID BEST MAN STOP YOU ARE INVITED STOP

The signature read: DUKE AND BRENDA.

Another Tiny David story by Robert R. Mill, will appear in an early issue.

Doctor Fuddle's FINGERS

He plucked a lizard out of the fourth dimension, and comedy out of a convention of scientists.

By NELSON BOND

Who wrote "Exiles of Time."

THEY didn't give any Peace Prize that year, because the big guns were booming, national boundaries were being jigsawed, ideologies were being forcibly rammed down unwilling throats. But they offered awards in some other fields. Of course I'm always the fall guy; so the chief, grinning like the ghoul he is, called me into his office and handed me the ticket.

"Here's a liberal education, Len," he said, "in one easy lesson. Go stuff yourself with poultry and erudition. And bring back half a column—with the names spelled right."

I said: "Look, I'm a reporter, not a bound copy of *Science & Mechanics*. Those atom-busters don't talk my lingo—and besides, I hate rubber peas. Anyway, I've got a cold. Why don't you send Jerry or Hank?"

"Thousands of good men," mused the chief, "walking the streets. Men who'd do or die for the dear old *Bulletin-Times*. And every week I overpay one good-for-nothing—"

So I went, and it was just the way I thought it would be. The banquet-hall smelled of moth-balls and old Encyclopedia Britannicas. Science was on a busman's holiday; there were fragments of gay and sparkling chatter about such trivia as supernovæ, Planck's constant and the Lorenz-Fitsgerald contraction. An acid-stained set of talons clutched my ticket; bifocals studied it; and a rusty dinner-coat shooed me to a table in the corner.

This shindig, I learned, was a retake of the annual Nobel awards for the benefit of those who hadn't attended the world première in Stockholm. As the blue ribbon winners were introduced, each was supposed to spill the lowdown on his latest work. Further than that, it was all Æschylus to me. I washed down a cocktail with a cupful of lukewarm consommé, followed Orator Num-

ber One to the point where he mentioned the "hyperpilosity of the anthropoid genera," and then began studying my dinner companions.

The Rock of Gibraltar on my right was no dice; but I felt an immediate sense of kinship with the little chap on my left when I found him staring dolefully at his cocktail glass. I grinned and whispered: "Me too. What do we do to get a refill around here? Faint?"

He started, blushing gently, then whispered back: "I—I don't want a refill. But I'd *love* to have my olive!"

I SAW, then, that he hadn't drunk his Martini. I discovered, too, that of all the wacky-looking jaspers in that assemblage, he had a running start on the title of "Most Likely to End up Cutting Paper Dolls."

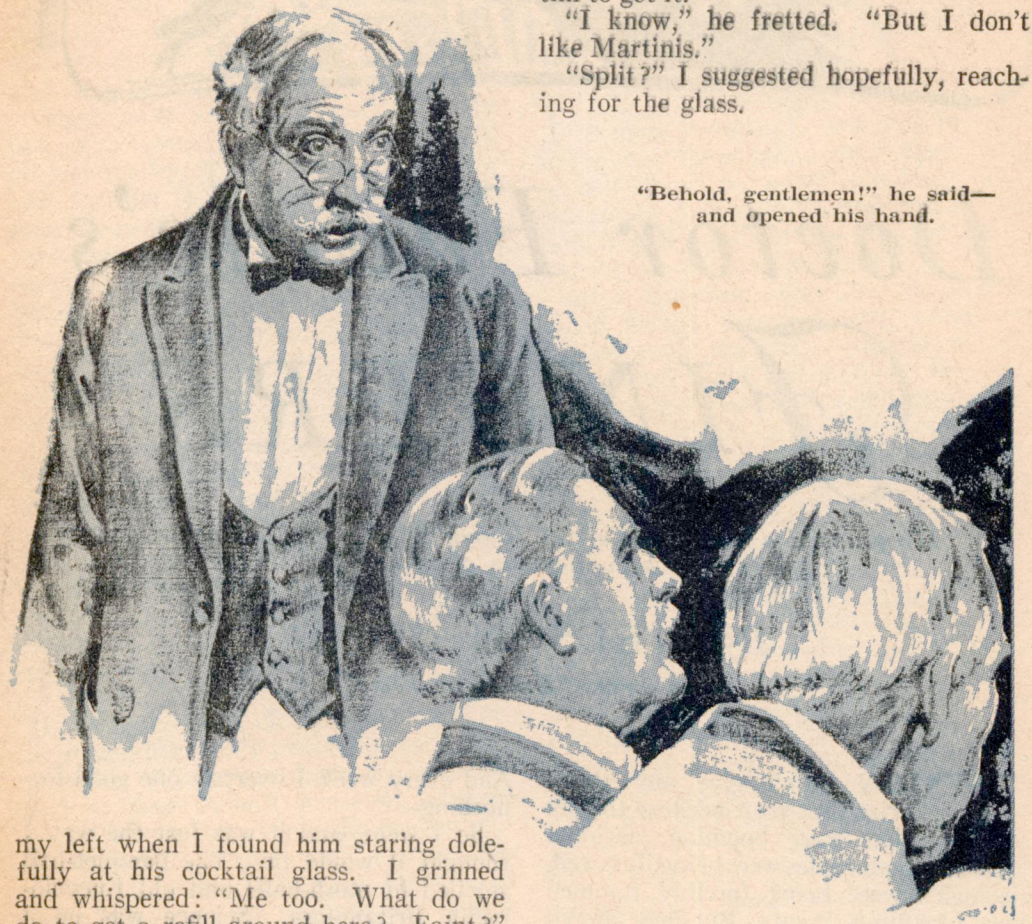
He was a pale little fellow, mild of manner and fuzzed above the eyes with brows like dejected parentheses. His collar was at least two sizes too large; his Adam's-apple was a study in perpetual motion. But the main what-the-hell was his hands. He was wearing black gloves!

I couldn't see them plainly. It was dark there in the corner, and he was a nervous little twirp, so his hands kept fluttering like baffled butterflies. But the glove on the right hand seemed to be more a mitten than a glove.

I said: "The olive, friend, is technically known as 'the gin-bibber's afterthought.' You have to drink your Martini to get it."

"I know," he fretted. "But I don't like Martinis."

"Split?" I suggested hopefully, reaching for the glass.



"Behold, gentlemen!" he said—and opened his hand.

But he stopped me with a little gasp. "Oh, no! That wouldn't be sanitary."

"Gin," I told him, "is a swell disinfectant." But he wasn't paying any attention to me. He was squirreling to left and right, peering anxiously at our neighbors.

"I don't think," he whispered, "anyone will see." He fumbled beneath the table for a moment. Then his hand whisked up and out, touched the glass—and he popped something into his mouth. The olive.

I said: "Hey! Wait a minute!" I said. "I *saw* that!"

He smiled gently. "You did? What did you see?"

On second thought, I wasn't so sure. The hands of my companion were once again cased in their queer covering. I said uncertainly: "Skip it, pal. It must be the environment. But I could have sworn you took that olive out of the glass without dunking your fingers in the Martini. It looked as if your hand went right through the bottom of the glass."

"Oh," he smiled, "is that all? It did!"

"It did?" I repeated carefully.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I can do all sorts of things like that—*now*. That's why I came here tonight."

"I wish I knew," I told him, "why I came."

"For instance," he persisted, "would you like me to take your watch without dipping into your pocket? Look!" He slipped off that mitten again. His fingers fumbled gently at the front of my vest—then he pushed his hand back into its covering. Something fluttered to the table. I gulped. And the little man flushed violently. "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"Here!" I snapped. "Gimme that!" I shoved the pawn-ticket back where it belonged. "So it makes with the sleight-of-hand, huh? Listen, wise guy, what are you doing at this gathering of scientists?"

"*If* you please!" His eyes sparkled with mingled petulance and indignation. "I am a scientist, and a greater one than any here. You'll see for yourself when —*aaaah!*"

My gaze followed his to the speakers' table, where the toastmaster was now introducing Sandman Number Two.

"—Dr. Archibald T. Pflueger, recipient of this year's award for Physical Research, will now discuss his concept of Space-Warps and Contiguous Universes. —Doctor Pflueger!"

Dr. Pflueger, two hundred-odd pounds of suet, was a positive soul. His statements began over my head and rapidly went higher. "Those of you," he puffed, "who have read my new paper will grant that I have definitely proven the impossibility of any universe other than that in which we live. Permit me to point out that this refutes the fantastic theories of our erstwhile colleague, Dr. Philomen Fuddle. Moreover, it clearly indicates my reasoning to be—"

"A medley," interrupted a high, clear voice beside me, "of myopic dogma, muddy logic and gross stupidity!"

A concerted gasp bounced around the tables like audible confetti. The speaker's larynx scuttled with all adjectives aboard. A voice cried, "It's Fuddle!" and a dozen more repeated the cry. The toastmaster's gavel beat the tempo for the pedagogical jam session.

But my little companion Fuddle didn't turn a hair. Face pale but determined, he drew himself up to his full five feet three and waved his curiously mittened paw for silence. He got it finally. Then he spoke.

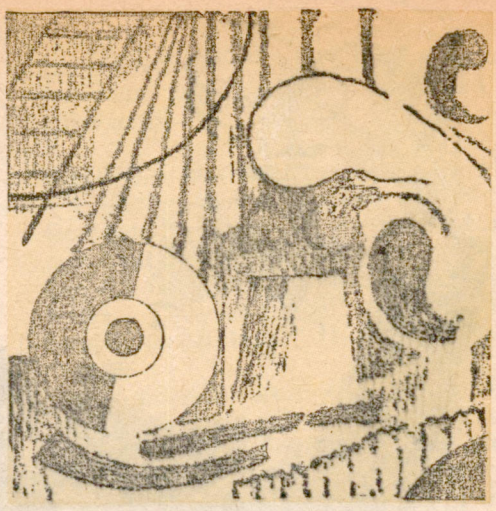
"Mr. Toastmaster, gentlemen—" He moved forward with the words until he was in the center of the hall. "Two years ago, before this group, I was ridiculed for presenting a theory that there might be other life-sustaining universes contiguous with our own.

"Since then, Dr. Pflueger has presented a mathematical refutation of my claim—"

Pflueger regained enough breath to blurt out: "Indeed yes, Fuddle! Your theory was preposterous. My analysis of the *n* characteristics of hyperspace clearly demonstrates—"

"Fiddlesticks!" broke in Fuddle. "You have your Nobel ribbon and your rhetoric, Pflueger. I offer *proof!*" He paused a moment, then dramatically unveiled his right hand. "Above and about me, gentlemen," he said, "you see but empty air. I contend, however, that this space is occupied—on another dimensional plane—by a world similar to our own. I shall now, to convince you, thrust my hand into this world—"

HIS bare hand was a whitish blur from where I sat. But I saw him move it upward and forward into the air with a brief, wriggling motion—and I swear it looked as if it had disappeared up to the wrist! Then he lowered his arm, and from his palm tumbled a handful



of small pebbles and twigs! He looked a little embarrassed.

"Sandy loam," he muttered thoughtfully. In a vast, incredulous silence he took a few steps forward; then again he thrust his hand upward. This time a triumphant smile cracked his lips. "Behold, gentlemen!" he said—and opened his hand.

A small purple lizard with red legs and blue wings plopped to the floor with a squishy thud, darted once around in a circle, and scuttled for the darkness of a corner.

Somebody yelled. Somebody else yelled louder. A strangled gasp annoyed my eardrums till I found out I was doing the gasping. Two graybeards dived under their table after the lizard-creature; the winner emerged croaking:

"Amazing! Incredible! This is no recognized member of the genus *Lacertilia*—"

Pflueger, his face the color of a crosstown bus, drowned the babble with his bellow. "Quackery! Sheer quackery! I'll teach you to interrupt me, Philomen Fuddle!" And he made a taurine rush for my little pal, who, smiling complacently, had once again pushed his hand into the nothingness above him.

I yelled: "Look out, Fuddle!" Fuddle glanced up swiftly and warned: "Careful, Pflueger! I've tapped a riv—"

Then Pflueger hit him. Fuddle tumbled backward, his hand jerking from emptiness with a sound like a cow pulling a hoof out of mud. And from a spot six feet above the floor gushed a spout of cold green water!

The hall had been a madhouse before; now it was like Ladies' Day at the ball-

park. Fuddle had uncorked a deluge. In two minutes the floor was an inch deep in water, and the doors were shoulder-deep with assorted scientists who shared but one theorem—*i.e.*, to get the hell out of there.

But I smelled story stuff. That's why I detoured by way of Fuddle, collared the dazed little chap and buffered him through the mob. I caught a taxi outside, and we ended up in my apartment.

AFTER a while he snapped out of it. When a glass of milk had soothed his nerves, he asked: "How about the water, Mr.—"

"Hawley," I told him. "Len Hawley. Your stream is still flowing, Fuddle. I just caught a news-flash. The Fire Department has issued an emergency call for hoses, for bigger buckets, and for plumbers who can weld invisible leaks."

His eyes widened. "Oh, gracious! I must go back right away! I'm the only man alive who can fix—"

"Wait," I advised him. "Let them worry along for a while longer, and maybe they'll withdraw the 'disturbing the peace' warrant that they've issued against you. . . . Anyhow, my comprehension is missing on all eight. How did you do that water trick?"

He made a deprecating gesture with the hand, which, even in the confusion, he had remembered to place back in its mitten.

"You still think it was a trick. But it wasn't; it was a purely scientific experiment, based on sound logic. If they had given me a chance to explain—"

"My mind," I said, "is so open it whistles when the wind blows. Give."

"Well, it all started two years ago. Dr. Pflueger and I argued about the nature of the universe. He claimed it knew but one plane of existence; I contended that the law of probabilities permitted any number of universes adjacent to, though not contingent upon, each other. You understand?"

"Not a word," I told him, "but go on."

"It's very simple, really: Consider the atom, the building-block of all matter, so minute that it cannot be seen. Yet even *it* is more than 99.9 per cent space! To my mind, this indicated that in the interstices of the atom existed planes of existence comparable to our own, but invisible to us. Therefore I poured my savings into the construction of a machine that would open the path to the other world—"

"And," I said, "you built it?"

A soft dream lurked in Fuddle's eyes. "I succeeded," he said, "partially. The instrument I built was successful, but it was not large enough for my main purpose."

"Large enough?" I prodded.

"My invention," explained Fuddle, "translates matter out of our plane of existence and into the neighboring one. It operates both ways. I have pushed through it hundreds of small objects. I have withdrawn from the other world scores of things—the lizard, for example."

I said: "But dammit, Fuddle, you had no machine at the banquet-hall with you. It was your *hand*—"

"Just my right hand. That was an—an accident. I was working with my machine one day,"—the little man looked embarrassed—"and allowed my right hand to be drawn into the magnetic flux-field. Ever since then—well, look!" He

slipped off his odd mitten. This time I saw, at close range and with a swift attack of the mimsies, a swift, shimmering something that should have been his hand. But it looked like no hand I'd ever seen before.

It branched off at the wrist into strange, curling fingers, bending at angles the eyes ached to follow. Fuddle touched my coat. The fingers gave a funny little shrugging twist and melted right through the cloth. Then he withdrew his hand—and in it was my wallet!

I gasped: "Hey! That was in my inside pocket!"

"But of course," he nodded. "Operating in the fourth dimension, my hand knows no material barriers—"

"Fourth dimension!" I wailed. "This is where I get off!" I sat down, quickly, and poured a long stiff one. The liquor took the edges off my duck-bumps, and I spoke almost naturally when I asked Fuddle next: "This discovery of yours—what does it prove, if anything? And what can be done with it?"

AGAIN there crept into his eyes that strange, half-hungry, half-worshipful look. His voice was low as he asked: "Len Hawley—are you satisfied with this world?"

"It's safe—at least on this side of the water," I said. "The one the reverend touts for is an even-money bet. Why?"

"It's a dreadful world, Hawley," Fuddle continued dreamily. "A world of flame and hatred, race persecution, bitterness and strife. A world peopled by megalomaniacs, tyrants, stupid and selfish clods. A world of grief, pain, battle, fear—"

"Oh, I don't know," I defended. "It has its moments: Black Label, the little blonde at the Gingerbread Club, by-lines and aces wired—"

"All my life," whispered Fuddle, "I've dreamed of another world. A better world, where men are clean and fine, noble as the gods they have forgotten. I've longed for a world in which there would be no ugliness, no crime, none of the evils of this civilization. Now—" His eyes lifted to mine rapturously. "Now I have found such a world!"

"The General Motors exhibit?" I guessed. "I liked it too. But you have to wait so long to get in—"

"No, Hawley. The world I mean is at your elbow, is about, around, within you, encompassing you. But you cannot see or feel it, because it is on another plane. It is—the world into which my hand extends.

"There is life there—life like our own, but intelligence far greater and nobler. Theirs is a simple, pastoral existence. Their life is a life of kindness, sweet song and warm sunny days—"

"You talk," I said, "as if you knew these things to be true. But can you prove there's life—over there?"

"My exploring fingers have probed its cool depths. Look, Hawley. I'll try to find evidence from this very room." Once again the mitten was off; again Fuddle the dreamer became Fuddle the prober. His fourth-dimensional paw weaving and glimmering weirdly, he began fumbling around. Suddenly he cried: "Here! I've found something—"

His hand made a swooping gesture too swift for the eye to follow, slipped from view for an instant. When it reappeared, its fingers clutched a soft, filmy bit of cloth. I stared, shocked. It was no fabric I'd ever seen before; its design was uncommon to earthly dressmaking; but its purpose was unmistakable. I said: "Why, Fuddle! Some fourth-dimensional lady is going to hate you!"

The little man was salmon pink. "Oh, my! I didn't mean to do anything like that!" he gasped—and thrust the silken flimsies back toward their portion of empty air. As he did so, his hand seemed to meet something solid; I could see it slide forward as against some curving substance....

Then, *"Oww!"* cried Fuddle—and the panties leaped from his hand. Fuddle, more embarrassed than shocked, stared incredulously at his finger.

"She—she *bit* me!" he wailed.

That was the clincher. That convinced me. I took a last drink and rose.

"You've got a convert, guy," said I. "Let's go fix that leak in the hotel; and then we'll go split a bottle of aspirin."

ON the way to the banquet-hall, Fuddle told me something of his dreams and desires. "I spent the money I had on my small machine. Now I'm trying to raise enough to build a larger one—one in which I can walk through to the other plane."

"And take a chance on meeting that fourth-dimensional gal?" I asked him. "Well, it's *your* neck! But who's subsidizing the new machine?"

He looked a little confused, at that.

"To tell the truth, it's being subsidized by a number of—er—small contributors.

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

"All my life," whispered Fuddle, "I've longed for a world in which there would be no ugliness, no crime. . . . Now I have found such a world!"

You see, it will be expensive. No bank or scientific foundation would lend me the money, so I have had to work the problem out in my own way."

"As, for instance?" I queried. But he wasn't giving out. Then we reached the hotel, and was it a mess! The authorities were willing to forgive and forget anything if Fuddle would just dam that drip. So he wiggled his fingers in the flow for a minute, and that was that.

He went home then, and I went back to the office. The chief was one paroxysm short of a strait-jacket. He saw me and loosed a bleat that shattered two windows.

"Hawley! The whole town's gone nuts about that Nobel uproar, and you let us go to bed without a line! You're fired! No, dammit, take off your coat and get to work—"

I said: "If I'm still working for this lousy sheet, you can have the story for a by-line and a bonus. If I'm not, I'll go across the street and sell it to the *Banner*. Which?"

He said: "Now, Len, you know me. Always kidding. Sit down, son. Want a cigar? Are you comfortable? Shall I send out for some sandwiches?"

So I'm a sucker; so I wrote the story. And it was a whipper. Just as I got it from Fuddle, I told them about the banquet and the lizard, about Fuddle's invention, about the experiment in my apartment—oh, you probably read it. All the news-services grabbed it up, by-line and all.

NEXT morning when I got to the office, I found a pair of 12-D's on my desk and a derby on the back of my chair. Stretched between them sprawled my old pal Harrigan, Detective Sergeant of our flatfoot squad.

I said: "I'm innocent, Harrigan. I've got an alibi. I was out pushing kids in front of trolleys when—"

"Funny man," said Harrigan disapprovingly. "Funny-man Hawley! No, chucklebrain, I come to see you about this." He punched a finger at my Page One yarn. "I wanna see this here, now, Fuddle guy."

"Miracles," I marveled, "never end! A dick who can read! Don't tell me you can add too, Harrigan?"

Harrigan crinkled paper in his coat pocket, brought out a yellow marble and popped it into his maw. That was his weakness, lemon-drops. He worked it around, gulped noisily and said: "Yeah. Wanna hear me? Two and two makes this here Fuddle guy do ten years in hinkey for petty thievery—if that there story of yours is true."

"Petty thievery!" I gasped.

"Yup. Been about forty cases of pick-pocketin' in the past coupla months. Each time the victim says he didn't feel nothin', and his coat wasn't ripped or cut or tore. Now, looks to me like this here Fuddle—"

I remembered, suddenly, old Fuddle's confused explanation that he was getting the money for his experiment from a "number of small contributors." But I starched my voice and said: "Well, I'm not going to take you to him, copper. If you're so damn' clever—"

Harrigan drawled: "I oughta pinch you for obstructin' justice, wise guy. But I won't—because I got an idea this is Fuddle comin' in now."

It was. An anxious look on his face, a copy of the *Bulletin-Times* in one gloved hand, Philomen Fuddle was approaching my desk. He said in a high, excited voice: "I wish you hadn't written this, Hawley. I'm afraid it's going to cause me a lot of trouble—"

And Harrigan rose.

"Beginnin'," he boomed around his lemon-drop, "now! You're under arrest, Dr. Fuddle. Will you come peaceable?"

Harrigan let me come along. He had a small coupé, but I was too bewildered to feel crowded. As we drove to the station-house, I asked: "But why, Fuddle? Why did you steal money? Anyone with your intelligence—"

Harrigan interrupted: "He aint said he done it yet, Hawley. An' anything he says'll be used against him."

Fuddle shrugged dejectedly. "Oh, I'll admit to the charges. But there were extenuating circumstances."

"They," grunted Harrigan, "always is." He flipped another lemon-drop into his jowls. "But like Len, I can't figger why you done it, Doc. A man like you ought to respect law and order."

"I do, ordinarily. But—" That familiar dreamy look stole again into Fuddle's eyes. "I had a vision—and I wanted to convert it into reality. Now! Before it is too late. Before man destroys himself in flame and hate and fire."

Harrigan glanced at me dubiously. "Sees things, huh? Week or two at Bellevue, maybe—"

"No, Officer," said Fuddle wearily, "it's not that. My dream"—he turned to me—"was that I might complete the larger machine of which I told you—enter the other and better world, there create a haven for those members of our world who love peace and beauty.

"I couldn't raise the money any other way. I didn't want to take from honest tradesmen; it would have been easy to lift diamonds from show-windows—but far too unfair; so I stole from those who could afford to donate to science—but wouldn't. You'll find, Officer, all the complainants are men of wealth—"

"ARE you crocked?" demanded Harrigan. "Easy to take diamonds out of windows? Where do you get that stuff, anyway?"

"Show him, Fuddle," I suggested. "He's not a bad guy at heart. Just dumb, like all cops."

"You're *both* crocked!" said Harrigan with conviction. But with curiosity too. At Fuddle's suggestion, he pulled into a quiet side street. Fuddle said nervously: "To be brief, Mr. Harrigan, my fingers are able to penetrate three-dimensional

matter without in any way being injured or injuring the material through which they pass. Thus I stop your car—*so!*"

He whisked off his mitten, pressed his hand right through the dashboard of the coupé. His wrist made a tugging motion. The car coughed, choked—and drifted to a stop.

HARRIGAN gasped, "My Gawd!" and made strangling noises in his throat. Fuddle said mildly: "It was simple, you see. I just disconnected a few wires and— *Len!*"

For Harrigan was still strangling—a mere shock was not responsible for the horrible choking sounds he was emitting; nor was it fright that caused his eyes to bug, his face to purple. He was clawing desperately at the door with one hand; the other was tearing at his throat.

I cried: "One of those lemon-drops, Fuddle! It's stuck in his windpipe!" I made a frantic grab for the door. All I could think of was getting Harrigan out of the car and pounding him on the back to dislodge that sourball—before he passed out. But I'd forgotten about Fuddle. The little man stopped me with a gesture.

"Just a moment, Hawley. It's all right."

He leaned across me; his fingers slipped upward, melting into Harrigan's larynx. Just like that. Then Fuddle moved back again, and the lemon-drop plunked on the floor of the car. Harrigan's breath soughed explosively; his tense body relaxed. He coughed once or twice, then he turned astonished eyes to Fuddle.

"You—you put your hand through my neck—into my throat!"

"Why, yes," said Philomen Fuddle. "It was simple, really. As I told you—"

"You took that thing out. I'd 'a' died," declared Harrigan. "I'd 'a' been stiff as a herrin' in another minute. An' I was was gonna shove you in the jerry!" You could almost hear the rusty cogs of cerebration in his skull. . . . Then Harrigan reached his decision. He opened the door of the car with a hamlike hand. "Get out, Doc!"

Fuddle said: "But—but I don't understand!"

"Beat it!" ordered Harrigan. "Scram. Get out o' town before some other copper gets the same idea I had. I guess them guys you swiped from had too much, anyhow. An' if it hadn't 'a' been for you—well, get goin'!"

Fuddle gasped: "But really, I—"

"Do what he says, Fuddle," I interrupted. "Get out of town. Go ahead with your experiment. Maybe you'll be successful. If you are, let me know. That idea of yours may be crazy, but—another world! A better world! Good luck, Dr. Fuddle."

He slipped from the car then—a wistful wisp of a man, short, pale, quixotic, with one marvelous hand encased in a queer mitten. He turned and waved at the corner.

I never saw him again. But the other night I was reading the AP news as it came in over the teletype, and I saw something that gave me a jolt:

A news item, it was, from L.A., where there was some sort of jewel exhibition being held.

"Police were baffled today," it said, "by the mysterious disappearance of the famous Death's-head Tiara, the value of which is estimated at more than five hundred thousand dollars. This jewel-studded coronet, which historians estimate cost the Empress of Russia the lives of a million subjects, disappeared from a locked and sealed casket in the display-room of the Los Angeles Museum. Expert locksmiths testify that the seals were neither broken nor the locks tampered with.

"Detectives are also seeking information as to the whereabouts of one P. Fiddle, a night watchman on duty when the diadem vanished. It is feared that the thief or thieves may have done away with Fiddle."

FIDDLE? They never spell things right. Anyway, I showed the clipping to Harrigan. We had a long talk about it over sweating steins at Joe's Place. Maybe it was the beer, or maybe I've always figured Harrigan wrong. Anyway, his opinion startled me.

"I hope it *was* him, Len," he said gravely. "I hope it was him, and that now he's got enough dough to make that gadget of his'n work. Because—well, he was a nice little guy. He saved my life. And besides—that other world that he was talkin' about, it was a good kind of a world.

"Peace. No wars. Clean people, livin' cleanly. I hope he does make it. An' that if he does, he'll come back to let us know what he found—over there."

But we haven't heard anything yet. I'm waiting and wondering and hoping, myself.

When

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

The Story Thus Far:

ON my way to a holiday motor-trip in France, that fateful summer of 1939, I chanced to do a service for a fellow-traveler, a lovely girl named Katharine. We were to meet next morning after the Channel crossing, but she gave me the slip. And George Laking, who was to share the trip, sent a message that he'd been delayed, but would join me later.

Killing time, I wandered that evening into a strange café, and there was Katharine sitting at a table with a group of evil-looking men.

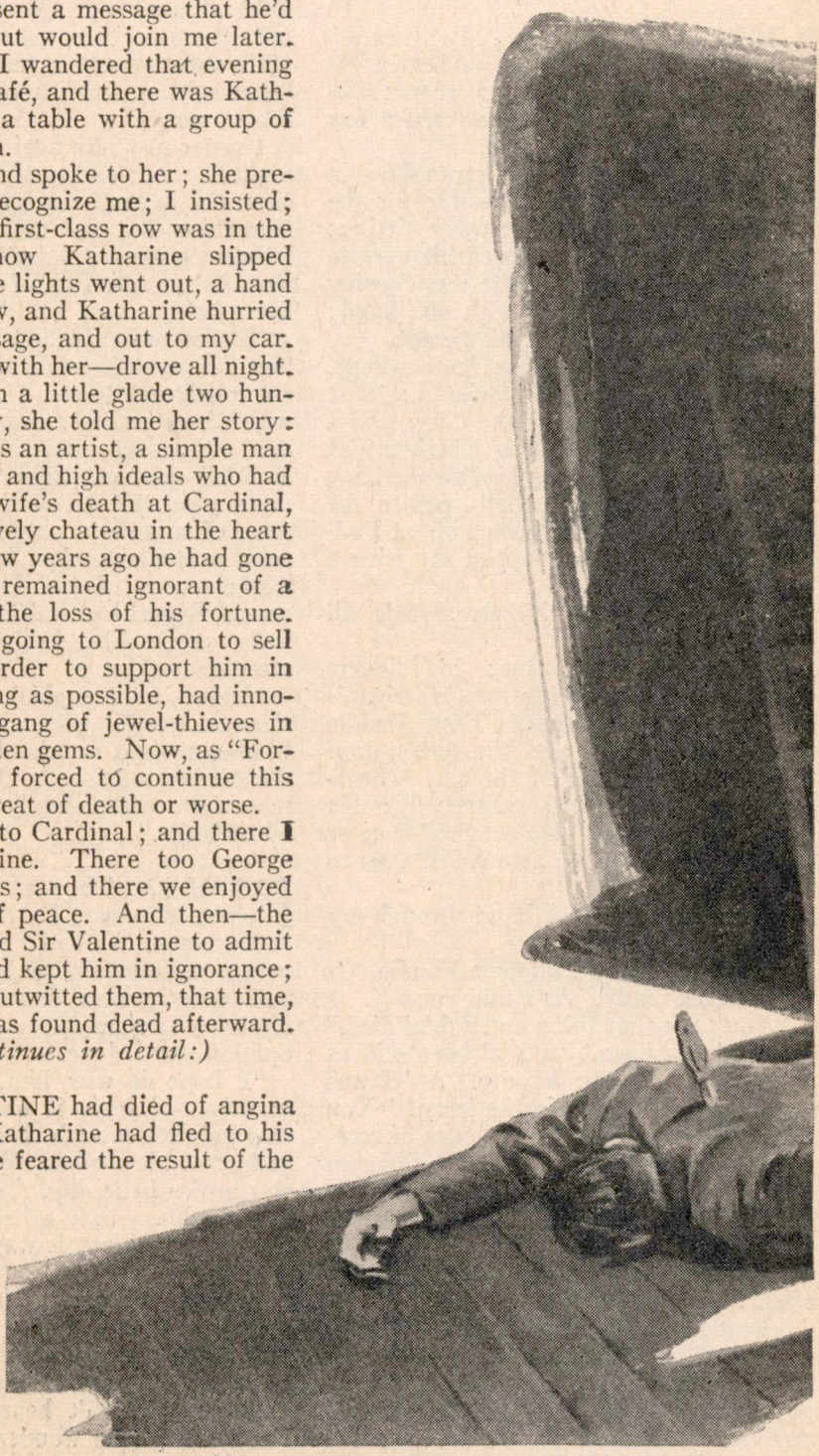
I went over and spoke to her; she pretended not to recognize me; I insisted; and presently a first-class row was in the making. Somehow Katharine slipped away. Then the lights went out, a hand caught my elbow, and Katharine hurried me down a passage, and out to my car.

I drove away with her—drove all night. Next morning in a little glade two hundred miles away, she told me her story:

Her father was an artist, a simple man of fine character and high ideals who had lived since his wife's death at Cardinal, a quaint and lovely chateau in the heart of France. A few years ago he had gone blind. Yet he remained ignorant of a later disaster: the loss of his fortune. For Katharine, going to London to sell her jewels in order to support him in ignorance as long as possible, had innocently aided a gang of jewel-thieves in transporting stolen gems. Now, as "Formosa," she was forced to continue this career under threat of death or worse.

We drove on to Cardinal; and there I met Sir Valentine. There too George Laking joined us; and there we enjoyed a day or two of peace. And then—the enemy persuaded Sir Valentine to admit them, for we had kept him in ignorance; and though we outwitted them, that time, Sir Valentine was found dead afterward. *(The story continues in detail:)*

SIR VALENTINE had died of angina pectoris. Katharine had fled to his side because she feared the result of the



His body fell forward—to show us the man who had killed him, standing framed in the doorway.

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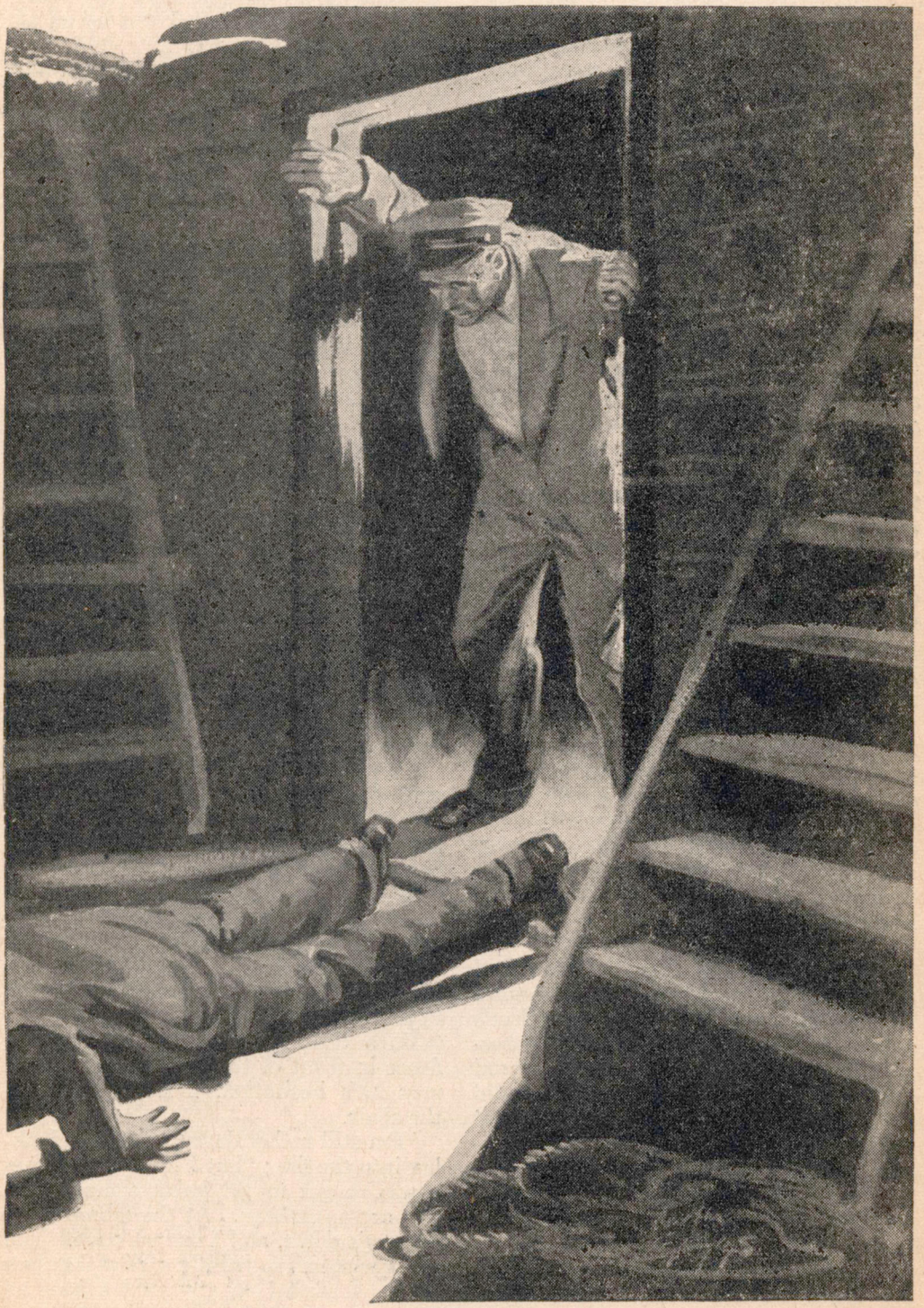
the Devil Drives

By DORNFORD YATES



energy he had shown—and her fear had been justified. Somehow her father had managed to bolt the guard-room door, and had then succumbed to a savage attack of pain. This had been so relentless that when it passed, the giant was a dying man; though he survived to whisper that all was well, and smile at the way in which he had sped his guests, one minute later he died in his daughter's arms.

And there I will leave a matter which I would give much to forget, for though I have come to see that I cannot fairly be charged with Sir Valentine's death, at the time I felt wholly to blame.

Indeed, I had no more heart for the fight which we had begun, and was only thankful to think that the Shepherd and Judas were gone. I supposed that they would return—eventually: but George's terrible news had thrust them into the background, as nothing else could have done. The man was dead for whose sake his gallant daughter had sowed the wind: and now she must reap the whirlwind, although her objective was gone. . . .

It was well for us that the enemy made no move for the next three days; for if we still took precautions, we took a good many risks; but we did what had to be done—and hoped for the best.

Three times, on Katharine's business, George and I visited Cruise; and when the funeral took place on the second day, no one, I think, would have dreamed that two of the principal mourners were themselves in danger of death. The service was held in the chapel of which its faithful master had been so proud, and from there he was taken down to the little churchyard and laid to rest in the shade of an English oak. Every man and woman of Cardinal shared in this simple rite, and most of them were in tears, because they had seen the last of a saint who had been their friend.

EXCEPT for this hour or so, I had hardly set eyes upon Katharine since she had risen and fled from the officer's room; for she had all her meals by herself, and saw no one at all but Conrad and, once or twice, George. Neither did she appear the following day. She spent some time, I know, in Sir Valentine's private rooms, and she walked on the ramparts that evening when dusk came in: but though she sent us word that she was perfectly well and that we were to give the servants what orders we pleased, she did not ask to see us; and we, of course, took care to respect her privacy. . . . But each night, though she did not know it, I slept across her doorway, with a pistol close to my side.

So three full days went by, while Katharine mourned in secret and the enemy left us alone.

THOUGH I had been fast asleep, the creak of an opening door was more than enough. In a flash I was up on an elbow and ready to act.

And then I saw that the door that had moved was my lady's.

It swung open, and she was standing there, torch in her hand.

"I'm not in your way," I said quickly as I got to my feet and stood back against the wall.

She put out the torch and stood framed in the little doorway against the gentle glow of some light in her room—a slight figure, swathed in a dressing-gown.

"I couldn't sleep," she said slowly. "D'you do this every night?"

"I've done it lately," I said.

"And I never knew. It's very sweet of you, Esau; but I'm in no danger here."

"I like," I said, "to have you under my hand."

"Don't stand on the stone," she said. "Have you no slippers here that you can put on?"

I stooped and put on my slippers and then my dressing-gown.

"That's better." She turned on her heel. "Come and sit by the fire—and we'll talk, if you're not too tired."

Without a word, I followed her into her room.

I could not see this well, for the walls were dark; and the only light there was was that of a shaded lamp which was burning beside her bed; but a slow wood-fire was glowing upon a spacious hearth, beside which a deep armchair was taking visible shape. The windows being wide open, the room was fairly alive with the cool night air just tempered by the fire.

"You sit in the chair," said Katharine. "I'd rather sit on the rug."

With that, she took her seat on the fleece in front of the hearth, and after a moment's hesitation, I let myself into the chair.

"I'm still rather dazed," she said, looking into the fire; "but I know that somehow I've got to get going again. In a day or so, perhaps. At the moment my battery's down, and I cannot start. You see, life seems so pointless, now that he's dead. I can't help you, and I have no longer a reason for helping myself. For-

mosa's occupation's gone. He was her *raison d'être,* and now he is dead."

"He saved the game," I said. "I think he would turn in his grave, if after his sacrifice we went and threw it away."

Katharine pushed back her hair.

"Perhaps. I don't know. I find it so very hard to care any more. Don't think I don't love you, my blessed, because I do. But I don't seem very successful in things I undertake, and—"

"You can say that of me," I said, "but not of yourself. You added three years to his life—three happy, care-free years. But I—didn't add: I only took away."

Her head was round in a flash.

"What nonsense, Esau! How can you say such a thing? My dearest boy, you were only a cog in the wheel. I don't even blame the Shepherd for—for what occurred. Which brings me back to the point, for I didn't bring you in here to talk about him: I'm not too good, for the moment, as you can guess. Besides, I've lawyers to see, and I've got to mop up. But I'd like to know what is happening. I've been hit over the heart, and that organ is numb: but as I said once before, I don't want you to be hurt."

"Nothing is happening," I said, "so far as I know. And I've learned my lesson, all right. I'm not forcing any more issues. But because I sit still, don't think I'm letting up. I don't want to leave you just now though; if I did, I should be so worried that I should make some mistake. The last time we drove to Cruise, I was beside myself till we got back."

"But Esau, I'm safe enough here. Of course, in a sense, this place is a trap; and if they can shut its mouth—well, you will be done. As I said just now, I don't know what to advise; but I think that your forte is movement; and I feel, when you're sitting still, that you're playing their game."

There was a little silence.

SHE was right, of course; and I knew it. The line I had taken before was the line to take now. We were at home in the country, but the enemy was not—the Shepherd crawling through bracken would have been matter for mirth. And Judas belonged to the gutter—not to the ditch. And yet—

I did not want to leave Katharine, and that is the whole of the truth.

"I feel," I said, "that we should keep together, you and I. I can't tell you why; but I do not like the idea of splitting our force."

"But I'm not a force, Esau. I doubt if I ever was; and now I'm a broken reed. If the Shepherd walked into this room, I shouldn't get up. We've been through so much together that now, when I'm not with you, you imagine vain things. With Conrad here and everything shut and barred—"

"I know," I said, "I know. But sooner or later, my lady, the Shepherd is coming back. And if you're to be in when he calls—well, I don't want to be out."

ANOTHER silence. Then—

"I can't argue with you," said Katharine. "I can only repeat that I think you're playing his game. I'm sure he's doing something; and I think you should make an attempt to find out what it is."

"I'll talk to George," I said. "Perhaps, if he stayed with you—"

"No, no. You can't do that. To go out alone would be madness."

"Tomorrow morning—*this* morning, I'll have it all out with George."

She sighed, as though with relief.

"That's right," she said. And then, "If only things were different, I'd ask you to take me away for a three-weeks' change. I wish I could explain how I feel. I want to go to sleep and never wake up any more. But if I could go away, with you to look after me, I think in a little I'd be myself again."

"Why don't you do it, my darling? Leave for Marseilles tomorrow and there take ship? We can go to Colombo or somewhere, and the Shepherd can go to hell."

Her gaze was fast on the fire.

"Ah, if we could, my blessed! But that's no good, because, if we got away, we should have to come back. And when we came back—well, he would be waiting for us. And one day you would go out—and never come in."

"Let's chance it, Katharine. Joseph can stay here with Conrad, and George will clean everything up. If we disappear—"

"Esau, do realize this—that we can't disappear. The Shepherd means to have us; in less than twenty-four hours, he'd be on our trail, and we should be hunted down. It is his job to know things. Accurate information is just the breath of his life. And he pays well—by results."

"I don't care. Let's go. The future can shift for itself."

Very slowly she shook her head.

"Don't tempt me, Esau," she said. "I'm not fair game. Our only chance

For the next four hours we sat listening, observing: Tears and laughter, furtive communi-

now—and you know it—is to stand where we are and fight. It's more than three days since they went; and the Shepherd may have decided to bide his time. He's bound to win, if he does. . . . In fact, as I see it, he's bound to win anyway. You and I are—well, out-ranged, Esau. A motorboat can't take on a battle-fleet."

I put my arms about her and held her close.

"Courage, darling," I whispered. "The boat holds two."

"But one's no good, Esau. What is it like to be loved by someone who's short of a heart?"

Her head came to rest on my shoulder —and soon, I found that she was asleep!

TWENTY-FIVE hours had gone by. George and I, crouching close to the crossroads, were using our eyes and ears.

cations, sudden brawls, spurts of temper, treacherous advances—all these we witnessed.

We had left the castle at nightfall, after a peaceful day. I had seen that the gate and the postern-door were locked and barred, and Conrad and Joseph were doing night-watchmen's duty until we got back. One was patrolling the castle and paying special attention to Katharine's whereabouts, while the other was stationed in the pantry, ready to let us in whenever we should return. I had not dared leave them a pistol; but each was armed with a hammer, which he was to use at sight. And Katharine had promised to stay in Sir Valentine's study until she retired.

Rain had fallen gently the whole of the day, to cease when dusk had come in; and when we had started out, a clean-cut moon was shedding a powerful light. This stood us in excellent stead, for while we kept to the shadows, we could observe our surroundings almost as though it

were day. We had been out for six hours, but though we had covered the whole of the ground we knew, we had seen or heard no sign of the men we sought.

First we had gone to Ousse.

As I have said before, after Sir Valentine's death we had driven three times to Cruise, and though I was ready to swear that we were never followed on leaving town, I could not be sure that we had not been seen. If the Cardinal road was watched, the Shepherd must be aware that the car was outside the castle when not in use—not only outside the castle, but garaged somewhere at hand, yet clear of the Cardinal road. Once he possessed this knowledge, his discovery of the Lowland would be but a matter of hours. And that would be serious; for if the car was a prize, the path from Ousse to the castle would presently be known to him.

It follows that, making for Ousse, we used the greatest caution the whole of the way; but when at last we got there, the padlock which kept our barn was fast to its chain; and when I put a torch to a crevice, I saw my faithful car standing silent inside.

This was a vast relief. And when I remembered how we had gone forth in broad daylight, to spend, on one occasion, an hour in the market-town in which the Shepherd was lodged, I felt that his secret service left something to be desired. Be that as it may, we had got away with the risks which we had to take, and the secret which meant so much was still inviolate.

Thereafter we lost no time in returning to Cardinal. Since we could answer for Ousse, we meant to go on; but as we must go by the castle to gain the valley below, we stopped for a moment to make sure that all was well. We had given our usual signal, and one minute later Conrad had lowered the bar. He had said that all was quiet, that Joseph was on patrol, that my lady was still at work in Sir Valentine's room.

With this for comfort, I had led the way down to the valley, over the moonlit meadows and up through the hanging woods. And now the dawn was coming; and still we had the world to ourselves.

"NOBODY is here," breathed George. "I'll lay to that. No man born of woman can stay without moving a muscle for twenty minutes of time."

I fingered my chin.

"They may have withdrawn," I said. "But in that case I cannot believe they have left no one to see what we do."

"We may have missed him," George said. "They may have a post closer in."

"The gap in the woods," said I, "is the only place. And I'll swear by fire and water there's nobody there."

"And the woods behind the castle?"

I shook my head.

"There's only the path to Ousse, and we've accounted for that. A man posted there could see nothing. There's nothing to see."

"Except," said George, "our private way in and out."

"That's quite true," said I. "But if a post had been there, I should have been —well—disposed of, fully six hours ago."

George drew in his breath.

"I'm glad to know," he said, "that you realize that. I've taken some plunges to date, but leaving that casement tonight made my blood run cold."

"I was glad to get it over," I said. "I'll give you that. And I didn't like our ramble to Ousse. Katharine's perfectly right. When you're dealing with people like this, it's a damned unpleasant position to be out of touch."

George shrugged.

"It looks as though we'd got to endure that state. If you want my private opinion, the Shepherd's sheered off. I don't say he won't come back, but I think your tactics showed him that he was out of his depth. The loss of his car was the very hell of a jar, and—I don't know how far he walked, but I'll lay he was sick of life when he rolled into Cruise that night. And then, again, he'd fired on a *grand seigneur*. . . . A sewer-rat can do his stuff in the place to which he belongs; but let him loose in the country, and even a terrier-puppy can show him where he gets off."

"Well, I don't know," I sighed. "All I can say is that if I were in his place, I'd have Cardinal watched. And now we'd better get back. I think next time we'd better go out by day."

"Yes, but not by that window," said George. "It's bad enough by night, with Joseph squirting his torch all over the place. But by day—no, thank you!"

"You don't seem to fancy that spot."

"I'll say you're right," said George. "And I'll tell you why. Because it is one of those places which favor the early bird. A little sward, entirely surrounded by foliage, except for the castle wall. The spot to shoot a spy in, at daybreak!"

"You're making me uneasy," said I,

and glanced at the east. "Come on. Let's get back." We turned. "And before we go in, we'll comb that surrounding foliage for early birds. The light ought to be just right an hour from now."

As we made our way over the meadows, the castle above us might have been drawn in pencil, and color was creeping into the topless woods.

Because it was sunk in the trees, the path which led up from the meadows was still somewhat dim, but the light there was more than enough to tell me whose body was lying six paces ahead.

Conrad had fallen face downward, full in the way.

AS I turned the butler over, he cried out and opened his eyes.

"My leg, sir—it's broken! . . . I slipped and fell. I was going to rouse the village. The blackguards are in."

"God Almighty," I cried. "And Joseph?"

"I think he's dead, sir. He's lying outside the window. I didn't stop to see."

Somehow I framed my next question—just two words long.

"Miss Katharine?"

"God knows, sir. I know they were with her—I heard the Shepherd speaking. That's how I knew they were in."

I remember shaking my head, as a man who has come to the surface wishes to shake the water out of his eyes and ears.

"But how did they enter? By the window?"

"I think so now, sir. I can't see no other way. They must have given your signal."

As I started up, George caught my arm.

"Steady, Thunder," he said. "If you rush in, you'll buy it—*just as they mean you to.*"

"But—"

"Hear his tale first," said George. "I'll watch while he puts you wise."

With that, he drew his pistol and moved to a bend in the path a short distance ahead.

"WHEN did this happen?" I asked.

"Just after midnight, sir. Joseph was in the pantry; I'd been down to the courtyard, to look at the gate. I came back by way of the terrace, under Sir Valentine's room. And then I heard him speaking: 'I should like to see the butler,' he said. 'D'you think he'd come if we rang?' 'He happens to be out,' said Miss Katharine. 'Oh, no, he isn't,' said the Shepherd. 'Messrs. Solan and Laking are out—we saw them go. And we saw them return—from Ousse—*and have a word with the butler,* before they went on.' Well, I knew I could do no good, sir, if they were looking for me; so I thought I'd best make for the village and give the alarm; an' I thought that Joseph was somewhere—until I got out. An' then I tripped over his body, down in the grass. So, though they'd put the bar back, they must have come in that way. But I hadn't hardly got on to the path itself, when I slipped in the wet and come down on the root of a tree. That was way back, that was. I've crawled as far as this. I ought to have stayed, of course. I can see that now. But I didn't run out of fear, sir. I thought if I raised the village—"

"That's all right," I said somehow. "You'll have to stay here for the moment."

With that, I went on up to George. As I took my pistol out—

"They came in by the window," I said. "They gave our signal and entered just after twelve. I'm going up to see if the bar is in place—"

"Steady, Thunder," said George.

"Why did I leave her?" said I. "Can you tell me that? My instinct told me not to—it's told me not to for days."

"If the window's open—" said George, with his hand on my arm.

"I'm going in," said I. "You'll stand by and cover my entrance, as well as you can."

Perhaps two minutes went by before I could see the sward, and beside it, the castle wall. And then I saw Joseph's body, asprawl on the dripping turf.

Two more cautious steps. . . . Then I saw that the window was open—that the movable bar had been dropped.

George never covered my entrance—he had no time. I was up and had entered the passage before he could think. My one idea was to reach Sir Valentine's room.

I think I tried to go quietly—I cannot remember well. But the corners and bends were so many that I could have been shot dead a score of times. Yet no one fired upon me, and after what seemed a lifetime, I came to the elegant doorway, to see that the oak was shut.

For an instant I listened at the keyhole, but heard no sound. Then I lifted the latch, flung the door wide open and leaped to one side. The precaution was needless, for nobody was within.

The crimson curtains were drawn and

the lights were on, and a huddle of ash still glowed where a log had been.

For a moment I stood looking around. Then, because the windows were open, the breeze of dawn fluttered in and out of the chamber, to set the curtains swaying and carry a sheet of notepaper down to my feet. I picked it up and read:

Dear Mr. Solan:

Charming as I find these surroundings, I decided some days ago that, for the settlement of our dispute, a city was really the most appropriate place. That you will approve this decision is too much to hope, but I have prevailed upon Miss Scrope to return with me to the scene of our misunderstanding some ten days ago.

Youth is naturally impulsive: age alone sees the value of holding its hand. But you made me feel young this evening, more than once. It would have been so easy to—have things out. But, you know, I think I was right. I nearly always am.

Miss Scrope is really sailing for South America this time—probably some day this week.

Chapter Nine

THREE frantic hours had gone by, before George and I were ready to leave for Ousse.

Joseph, who had been drugged, was almost himself again. The man had nothing to tell, except that our signal had been given, and when he had lowered the bar, a cloth had been clapped over his face. He must, I think, have leaned out, when I did not appear; but that he could not remember.

We had got Conrad in and had sent for the village doctor to set his leg. And then putting Joseph in charge, we had thrown a few things together and taken some bread and cheese with us, to eat as we went.

Either because I was tired, or else because my brain no longer deserved that name, it never entered my head that the Lowland might no longer be standing where I had seen her last.

In fact, she was—what was left of my faithful car. But that was not worth taking up. The flames which had destroyed her had also destroyed the barn. The roof had, of course, fallen in, and she was more or less buried beneath a welter of slates.

I cannot remember returning to Cardinal; I think George had hold of my arm, and a peasant was stumbling behind us, raving that he was ruined, and reciting the fabulous offers which he had refused for some building which now had no value at all.

ROUEN was hotter than ever, when George and I climbed out of the Gournay bus. It was the hour of sundown, after a sweltering day, and we had not bathed or shaved for forty-eight hours. This, of design. We hoped to escape recognition. It was our only chance.

Our overalls were filthy; our shoes would have been rejected by any tramp; our hands were ingrained with grease and our hair was clipped to the scalp. If we had been followed to Paris, I think that in that city we must have been lost; for we parted company there, and each devoted two hours to seeking to cover his tracks. We had traveled by different trains to Gournay-en-Bray, and from there taken bus to Rouen, a matter of thirty miles. I cannot think what I looked like; but few, I think, would have dreamed that George was not what he seemed—a cheerful French mechanic who thought himself lucky if he had enough to eat.

Our object, of course, was to find out where Katharine was lodged, and we hoped to do this by picking up one of the gang and trailing him home. Approach the Wet Flag we dared not, for all its environs were sure to be closely watched, and though I felt pretty sure that we could pass in a crowd, we could not, I think, have survived a deliberate scrutiny.

How slight was our chance of success, we were well aware. Yet no other course was open, for I had been led to Rouen just as a beast is led to the abattoir. Cardinal was not convenient—one does not slaughter a beast on the lawn of a country-house; but Rouen, with its slums and its river, was almost ideal: a man could disappear there—be sunk without trace. And since, to save Katharine, I must preserve my life, I could only endeavor to see before I was seen.

Of seeing the Shepherd or Judas, we had but slight hope, for they were not likely to favor the places to which we could go; but both of us knew Satan, and George would know the fellow who had followed him down to Cruise.

So, using the meaner streets, we made our way down to the quay, and when the light was failing, we entered a low-class bar. . . . It was the first of many.

My lady's door swung open. . . . "I'm not in your way," I said quickly.

For the next four hours we passed from bar to café, and café to bar. Sometimes we sat out of doors, just clear of the glare of some light, observing the passers-by as well as such as entered and left the house; and sometimes we sat indoors, with our backs to a wall, always watching the door and listening to conversations conducted by the scum of the earth. Tears and laughter and gambling, furtive communications and sudden brawls, reasonless spurts of temper and maudlin charity, treacherous advances, blackmail and sometimes a rough good-

will—all these things we witnessed that sultry night: and we saw a thief sell two watches which he had stolen that day, and two women empty the pockets of a man who was lolling between them, the worse for drink.

I wish to do Rouen no injustice. The lees of any great city are always vile. That we saw as much good as evil is probably true; but I remember the evil, because that night we were looking for evil men. . . .

Supposed to be German-Swiss, I spoke only with George; but George spoke with all and sundry, if ever it seemed convenient for him to open his mouth. I seldom understood what he said, but five times out of six he made those who heard him laugh, which proves, I think, the perfection with which he played out his part. Indeed, he carried the whole of our sordid performance; I only grunted and did as he said. He spat and picked his teeth and rolled his own cigarettes; and when I would have bought some, because I had not mastered the art, he would not let me do so, but gave me gum to chew.

It was half-past one next morning before we threw in our hand; since we could not endure to sleep in the only quarters which would have become our estate, we made our way out of the city and lay down beneath a hedgerow.

IF George slept, I cannot tell; but though I certainly rested, I never closed my eyes. I saw the stars in their courses and a clear moon's leisurely progress over a velvet sky; I saw the heaven paling before the dawn, and marked the ageless flourish proclaiming the rise of sun; but to me the pageant was only a sluggard clock, to tell me when Rouen would wake and her streets be busy enough to let us tread them again.

To tell the truth, I was desperate; and when I thought of my darling, I was possessed. I could have moved mountains, if mountains had stood in my way; I would have jumped at murder, if that would have served my turn; but all my strength was useless, my resolution futile, my eagerness vain: the strong man armed could do nothing to save his soul. Sometimes I saw her locked in some shuttered room, with Satan to bring her food and leer at the lovely ghost that sat so still; sometimes I saw her free, but in some vile apartment that knew no air, with the Shepherd discoursing of the folly of trying to frustrate his schemes; sometimes I saw her in a cabin, whose portholes would not open, whose bell was answered by a negro. . . .

There a black wave would seem to rise in my brain; when it had curled and broken, and I could think straight again, my muscles were taut and cracking, and the sweat was out on my face.

There was nothing to be done—nothing. I could only keep my distance—because if I were taken, then she would be left to her doom.

THAT day we tramped the streets until noon, ceaselessly watching for one of the men we sought; but if they were out and about, we never saw them; and though we paid special attention to the hotel I had used, no one that we could see was watching that house.

After breaking our fast at a café which hardly deserved that name, we walked along the quays, because, to tell the truth, I could not sit still. Here we were presently offered a few hours' work—the job, in fact, of helping to coal some ship; and since I had little hope of finding our men by day, and anything was better than waiting for night to fall, I nodded to George to take it, and then began to wonder if I had made a mistake.

In fact, the work did us good; and when we came for our money at six o'clock, the boss offered to take us on for a month. George thanked the fellow, but said we were going to sea and were hoping to work our passage to Buenos Aires, that I had a brother there in the motorcar trade, who had promised, if we could get there, to set us both up. Then he asked for the name of some vessel bound for that port, but the fellow shrugged his shoulders up to his ears, said he had coaled such ships when working at St. Nazaire, and remarked that a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush.

So once again we drew blank.

But one thing we had achieved: and that was such a disguise that had I accosted the Shepherd and clapped him upon the back, I cannot believe he would have known who I was. We wiped some dust from our faces and rinsed our hands, because if we had not done so, we should have been turned away from the lowest bar; but the stain of the coal remained, and when I saw myself in a mirror, I thought it was somebody else.

Perhaps because they were not by the waterside, the bars we frequented that night were not so crowded or noisy as those of the night before. They were

smaller, less blatant haunts, where men put their heads together and some looked over their shoulders before they spoke. This made me feel that we were on promising ground; but the rooms were so poorly lighted—perhaps, of design—that sometimes we could not be sure of a man sitting back in the shadows, until he got up. It follows that our progress was slow, and midnight was striking before we had got very far.

In fact, at that very hour we were badly delayed. The bar we were using was narrow and shaped like the letter L, and since the angle tables were all of them occupied, we were forced to put up with a place from which one arm of the L was wholly out of our sight. If, therefore, we were to answer for the customers out of our view, we could only sit still where we were until they came out; for we were not far from the door, and they would have to file by us to reach the dark, cobbled alley in which the establishment stood. And this, after consultation, we had decided to do, because we both of us felt that the farther end of this bar afforded the very seclusion which our men were likely to choose. We had, of course, made our way up there when we had entered the house, but a waiter had met us to say that that end was full; and that had made us wonder whether we had not stumbled upon a cheap edition of the Wet Flag itself.

WE sat there for fifty minutes, and might very well have sat there till closing time, if a drunken Frenchman had not put a spoke in our wheel.

We had hardly been accosted that evening, until he appeared from nowhere and asked for a light; that was well enough; but when we had given him one, he sat himself down at our table and called for wine. Since drunken men are touchy, we drank with him; but though George spoke him politely, he only stared in reply and began to talk to himself.

This would not have mattered, if he had not raised his voice, but after a little, heads began to come round and people began to smile, and before five minutes had passed, our table was the cynosure of every eye.

So far as I could make out, his talk was all of women whom he had known, and the memories seemed to afford him more pleasure than pain, for more than once he laughed till he spilled his wine; then he would pull himself up and look defiantly round, as though not he, but some other, had found his reminiscence matter for mirth.

At last I could bear it no longer; I glanced at George; but when we got to our feet, the drunkard rose too as though he belonged to our party, and we all passed out together into the ill-lighted alley of which I have spoken before.

GEORGE and I walked briskly, but could not shake the man off, for when he found we were gaining, he broke into a shambling trot. This made me ripe for assault, for so long as the brute was with us, we could not possibly enter another bar; yet take to our heels we dared not, because a running man is bound to attract the attention of anyone there to see; and though the alley was deserted, the street at its end was not. Indeed, I had just decided that we must round on the fellow and have things out, when to my complete amazement, he spoke in excellent English, giving voice to the following words:

"Don't look round, you two: but when you come to the corner, turn to the left; then carry straight on, till you see the cathedral ahead. I'll join you there, in the *place,* five minutes from now; that'll give you time to clear out, if you don't want to see me again; but since we're all three English, we might be able to help one another along."

With that, I think he fell back, but in any event at the corner he turned to the right, and we walked on alone till we saw the cathedral ahead.

"What about it, Thunder?" asked George.

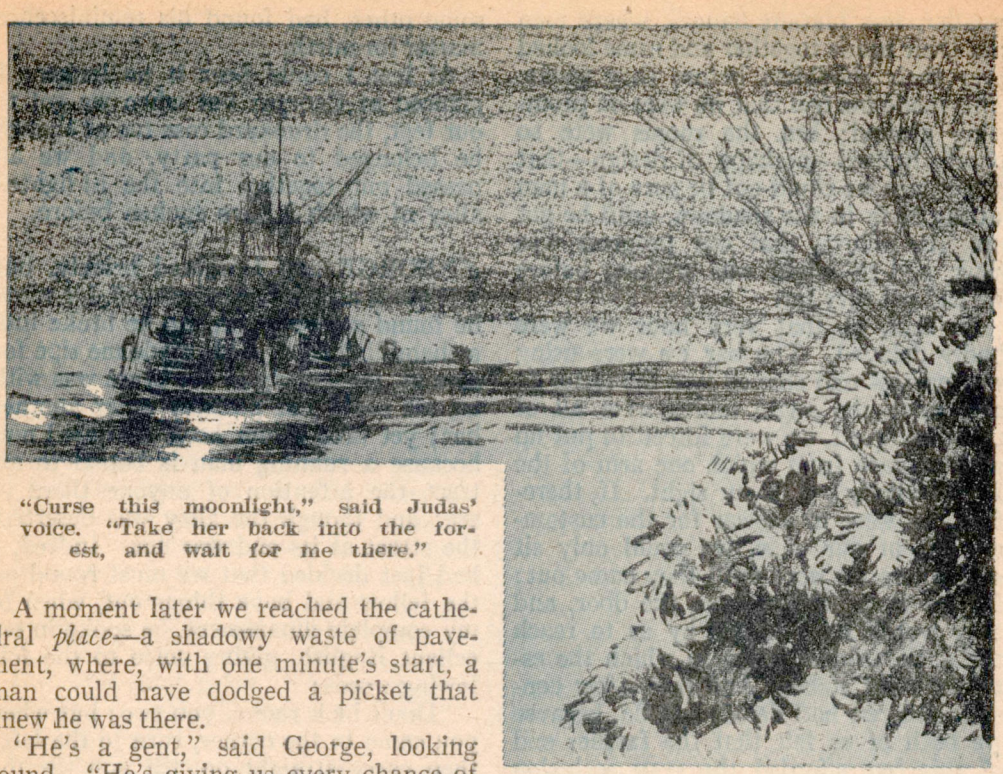
"We stay," said I. "We wait and see this fellow who's found us out. God knows what he's doing, or who he is, but he doesn't sound like a policeman, and he doesn't talk like a crook; and if he can solve a problem as well as he plays a part—"

"And there you're right," said George. "I could have sworn that he came out of Marseilles. He had a trick of speaking—"

"It shows what we're fit for," I sighed. "But the point is this: He's probably purely curious; and when he hears what I tell him, he'll give us a tip or two and leave it at that. But he *might* be willing to help."

"What shall you tell him?" George inquired.

"I'm not sure yet. We'll have to see how he shapes up, before we open our hearts."



"Curse this moonlight," said Judas' voice. "Take her back into the forest, and wait for me there."

A moment later we reached the cathedral *place*—a shadowy waste of pavement, where, with one minute's start, a man could have dodged a picket that knew he was there.

"He's a gent," said George, looking round. "He's giving us every chance of fading away. In fact, unless you want to, we'd better stand under that light."

THE *place* appeared empty. Only the lights of two cafés which stood on its edge suggested life or movement of any kind. Indeed, the effect was eerie, for the moon, which was up, was masked by the great cathedral, so that we were in comparative darkness, while all the world about us was bathed in light: and though we crossed to a lonely lamp, this did its work so badly that we might as well have stayed where we were.

The minutes went slowly by, and I was beginning to think our friend had either missed us or changed his mind, when a figure slouched out of the shadows. Then the same voice spoke quietly:

"Well, that's all right. But let's get out of this glare." He moved toward the cathedral, with us behind. "This'll do for the moment. I don't want to stay here long. And now—my name is Mansel; and I may as well say right out that you interest me. You see, I know nothing about you, and yet you seem to be doing the same as me: Looking out for some person or persons whom you are anxious to spot before they spot you. Then, again, you mean business—as I do. I mean, I think you're both armed. That we're after the same misdemeanant, I can't believe: I want a German called Rudy—a most undesirable man. And here let me say that I've nothing to do with the police. I'm not unknown to them; but I never work for them: I work for myself. You see, I can do rough justice; and that is a thing which the police can never do. Yet very often justice, unless it is rough, can never be done. But perhaps I'm boring you."

"Indeed, you're not," said I. "We're a couple of raw recruits; but—well, we're out to do rough justice, because we can't go to the police."

Mansel regarded me straightly.

"Rough justice," he said, "is sometimes a two-edged sword. I mean, it can't be explained in a court of law."

"I know," I said. "That's a risk I'm ready to take. But I've not got as far as that. I've still got to find my man."

"Sure he's in Rouen?" said Mansel.

"No doubt about that," said I. "He gave me an invitation to come to this town and be killed."

The other nodded. "It's quite a good place," he said, "in which to bump a man off. May I ask why he's done you this honor?"

"Because I know who he is."

"Don't you think the police know?"

I shook my head.

"I happen to know they don't. I really can prove what I say. He belongs to a very good club; but less than a fort-

night ago he received the Rochester diamonds—here in this town."

For fully a quarter of a minute Mansel stood still as death. Then—

"I'm almost afraid," he said, "to ask you his name. In fact, I'd rather not hear it spoken aloud. But if it's the name which I think it may possibly be, Rudy can go to hell and I'll come in with you."

I breathed the name in his ear. . . . I saw him moisten his lips. Then—

"That's right," he said quietly. "By God, my son, I don't wonder he wants your life! The men I've tried to bribe—But I've yet to meet the crook who will give him away."

MANSEL led us out of the city to where his car was waiting to pick him up, and in little less than an hour we three were sitting back in a fine Rolls-Royce, while Carson, Mansel's servant, was whipping us over the roads to a lonely farm.

Since the strain had now been taken, I fell asleep in the car, and can only dimly remember that I was led into a bedroom and shown a bed, upon which, because of my state, I tried to refuse to lie down. But Mansel was giving orders, and George was saying, "He hasn't slept for four days," and the draft between the door and the windows was lifting the little curtains, on which some fable of Æsop was printed in red.

I never woke till noon; but when at last I sat up, George was sitting, smoking, on the foot of my bed. Before I could ask a question, he lifted a hand.

"It's quite all right," he said. "I've had a bath and breakfast, and you're going to have the same. We've got a day off, my boy, and Captain Jonathan Mansel is doing our job."

"But—" I broke in.

"I've put him wise," said George. "He knows the whole of our story from first to last. We talked for two hours last night, and he left at five this morning to get to work. We are to meet him this evening at nine o'clock. And then we shall hear what he's done and what he proposes to do.

"And now get hold of this, Thunder: Our luck has come in with a bang. First and foremost, not only is Mansel an expert at what we've been trying to do, but his astounding efficiency hits you between the eyes. I'll give you a little example:

"Last night I asked him this question. 'How,' I said, 'did you penetrate our disguise?' 'I never should have,' he said. 'When first I saw you, I thought you were what you seemed. But I've studied lip-language a bit; so when you were speaking together, I saw what you said. I tell you it shook me up. French stokers don't use the King's English under their breath.' "

"That's good enough," said I. "I'll say he's the man we want."

"Secondly," said George, "for years it has been his ambition to find the Shepherd out; but he's never been able to place him—nobody has. He knows the Wet Flag—he's been there, but not for the last five years. 'Too dangerous,' he said. 'I should never come out alive.' 'Why isn't it closed?' I asked. 'The police must know.' 'Of course they do,' says he. 'It's a case of live and let live. Hornets will always be, so where's the sense of routing them out of their nest?' "

"And thirdly?" said I.

"Thirdly—the best of all. D'you remember last night he said he was after a man?"

I nodded. "A German, called Rudy. He didn't say what he'd done."

George leaned forward, bright-eyed.

"Rudy's a pillar of the white-slave traffic, Thunder. It follows that Mansel's aware of how that traffic is run. For the last three weeks he's been studying nothing else. All, of course, from Rouen. And though he's yet to meet Rudy, he knows a hell of a lot of what he himself described as 'about the closest borough I've ever tried to survey.' "

I TOOK a deep breath. To say I was thankful, means nothing. Despair had been changed into hope—almost into confidence. The awful weight I had carried was suddenly lifted and gone; and though I was not such a fool as to think the danger was past, I knew that the odds were now even, instead of being so fearful as scarcely worth setting down.

TWO or three moments went by, before I could trust my voice. Then—

"What's Mansel doing now?"

"Locating a vessel," said George. "He knows that white slaves are taken by tender to Havre, and that there they are put on board some South American ship. It's that tender he's out to find; and she's what he calls 'slippery.' She's always moving about—on perfectly lawful occasions, most of the time. This is because of the efforts made to suppress her true trade."

"A blind," said I.

"Exactly. Nobody knows she has a couple of padded cells. But Mansel does; and he knows her name and her shape. He makes it all look very easy. 'Once we've found her,' he said, 'we're practically home—always provided the Shepherd fulfills his threat. And I'm perfectly certain he will. Crooks fight shy of taking a girl for a ride; yet he *must* be rid of her, in case she opens her mouth.' "

" 'Practically home?' " said I, with a hand to my head.

"My very words," said George; "and he smiled in my face. 'The tender,' he said, 'is the hall through which my lady must pass. Very well. We wait in the hall. If the Shepherd sees her off, I make his acquaintance there. If he doesn't, we take her away—and I make his acquaintance later, thanks to the information which she can give.' "

There was one dreadful question I had to put:

"Supposing—she's gone?"

"She can't have. No slaver has touched at Havre for more than a week."

So died the last of my terrors, and though George went on talking, I hardly heard what he said.

After a little, he got to his feet and stretched.

"It's like a Greek play," he yawned, "and Mansel's the god in the car. I tell you, Thunder, I never met such a man. He's an answer for everything; and the moment you hear it, you see that the answer's right. That, of course, is greatness. With it all, he's most unassuming, and begged me to tell you you'd put up a splendid show. 'It was Katharine Scrope,' he said, 'that weighted him out of the race. But for her weight, he would never have taken his toss. I

mean, that goes without saying. But now the tables are turned, and she's round the Shepherd's neck. And her weight will bring *him* down. . . . But if things go as they should, he'll never get up any more.' "

At five minutes to nine that evening the Rolls was stealing down a shadowy lane, when Mansel rose out of some bushes ten paces ahead. As I made to leave the car, he motioned me back; then he spoke a word to Carson and whipped inside.

"Good news," he said quickly. "The tender is down the river—thirty-odd miles by water, but very much less by road. She's moored this side of Caudebec—that's where we're going now. All cats are gray in the dark, but the moon will rise in three hours, and very soon after that, I hope we shall pick her up. Now she's loading at Rouen on Monday—you'll never guess what: French mustard! Well, that made me think at once; for the Argentine is a *gourmet*—he knows how to live. Sure enough, a steamer for Buenos Aires will touch at Havre on Tuesday—that is, in four days' time.

"Now what we cannot tell is when and where the tender will take on her special freight, or in plainer terms, Miss Katharine Scrope will embark. It will certainly be by night, and probably not at Rouen, because for the last two years those who run these cargoes have had to watch their step. It is now in fact, an extremely dangerous game, and the river police at Rouen are not too bad. Everything points to Monday—to Monday night. The tender loads her mustard and pushes off from Rouen, as soon as the sun is low. Havre is eighty miles off and would take her about six hours. If she likes to stop on the way, it's easy enough. But we cannot *bank* upon Monday—because, with two sound-proof cabins which do not appear, she could easily tie up at Rouen with Katharine Scrope on board."

I tried to steady my voice. "She may be on board at this moment?"

MANSEL nodded.

"She may. I don't think it's likely, but still she may. So what we have to do is perfectly clear. First, we have to make sure that she is not on board. Then, having made sure of that, we must never lose sight of the tender until the ship she is serving is under way."

There was a little silence: then—

"Pass," said George quietly, and Mansel laughed.

"Not so hard as it looks," he said. "And I'll tell you another thing. That Fortune favors the bold is perfectly true. I've proved it again and again. If you ride straight for your point, the jade will lead you over the worst of the jumps."

There was another silence. Then I moistened my lips.

"I'd got a speech ready," I said, "for when I saw you again; but now I can only say that if ever in days to come I can be of service to you—well, you've only to let me know it and I'll be there."

A hand came to rest on my shoulder.

"Thank you," said Mansel. "No man can ask more than that. But you mustn't get the idea that you're in my debt. I'm delighted to help you to save such a gallant girl; but you are affording me a chance for which Scotland Yard would pay out five thousand pounds—a chance of taking a dean of the underworld."

A QUARTER of an hour went by before Carson slowed up, and we left the car where three ways met in a wood.

"I shall want you, Carson," said Mansel. "Put the Rolls in the thicket we used to use, and then come on to the footbridge over the sluice."

At once the Rolls moved off, and Mansel led us due south and then took a path on the right.

"We are now," he said, "on a salient or tongue of land, with the river running all round it, except across its neck where we left the Rolls. Carson and I know it well, for we wasted a week round here on a clue which proved false. Now the tender is moored off the western side of this tongue, under the lee of the forest to which we shall very soon come. That is as much as I know, and the tongue is five miles long—which means that we're bound to find her within two hours. But it's no good our looking about till the moon is up, so as soon as Carson comes, I'll send him to get us some food at a place I know, and then we'll have a picnic down by the riverside."

And so it fell out.

Under the trees of the forest which graced that reach of the Seine, we ate and drank the fare Carson had brought, as though we were pleasure-seekers, eating their supper abroad; the perfection of our surroundings needed a poet's pen, and when it came into my head that on that flawless evening thousands of people in France were certainly doing as we, it seemed almost absurd that the four who had chosen this most romantic spot

should not be seeking pleasure, but be engaged upon matters of life or death.

When we had finished our meal, George and I sat smoking, whilst Mansel slept; for we, of course, were rested, but he had been up and about for twenty-four hours. Carson roused him, as soon as the moon was up, and five minutes later our search for the tender began.

We were moving upstream, and we must have gone more than three miles when Mansel, moving before me, stood still and lifted his head. For a moment he listened intently. Then—

"There's a car in the forest," he said. "Pass the word to Carson and follow me."

With that, he began to run, glancing now and again at the trees on his left. Naturally, I did the same; and after a moment or two I saw a long way off a moving flicker of light.

A car, with its head-lamps dimmed, was coming up at an angle as though to cross our front; this, because of the river, it could not do; it was bound to stop at some point on the river's edge. And I realized that it was for this point that Mansel was running so hard. He wanted to get there before the car arrived.

Somehow or other we did it, with forty seconds to spare: the going was in our favor—the towing-path we were using was smooth enough, but the car was going slowly because, as I afterward found, the track upon which it was moving was in a terrible state.

Be that as it may, when a small sedan stole cautiously out of the track, to come to rest on an apron which gave upon a landing-stage, George and Carson were crouching behind the briers on its right, and Mansel and I were kneeling behind the ruinous shed which rose on its left.

Somebody stopped her engine and put out her lights. Then a door was opened and somebody left the car.

For a moment or two there was silence, as though whoever it was, was using his ears. Then—

"Curse this moonlight," said Judas' voice. "Take her back into the forest and wait for me there. An' don't lose *this* car! 'Please sir, a Willie pushed me' won't work again!"

Chapter Ten

SATAN made no reply. Perhaps his heart was too full. But he took it out on his gears, as he went about, and Judas cursed him savagely for making such a row.

Then the car swung off the apron and into the forest again, while Judas stood full in the moonlight, watching her go.

For more than a hundred paces, she held on her way; then I heard her engine stop, and I saw her lights go out; so did Judas, standing with a hand to his chin. Then he turned on his heel and made for the landing-stage.

Mansel breathed in my ear. "D'you recognize him?"

"It's Judas," I said. "The other man's A.D.C."

Mansel nodded. Then—

"That is the tender—there. He's going aboard. We'll do the same, if we can, and see what's what."

Now, since the tide was low, the tender's deck was below the landing-stage; and though I could see her funnel and part of her stern, I could not see any more of the craft herself; and I should have lost sight of Judas if he had not taken a torch to guide his steps, for balks of moldering timber stood up on either side of the landing-stage, and since we were well to the left, the balks and their shadows combined to conceal the man. As it was, I was able to watch the beam of the torch, till at last it fell on the funnel and then disappeared.

MANSEL touched my arm.

"Remember," he said, "no violence. We're out to see and to hear. However great the temptation, we must not touch him tonight."

"I know," I said. "I promise. Do—do you think she's on board?"

"I don't think so," said Mansel. "And now let's go. Keep three paces behind me and do as I do."

With that, he whipped back to the trees, and when we were out of the moonlight, across the track. At once he turned back to the apron; and as he passed George and Carson, he told them to stay where they were.

"If there should be trouble," he said, "Judas' one idea will be to get to the car. You will see that he doesn't do it. But if there is no trouble, you are to let him go by."

Then we skirted the little apron, keeping within the wood, and one minute later we stood on the water's edge.

The landing-stage was now between us and the moon, and the shadow its bulk was casting was only some ten feet off, but Mansel went down on his stom-

ach and wriggled across the gap, and I of course did likewise—in some impatience, because I was so anxious to get aboard.

Now the landing-stage was a very rude affair and must have been built a great many years ago. Had it been kept in repair, it would, I think, have stood any kind of shock, for its piles were like so many tree-trunks, and these were tied together with beams. Three rows of beams there were, which ran the length of the stage—I suppose to act as fenders against the thrust of some ship; but they made things easy for us, for we walked along upon one and held to the one above us, in case we should slip.

WE came to the tender, which looked like a miniature tramp and seemed to be in darkness, except for the light of the moon.

I saw Mansel searching her deck. . . . Then he stepped over her rail and glided into the shadow of her companion-hatch.

I saw him peer down the stairway. Then he turned his head and motioned to me to come up.

"Keep one pace behind me now."

I nodded.

Below, a light was burning, and men were in talk. I could hear the murmur of voices and then a laugh.

Mansel passed down the companion, with me on his heels. . . . The companion led into a small saloon; a light was burning somewhere behind our backs.

I confess that my heart was beating as never before, but Mansel never wavered or so much as poked his head. Indeed, he seemed to sense the lie of the land, and to know that, thanks to this, we had nothing to fear. That he was perfectly right, I saw for myself as soon as I had descended and turned about.

Standing at the foot of the stairway, with our backs to the dingy saloon, we found ourselves facing two gangways, one upon either side of the stairway itself. Doors were hung in these gangways, and that on the right was shut; but the door on the left was open, and lights were burning beyond.

Looking through this doorway, I saw that the gangways curved inward and almost at once became one, out of which doors gave to cabins on either side. The door of a cabin was open and men were speaking within.

At once Mansel tried out the gangway whose door was shut; for this, being round the corner, was very dark. Then he stepped back and spoke very low.

"Rumor says it's Formosa; I'm not going to sign for Formosa."

"We can't hear there," he said. "We'll have to go on. But we must be ready to clear, if somebody moves. The instant you feel me touch you, whip down the saloon. A man coming out of the light won't notice us there."

Then he turned to the other gangway and stole to the open door, and after listening a moment, stepped over the sill. Directly I did the same, the voices of those who were talking became very clear—not so much because we were closer, as because we had passed the obstruction the stairway made; for the cabin in which they were speaking was upon the same side as we, and having to turn two corners, the sound was spent before it had come to our ears.

"Rumor says it's Formosa," said a man, with an accent I could not place.

"Well, Rumor's wrong," spat Judas. "It's a girl of the name of Scrope."

"Maybe that's Formosa's name. I guess she wasn't christened Formosa, no more than Bermuda was."

"It's not Formosa," said Judas. "Formosa's down in the country. She's stuck herself in a castle an' won't come out. I don't mind saying we want her—an' want her bad. But we're not such fools as to turn her off. You don't kill golden geese—they're a sight too rare."

"I've known it done—when they won't lay no more eggs."

"Who says she won't lay any more? She's fallen foul of His Nibs because of a Willie's health. I'll say he was sore to start with, but—"

"Rumor says this is Formosa," said the other again.

Judas snorted.

"I've told you it isn't," he said, "but let that go. If you like to call her Formosa, that's your affair. There's the six photographs of her—name and age on the back."

"Now listen here," said the other, and cleared his throat. "I know what I know about this, an' I'm not coming in. Ordinary stuff I will ship; but rumor says it's Formosa; I'm not going to sign for Formosa, and that's God's truth."

"You're out of your mind," said Judas. "Why ever not?"

"'Cause I don't choose to," said the other. "An' I'm my boss."

"Look at that face," said Judas. "There's a full five hundred there."

"I won't say there isn't," said the other.

"An' you can afford to drop one fifth o' that?"

"That's my affair."

"One hundred quid?" said Judas. "An' the franc where it is?"

"Put it away," said the other. "You can't bend me."

"I wonder," said Judas softly.

THERE was a moment's silence; then somebody poured liquor into a glass.

"Good weather for grapes," said the other. "My brother down at Bordeaux—"

"Quite so," said Judas. . . . "How's Daisy?"

"Doing well," said the other. "She's maiding in San Francisco, and likes it fine."

"Nursemaid again?" said Judas.

"Housemaid now. Lives like a queen, an' she's got a half-share in a car."

"There now," said Judas. "Some people have all the luck. An' Choker Kay—"

"What's that to do with Daise? She wasn't in on that job."

"In or out, she wouldn't have stood a chance. Not after Choker Kay had opened his mouth."

"He lied," said the other calmly. "An' a lot of good it done him, the rotten swine."

"Say he lied," said Judas. "The child was dead."

The other smote upon some table, so that the glasses rang.

"What if it was? My girl was up in Paris. Until she read the paper, she'd—"

"I know, I know," said Judas. "That's why she did a trot. An' now she's in San Francisco, an' doing well. An' the poor damn' police still hoping—"

The other laughed—a very unpleasant laugh.

"I'll see you, Bright Boy," he said.

"Will you?" sneered Judas. "Right. Daisy is now at Lyons. She works at a sweet-stuff shop in the Rue Laval. She calls herself Ella Bohn, and she says she's Swiss. And she is engaged to be married to one of the *gardes mobiles*."

I THOUGHT the silence that followed would never end: when at last it did, the other man's voice was changed.

"What—then?" he said very thickly.

"This," said Judas sharply. "You'll load our cargo, Mangey, load it next Tuesday morning at one o'clock—*unless you want Daisy taken Tuesday night.*"

There was another silence, almost as long as before.

At length: "You've got me down," said Mangey. "How did you know?"

"Rumor," said Judas lightly. "But that's by the way. If we bring her down on Tuesday, an' you're not here—"

"Lose it," said Mangey hoarsely. "I've said I'm down."

"Then sign for her now."

"But—"

"Sign for her *now!* I've had about enough from you. And here's a bit of advice: Don't ever sin against us, 'cause we shall know if you do. An' we sha'n't come an' argue, Mangey. We shall post a little letter—with Daisy's name and address. An' then we shall just write '*Paid*' against your name in our books."

If the other made any answer, I do not know, for here Mansel touched my arm, and I turned at once and made for the dark saloon.

We reached its depths together, and turned about. Then Mansel set a hand on my shoulder and spoke in my ear.

"There's trouble coming to Judas. He's gone too far. There was danger in Mangey's tone, and that last threat will push him over the edge."

That was as much as he said, and the two of us stood like statues, watching the little gangway and the frame of the door within it—a thin rectangle of light.

Nearly a minute went by before Judas appeared—I saw the light on his face, as he came to the sill. The other, I thought, was behind him; but the gangway was so narrow that Judas' body filled it, to block my view.

I saw him stoop for the lintel and then stand up, and since he was taller than the doorway, he looked like some headless figure, standing against the light.

Then two things happened together: Somebody let out a sob—the sob of a man who has made some physical effort with all his might; and Judas hollowed his back and threw up his head.

He made no sound that I heard, but he seemed to be trying to turn. And then his body fell forward, flat on its face—to show us the man who had killed him, standing framed in the doorway, with a hand upon either jamb.

A rat of the underworld had put a spoke in our wheel!

One may feel ripe for murder; but when one sees murder done, it hits one over the heart. At least, that is my experience. . . . I felt that I must have air. So, for less than a moment—although it seemed longer than that. Then I was trembling all over, and Mansel was standing behind me, with a hand on each of my arms.

Mangey was still in the doorway: but almost at once he turned and passed out of our sight.

"All right now?" breathed Mansel.

"Yes, thanks," I whispered. "I'm sorry. But what on earth can we do? We'd got the game in our hands; and now he's torn everything up."

"It's quite all right," said Mansel. "We'll save it yet. Mangey is badly placed, and I think he'll do as I say."

"Is—is Judas dead?"

"Dead, or good as dead. He's got a knife in his back. And now let's go and see Mangey. Time's getting on."

WE were halfway to the gangway, when Mangey appeared in the doorway, with something over his arm. I afterward found that this was the tick of a mattress, which he, of course, was proposing to use as a shroud. Mansel stopped when he saw him, and let him come on; the fellow never saw us, but peered at the corpse for a moment, then went down on his knees.

In fact, he had a hand in the pocket of Judas' coat, when he found himself bathed in the light of Mansel's torch.

I think I shall always see the look on his face.

He was a man of sixty, or thereabouts; his hair was iron-gray and his nose was blue and his face was weather-beaten, as sailors' are. But now his mouth was open, his eyes screwed up, and he wore the exact expression of a baby about to cry. The effect was so unnatural that I averted my eyes, and I think it shook even Mansel, for when I looked again, he had lowered the beam of his torch.

"Put up your hands," he snapped. "And do as I say."

MANGEY'S hands went up. In one was the photograph of Katharine, which he had signed.

Mansel went close to the man.

"Stand up and turn around."

"Who's you?" said Mangey, hoarsely.

"Never mind who I am. I've a rod. Stand up and turn round."

Mangey obeyed slowly, and the barrel of Mansel's pistol rose to his shoulder-blades.

Mansel passed me the torch.

"Put the beam on the body," he said; "and watch your step. We're going into the cabin to have a talk."

I did as he said—to see the hilt of a knife sticking out of the back of the corpse. The coat was stained for three inches about the hilt: but I saw no blood on the floor, perhaps because the knife had not been withdrawn.

"Into the cabin," said Mansel.

Mangey began to go forward, and Mansel stepped over the corpse.

The cabin was very tiny and short of air. A locker beneath a porthole served for a seat, and before this was fixed a table, on which were wine and whisky and the glasses the men had used. And there were five photographs of Katharine, passport size.

By Mansel's direction, Mangey passed to the locker and there sat down, placing his hands upon the table and thereby adding a picture to those that were there. Now he was round, his eyes were like two gimlets and fast upon Mansel's face. The man could not think where he stood. All his shrewdness had failed him; his cunning had broken down.

Mansel was speaking to me.

"I want the others aboard. Post them by the companion, and say that if Satan should come, he is not to descend."

BE sure I wasted no time. Indeed, if George and Carson had cared to complain, they could with justice have done so, for I gave them Mansel's orders and stated that Judas was dead—and then whipped back to the cabin as fast as ever I could.

"Provided," Mansel was saying, "provided you play my game. Satan's easy money. He'll never call your bluff. But the other one will, Mangey. You know what chance you stand against a man like His Nibs."

"None at all," said Mangey, and put his head in his hands.

"Less," said Mansel. "He'll smell the doings before you can open your mouth. And that'll be that, my friend. And Daisy—"

"That's why I done it," said Mangey. "To save my girl. I don' know whether you 'eard what that devil said."

"I heard," said Mansel. "But this won't save her, you know. You don't save people by putting the rope round their neck. But I *can* save her—if you like to do as I say. Look sharp an' make up your mind. Satan's back in the woods. I don't know how long he'll wait, but he'll come to look for Bright Boy, before he goes."

Mangey leaned forward.

"You can't have it both ways," he said. "I 'eard you send for the others—to stop him from comin' down."

"What a fool you are!" said Mansel. "D'you think I want him here while I'm talking to you? When I go, they go with me—and Satan's free to come down—and to help you sink that carrion, for all I care."

The other blinked at him.

"What are you? A—policeman?"

"No, I'm not," snapped Mansel. "If I were a policeman, you'd not be sitting there. An' while we're talking of policemen, just drink this down—I can talk to the police, because they have nothing on me. And if you were to double-cross me, by God, I'd open their eyes."

"Sez you," said Mangey.

Grimly Mansel surveyed him.

"Don't get me wrong," he said. "D'you think I care if a water-rat misses stays? But I heard you jib at taking Formosa on. And *in return for that*, if you do as I say, I'll see you out of this jam."

"That's queer," said the other slowly. "I never seen Formosa: but near two years ago she was very good to my girl. Sick of a fever, she was: an' Formosa took her off and put her in her own bed. An' nursed her well: an' slep' on the floor herself."

There was a moment's silence. Then—

"Take it or leave it," said Mansel. "It's up to you."

His eyes on the table, the other spoke to himself.

"Well, I aint got nothing to lose." His head went up. "All right, Mister. I'll see you. What d'you know?"

Mansel spoke over his shoulder.

"Come into the cabin, will you?"

I came right in. Mansel addressed Mangey.

"Look well at this man," he said.

Mangey studied me carefully.

"Yes," he said, "I guess I'd know him again."

Mansel returned to me.

"Ask George to come down a moment."

I did as he said, and George was surveyed in his turn.

Then George was returned to his duty: but I stayed on—to hear the explicit instructions which Mansel gave.

I WILL not set these down, for I am going to tell how Mangey carried them out: but when it is remembered that, except while dealing with Mangey, Mansel had had no chance to think anything out—unless you count the few moments succeeding Judas' death—I think it must be admitted that he had a very rare brain: for his plan was subtle enough, but, what is more to the point, he had every tiny detail cut and dried, and the moment Mangey said that he would come in, Mansel dictated his orders, as though from some sheet and had an answer all ready for every one of the questions which Mangey asked.

At length he stood up.

"Well, there you are," he said. "Go on and get to it now. I may say I'm coming with you. Satan will not see me, but I shall be there. And I shall hear all that is said. So I shouldn't make any mistakes—if I were you."

"You don't trust me far," said Mangey, and got to his feet.

"Why the devil should I?"

"You're a one," said Mangey, and let out a laugh.

His spirits had certainly risen, for as he left the gangway, he kicked the corpse in the stomach and laughed again.

One minute later he left the landing-stage and made for the wasted track, with Mansel close behind him and myself upon Mansel's heels.

WHY the Shepherd employed Satan, I do not know. The fact remains that he was fast asleep.

When Mangey shook his shoulder, he started up with a whoop.

"Good God," he said, "it's Mangey! Where's Bright Boy gone?"

Mangey's answer was quite unprintable: but it found high favor with Satan, who had small use for Judas. I heard the blackguard chuckling, as he clambered out of the car.

"No, where is he really," he said, "you wicked ol' man?"

"Gone down the river," said Mangey, "walkin' along o' the bank. I was to come an' tell you to take the car to the crossroads an' wait for him there."

"Walkin' along o' the bank? What ever for?"

"Snoopin'," said Mangey, and spat. "I only hope he falls in and sucks his toobs full o' mud. Jus' because I can't do Tuesday—"

"Why can't you do Tuesday?" said Satan.

" 'Cause o' the tide. I can't do Monday nor Tuesday—the tide don' fit. If I took her aboard on Monday, I couldn't get up to Rouen, to load my stuff: if I took her aboard on Tuesday, I couldn't get down to Havre till the afternoon. 'So it's got to be tomorrow,' I told him, 'or not at all.' You'd 'a' thought I'd stung him for sixpence, the way he talked. Called me a so-and-so, an' said I was only fit to handle a punt in a sewer. An' I've been treading this river for forty-five years next March."

"Yes, but who's he snoopin'?"

"I'm coming to that. At last he throws in his hand, with a mouthful o' threats—an' makes me sign for a girl what I've never seen. An' when I says 'That isn't business,' 'We don't do business,' he says, 'with filth like you.' "

And, with that, the old skipper let fly, condemning Judas in terms which I dare not set down and expressing such hopes for his future as, had the dead man been buried, must have made him writhe in his grave.

"Easy," said Satan, "easy. I know all that. I want to know who he's snoopin', you fool."

"He's snoopin' a couple o' Willies—"

"A couple of *what?*" screamed Satan.

"Willies," said Mangey. "They come aboard tonight and asked to be taken on."

But if Satan heard what he had said, he made no reply; instead, he darted glances to right and left, and then he prowled round the car, poking his head and peering and striving to prove the darkness in which we stood.

"You too?" said Mangey. "That's what Bright Boy done."

"I'll say it was," said Satan. "You damn' wash-out, why didn't you tell me before?"

Then he asked what the "Willies" were like, and Mangey described me and George, and the things Satan said of us both were even more dreadful than Mangey's abuse of Judas.

"What time was this?" he demanded.

"I don't know," said Mangey. "I never looked at no clock. They hadn't been gone very long before Bright Boy come. First thing I knew, I heard them fallin' about; and so I come up an' out to see who it was. One of 'em talks in French: but it wasn't a French I knew, so I has them down to the cabin and into the light. Willies all right, they were, with four days' growth on their chins. They didn't look down an' out, but that's what they said they were, an' they asked to be taken on for the run o' their teeth. 'Taken on'—just like that. . . . And one of 'em wearin' a wrist-watch that looked like gold."

He spat contemptuously.

"GO on," said Satan, "go on. What 'appened next?"

"Well, I was all alone, so I couldn't do nothin' then—I wouldn't of minded one, but the two was over my weight. But I told 'em to come back this evening at half-past ten. 'Neither sooner nor later,' I said: 'for I sha'n't come aboard before ten, an' I sail at eleven o'clock. I promise you nothin',' I said: 'but I've got to load at Rouen'—I didn't say when—'an' if you like to work for your dinner, maybe I'll let you wipe the stevedores' eyes.' "

"Go on," said Satan. "What then?"

"Well, they swallowed that," said Mangey, "an' said they'd be back to time. Then they asked the way to Caudebec and sheered off again goin' downstream."

Satan was biting his fingers.

"He'll never get 'em," he muttered. "He ought to have come for me. I'd find them, if they were abroad in Hell!

But he wanted 'em all to himself: an' then to come back to His Nibs an' say 'Look what I've done.'"

"You can 'ave them tonight," said Mangey. "What for d'you want them so?"

"Never you mind," blared Satan; "you get back to your hooker an' rake her decks." With that, he flung into the car and started her up. "Where did he say? The crossroads?"

"That's where he said," said Mangey.

"An' I'm to sit there with the car, while he turns them off?" He spouted a frightful oath. "But I'll lay he doesn't do it. He'll never run them down. He can wait behind a door with a rod in his fist; but he'd never come up with a heavy, unless he was fast asleep."

Then he let in his clutch with a bang, and the car went lurching over the broken road.

As the sound of her engine faded—

"Windy," said Mangey, and spat.

"Easy money," said Mansel. "I told you so. And now you'd better get back and bury your dead."

THOUGH the trap was set and baited, it was by no means certain the Shepherd was going to walk in. There was only, I think, one weak spot in Mangey's tale, and that was his excuse that, except on the Sunday morning, the tide would not serve. This could not be avoided: had Mangey agreed to a later date, the Shepherd might have walked in and left Katharine behind: but now he had the chance of killing two birds with one stone—that is to say of disposing of George and me between ten and eleven o'clock—and putting Katharine aboard at half-past twelve. But what was very much worse than any weak spot in the tale was the very awkward fact that Judas would not reappear. Still, this was not our fault. Mansel could do most things that a man can do; but, as he himself put it, "I've yet to master the art of raising the dead."

We followed old Mangey aboard and watched him below.

Then Mansel, calling us together, spoke in our ears.

"I don't know how long Satan will wait at the crossroads: but I'm sure that in spite of his bluster he'll hesitate to let Judas down. So I think we can count on his waiting until it is light. And then he'll go home—to his master—as fast as ever he can. We've got to try to follow —in case of accidents. I dare not leave the tender—I don't trust Mangey an inch. And Mr. Solan must stay with me. So Mr. Laking and Carson will now go back to the Rolls, take up some likely spot on the Rouen road, and fall in behind as soon as Satan goes by. I'll leave it there, for Carson's extremely clever at trailing a car: but I don't think you need be afraid of taking odd risks, for Satan's one idea will be to make his report and, as he's nobody with him, he won't be able to keep a look-out behind. You've got his number, Carson?"

Carson repeated the number of the car—a thing which I must confess I could never have done.

"That's right. Now if you should run him to earth—and I hope to God you do —Carson will leave the car and Mr. Laking will then take over the wheel. Carson will know what to do: Mr. Laking will take the Rolls on and park her wherever he can, and will then come cautiously back to where he saw Carson last. As for communication, we'll have to hope for the best. Mr. Solan will be close to the apron most of the time.... Has anyone any suggestions?"

Nobody had.

"Very well. You two get off and do your bit. If you can get back before dark, I'd like you here. But things don't always fit in: and if you're doing good work, by all means stay where you are."

So George and Carson went off, to pick up the Rolls; and presently Mansel went down, to see for himself that Mangey was duly performing the task which his folly had set. And so I was left alone on the deck of that sinister ship.

I WILL not relate my feelings; they may, I think, be imagined as well as described. But one thing I must record; and that is this: Whether because what had happened seemed still unreal, whether because Mangey's story had rung so uncommonly true, the curious fact remains that more than once I found my eyes on the tow-path, in case a man who was dead should come back that way.

I remember that very well, as also the moon upon the water and, very far in the distance, a spark of light—which made me think of my darling, and how, but for Judas' death, she must have been saved.

And then my musing ended—for a sudden, savage blow on the back of my head put me down and out.

The dramatic climax of this novel will appear in our forthcoming October issue.

Labels Can Lie

A brief drama with a surprise in the climax.

By

EUGENE P. LYLE, JR.

Illustrated
by L. R. Gustavson

WHETHER or not he had actually heard stealthy footsteps descending the stairs, did not matter, now that he was fully awake. For now he did hear the faint yet musically clear note of a bottle clinking against other bottles as it was lifted from the sideboard downstairs. Well, well, so old Bixby was indulging another of his nocturnal thirsts!

The wide, thin mouth of the master of the house tightened in a caustic smile as he flung off the covers. Not that he begrudged the faithful chap a reasonable nip, but visualizing rare old stuff being guzzled, even by a rare old butler, Mr. Randolph Worcester Malone winced.

Tricks and devices in rebuttal he had concocted, but this chance to startle his solemn retainer in the act held promise of sardonic humor that pleased him better. Because, for all his chilled patrician exterior, Mr. Malone was obsessed by a naïve curiosity regarding the human mechanism under stress. How would it tick, if at all, before a sudden shock? To render the surprise complete, and especially not to awaken the priceless baby girl who was his orphaned grandchild asleep in the nursery, he trod ever so lightly, going down the dark stairs. . . .

The surprise, however, when the gaunt apparition in wine-red pajamas that was himself materialized in the lighted dining-room, was not merely complete; it was unanimous. For the man over by the sideboard about to tilt a bottle to his lips was not Bixby. He was a stranger. The stranger planked down the bottle; and next thing, Mr. Malone was gazing across the table upon an automatic pistol in a gloved hand. Mr. Malone slowly lifted his own empty hands. Slowly also the expression of shocked incredulity ebbed from his keenly chiseled features.

"Gawd alive, what a pan!" the stranger was whispering. "Gawd alive, it's freezing over!"

By now, oddly enough, or perhaps not so oddly, Mr. Malone was more curious than anything else. About himself, this time. Would the old works tick with that gun leveled at the middle frog of his pajamas? He had sometimes wondered what he would do in a fix like this, so that he was astonished, and relieved, to discover that he was taking a detached though absorbing interest in the whole transaction.

Moreover, he was puzzled. Any burglar free to go would promptly go; yet this burglar only scowled and mouthed obscenities of frustration.

"You've gummed the cards, damn you—you with that pan of ice," he added. "Say, what they call you in a poker game?"

Mr. Malone smiled.

"My young friend, they generally lay down."

The gloved fingers tightened on the gun. "Mister, I got to kill you."

"And add murder?"

"'Twon't be adding much, if they catch me."

But still Mr. Malone did not understand, not until he glanced past the man at the family plate on the sideboard. There it gleamed, with never a gap to betray that a single piece had been lifted and stowed in the burglar's wicker basket on the table. It was a large hamper, with two lids closed under the curving handle. If he had not intruded, if he had not had a good look at the fellow— He understood. The man had to kill him, of course. Not for that reason, though, did Mr. Malone lose his frosty impersonal detachment.

"I wonder," he said, "what you would do if I saved your life?"

He was in time. The finger on the trigger twitched and slackened. "Eh," the man ejaculated, "save my life?"

Mr. Malone's shoulders lifted. "The fact is," he said, "I have already saved it." And he added in a tone of gentle reproach: "Yet you fancy you must still take mine."

"Aw, nuts!" The man spat the words out the side of his mouth. "You stopped me taking a slug o' brandy, that's all; but Gawd help me, do I need one now!" He scooped up the bottle. "Here's how."

"Wait!" Mr. Malone's voice had the edge of a brandished razor. "Read the label, you fool!"

SOMETHING in that warning checked the man. "I don't see—" he began.

"The label *on* the label," said Mr. Malone.

The man turned the bottle in his hand until a druggist's sticker bearing the medieval symbol of death met his eye; and as he stared, his high sallow cheek-bones resembled smears of whitewash.

"'Poison!'"

"That makes twice now," Mr. Malone observed. "I could have let you drink it."

"S-s-sure." The whited cheek-bones burned red. "Sap, you could have saved your own hide. Why didn't you let me drink it?"

Mr. Malone shrugged delicately. "I so often wonder," he explained. "If I had let you die, always I would have wondered—"

"Brother,"—again the man was snarling,—"if you figger that softens me up—"

"Brother," Mr. Malone's gentlest tones interrupted, "if you are going to shoot me, why do you wait?"

"Too much noise."

So that was it. Though Bixby slept on the third floor, and both the housekeeper and the nurse were away for the night, which the man doubtless knew already, he dared not risk a pistol-shot if he could help it.

"And besides," said the man, "I can't stand that frozen pan. I'll bust it." Definitely a killer now, he started moving round the table.

"Not that, not that!" Mr. Malone cried out. "Wait, poison is quieter." He reached for the bottle.

He had it before the man with the clubbed pistol rightly knew what he was about. The liquor gurgled down Mr. Malone's throat, though his chilled gray eyes were narrowed on the man, even as he lowered the bottle and swayed drunkenly.

THREE, four shots reverberated through the house, and brought old Bixby hurtling down two flights of stairs, nightshirt swirling about his bare shins. He burst into the dining-room. The sparse pinkish-white tufts on his round bald head stood in rumpled disarray, and his eyes bulged, but with his first agonized glance he stiffened, correct and dignified.

"I—I feared you were being shot at, sir."

"No," his master replied. "I did the shooting, Bixby. It seemed the easiest way to call you."

His master sat in one of the carved chairs, and he was shivering slightly by way of reaction from terrific strain. He was cuddling a baby in his arms, while on the table the wicker hamper lay open, empty except for a pillow.

"But surely there was a burglar, sir?"

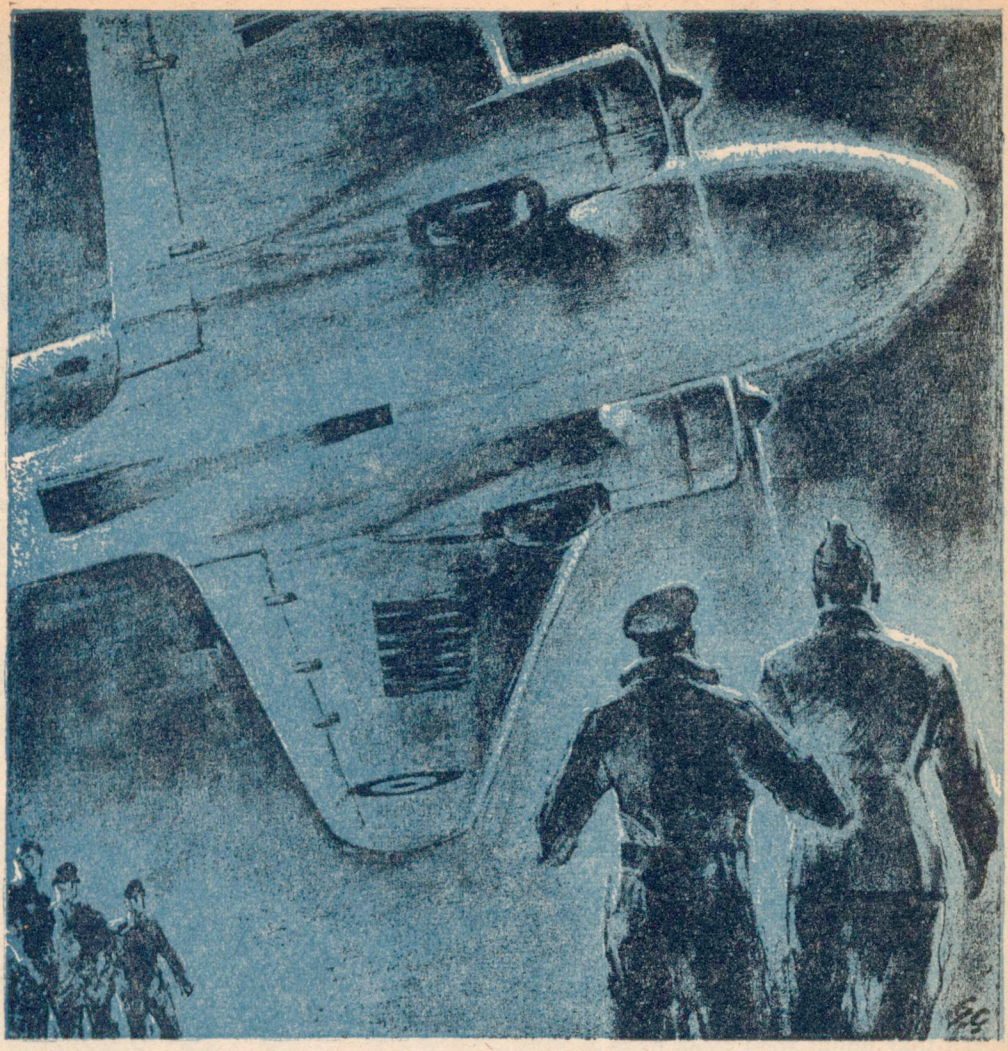
"On the floor, Bixby." Mr. Malone pointed an automatic in his hand to a shape lying there. "His intention was to brain me with this." He indicated the pistol.

"But he is stirring, sir; and there is a broken bottle."

Mr. Malone sighed. "Rare old stuff. In spite of the label, I could not save it. I had to waste it, busting—yes, *busting* is the word, I believe—his ugly pan. Now telephone, please, for the police ambulance."

"Quite so, sir." And Bixby departed, still stately and reserved in his shirt-tails, to the library.

"K'choo—k'choo—k'chuck," Mr. Malone remarked to his granddaughter, wondering what made the tiny mechanism bubble and squeak at such gibberish.



Death Flight

Not only in the air, but in the strange 1940 hangars under the English chalk cliffs, the enemy struck hard.

By TRACY RICHARDSON

WITHOUT doubt it was one of the world's strangest airplane hangars: carved into the chalk cliffs somewhere along England's coast, concealed from observation and attack by a steel door that raised inwardly by hydraulic machinery whenever an airplane was scheduled to depart. Far back under the cliff a gigantic elevator brought the returning planes down from the surface after they had landed on the camouflaged air-field above.

Everything necessary for the complete operation of a flight of twelve fast supercharged reconnaissance planes was contained in this underground hangar a hundred feet below the surface—here were administrative offices, communication-rooms, armories, photographic laboratories and quarters for the flying personnel and the mechanical staff.

This was one of the secret hangars of the Special Service Squadron, all members of the Royal Air Force, but detached for special duty and accountable only to the General Staff officer directing their activities. Each pilot was chosen not alone for his flying ability, but for some special training or ability he possessed; and to say that you were a member of the Special Service meant that your family tree could stand the most searching investigation for generations past.

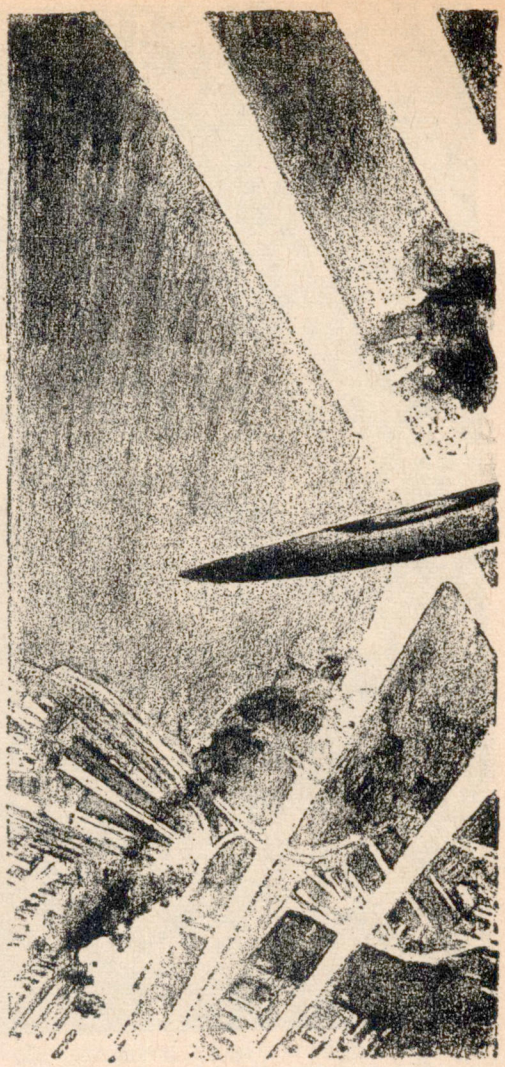
In this underground hangar the commanding officer, Commander Ferril, was concluding a talk to the flyers, observers, photographers and gunners by saying: "That is the picture in a nutshell. Four of our planes have disappeared, all in the same spot near the west entrance to the Kiel Canal. Each one of them was in constant radio communication with our outfit here until the break came—no warning, not a single sound. Just silence, an absolute break and nothing more. They never returned.

"We know the Germans are always ready to take credit for bringing down an Allied plane, but they have not reported a single one of these four. Why? What broke off their radio communication so abruptly, right in the middle of a sentence? We must get photographs of that section even if we lose fifty planes, but I don't like it. Now, I want every man here to concentrate on this—think, think of every word you may have heard, think of the little things you may have heard that might shed some light on this unfortunate situation."

"Sir, how about this electrical ray they're always talking about?" asked Flight Lieutenant Dwyer.

"That's been given thought," answered Commander Ferril, "but to date there is not the slightest proof that such ray exists, at least strong enough to stop an airplane. It's possible, but I'm more inclined to believe they have developed a super anti-aircraft gun of some sort. . . . Now if anyone gets any ideas before Newell and Smithers take off on this flight tonight, let me know. That's all for the time."

AS the officers broke into small groups to discuss and compare information, Flight Lieutenant Coulter-Brown beckoned to Lieutenant Linton, his observation officer. "Linton," he said when they were off to themselves, "I've got an idea about getting at the truth of this thing. Trouble is, I can't come out into the open and tell about it. Perhaps if we went together to Commander Ferril, he would listen to us."

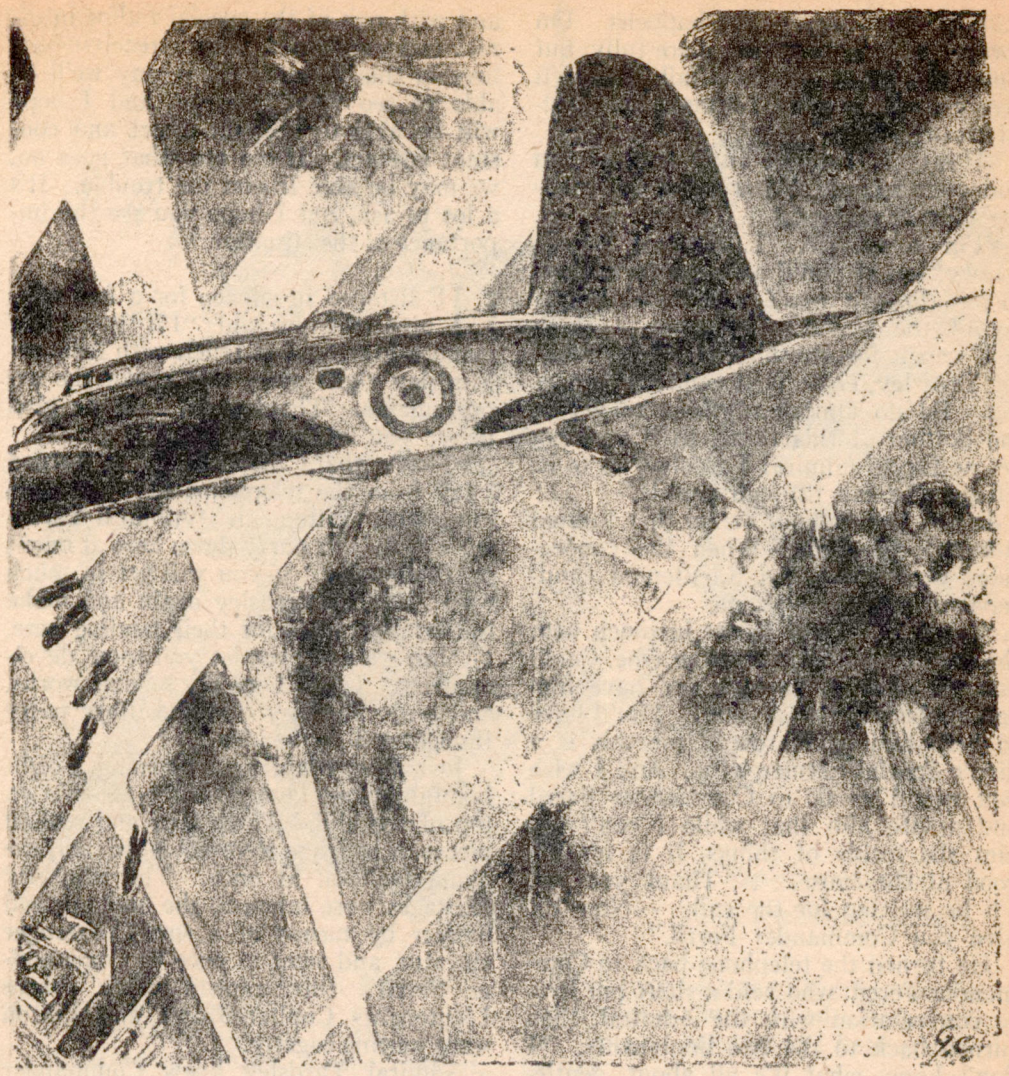


"They've picked up our motors. Search

"Sounds as if you were thinking of that mysterious Legion we bumped into that time in Germany."

"Right. My father is a member of that outfit. They're all veterans of the last World War, every one of them crippled in some way, but still doing a lot of good work for their King and country. If you remember that remarkable radio set they had, you will get my point. It operates on a frequency never touched by the standard or short-wave radio—You beginning to get the idea?"

"Well, what are we waiting for? After the small bit I saw of this Legion, I'd back them in almost anything. But Mister, my thought is that you're asking for a mighty dangerous mission."



fights breaking out. . . . Dropping our eggs to give them something to think about."

"It isn't the danger; you know that. If this bunch gave much thought to danger, there wouldn't be any Special Service. No, it's the uncertainty, the not knowing what has happened or will happen. That's the thing that breaks men's nerves. If the Germans have perfected some new weapon that plucks airplanes out of the air like shadows, we've got to know about it for certain before they get a chance to use it on large flights, now that the big-scale operations have begun. Come on, let's try our luck with Commander Ferril."

The orderly at the Commander's door passed them through at a signal from inside. A camaraderie existed among this lot of flying-men that was probably more democratic than most.

"Commander," asked Coulter-Brown, "was a radio check kept on these planes that disappeared, so that their exact positions are known?"

"Absolutely. Four separate stations were tuned in on them all the time. We know to within half a mile where they were when they quit sending. You got any ideas?"

"Would it be possible to hold up this flight tonight—put it off until tomorrow?"

"Impossible. I'm sorry—I'd put it off indefinitely if I could. I feel as if I were sending men to a certain death. But the job has to be done, tackled every night until we succeed. Daytime flights are next to impossible, so we've got to carry on this way."

"Then, Commander, pending certain arrangements that I think I can make, I'd like to be assigned with Lieutenant Linton for that flight tomorrow night. Not the regular flight, but as an added

number, to observe what happens. I'm sorry that I can't explain more fully, but I'm sure our radio will not fail. If you'll give your permission, I'll make the needed arrangements."

"H'm! If I didn't know both of you and your records, I'd say you were taking a lot for granted."

"I'm sorry, sir. I know it sounds screwy, but if you'll give me permission to put through a call to Admiral Yardsley of the Naval Intelligence, I think he'll vouch for anything we undertake."

"Yardsley, eh? That sounds convincing. I'd do almost anything to get to the bottom of this thing, so if you can get as far as Admiral Yardsley, go to it. I'll put the call through myself."

It was half an hour before they located Admiral Yardsley. When the connections were completed, Lieutenant Coulter-Brown took the phone.

"Admiral, I want to get in touch with the man we know as Number One. Could you get through to him and have him call me here at this station? You'll have to help him get through, for this is a direct Special Service wire. And I wish you would speak to Commander Ferril and assure him that while I can't tell him the inside of things, it is for the good of the cause. . . . Thank you, sir. I'll be waiting for the call. —Now I'll give you Commander Ferril."

He turned the telephone back to Commander Ferril, who held a short but lively conversation with the Admiral, then turned back to the two lieutenants. "I don't know what it's all about, gentlemen, but Admiral Yardsley says I'll be wise if I coöperate with you in every way. So I'll play cricket—within limits, of course. I'll let you know as soon as the call comes through."

LIEUTENANTS Coulter-Brown and Linton played a hand of bridge before they were again called to the inner office.

"Want me to get out and give you more privacy?" the Commander asked.

"Why, no sir," said Coulter-Brown. "We may have to ask questions of you, especially if things work out as I hope."

Coulter-Brown gave his name over the telephone; next he quoted a number, waited for perhaps half a minute, and then gave another number; finally he got busy explaining. "It's this way, sir—" He briefly outlined the situation, omitting names and places, then continued: "My idea is for Linton and me to ride high, say twenty-five thousand feet, and with one of the special radios in direct communication with a receiving-set here in this hangar. That way we'll be able to see what goes on, and I hope will be able to keep in direct and constant contact. If we see what goes on, we may be able to end the trouble. It's a lot to ask, but I hope you see the importance of the situation."

HE listened in silence for a few minutes; then he said: "I'll have Commander Ferril get in touch with Admiral Yardsley right away and make the arrangements. Thanks, sir. I'll be glad to see you again."

"That's that," he said as he turned away from the telephone, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "Admiral Yardsley will fly this party down here at once; so, Commander, if you will get in touch with Admiral Yardsley again and make the arrangements for their landing here, I think we can promise you some developments. I only hope my scheme works, and both Yardsley and the other party thought well of the idea."

Just at daylight next morning a light bombing-plane landed on the air-field on top of the cliff. Three men and several pieces of baggage were unloaded, and the plane took off at once. The men and packages were taken to the underground hangar by means of a small passenger elevator, and went at once to Commander Ferril's subterranean office, where Lieutenants Coulter-Brown and Linton were waiting eagerly.

Admiral Yardsley knew Commander Ferril, and he introduced Mel Service and McTavish with the simple explanation that they were men who at times undertook special work of a technical nature for the Government. Coulter-Brown knew something of the achievements of Mel Service—who had spent years recovering from wounds received in the last war; had then devoted a vast inherited fortune to the rehabilitation of other incapacitated veterans, and had organized this "Legion of Legless Men" into a sort of super-intelligence corps that had already done invaluable work. Not so long ago, indeed, Coulter-Brown and Linton had been rescued after a forced landing within the enemy's lines, by a secret agent of the Legless Legion.

"Brownie, is that the Number One man you told me about?" whispered Linton to his companion.

But Coulter-Brown didn't answer, for Service was talking and asking questions.

"Duffie, is there the slightest thing about the running of that ship that's out of tune?"

"Commander Ferril, as I get it from what Brown tells me over the telephone, your plane radio goes dead right in the midst of conversations, and each time it has happened at approximately the same place."

"That's right, Mr. Service. It happened again last night, despite every precaution we had taken. They were sending out constant signals; everything was going fine; and then—they were gone. Never another trace. We're afraid the Germans have perfected some sort of ray that will stop the motors and radio. We don't know—that's the worst part of it; it gives us the creeps, and we must find the answer, now that they've rolled over Belgium and Holland. It would be terrible to send over a whole fleet of bombers and have them all brought down in this mysterious way."

Service turned to his companion, McTavish. "What about it, Mac—think any sort of ray could be responsible?" He turned to Ferril: "McTavish is one of the greatest electrical engineers in the country today. You can take his answer as that of an expert."

McTavish didn't hesitate in his answer. "Absolutely not. Such a ray, if it exists, would upset everything electrical within a thousand-mile radius. Many types of the so-called 'death ray' have been brought out, but no one has as yet devised a means to control such a current, or a motor that could develop sufficient power to make it practical."

Service interrupted: "Commander, could it be possible that by some means the Germans are capturing these planes and keeping it quiet until they get an entire flight of them? Disguised as Allied planes, they could stage a raid over England, or more likely still, carry out a raid over some neutral country so that the blame would be placed on the British. That stunt has been done before, you know."

"I don't know what to think," said the Commander flatly. "We've gone over every possible angle; every pilot has been on his toes, ready for anything, expecting the worst; but it was just a repeat performance. The planes go out on the regular routine, report nothing untoward, and then—silence. I don't think they were captured, for every one of our Special Service planes is equipped with a time-bomb to destroy the ship rather than have it fall into the hands of the enemy. Of course we have no way of knowing whether or not they were used. If you can figure anything out of this, I'll be eternally grateful."

"There's one thing sure," said McTavish, "they can't drown out our radio or interfere with it in any way. Electric rays? Well, we'll find out about that. Let's get busy installing the radio in the plane Coulter-Brown will fly tonight."

McTAVISH, with Coulter-Brown assisting, did the work. To install the receiving-set in the office, all that was necessary was to open the box, for all the power was furnished by batteries in the set. In the plane the smaller set had to be anchored, and the microphone hooked up alongside the regular mike in the oxygen helmet. They were so arranged that the voice went out over each set, but the cutting out of one would not interfere with the other.

Commander Ferril expressed a doubt that such small receivers could possibly function over a distance of four or five hundred miles. So after they had tested between the office and the ship, and found everything in perfect order, Service talked to Crane in their London office, then put through a connection for New York. At the same time he had Commander Ferril tune in the regular set with the short-wave station of a broadcasting company in New York, and they listened to the two receptions.

On the regular short-wave reception a noise that sounded like ocean waves almost drowned out the words; but the special set which McTavish had installed brought the words through as clear as though the voice were in the next room.

"Why doesn't the Government furnish us radios like that?" demanded Commander Ferril.

McTavish laughed, and explained: "In the first place, they don't know about them. Secondly, there is an important alloy necessary to these sets that, now the war is on, is impossible to get. I couldn't get the material to build another set like this for love or money."

Service had subsided in his chair. He brought out his pipe and tobacco-pouch, carefully stuffed the pipe, took out an ornate lighter and laid the outfit before him on the table. Slowly, mechanically, as though not realizing his actions, he extracted another bit of tobacco from the pouch, rolled it around in the palm of his hands and popped it into his mouth. Commander Ferril made a grimace of repugnance, but McTavish watched Service intently.

"The Chief's got an idea," said McTavish quietly. "When he chews his tobacco instead of smoking it, he is in deep concentration—and he comes up with the damnedest ideas! I hope this is a good one."

Conversation went on for a few minutes, but the only thing alive about Service, apparently, was the slow movement of his jaws. Suddenly he sat erect, spat the tobacco into the waste-basket and said: "Tell me about these bombs you carry in the planes—not the construction, but the method of timing. For how long or how short can they be set, and how accurate?"

Lieutenant Linton answered: "I know that one perfectly, sir; I was Armament Officer for a while. The timing is controlled by a double counter stop-clock that can be set to the second. It is absolutely accurate, and can be set for Instantaneous, or for a twenty-four-hour delay. There is a safety-pin that must be pulled before contact can be made to explode the bomb. That's the rough idea."

"I see," said Service. "The pilot, if he gets in trouble, sets the time, pulls the safety-pin and takes to his parachute—and the bomb explosion destroys the ship. Linton, show me how these bombs are arranged in your ship." Service jerked to his feet, and before anyone could say a word, he had stalked from the room, followed by Linton.

LINTON guided him over to a sleek streamlined plane; it looked overpowered with its two motors, but Service could see that the plane really carried a heavy load. Four fixed machine-guns were built into the pilot's cockpit. In the rear compartment twin cannon were mounted on an oversized scarf mount. Two heavy machine-guns were mounted to fire through an opening in the bottom of the fuselage. A huge aërial camera was built into the ship itself, and

under each wing were suspended six small bombs. This type of reconnaissance plane was anything but helpless—it was as full of stings as a hive of bees.

"Beauty, isn't she!" said Linton, pride in his voice. "Can do better than three-fifty full out; and for photographic observations can cruise around one hundred and fifty." He opened the door, and Service followed him into the cockpit. "Here we are, sir. The bomb is right here on the side wall, within easy reach of the pilot or observer, and where it won't get kicked around. It's held in place by this spring, which also permits easy removal."

SERVICE completed his inspection, and they returned to the office. "Commander Ferril, I want to talk to you and Yardsley alone. The rest of you wait outside—you stay, Mac."

Yardsley grinned at Service's outspoken brusqueness, but Commander Ferril permitted himself to look annoyed.

"Now," said Service when they were alone, "tell me, are the orders posted as to who is to make this flight tonight? How do you work it?"

"Yes. It's a routine flight, except that tonight two planes go on the same job, and the orders are typed and placed on the bulletin-board. The order gives the ship's number, crew names and the operations number; it doesn't say what the operation is, but that's generally known."

"How far do you go in checking on the men who work here in this underground hangar? Are you sure of them?"

"I'd stake my life on the officers. The men have been investigated from the day their mothers bore them."

"A lot of mothers wouldn't recognize their own offspring. I'll gamble one thing: the trouble lies right here in this hangar—one of your own men."

"I don't believe it! It's impossible!" snapped Ferril indignantly.

Admiral Yardsley interrupted: "Probably you wouldn't believe either, that for a while a German intelligence officer was close to the head of the R.A.F. Intelligence, would you? Well, it's a fact; and with that as an example, you can see that it's possible for anything to happen in a crazy war like this one. Go ahead, Service: give us your ideas."

"Only this: Commander, instruct the men going on this flight tonight to follow my instructions. If they do, I'll wager my last shilling they'll return safe. Then we'll trap the traitor. Now I want to talk to the crews by themselves—nothing mysterious; I'm just cutting down the chances to myself, who thought of the idea, and the four men who will gamble with their lives that I'm right. . . .

"Now," said Service a few minutes later, when he was alone with the four flyers who were to make the reconnaissance flight that night, "I'm positive that if you follow my instructions, you'll return safe from this flight of death, so called. Here's your life-insurance: As soon as you get into the air, I want you to examine the bombs on your ship, see if the safety-pin is removed, and check the time they are set to explode. Then regardless of whether the safety-pin is out or not, throw the bombs into the sea. That's all you have to do, except not to talk about it, and act as natural as possible. If you get further instructions while in the air, carry them out." . . .

There was a tenseness in the underground hangar that was not healthy. The two planes that were to take off on the death flight to the Kiel Canal had been groomed to perfection, and Coulter-Brown's was in place on the launching device, its motors warmed and ticking over slowly. Pilot and photographers took their places, and men lined up on each side, watching what they felt sure was a last flight, and waving Godspeed and good luck.

Somewhere an electric motor whined at high speed, then settled down as it took up its load. Swiftly the armored door that protected the entrance to the cave hangar moved upward and inward. All lights were extinguished. Commander Ferril flashed a signal with his hand lamp; there was a slight sound of escaping compressed air, and with roaring motors the plane was off, out through the door and climbing rapidly into the darkness. The second plane was wheeled into position for launching.

AS the second plane shot into the night, officers and men crowded to the door for a few brief moments to breathe in the damp air that rolled in from the sea. There would be other flights out tonight, but this was special, the flight from which no ship had returned.

With the planes in the air, Commander Ferril, Admiral Yardsley and Service rejoined McTavish in the Commander's quarters. The radio sets were connected with both ear-phones and loud-speakers. McTavish kept the ear-phones of his set glued to his ears, while the rest of them

sat listening to every word that came in over the air. They knew that three other stations of the Special Service were tuned in on the flight and checking their positions with their direction-finders.

"Number One," droned the voice of Lieutenant Linton, coming over both receivers clear and distinct. "Climbing. Twenty thousand. Went on oxygen at fifteen. Can see signal-light of Number Two coming up fast. Leveling off for rendezvous. How are we coming in?"

"Both sets coming in clear and strong," McTavish replied. "Carry on—but you'd better take it easy, for it will be a long talk. If you get tired talking, tap on the mike with something, just so we get the sounds constantly."

"O.K. . . . Number Two leveled off with us. Compass course twenty degrees north of east. Strong tail-wind. Air speed three hundred throttled down. Everything clear and bright. Outside temperature twenty below. We separated from indicated cargo, which was alive and set for twelve-five."

Then they made contact with Number Two ship, and they also announced that they had got rid of their time-bomb, and that it had been set to explode at exactly twelve-five.

"Now, what in the name of God do you make of that?" demanded Ferril.

"It means," said Admiral Yardsley quietly, "that Service hit the nail right on the head. Someone here in this hangar had it figured out that at twelve-five the two ships would be almost to their destination. That the time-bombs would go off simultaneously, and you would have the mystery of two more planes to think about. The ideas of death rays and super guns or aërial gas-clouds could be quietly bandied about among your flyers until they were so jittery they could not do a good job of flying."

"I'm a flyer," said Commander Ferril. "I see that there are things in the Intelligence Service that require special talents. I'm in your hands—so what next?"

"Nothing right now," replied Service. "We'll just have to wait and go through with the plans."

MINUTES sped by as they sat in the dead quietness of the soundproof underground chamber, listening to the reports from the two planes. They heard them describe how the planes behaved, how the sea looked through the moonlight from twenty-five thousand feet altitude. Then:

"O. K." came the voice of Lieutenant Linton. "Objective sighted. Number Two has cut motors and is gliding down for photographs. We're cruising at twenty thousand. They've picked up our motors. Searchlights breaking out. We're directly over objective. Everything lit up by flares dropped by Number Two. Archies breaking ahead of us and to the left, all short. No shells down below. Think we've got something. One plane stays high and makes a noise, second plane goes in and does the dirty work with motors cut."

From the Number Two plane they still were getting the chant of the observer-photographer: "It's a beauty. Clear as a bell. Getting pictures. Nothing bothering us. Cut in motors at two thousand feet and dropped ground-flares. Will make another trip across and get pictures by their light. . . . They've spotted us. Hell's broken loose. Shells exploding everywhere. Tracer-bullets look like lace curtains. Dropping our eggs to give them something to think about. Signaling Number One all's clear. . . . Going home, safe."

"We've got you, Number Two!" came in the jubilant voice of Linton. "We'll drop our eggs and wait for you upstairs. Looks as if we've laid the ghost."

SERVICE lighted his pipe. "That," he said lightly, "is that: The simple story of an air-raid on a heavily fortified enemy position. Here, however, we have another script. Some one little enemy within your own ranks has managed to destroy five of your ships; but thousands of anti-aircraft shells failed to score a hit. Now for the pay-off."

Commander Ferril got contact with both planes and ordered them to fly to Field Three and wait for further orders.

"Now," said Service, "let's see how good an actor you are, Ferril. Stagger out there as if you'd just heard about your wife and children being bitten by a mad dog. Draw a line through the names of these pilots, and chalk up the next flight for an immediate take-off. Swear, and rave that you'll get the pictures if you have to send out a ship every half-hour. Make it good, because you've got to fool a smart man."

And as Commander Ferril dragged himself out with bowed head, it did look good. Flying officers and mechanics crowded around him as he struck off the names of the four men who had gone out last. Beneath he entered two more

names and the number of a ship. Dead silence greeted his action. They knew without question the reason. Two more planes had gone to swell the tide of the mysterious missing.

"Powell and Roberts out as soon as your motor's warmed," said Ferril in a strained voice. "White and Featherstone stand by to go out in thirty minutes. I'm sending ships out every thirty minutes until daylight. Get busy."

Mechanics rolled out the ship and adjusted it on the launching platform. A mechanic climbed in, started the motors and sat watching the instruments as the motor warmed—and three pairs of sharp eyes were watching him. As he throttled down and climbed from the ship, dragging his tool-kit after him, Ferril, Service and McTavish looked at one another with puzzled frowns. As far as they could see, the man had not made a single move while in the plane, and no one else had been on the inside since its flight number had been announced. Yet they felt it must be this man.

Commander Ferril called the mechanic over: "Duffie, is there the slightest thing about the running of that ship that's out of tune? Any chance of it going wrong?" As he talked, he idly laid his hand on Duffie's tool-kit.

DUFFIE hastily jerked the kit away. "No sir," he said. "She's shipshape if ever a plane was; she's fit as a violin, sir."

Yardsley snapped to attention. "Duffie," he barked, "come into the office—something I want to talk to you about."

"I'll put the tool-kit away first, if you don't mind, sir."

"Ah, but I do mind, Duffie, very much. Bring it along. I want to hear your explanation of what you're doing with a time-bomb in your tool-kit. . . . . You see, Englishmen don't say 'as fit as a violin.' The expression is *'fiddle.'*"

Mechanic Duffie's face paled; then a smile lighted his face, a rapt fanatical expression as though of happiness. He raised the tool-kit with his left hand and slipped his right hand inside. "All right, I'll take it right here—and a lot more of you with me. *Heil Hitler!*"

THERE was a swish through the air, and a cry from Mechanic Duffie. The tool-kit dropped to the ground, and Commander Ferril made a dive for it. He threw back the cover and brought out one of the time-bombs. And he heaved a sigh of relief as he noted that the safety-pin was still in place. The time had been set to *Instantaneous.*

On the floor of the hangar, Duffie was covered by a dozen fighting mechanics, each one trying to get in a blow at the traitor. Ferril shrugged and walked back to his office, satisfied that Duffie would be attended to.

"Mac," said Service, wiping the sweat from his face, "you threw that cane of yours like an Australian Bushman. It saved our lives."

"It was a good throw," agreed Ferril. "If he had pulled that pin, we'd all have blown to Kingdom Come." He turned to his files, brought out a card marked *Alfred Duffie,* and added a notation: *"German spy, executed by act of God."*

"MacTavish," said Commander Ferril, "would you mind getting those two ships on the radio and instructing them to come home? I'll go out and put a notice on the board: *'Operation 718 successfully completed.'* I rather think that the boys will appreciate some good news for a change."

As Ferril walked from the office, a ship was just taking off.

"Who was that?" he demanded of one of the officers.

"That, sir, was Smith and Burns. They're going out to sea to dump some junk, and a time-bomb that somehow or other went wrong. I have to report, sir, that one of our mechanics was killed accidental-like, not in line of duty—a man who went by the name of Duffie."

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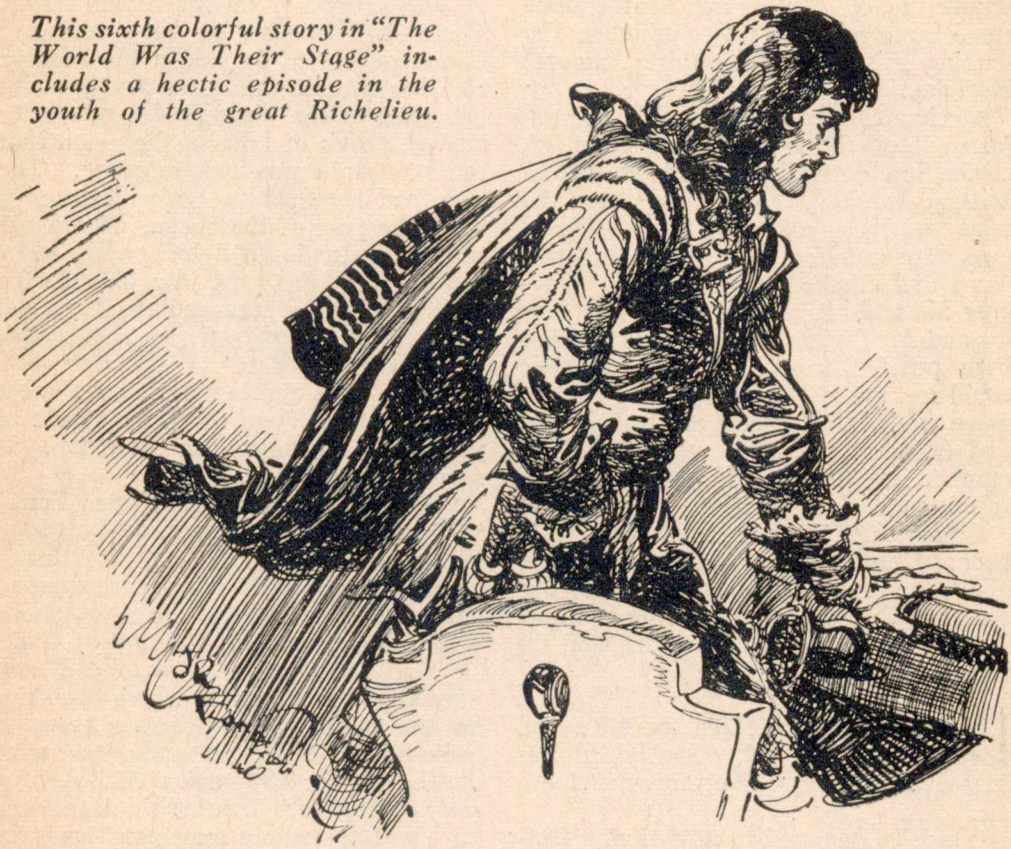
The Bishop's

This sixth colorful story in "The World Was Their Stage" includes a hectic episode in the youth of the great Richelieu.



ANDREINI ran down the narrow street, gasping for breath; sighting a tavern's lights, he checked his pace. Shouts and oaths resounded in his wake. He clapped his sword into scabbard and swung into the tavern's big room. A glance showed him that the place was empty except for one man sitting at a table by the fire.

Swiftly, Andreini hurled himself at another table, uncleared, where men had eaten and drunk. He sprawled into a chair, dropped hat and cloak beside him, wiped a smear of blood from his hand. Not his blood; two men had died, back there.

He leaned forward across the table. With adroit mobility, the dark, vigorous features became vacuous, maudlin. His strong, unafraid eyes grew bleary. As the landlord came and took his order, he was the very picture of a nodding, wine-sodden rogue all but under the table.

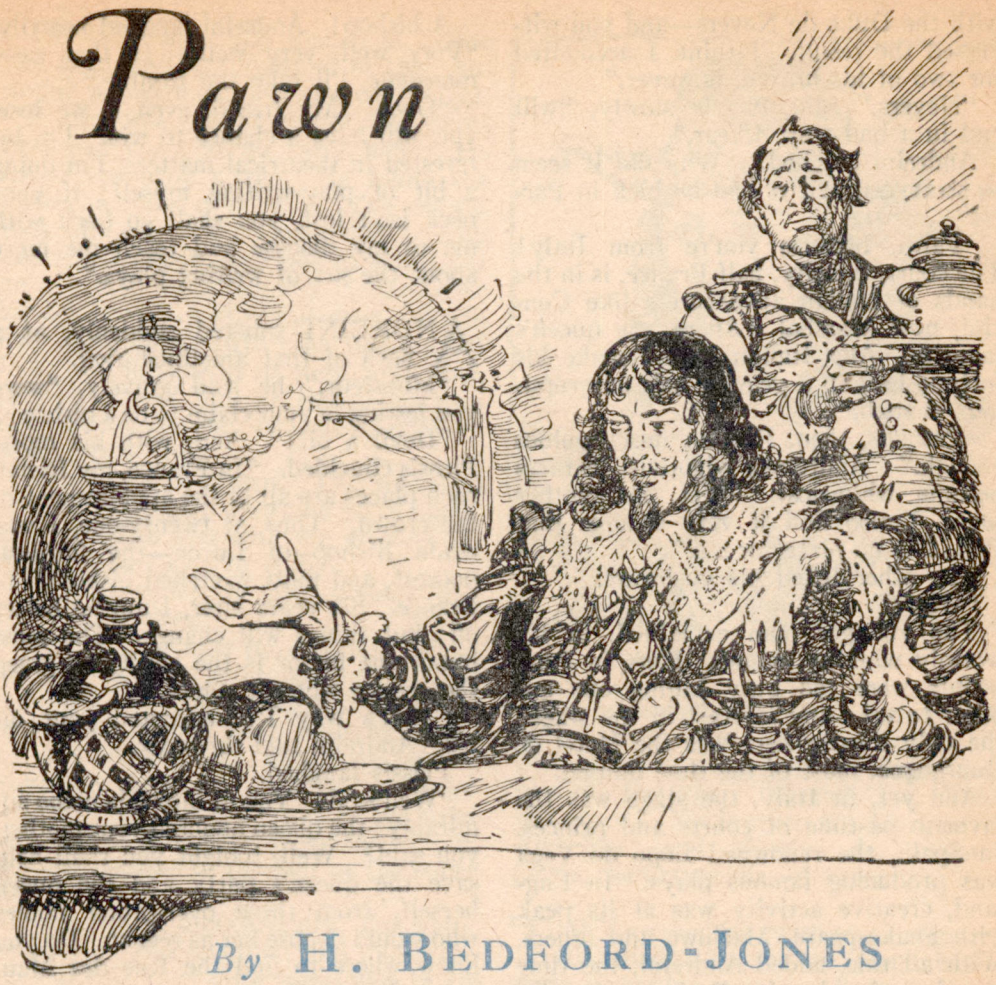
Now, controlling his heaving lungs, he waited. Would that one man at the other table give him away? A young man, handsome, cloaked and sworded, a gem on his finger; another of these damned French nobles! They were all arrogant and treacherous, thought Andreini, and he was not far wrong. In 1613 Paris was a place of intrigue, assassination, death. The young Louis XIII was a boy; his mother, Marie of the Medici line, ruled France with her own favorites. . . .

"Nevers! Nevers! Ho! Where's the damned rogue who insulted the Duke de Nevers?"

A burst of voices, a stamp of feet, as half a dozen men with steel out came crowding into the tavern. Andreini lifted one of the pewter cups on the table, drunkenly.

"God save the noble Duke de Nevers!" he hiccuped. "Greatest man in France!"

Pawn



By H. BEDFORD-JONES

They crowded out again with impatient oaths and were gone roaring on down the twisting street. The man at the next table—Andreini judged him as twenty-seven or eight—broke into a laugh.

"Well done, monsieur!" he exclaimed. "Lucky they didn't see your left cuff—it's badly blood-stained. Will you do me the honor of joining me, since I have some time to wait here? I am no friend of Nevers, by the way, but am a stranger in Paris."

The speaker was thinly affable, imperious of eye and voice.

Andreini, flinging off his pose, broke into a laugh and rose. He was only twenty-two, and quick at friendship.

"With all my heart!" he responded. He went to the other table and bowed, his sharp eye catching closer view of the man's ring. An episcopal ring, the amethyst of a bishop? Ridiculous!

"I too am a stranger here," he said. "Permit me: Jean Baptiste Andreini, from Italy, and going back there empty-handed and empty of purse."

The other laughed heartily. "That's the strangest thing I've heard since I came to Paris! I'm Armand du Plessis, at your service. Sit, be comfortable, the night's young. Landlord! Wine! And a fowl from the spit for each of us! Well, my friend, devil take me if you didn't play a deft trick yonder! You should be a mummer, a strolling actor!"

"SO I am," said Andreini. He saw the quick incredulity in Plessis' eye, and smiled. "Oh, not one of your French mummers who help quacks sell their medicines on the Pont Neuf! In Italy an actor is held in high esteem as an artist. I had hoped that I might get commissioned by the queen to bring a company of players here. My parents were well known in France; years ago, the queen signally honored my mother. But I've failed. It's impossible to get any entry to the court. My latest try was

with the Duke de Nevers—and you witnessed the result. I think I accounted for two of his bravos, however."

"Nevers," said Plessis slowly, "will end in a bad way, I fear."

Andreini laughed. "Why did it seem so strange that I've had no luck in Paris?"

"Faith, because you're from Italy! The court, the city, half France, is in the hands of Italian adventurers like Concini, now Marshal d'Ancre, the queen's favorite. Any Italian should make his fortune here in a year, if he's unscrupulous enough."

"Perhaps, then, I'm not unscrupulous enough." Andreini's vigorous features became whimsical. "Yet, in another sense, I also find it very strange that Paris has no place for me."

The other lifted his eyebrows.

"Why?"

The younger man explained, in his warmly winning manner: Here in Paris people were too busy killing one another to take any interest in the stage; the only theater here was the Hotel de Bourgogne, most of the time unused.

And yet, in Italy, the stage was the favorite pastime of courts and princes. In Spain, the renowned Lope de Vega was producing famous plays. In England, creative activity was at its peak with Shakespeare, Marlowe and others. With all this, added Andreini, the time was fast ripening for Paris to vie with other capitals as a theatrical center.

"The time's coming, and I'd like to be the man to bring the stage into fashion here," he concluded. "All I need is the chance; the queen has favored Italian companies of players who come and go. I want to come and stay. The time's ripe for France to have a theater of its own, I'd stake my life on it!"

"Then, my friend, you shall have the chance to stake your life," said Plessis, a spark kindling in his sharp eyes, the eyes of a cynic. "There's a game afoot; if it's won, you shall win greatly. If lost—you take your chance. You'll fit into it admirably. Will you make good your word, and gamble?"

CALMLY Andreini met that imperious gaze; but his pulses leaped. He knew well this was some intrigue, probably of the court. His chance!

"Yes, monsieur," he replied. "But I've told you that I have scruples."

"You need have no more than I, who am a bishop."

A bishop! Andreini laughed heartily. "Very well, very well! In that case, monsieur, I'll take the gamble."

"Good. My friend, even if we lose, you still have a chance to win. I'm interested in theatrical matters, I'm doing a bit of play-writing myself; if your neck isn't lost, you shall go back with me to my diocese and teach me more about the art of writing plays."

ANDREINI sobered suddenly, at a flash of that amethyst ring.

"Monsieur," he said gravely, "were you jesting in your claim to be a bishop?"

"Devil a bit!" And, with his reply, Plessis chuckled. "In France, my friend, such places are all in the appointment of the crown. Thus, at twenty-one, I was made Bishop of Lucon—the filthiest, poorest, and most wretched bishopric in France. Six years later, I am no better off; but things will change. The most important factor is the ability to grasp the chance when it comes."

"That's why I've accepted your offer," Andreini said shrewdly.

Plessis laughed.

"Well said! You fit into this niche admirably; the queen honored your mother, you said? Well, tonight you shall help save the queen's party and the queen herself, from these over-proud nobles who would depose her as regent. Do you know where to find the Rue des Mauvaises Paroles?"

"No."

"You'll find it close to the Bureau des Postes. Go there now, at once; await me. I have a house there where I live while on my infrequent Paris visits." As he spoke, Plessis twisted the ring from his finger and extended it. "Take this. My servant is named Cadillac; he'll take care of you. Get some sleep; we have the rest of the night for action. I'll be along in an hour or so with everything you may need."

"Tonight, you say?" said Andreini, as he took the ring. He was astonished.

"Yes. There's to be a ball at the Louvre. It will last till daylight."

The Louvre! The court! The queen-regent! Dazedly, Andreini gathered up hat and cloak and was at the door when several men entered; he stood aside to let them pass. They were all masked, but he caught a glint of jewels, and one furred mantle was embroidered with the insignia of the Sant' Esprit; the wearer, then, must be one of the greatest nobles in the realm!

For these men, the Bishop of Lucon had been waiting. Assured of this, Andreini plunged off into the chill night.

Winter was not far distant, and darkness had come at an early hour. He found the little street. He found the house, an abode of poverty. The servant took him to a cold room; doffing only boots and sword, Andreini stretched out on a bed, drew a tattered blanket over himself, and was asleep at once. Youth had rebounded swiftly; he dreamed of fame and fortune as he slept, and when they awakened him he leaped up with new eagerness—only to stare blankly at what greeted him.

Candles lit the room. Two men had aroused him; they were clad all in black, and bowed to him with the greatest respect. One spoke in Italian.

"Eminence, we are here to assist you. It is time to dress."

Upon a chair near by, Andreini beheld the scarlet biretta and robes of a cardinal.

Before he could speak for astonishment, they were at work upon him. He fell in with their task, since they refused to answer questions. His merry humor returned; no doubt he was to play the part of a cardinal, a prince of the church, in some masque or pageant at the court this night!

They dressed him carefully. The white linen collar was spotless; and under the folds of this, they drew the ribbon of an order; the jeweled decoration glittered on his chest. A scarlet skullcap, the biretta clapped on above it. A huge sapphire ring. And, under the robes, a long and very business-like Milanese stiletto, almost as good as a sword.

"Come, Eminence," said one of the two attendants. The other flung open a door; Andreini, passing through, heard his voice: "His Eminence, Cardinal Ferrari!"

Andreini stopped short. He was in the largest room of the tumbledown little house; before him sat the black-clad Bishop of Lucon and two other gentlemen whom he knew must be great nobles. One of them wore that furred mantle bearing the insignia of the Sant' Esprit.

They eyed him keenly and silently. He drew himself up, and his voice rapped out upon the silence of the room with biting acerbity.

"So, messieurs, this is the greeting you give a prince of the church?"

"A thousand pardons!" Plessis was on his feet instantly, bowing low; Andreini extended his hand, and Plessis kissed the sapphire ring, then looked up with laughing delight in his long-nosed, narrow features. "Permit me, Your Eminence! My brother, the Marquis de Richelieu; and Marshal de Bassompierre, the first soldier of France."

ARMAND DU PLESSIS

THEY greeted him with mock respect; Richelieu in silence, an intent, handsome, unsmiling man, and Bassompierre, he of the furred mantle, rolling out a jest and a roaring burst of laughter.

"He's good, Armand, he's good!" he cried. "Here, Richelieu—wine for the Cardinal! A toast with you, honest churchman; health to us all, this night, and the Bastille for the Comte de Marillac!"

Wine was on the table. Andreini, ignorant what it was all about, took the glass handed him, clinked it with the others, drank, and sank on a stool. Instantly, the room became still and grave with tension, as Plessis took up the word.

"My friend, I'll be brief. This evening the Papal nuncio, Cardinal Ferrari, was to have arrived in Paris. On the road from Orleans today, his coach was attacked by armed men—by Marillac and other gentlemen belonging to the Duke de Nevers; they were masked, but we know their identity well enough. Their purpose was to kill the Cardinal and seize his dispatches. They killed his secretary and thought him killed, but left him only wounded; he is badly hurt, however. They missed the most im-

portant letters and dispatches, getting away with others that do not matter. So far, clear?"

Andreini nodded and sipped his wine, wasting no words. He knew suddenly that his head was damnably loose on his shoulders!

"Nevers is leading, under cover of his man Marillac, a conspiracy against the queen and the Italians at court," went on

Andreini presented the packets of letters to the queen. "I shall hope for the honor of a private audience, within the next few days," he said.

the young bishop, caressing his goatee placidly. "The Cardinal was bringing letters vital to the queen—assurances of money and support from Italy and Savoy. Nevers is announcing at the Louvre this evening that Cardinal Ferrari was killed by assassins hired by the queen and Concini; he's playing for quick, hot action, with Marillac primed to assassinate Concini. What then? Nevers will probably seize the queen, the regent, and the boy king, before morning. You understand?"

Andreini nodded again. After all, it did not matter particularly who was who, in his mind. He could not hope to understand the ins and outs of this business. But here Bassompierre spoke up, in his hearty soldierly manner.

"Almost too bad to stop the game, Armand! That damned Concini disgraces the office of a marshal of France!"

Plessis darted him a glance and a thin smile. "Agreed; but let us save him so that he can be killed by the right people, at the right time. Now, my friend from Italy, we plan to introduce you to the queen's presence in an hour from now. Satisfied?"

Andreini shook his head. "First, there may be someone who knows Ferrari. Second, I look too young for the part."

Plessis shrugged exasperatedly.

"There'll be no one there who knows him. And cannot you, an actor, make yourself look older?"

"Certainly. But—"

"Then, attention!" rasped the bishop. "You're not to be introduced to the whole court; merely in private, to the queen—which means to her council as well, and the great lords with her. Nevers will be there. So will Bassompierre. You'll hand her your letters; we'll provide you with an imitation secretary and servants. Then withdraw, the coach will bring you here—and the Cardinal vanishes. Nevers is blocked, the plot is checked, and the

ANDREINI

truth will become known tomorrow. They'll wonder, but never know! The Cardinal, of course, will later say that he sent someone to represent him. Satisfied?"

Andreini reflected upon the question; his head really felt very loose indeed. He was too proud to back out, however; and this singular ecclesiastic inspired a certain confidence, far more than did the gorgeous, massive Bassompierre—who had been born Betstein—or the dour Henri de Richelieu. Some inner fire burned in this young prelate that communicated itself to him and sparked in his soul.

"Why should I not be satisfied? Why should I?" he replied, and shrugged. "I am no one. The question is, are you satisfied? A few lines in my face, powder on my hair and my eyebrows, a pair of spectacles to my eyes, a little dark stain to my face—"

He assumed the thick lisping accent of an Italian, blinked at them, drew down his jaw, and put on ten years in an instant. There was nothing to threaten his identity; it was an age when cardinals or bishops or princes might be boys in years, when a nuncio of Rome might be a prelate or a soldier or an influential relative. The impossible was a part of everyday life—some princely whim might land a gypsy in a royal palace.

This was precisely what Andreini encountered, a little over an hour later.

WITH coach and servants, and a silent little man who posed as his secretary, Andreini drove into the pile of masonry that was more like a fortress than a palace. Bloody was the Louvre, every foot of it drenched in blood by duels, assassinations or dark deeds like that of St. Bartholemew's Eve.

Bassompierre and Richelieu had gone on ahead to attend to his reception. Armand du Plessis, who had no post at court, accompanied Andreini to give him some final coaching, and was going to remain in the carriage. In the courtyard, however, everything was wild turmoil; nobles and lackeys, coaches and sedan-chairs, torch-boys, officers, guards and palace officials. Here, too, was a crowd of young nobles who had fetched a gypsy crone into the courtyard and were surrounding each coach as it arrived and stood waiting, with the crone telling brief fortunes, racy as she dared.

Andreini found them at his coach door, found a torch thrust close to give light, found the crone gabbling—and then she fell silent. At sight of the Cardinal's robes, the whole pack fell silent, abashed. The gypsy woman, unable to draw back, flashed her eyes at the three men inside and her voice lifted in a hoarse cackle.

"Red shall be still redder ere the red dawn comes! Here's the wrong man in the red robe—there'll be an end to laughter when the other gets his hat!"

She was dragged away, still screeching, by the pack of young nobles, one of whom had the grace to apologize.

Plessis, in his corner, laughed softly. "You heard?" He jogged Andreini with his elbow. "The wrong man, ha! My friend, if ever I wear that biretta of yours, there'll be less laughter and more common sense in Paris! Well, here we are. Luck attend you!"

Andreini and the secretary alighted. The guards saluted. A chamberlain bowed low; he had been sent to bring His Eminence to the private apartment of the queen. Marie de Medici was not gracing the ball tonight with her presence, by reasons of health, but was receiving a chosen company in her own quarters.

And now, as he followed into those torch-lit corridors, Andreini began to realize for the first time just how loose his head really was, beneath the red skullcap and biretta. For he was playing at being a prince, in the house of kings; and the rapiers of those around him were not for show but for use. All eyes were turned upon him, with curiosity or astonishment, and his heart nearly failed him when, after stairs and passages and guards, he was led into a great

antechamber filled with brilliantly clad women and still more gorgeous men.

They fell silent, staring at him, openly amazed by his appearance. It was hard to face them, to walk through them, to smile amiably and make a movement of the hand that might be taken for benediction. But the chamberlain kept on, came to a door beyond, and the door was opened.

"His Eminence Cardinal Ferrari!"

So Andreini came into the presence of the queen—Marie de Medici, stout and middle-aged, swathed enormously in her rich robes, and so reeking with perfumes that the senses reeled.

SOMEHOW he remembered all Plessis had told him; he got through the ceremonious greetings without a blunder. All the while, he was conscious of the faces around; faces astonished, furious, threatening, bewildered. Nevers, tall and darkly handsome; the weak and cowardly adventurer who had become Marshal d'Ancre; Epernon, Bassompierre, Vendome, Conde and others of the great lords; the ladies of honor, and a few Italian faces, women and men, more powerful in France than the great princes themselves. Most of those faces were amazed and hostile, as Andreini realized; therefore, this plot to seize and depose the queen must be widespread!

A seat was placed beside Marie; Andreini took it, pleading fatigue and nearsightedness, and sheltered his eyes from the glare of the candles. The queen, having finished with formality, greeted him in the Italian that everyone here spoke, and all the vigor of her volcanic nature leaped forth.

"Your Eminence, I have heard the most shameful stories this evening! In fact, your arrival is so amazing to everyone that we cannot understand it. Why, we were told that your carriage had been attacked, that you were hurt—or dead! Only a few moments ago one of our gentlemen brought definite information that these stories were true!"

"Oh!" said Andreini, glancing up and meeting the gaze of the Duke de Nevers. "No doubt it was a mistake; I've met only one French gentleman all the way from Orleans here, and he was very pleasant. Marillac, I think the name was. Eh, Orlando?"

The little secretary bowed. "The Comte de Marillac, Your Eminence."

Nevers changed countenance. The queen plunged into questions. Andreini through his secretary presented the packets of letters to her.

"Your Majesty may have every confidence," he said, "in the help and backing of Savoy and Tuscany and Rome; as regent and guardian of King Louis, you represent France. I shall hope for the honor of a private audience, within the next few days, when Your Majesty may be somewhat recovered in health."

"And then, perhaps," intervened Marshal d'Ancre smoothly, "you may wish to make some complaints regarding annoyances on your journey here? It will give us great pleasure, Your Eminence, to sweep away any unpleasant memories that may have occurred."

Andreini met the weary, crafty eyes of the Italian, and wondered.

"Oh, there were none!" he rejoined cheerfully. This Concini, he perceived, was no fool, had not been tricked at all —ah, of course! He must be in on the scheme of imposture. The queen was not. She met Conde, Nevers and the others with a mocking defiance; in fact, she made it very plain to everyone that now she was more than able to cope with whatever arose. And so she was. These letters from the south and east would redouble her strength. Everyone would flock to fawn upon her, now that money and support were assured her.

Andreini was pumped for news of Italy. With some effort he kept to his role; none the less, his eager youth peered forth, and his winning personality broke through the words, until the man himself became the center of interest for all. The dull and stodgy room, so filled with jealousies and suspicious hatred that men feared to speak their minds, became transfigured. Wit and laughter leaped forth, dignity was lessened, stories began to breed, none too decorously either.

AMID a burst of laughter, Andreini caught the name of Richelieu. Someone had just come from the ballrooms, bringing the story; it seemed that the marquis had encountered the gypsy crone, who told him no pleasant fortune. He would be slain in a duel and another man would make his name famous—so she said. Richelieu had flown into a fury. It was all a bright joke; such was the measure of humor at this court. But, to Andreini, it occurred that if Richelieu were to die, his younger brother Armand du Plessis would bear the name. This young bishop from the country, Andreini realized, might yet become a great man.

Theaters? A question from the queen, and now Andreini struck into what he really knew. He had fulfilled his mission here, and caught slight gestures from Bassompierre telling him to be off; he disregarded them. Marie de Medici had a vivid interest in the subject, and he determined swiftly to make the most of the occasion. After all, he was gambling with his head, and here was his chance to win something.

HIS fluency, his knowledge, his vehemence, delighted the queen. She asked advice, and he gave it freely.

"You should have an established company of players here, Your Majesty. There's one theater well suited to such a company, the Hotel de Bourgogne. Why not bring Italian actors here, add French to them, and gradually build up a French school? I know the very man for your purpose—young Andreini, son of the famous name."

"Oh, of course!" The queen clapped her hands. "I remember—Isabel, that glorious woman who had been given degrees by universities because of her learning—you say there is a son?"

"Yes, Jean Baptiste Andreini, Your Majesty. I feel sure that a letter from you, a commission to bring his own company here, would prove the ambition of his life! He is at Florence, or at least his company is there—"

"I shall write him at once, tomorrow!" exclaimed the queen eagerly. "A splendid idea, Your Eminence, splendid! I thank you for it. Yes, I remember his mother well, poor woman! When she died, they refused her Christian burial because she was an actress; and the whole city of Lyons turned out to do her honor, to atone for the disgrace! What became of her husband, the poet and actor, who wrote so many plays?"

They were speaking in Italian, rapid and low-voiced, but not in any confidential manner. Andreini, as though casually, traced a circle on his knee with one finger, then other circles. He knew that this sharp-eyed woman would recognize the Medici crest, and at the sign would watch his words carefully.

"After her death, Your Majesty, he never appeared on the stage again. He used to say that with more care, her death might have been avoided; it was a most unfortunate accident. He devoted himself to instructing his son in the whole art of the theater. In the words of the nimble Harlequin: Knowledge never comes amiss, and is more potent than gold, more faithful than friends or guards!"

"A wise saying. The son should be just the man for us; I'll write him with my own hand. Better arrange for money too, I suppose." With an abrupt break in the conversation, she turned; Andreini had not judged amiss her Italian subtlety of mind. "M. de Bassompierre!"

The noble approached with a low bow. "What guards are on duty?" she demanded.

"The guards on duty tonight are, I believe, the company of M. de Marillac."

"Indeed!" The queen darted a glance at the Duke de Nevers. "You will have the goodness to replace them now, instantly, with the company commanded by the Baron de Pont-Courlay, who will remain on duty until further notice."

"At once, Your Majesty." Bassompierre bowed again, so far as his marvelous starched lace collar would permit, and with a shadowy smile on his bluff countenance, departed.

The Marshal d'Ancre suavely intervened. This adventurer, whose name of Concini was the most hated name in Paris, suggested that the Cardinal must be weary, and offered to take him to some refreshment. The queen at once dismissed Andreini in the most gracious manner, giving him her hand and assuring him of a private audience whenever he so desired.

Andreini had to admire the neat way in which he was shuffled out. Concini took his arm and led him through the apartments, talking earnestly of nothing, while the secretary followed. Once a door closed behind them, the Italian abandoned all pretense and clapped Andreini on the shoulder.

"Excellent! Well done, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Bassompierre could only give me a hint or two, and very luckily too, because I've met the real Cardinal Ferrari. What's this about the guards? It was a plot?"

"Yes," said Andreini. "The marshal knows, and so does the Marquis de Richelieu."

"Good. I'll see him immediately, then. Bassompierre told me to get you to your coach; I'll send my lackey with you by the private stairs."

THE lackey was summoned. Concini, in token of his admiring gratitude, pressed a ring upon Andreini's finger, and hastily departed. Under guidance of the

lackey, Andreini and his secretary by a devious way gained the cold courtyard where the coach was waiting. The guards, surprised at their appearance, summoned the coach. Andreini perceived that squads of men were coming and going; Bassompierre was putting the palace in charge of more secure guardians.

INTO the coach, now, while the horses pawed the cobblestones and from the enormous building came the sound of viols and flutes and gay voices at revelry. The coach door slammed, the wheels rumbled.

"All well?" came the voice of Armand du Plessis. "Why is the guard being changed?"

"By Bassompierre, at the Queen's orders. Yes, all's well. Concini's on the alert. He gave me a diamond ring that must be worth a thousand livres by the look of it."

"You'll probably find the stone full of flaws," said the bishop dryly.

"Is this masquerade finished?"

"Thank heaven, yes!"

"Then give me a hand," said Andreini, "and I'll get out of these damned clothes. As a costume they're lovely, but I'm wrapped like a mummy."

Plessis lent a hand; the secretary lent a hand; and as the carriage swayed and rumbled, Andreini got out of his luxurious but muffling robes. The imitation secretary folded and laid them carefully aside; they belonged to the real Cardinal. This secretary was in actual fact Cadillac, the lackey of Plessis, and a shrewd and able fellow. He gave his own greatcoat to Andreini, now stripped to shirt and drawers.

"Hello!" exclaimed the bishop. "This doesn't look like the shortest way home—what the devil is in those rascals?" He tugged at the window on his side, got it open, and sent an angry shout at the driver and groom on the box. In reply came a burst of laughter, and a whipcrack so close to his face that Plessis jerked away from the window with an oath.

"Those are not our men, monsieur!" exclaimed Cadillac in alarm.

"So I perceive. And horsemen behind us; neatly trapped, by my faith!" The young bishop turned to Andreini. His voice was cold and calm. "Sorry, my friend; I made a bad mistake by waiting in this coach! They replaced our men, and I knew it not. Now we're caught."

"Why?" demanded Andreini. "What can they do with us?"

"Kill us, you fool. Cadillac! There's a chance they may pay more attention to us than to you. If you can get away, do so. My brother, Richelieu, promised to return to my house and meet us there; you'll find him quick to aid us. Andreini, get into the Cardinal's cassock again—throw it around your shoulders, anything to keep their attention on you and me. Quickly, now! It may give Cadillac a chance to get away."

Andreini obeyed, and barely in time. The coach slowed. The clatter of horsemen behind swept up close. They turned in at a courtyard which was bright with the ruddy flare of torches. Plessis reached for the door-handle, and clapped Andreini on the knee.

"You to the other one!" he said swiftly. "Now!"

Not waiting for the coach to stop, he flung open the door and leaped out. Andreini did the same on his side, hampered by the scarlet robe and letting it fall as he struck the cobblestones.

The following horsemen swept around the two men. Guards from the gates hurried to join them; laughter and oaths resounded. The glitter of steel warned Andreini against any attempt to fight. He made none. Laughter redoubled at sight of his costume, the cassock being now gone.

"Here's your Cardinal!" shouted someone. "And the other, who's he?"

"The little Bishop of Lucon!" came reply, amid more laughter. "Where's Marillac?"

"Inside. Fetch the cassock along. Better close those gates, there!"

Just when Cadillac had gone, how he had managed it, Andreini had no idea. A torch was thrust close to the coach, it was seen to be empty; there was no sign of the lackey anywhere in the courtyard. So much laughter was going on, so loud were the oaths and high talk, that he might well have made his escape unobserved; and certainly no one missed him.

GATES clanged shut; a house in Paris was built to stand seige, and frequently did. Arms gripped by a man on either side, Andreini was hustled along after Plessis into the house. It was a handsome place; they stood in a long hall where lamplight touched upon old armor and tapestries and portraits. At one end of the hall, a stairway rose sharply to a landing, then twisted around and out of sight. By the foot of these stairs was a huge litter of straw, where serv-

The poniard plunged to the hilt in Marillac's body—and the sword came free as Marillac staggered.

ants were packing some hampers and casks.

"That straw, those stairs!" said Plessis in low, swift Italian, and gave Andreini's ankle a kick. "Not now. Be ready for anything. Use your wits or die!"

They were dragged away from each other. Their weapons had already been taken; now there seemed to be a wait. A number of gentlemen appeared, tramping through into one of the rooms off the hall. Bravos and soldiers clustered at the doors. Suddenly there was a stir. Into the hall came three men, breathing oaths.

One loosed a shout at the servants:

"Cease the work, you dolts! Unpack everything. We're remaining here."

"Yes," said Plessis, with dry irony. "The Louvre remains occupied, Marillac."

The other paused briefly—a man with hot eyes of fury, and a reckless, headstrong air. His two companions wore the sash of guard officers; members of his own company, no doubt. He looked at the two prisoners, and gestured.

"Bring them in."

He and his companions strode on. Andreini and Plessis were shoved after. They came into a fairly large room with painted walls and ceiling. A dozen gentlemen were grouped about a table where wine and silver flagons and salvers of food were set out. They greeted Marillac with acclaim. Andreini comprehended that this must be Marillac's house.

Pen drawings by
John Richard Flanagan

"Where are all the ladies, Marillac?" demanded someone gayly.

"I sent them out of Paris." The Count seized on a flagon of wine, quaffed, and wiped his mustache. "Ah! Well, my friends, we've lost, thanks to these two rogues yonder. Nevers and Condé will be here in an hour or so. What we most need now, is information."

Andreini scanned the faces and figures before him, and found no luck in them. Hot arrogant features, cruel eyes, men stamped with the lowest forms of vice; yet, because of high birth and place, flaunting in the world's face their depravity and disregard of any law human or divine. Honest men there were at court, and brave, but not in this circle of dissolute nobles.

Eager tongues broke forth in all sorts of rumors and statements regarding the Cardinal, the bishop, the queen regent, Bassompierre—while Marillac quaffed his wine and Plessis stood cool and disdainful, and Andreini eyed the men around him warily. Then the Count set down his goblet, demanded silence, and stepped up to Armand du Plessis.

"You may be a good bishop, monsieur, but you're a damned unlucky conspirator," he said harshly. "I hope you realize it?"

"At least I'm good at something," Plessis smiled icily.

"You impudent little provincial!" snarled Marillac furiously. "Because your brother is a court favorite, you take on the airs of a great noble! Well, who's this rascal masquerading as a cardinal? And who's behind all this tasty bit of intrigue? Speak up, unless you want to be put to the torture and made to speak!"

IT was no idle threat, as the faces around bore witness. Hands were at poniards; let the explosion start, and murder would be let loose in an orgy of blood. Greater men than this little country bishop had been stabbed to death and flung out in the gutter, to be picked up by the watch.

Abruptly, the voice of Andreini quavered upon the room.

"Monsieur! No torture! Spare me, spare me of your grace, and I'll tell all!" he cried out. Terror filled his eyes, dis-

torted his face. Fear shrilled in his voice. He pointed at Plessis. "Take him away, and I'll tell you everything! Don't leave him here to curse me! I can't tell you the truth if he's looking at me!"

Armand du Plessis lost his calm. He swung around with a bursting oath.

"A pox on you, you damned Italian rogue! Be a man and—"

"Take him outside," broke in Marillac, gesturing the guards. They surrounded Plessis and dragged him out of the room. The two holding Andreini released him, at another gesture, and followed.

"I'm not a noble, your excellency," whined Andreini, clasping his hands in entreaty. An ecstasy of fright shook him. His eyes rolled, his voice pleaded at them: "I can't stand the torture; I was tortured once, and I cannot stand it! I'll tell you everything, all the names, what the queen said, everything! Give me a crucifix—I'll swear it!"

Small chance of any sacred symbol being found among these gentlemen!

They looked upon him with contempt, but also with swift interest. In his passionate plea, Andreini came to one knee, lifting his clasped hands to Marillac, with such desperate cowardice in his manner that the Count snarled a disgusted oath.

"Not a bad idea, Marillac!" exclaimed someone. "Here, give the fellow a draft of wine, then swear him on your sword-hilt and we'll get the truth out of him!"

Others applauded. A flagon was filled and thrust at Andreini; he gulped down the wine, spilling it over his chin and shirt, coughing, wiping his lips. Marillac, poniard at girdle, hitched around his baldric so that the cross-hilt of his sword protruded.

"Lay hand on that, and swear!" he commanded.

Andreini, still on one knee, gripped the hilt with his right hand. He lost balance; he tottered, flailed at the air with his left hand, pitched forward—and that left hand gripped the poniard.

Then, swift as trained muscles could flash into action, he was up and on his feet. The sword stuck in the scabbard, as he had feared. The poniard did not. It came free, it plunged to the hilt in Marillac's body—and the sword came clear as Marillac staggered. A weapon in each hand, Andreini was darting for the door before anyone fully realized just what had happened; before Marillac's death-cry rang upon the room, even.

The door flew open. In the hall was Plessis, a group of men about him. Andreini was upon them like an angel of vengeance, bloody poniard flashing, rapier darting at them. He thrust one man through; the others broke and scattered.

"Quick! To the stairs!" he cried.

The bishop stooped, caught up the sword of the hurt man, and ran for the stairs. None of the guards were in this direction. As he joined Andreini, he said:

"Apologies, my friend! You even fooled me—here, you rogues! Out of the way!"

The servants, now at their unpacking, scattered hastily. Behind, shouts and oaths and armed men were erupting. Andreini leaped to the stairs, and swung around. He saw Plessis pausing at a lamp-stand below the stair-post; with one blow of his sword the bishop knocked away glass and shade, and held the flame to the straw at his feet. It caught. A leap, and he was on the stairs with Andreini, laughing wildly, excitedly.

"A good bishop should make hellfire serve him well!" he cried in a gay voice. "That's a line for one of your plays, Italian—up a little farther—right! You take the wall; I'll take the rail—"

The flames had caught the masses of straw, with a thick smoke and a crackling roar, mounting to tapestries and woodwork. The servants were screaming and bawling; down the hall came a rush of nobles and soldiers yelling vengeance and curses. The foremost came leaping through the smoke, to meet the rapiers awaiting for them.

Andreini felt a shocked sense of admiration at sight of this bishop's swordplay. It was swift and beautiful to see; Plessis had his point in and out like a flame. And, being above those who came, he thrust only for the face. Then Andreini was in the game also.

It lasted only a moment; but it was like a scene from some half-imagined hell. The first men through the veil of smoke, nearly all smitten through face or throat, rolled in agony and screamed and coughed. The others plunged full upon them, trod on the bodies, slipped in the blood, yelled in blind panic as the smoke hid everything—and Plessis, descending a step or two, deliberately thrust one man through, then another.

"There's an episcopal bishop's blessing for the rascals!" he panted. "Now, friend—back! Back and up, before they realize we're gone!"

The attack had ceased, for the moment. The smoke had thickened, as water was flung upon the flames; Andreini was choked and gasping now, feeling his way up to the landing and then on in clearer air and darkness.

"Don't waste time!" exclaimed Plessis. "Here, stick to me. Make for the back. The front windows will be shuttered. The back, and the garden!"

Closed rooms, a strange house, and pitch blackness; how they managed it, Andreini never knew. Fumbling through dark rooms, and at last to a window, while behind them the house rang with yells and streamed with smoke, and shook to the pounding of men's feet.

Plessis leaned far out, and pulled himself back, cursing.

"A hazy sky, no stars, but it seems like a roof beneath. The kitchens, perhaps. I'll chance it! You hang out and grip my hand."

He let himself out. Andreini got a handgrip on him, lowered him, and caught a joyous word. He let go, and himself took the greater chance of hanging and dropping. All went well, however, and a moment later they dropped to the ground below, and slipped off into the gardens, and so to the rear wall.

TEN minutes later Andreini, heedless of his unconventional costume, was watching a singular scene, at the front of Marillac's house. The street was bright with torches. In the entry stood the Duke de Nevers, one of the greatest nobles of the realm, passionately denouncing the Bishop of Lucon to the King's Lieutenant, whose party of fifty archers of the watch surrounded the entrance. They were actually armed with pikes or muskets, but still bore the name of archers, in sympathy with the past.

Nevers denounced the country bishop with fiery heat; Lucon had killed M. de Marillac of the guards, with two other gentlemen, and had hurt or wounded many. On the other hand stood Cadillac, lackey of the bishop, crying to heaven for vengeance on Marillac and others who had kidnaped the good prelate and were holding him prisoner even now.

"May Satan fly away with me, if I know what to believe!" cried the perplexed and angry officer. "A bishop, you say? A bishop to kill gentlemen of the guards? Then the guards had better take to theology!"

"Precisely my opinion, monsieur," intervened a new voice, a voice calm and poised and unhurried. From Cadillac broke a cry of joy, as the Bishop of Lucon pressed through the guards and came into the full torchlight. He bowed composedly to the officer, and to the Duke, who stared slack-jawed.

"SEEMINGLY there is some curious mistake, gentlemen," he went on affably. "I am the Bishop of Lucon, true; but it is obvious that, having just arrived, I could not very well be killing gentlemen inside the house yonder. Nor, being afoot, and safe, have I been kidnaped and put to danger—plain, is it not? Therefore, M. de Nevers, your friends and gentlemen have evidently made a mistake in someone's identity; and this rascally servant of mine has been drinking and imagining things. You rogue! Go home instantly; and as penance, give your breeches to the beggar at the corner yonder, who has none. Quick about it! You shall have a dozen lashes tomorrow, for your punishment. M. de Nevers, my profound apologies. And M. the Lieutenant of the King, my thanks for your good-will and my regrets for having disturbed you! Good evening, gentlemen."

And with another bow the Bishop of Lucon went his way. As he later observed to his guest, it was the shortest and most profitable sermon he had ever preached; and might well have closed with an admonition on how much even the best-educated person can learn from the theater.

"I only trust, my friend," he added amiably, "that you will also find the evening profitable, aside from that ring upon your finger."

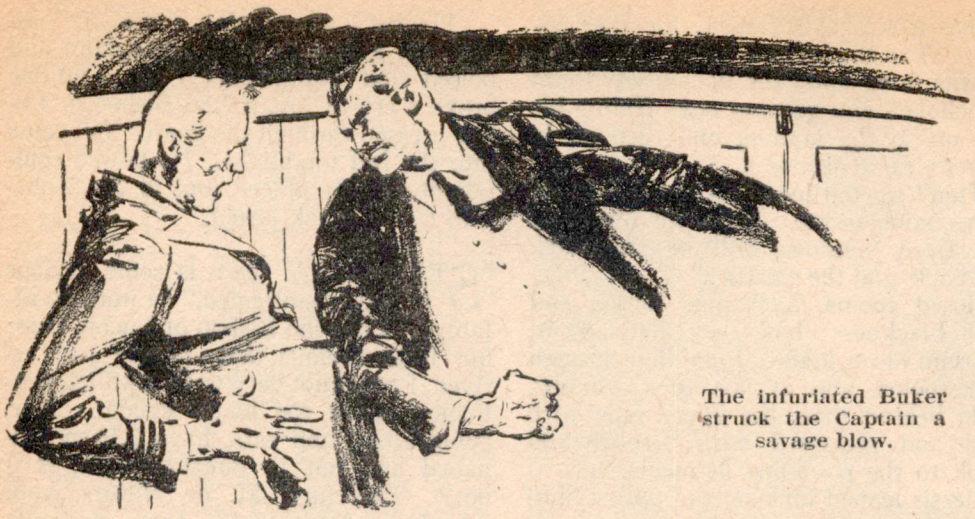
Andreini smiled. "I shall, you may be sure, if the queen does not forget her promise to commission me and my company of players!"

The other nodded at him sagely.

"There are two really regal attributes of Marie de Medici," he observed. "First, she knows the very slight importance of the truth. Second, she knows the tremendous importance of a promise! If she promised to write you with her own hand, she will do so."

And she did, the letter even today attesting what a profound cynic was the Bishop of Lucon, and what an excellent actor was Jean Baptiste Andreini.

Another story in "The World Was Their Stage" series will appear in our next issue.



The infuriated Buker struck the Captain a savage blow.

"SO you've started playing at your little hobby, huh, Cap'n?" The snickering voice of Buker grated on the ears of Captain Miles. During the past two days he had come to detest the sight of this swaggering agent of the charterers. He frowned sidewise at Buker, who had dropped uninvited onto the settee, a thick cigar clamped between his tobacco-stained teeth.

"The ship was laid up so long there isn't a single clock on board which doesn't need overhauling," he complained. "Also," he added tartly, "this is my cabin, not a public smoking-room. And I like privacy."

Buker grinned. There was a mocking light in his dark eyes. He removed his cigar and flicked the heavy ash offensively onto the Captain's carpet.

"I'll go where I like and do as I please on this ship."

The Captain had turned back to his desk, on which lay wheels, pinions and other parts of the chartroom clock. He was white-haired, over sixty but still active, his lined face ruddy with health. With Buker's remark his head jerked round again, his blue eyes like steel.

"You might be the charterer's man, but don't forget I'm Captain," he snapped.

"A captain without authority," sneered Buker.

The Captain stared, a strange uneasiness stealing over him. He had felt there was something queer about this voyage from its beginning two days ago. For one thing, the ship was undermanned, with the most disreputable-looking handful of officers and men he'd ever signed on; for another, they showed toward Buker a deference that was puzzling for a man who merely represented the charterers.

"Without authority?" Captain Miles challenged.

As if in answer, the radio operator entered without knocking. He was a dark-skinned young man of Latin-American origin. A cigarette hung from his lips.

"There ees a ship about feefty miles astern sending out S. O. S.," he said to Buker, ignoring the Captain. "She want some one to take off her crew queeckly. We are the nearest ship. She ees on fire. There are the details." He handed Buker a slip of paper.

The Captain glared up at him. "Do you usually report distress messages to passengers?" he demanded.

The operator removed his cigarette and blew smoke down his nostrils insolently. He exchanged glances with Buker.

"That's one thing I meant to tell you," said Buker. "We don't answer any distress calls."

"Eet ees what I thought," responded the operator. "So I no answer eet before reporting to you."

"Reporting to him!" exclaimed the Captain incredulously. He reached over and snatched the paper from Buker's fingers. He took in the scribbled words at a glance. In one movement he thrust back his chair and came to his feet.

"We'll soon see who's in command here," he said, setting his jaw.

He strode past the operator, who grinned at Buker. The Captain marched straight for the bridge ladder and mounted it. The second mate was lolling over the fore-rail.

"Bring the ship round," the captain called to him. "We're going back to an S. O. S."

The second mate straightened up leisurely and turned to face the Captain; he

Old Clocks to Mend

A canny ship-captain deals with gun-runners.

By PATRICK O'KEEFFE

was unshaven, dressed in shabby shore clothing. Captain Miles had remarked to his two mates that neither of them wore uniforms. They told him, none too civilly, that they'd been out of jobs so long that they couldn't afford to get them out of hock. A cigar-stump between the mate's teeth added fuel to the Captain's anger.

"Throw that cigar away," he rapped. "I've told you once already there's to be no smoking on the bridge."

The second mate merely rolled the stump into the corner of his mouth. He looked past the Captain at Buker, who was climbing the bridge ladder.

"Keep to the course, Miguel," Buker said.

The second mate grunted and leaned back against the rail. For a moment the Captain seemed rooted to the planks with amazement. Then his eyes blazed, and he strode into the wheelhouse.

"Hard right," he commanded.

The helmsman was a little Filipino. He made no attempt to obey the Captain, but simply glanced at Buker and the second mate, who had followed the Captain in.

AS a last resort Captain Miles sprang at the wheel to carry out the order himself. But the second mate, darting beside him shouldered him heavily, and he fell against the bulkhead. Straightening up, he eyed the three men in mingled anger and stupefaction.

"Do you realize what you're doing?" he ejaculated. "This is mutiny, flagrant mutiny. And preventing me from going to the aid—"

"We know all about that," drawled Buker. "So what?"

So what! Captain Miles' eyes searched the misty horizon through the wheelhouse windows. In the range of his vision there wasn't a solitary ship in sight on that gray flat stretch of the Atlantic. Even if there had been, he knew he would have been given no chance whatever to signal to her. He clenched his hands.

"You'll know *what* when we get to port," he cried.

"Mebbe I can change your ideas, Cap'n," Buker hinted. "Suppose we go back to your cabin. I've got a little proposition to make."

The Captain glared at him as if he'd like to strike him dead for his insolence. To be deprived of his authority was outrage enough. But this—this modern pirate was callously refusing to respond to an urgent call for help. And offering him a proposition out of it! Angry blood pounded at the Captain's temples. He suddenly rushed past Buker and dashed down to his cabin. He snatched open a drawer beneath his bunk. He was rooting under the clothing in it when Buker strolled in.

"I've already taken care of your gun, Cap'n," he mocked.

Captain Miles slammed the drawer shut and dropped back into the chair by his desk. He stared in desperation at the works of the clock and the tools strewn before him.

Buker lounged back on the settee.

"It's too bad we've got to do this to you, Cap'n," he grinned. "But your owners are to blame. We wanted to put our own bunch on board, right from the skipper down to the messboys; but your owners insisted on having their own cap'n aboard, to look out for their interests."

He grinned, as if at a hidden joke. "Mebbe if we'd held out, we'd have got our own way, because this old fruit-ship had been laid up so long they were ready to charter her out almost on any conditions; war prices are high and they were afraid, the way things are going, that it would all be over soon, and bring them down with a flop.

"It was tough luck you should come back off sick-leave at the time and get put on this ship. Mebbe you remember your Port Cap'n calling you into his of-

fice to meet me? He said we could rely on you fully, and you and me would get along swell if I found you plenty of clocks to fix. I decided an old guy like you who got fun out of taking clocks apart would be harmless enough for us."

Buker took out his cigar and contemplated the end amusedly. "But to get down to facts, Cap'n. The boxed automobiles and machinery and the rest of the stuff we're loaded down with aint anything of the kind. It's all munitions —gun-barrels, gun-mountings, shells, rifles, machine-guns—even hand-grenades. Those cases marked *'Spare Parts'* you saw being stowed in the square of Number Two hatch are packed with them. We had them to get rid of. They might come in useful."

BUKER seemed to enjoy the look of amazement that spread over the Captain's face.

"Of course," he continued boastfully, "a job like this is nothing new to me. I pulled off more than one during the Spanish civil war. I was born in the States, but my folks come from near Madrid, and I felt the same as they did about the old country. I joined up with an organization secretly pledged to help Franco, and I had a hand in smuggling munitions over to him.

"We had a lot of stuff left over when Franco ended the war with his victory. It was hidden away. German agents—the Fifth Column, they're called now—knew about it. So they came to us with a proposition. Germany helped Franco to mop up the Reds, so it was a case of one good turn for another. The result was that this ship was chartered, and some of the old bunch rounded up to run her. Like the old days, the stuff was specially trucked to the same pier, and loaded by the same stevedores, who knew what they were handling.

"In the next few days or so," went on Buker, exchanging smiles with the second mate, Miguel, "some of the speedy German ships lying in Caribbean and Central American ports will slip out to sea. They'll have on board German ordnance men and gunners already sent out to join them. We're supposed to be bound for Georgetown, British Guiana; but when we get further south we'll head out eastward to a certain position and lie hove to. The German ships will come along in turn and take off our cargo, and scatter in all directions as armed raiders to cut off supplies in this final siege of England that will wind up this business. So you see now why we can't be bothered with distress calls. We might have to take the crew on board, and they'd see too much."

With another smile Buker put his cigar between his teeth again and waited for the Captain to speak. Captain Miles drew an incensed breath.

"Go on," he said grimly. "What happens to this ship?"

Buker grinned. "Can't you guess? She'll be the first victim of the raiders. As she's bound for a British port, it will be said she was carrying contraband, and therefore legitimate prey. Seeing that she flies a Central American flag, no big power will be involved, though the Neutrality Zone question will be brought up. Her flag helped us to put aboard our own men without regard to nationality. All we needed were two mates, three engineers, and a few hands. The mate would have been Cap'n if the owners hadn't insisted on you. It was a bad break for you, because we'll be put aboard some passing ship by the raider, but you won't be allowed to come with us. You'll have seen too much."

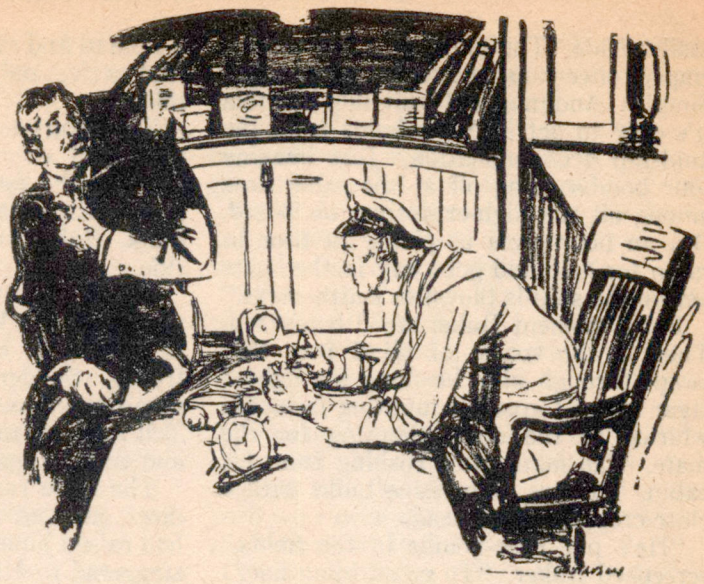
"Does that mean I'm to be liquidated, as they put it now?" demanded the Captain.

Buker smiled. "As far as I know, you're slated to be taken on one of the raiders, mebbe the first one. When the rest of us are landed at some port, our story will be that you died at sea, so there won't be any diplomatic inquiries as to your whereabouts. If the raider gets through the blockade to Germany after she runs out of ammunition, I guess you'll be held there for the rest of the war. Meanwhile, you'll have your freedom here, but that's all. Mebbe I'll be able to round up a few old clocks to help you pass the time with."

Buker chuckled, and the second mate and the helmsman grinned at his joke. The Captain's mouth tightened, but he made no response. He stood for a long moment in silence, as if in a ferment of indecision. Suddenly, without glance or word for any of the three men, he made straight for the door and went below.

CAPTAIN MILES didn't wait for Buker to provide him with material for his hobby. When Buker entered next morning, he saw three rusty and battered alarm-clocks on the Captain's desk; and the Captain was bent over the works of a fourth spread out in front of him.

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



"You're weakening," cried Buker. "You're no old fool, even if you do like to play around with clocks."

"Old clocks to mend!" cried Buker mockingly. "Been gathering up the old junk, huh?"

"I found them in the messrooms," growled the Captain. "They'll keep me busy for a while."

Buker drew back his sleeve. "You can have a go at this wrist-watch when you run short of work. It's always losing."

The Captain grunted and looked up from the mainspring he was cleaning. "Maybe you'll tell me what became of the men on that ship afire yesterday. Or didn't that bright radio-operator of yours trouble listening-in any further?"

"I guess it'll put your mind at ease to know another ship got to them in time," grinned Buker. "You see now, of course, why we couldn't be embarrassed with a shipwrecked crew on our hands."

Captain Miles bent over his desk again. Buker's eyes traveled round the cabin and came to rest on a number of rockets and several large-size empty coffee-cans.

"What do you figure on doing with those?" he queried.

The Captain looked round, following the direction of Buker's gaze; then shrugging, he resumed his task. "The locker where rockets and Lyle-gun charges are stowed got damp during the lay-up," he answered. "When I get tired of this job, I mean to put all the wet powder in those cans to dry out."

"You're not figuring on sending up rockets to get help, huh?" sneered Buker.

"Fat chance I'd have to do that without being seen," replied the Captain with bitterness. "You might be thankful yet I'm taking that trouble—if we get in a gale."

"We've got the radio," Buker said.

"Radios can break down," scoffed the Captain. "But don't think I'm worrying about your skins. It's my own I'm thinking of."

"Still sore, Cap'n!" chuckled Buker. "What about the proposition I made?"

The Captain was silent. Then grudgingly he murmured: "I've been thinking it over. There's more angles to it than you think. Maybe I'll be ready to give you an answer tomorrow morning."

"You're weakening," cried Buker eagerly. "You're no old fool even if you do like to play around with clocks."

HE returned soon after breakfast on the following morning for the Captain's answer. Captain Miles was just finishing dressing. He yawned sleepily. Buker lit a cigar.

"You didn't come down to breakfast, Cap'n," remarked Buker, smiling. "Overslept yourself?"

"If a man spends half the night crawling about the holds, he's likely to oversleep," replied the Captain carelessly.

Buker's smile vanished. "What were you doing in the holds?" he demanded.

It was now the Captain who smiled. "Maybe I was getting my answer ready for you. But here it is." He glanced up at his cabin clock. "It's now half-past nine. We have exactly one hour in which to abandon ship."

Buker started. "What do you mean?" he demanded hoarsely.

"You told me to play with my clocks," mocked the Captain. "Well, I played with them. You don't see those old alarm clocks I had in here yesterday. Maybe you've heard of time-bombs. They're

easily made. The parts of a few clocks, empty coffee-cans, and rocket gunpowder. Simple! And in an old fruit-ship like this it's easy to get into the holds from the 'midship accommodation. Just imagine four bombs going off at the same time among all the high-explosives on board. But an hour gives us plenty of time to radio for help and get away in the boats before the ship is blown to smithereens."

For a moment Buker stood transfixed. Then in the spasm of blind fury that swept through him, he flung his lighted cigar in the Captain's taunting face. He whirled to the door, shouting for the mate. The mate came rushing from his cabin. He was of massive build with a close-cropped blond head.

"He's put time-bombs in the holds," screeched Buker. "To go off in an hour! Beat him to a mash till he tells where they are."

The mate's heavy jaw dropped in alarm. Captain Miles was rubbing his cheek just below the left eye, which had narrowly escaped the hot end of the cigar. Before the mate could pounce upon him, he gibed:

"Do you think any man could tell just where he put them in the dark—after crawling over packing-cases to find a deep space to lower one into? How long would it take to find even one, never mind four? And we've only another hour to ten-thirty."

The infuriated Buker leaped past the mate and struck the Captain a savage blow in the face. The old officer went down with a crash against the foot of the bunk. Buker kicked him viciously in the side.

"*We!*" he screeched. "You can count yourself out. You'll stay and be blown to hell with her." Buker shook with frenzy. Suddenly he whirled upon the dumfounded mate. "Get the boats out. Tell Pablo to radio for some ship to come and pick us up. Fake up some reason."

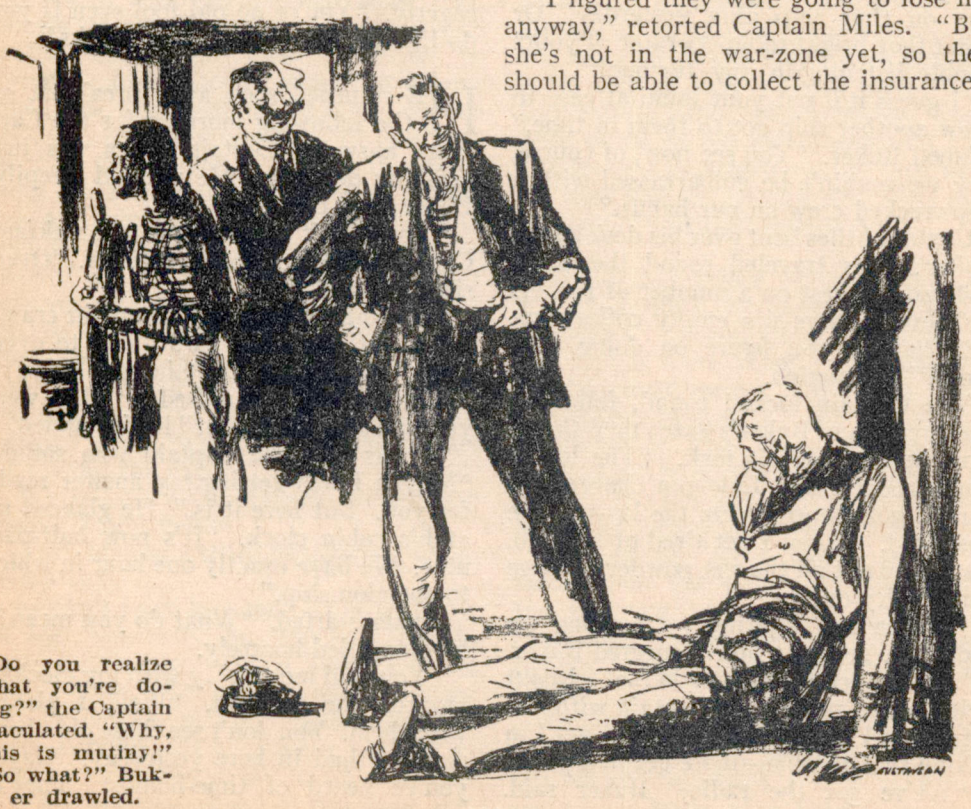
The mate rushed away. Buker glared down murderously at the Captain. He had raised himself on one elbow; now he staggered to his feet, wiping blood from his lips.

"You wouldn't dare leave me behind," he shouted. "You'd have to account for me."

The alarm in his face seemed to gratify Buker's lust for revenge. His dark eyes glittered with malice.

"You didn't figure on that, did you?" he croaked. "But you'll see." Then, as a sudden thought struck him, he grated: "Is that how you protect your owners' interests—blowing up the ship?"

"I figured they were going to lose her anyway," retorted Captain Miles. "But she's not in the war-zone yet, so they should be able to collect the insurance."



"Do you realize what you're doing?" the Captain ejaculated. "Why, this is mutiny!" "So what?" Buker drawled.

His reply seemed to enrage Buker almost to an insane pitch. He crouched as if to spring at the Captain's throat. But a nervous glance from the Captain at the clock brought another vengeful glitter to his eyes.

"And your sick hag of a wife will be able to collect on you, too!" he snarled, and ran out on deck.

It was several minutes before Captain Miles ventured to follow him. The alarm had spread over the ship, and the two mates and the crew were struggling to swing out the two boats. The davits had rusted in their sockets. The engineers had brought up mauls to hammer them loose. Buker stood at one side, throwing frantic glances at his wrist-watch. He caught sight of the Captain hovering under the bridge.

"Keep away from the boats," he yelled at him.

The radio operator came running up to him. Captain Miles heard the operator tell Buker that a ship would arrive in the vicinity in about three hours.

The two boats were finally swung out and lowered. The piratical-looking crew slid feverishly down the lifelines into them, their pockets crammed with small possessions they wished to save. Captain Miles went on the rail. Amid snarls and curses as they got in each other's way, the men thrust out the oars in a mad scramble to get clear. First one boat and then the other began to pull away. Buker was yelling at the oarsmen to pull their damnedest and get at a good distance from the ship before she blew up.

Captain Miles remained by the rail. The men in the boats shook their fists at him in rage. The Captain seized a lifebuoy hanging beside him and threw it overboard. A yell came from Buker:

"That won't help you. There's enough explosives on board to kill everything within half a mile."

THE Captain remained motionless by the rail, watching the boats flee across the smooth leaden sea. Then suddenly he hastened into the mate's cabin. In a drawer he found what he sought—a secret cargo-plan naming each case by its true contents. He hurried out on deck again and forward to the carpenter's shop. Here he grabbed up a hammer and a chisel. Returning to the foredeck, he began to unbatten Number Two hatch. He threw off the tarpaulins and wooden covers from one corner. The square of the hatch was filled with small cases marked *"Bolts."* The Captain lifted one out and labored up onto the bridge with it. He set it down in the port wing. Then he went back for another and placed it in the starboard wing. He opened each case with the hammer and chisel, eying the "bolts" grimly. Then he went into the chartroom and looked at the clock. It was ten-twenty-nine.

Going out into the starboard wing, he gazed at the distant boats. To speed their frantic flight, the sails had been hoisted before the gentle breeze. They had covered about two miles.

PRESENTLY they stopped. They lay to for nearly an hour; then they began to edge cautiously back toward the ship. Captain Miles allowed them to approach within hailing distance. Buker was seated in the stern of the nearer one.

The Captain shouted a warning:

"Don't come any closer."

Buker jumped up. "You tricked us, all right," he howled. "You didn't plant any bombs. But the rescue-ship hasn't shown up yet. We'll have cut your throat and be under way again by the time she gets here."

The Captain reached down into the case at his feet and held up one of the "bolts." It was a grooved object shaped like a small-caliber shell.

"I figured on maybe setting up a machine-gun," he shouted back. "But these hand-grenades are simpler. And one should be enough to blow a boat sky high. I've got a stock on each side of the bridge. So you can count on lying well off until the rescue-ship picks you up and throws you all into irons. A tug will be sent to tow this ship back. And," taunted the Captain, "I won't have a thing to do but fool around with the four alarm-clocks. I hid them in a drawer, ready to prove I was only bluffing if you meant to murder me on the spot. But I worded things into giving you the idea of leaving me to be blown up."

In fury Buker snatched out a pistol and emptied it up at the bridge. But Captain Miles stepped back under cover of the cab. And when the volley had ended, he drew the pin from the grenade and threw it. He aimed for a wide miss. But it had the desired effect. The flash and detonation and flying fragments started the boats scurrying out of range under oars, like two scared crabs. And when the smoke had faded away, another cloud appeared on the horizon—spouting from the funnel of the rescue-ship.

A colorful and most American episode of the pioneer West.

Illustrated by Lyle Justis

Has Anybody Seen

WHITE-WING GENUN had stood staring at a letter which had come by way of Tumbleweed Court, addressed to Sink-hole on Lost Winds River. Not too good at literature, nevertheless he had a carpenter frame that piece of paper and hang it behind the dance-hall bar for all to read:

Sinduster, Ohio.

Dear Mr. Genun:

Can you tell me if my son Sime Mideau has been through your country anywhere? Three years ago he left his home for the Cattle Country and mines out West. 'I aint heard from him sinct. He is a good, clean boy, tall with blue eyes. Work wasn't plenty here, nor paying much, and like his father he was impatient to be where times is better. If he comes by, I wisht you would tell him to write me he is safe.

Yourse Respect Fully
Sariah Mideau

Plenty of men stared at that letter, hesitating to say anything. Then some called for a personal drink. Others scuffed into the dance-hall, seeking sympathy. Occasionally one pulled his hat down over his eyes and headed out, riding across the big pasture through Tumbleweed, to be seen in his old haunts no more.

Men with dim eyes would ask some one who could to read that letter over and over again till they learned it by heart, and these repeated it like a poem at pack-train camp-fires, in beaver-trapper cabins; and it was even sung as wagon-trains scuffed across the prairies carrying rifles, kegs of powder, bars of bullet-lead, liquor and other commodities.

Five hunters emerged with much fur from the Rockies, and on their way to St. Louis dropped their packs and fed their horses at Genun's. One read the framed letter at the bar, stood in deep thought for a moment, and then asked:

"Hi-i, any of you fellers seen Sime Mideau?"

Like a war-cry the question was taken up by gamblers, long riders, dancing-women, scouts, buffalo-hunters and all, and whoever thereafter headed away

By

RAYMOND SPEARS

Sime Mideau?

from Genun's, he shouted to bull-whackers, pack-trains and settlers:

"Hi-i, boys, have you seen Sime Mideau?"

So from the Piedmont Breaks Forks, the saying echoed around. Sheriffs, city marshals, mayors, ranchers of note paused at the hail, reflected a moment, and then recalled that Sariah Mideau had written them asking about her son Sime. Plenty of reward-notices, missing-person inquiries, badly-wanteds, hung on official headquarter hooks; now a request became a saying and a hail.

Some one asked White-wing Genun how-come Mrs. Mideau happened to write him about her "good clean boy," considering his place. Genun bristled immediately, feeling insulted—just for what, he couldn't be sure.

But how about Sime Mideau? From in the Walla Walla country returned an echo.

A fellow of the name of Pid Furness strolled up to one of the bars, slammed down a double-eagle and shouted:

"Hi-i, have you seen Sime Mideau?"

As it happened, Deputy Marshal Harvey Scote heard that shout, and knew it was the hail that betrayed a man had come over the road from Sink-hole on Lost Winds River—had come reasonably fast, too. Looking the fellow over, Scote lined him up by his description with a man needed back on the Arkansas River on charges of horse-stealing, murder and highway robbery. He nabbed the suspect and received five hundred dollars for his pains in reward-money. And thus added a score to the rumors tied to the saying, an anecdote almost as good as the one about the horse-thief who was sitting on a mule at Alder Creek, a rope connecting with a branch overhead and his neck, and two feet or so of slack.

"Have you anything to say?" he was asked.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" he replied earnestly. "Have you seen Sime Mideau?"

Even the executioner sitting in the saddle had to laugh before he rawhided the mule—and the victim died with a smile. Professional camp-fire and barroom story-tellers reeled off a hundred yarns about

Sime Mideau, and one was a good laugh on White-wing Genun himself.

Someone told Genun that his place must have a funny reputation back East, that an Ohio lady should have heard about it. The current representative of the Genun family began to worry. Then a party of pilgrims came through and told him a piece had been printed in a paper about his place. He offered a gold eagle for one of the histories, and one smart fellow produced a lengthy and uncomplimentary account of the Sink-hole Crossing place, run by White-wing Genun.

Every time Genun read this only too accurate description, he grew morose and drank heavily. Sober, it made him angry; and drunk, it hurt his conscience. In either mood he begged to be shown the writer of that piece who had made fun of Genun and his ancestry. The piece said that the first Genun, unquestionably the original son of Cain, could have learned much iniquity from the place on Lost Winds River at Sink-hole Crossing.

This insult to the original Genun was unbearable, not that White-wing cared personally, for himself.

The piece had for its excuse a notorious fight partly in the big log cabin and partly at the ford and up the far bank, when the Old Dickson Fish-grain Brand riders overtook the Sage-brush horse-thieves at Genun's place, where their fate showed what bad luck it was to stop there even for a drink. Slurs like this just made Genun hop! Yet he had to admit it was sure comical to think of Mrs. Sariah Mideau's good boy ever stopping at his place, unless of course he was *damned* good.

As hunters, sports, dudes, English high society, and important quality people came through, just on purpose to see Mrs. Mideau's letter framed on the wall, and to stand where innumerable incidents had given rise to incredible yet true stories, —among the false,—Genun softened his asperity, considering the help to his business.

Presently he framed the newspaper piece too, hanging it where any orator could read it aloud, amusing parties from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, London and all those kinds of places. Sometimes copies in digest or *extenso* were made, and it became a mark of adventure and reputation to have had a drink of Genun corn liquor made from the original recipe taught—according to the Forgotten Books of Eden—by Satan to the original Genun.

A distiller in Kentuck' offered Genun one thousand dollars and a royalty for his corn-liquor recipe, but the old man shook his head, refusing to sell the honor of so precious a secret. Thus Sime Mideau and Genun's Corn were linked in common fame. Nobody could deny it was the

Hunters, sports, English high society people came to see Mrs. Mideau's letter.

firstest, bestest and onliest liquor, to begin with.

Other proprietors, demanding to know what ailed their liquor, had to make good, shut up or fight, upholding a touchy point of etiquette as to apologies, and claims of less anciently descended amusement-place keepers and the liquors they offered. Plenty of troubles started when indiscreet patrons brought up certain stories about Genun, his ideas, his Sink-hole on Lost Winds River, and especially praising the Genun corn.

Through it all, *"Have you seen Sime Mideau?"* persisted as a hail and a farewell, a greeting or an afterthought. Presently people forgot just what it meant, if anything. The question became a catchword. And then a party emerged from Away Back in the Percussion Country, wearing elkskin pants, rawhide boots and otter-skin caps. When they struck the Trans-Missouri Empire trail, somebody just naturally waved a greeting:

"Hi-yah! Have you seen Sime Mideau?"

"What's it to yuh?" the answer came. "I'm Sime Mideau, by the Lord!"

"Yo—yo're Sime Mideau?" the greeter gulped, nonplused. "Well, I'll be *damned!* Let's have a drink!"

The pack-trains, going and coming, stopped short, and it was Sime's turn to be embarrassed. The boys gathered around to figure out who wanted Sime Mideau, anyhow. And as luck had it, one had read the letter on the wall at Genun's Sink-hole Crossing, right at the bar.

"He's good, aint he?" somebody spoke of Sime.

"I'm *damned* good, if you ask me!" Sime Mideau declared.

Sime's beard reached to his waist; and to speak clearly, he had to lift his mustache out of the way; to drink even water, he had to hang the ends of his mustache over his ears. Speaking of his mother, a far-away look came to his eyes.

No whisper had reached the Percussion Country of the search for Sime Mideau. The well-met shout had spread over wide prairies, high mountains, through gold-camps, into river landings and to far Californy. The boys shook hands heartily, declaring themselves *damned*, individually and collectively, parting in good humor and pride. Having hailed, *"Have you seen Sime Mideau?"* they now shouted: *"Yes, by the Lord, an' what's it to yuh, hey?"* A great and popular curiosity had been satisfied, in part at least.

So the word raced ahead of the plodding mules of Sime Mideau that he was coming, he with his companions—daredevils of the placers, bringing out their pokes loaded down with nuggets and dust. There they were, a dozen of them, some with black, some with coppery, some with

It became a mark of reputation to have had a drink of Genun liquor, made from the recipe taught by Satan to the original Genun.

yellow beards, and long hair. Not one of them had thought anything special about Sime Mideau—good feller, faithful worker, big to hold his end up, keen, brave and all right, you betcha!—being just one of the crowd.

There he was, everybody asking everybody if he'd seen him. And there was a dance, a quadrille, and the girls all went out around, asking *"Have you seen Sime Mideau?"*—singing it! And the men'd all sing back, *"No, my dear, but won't I do-o?"*

Here came the real genuine article! And he was heading, angling down the line to Sink-hole Crossing, on Lost Winds River, at the fork of the Arkansas. And of course there came the Sime Mideau excitement, inevitably. White-wing Genun had been for years and years running along the way a man will, a cynosure of many eyes and attentions, getting to be kind of an old story. And then a fellow came riding in, his horse white with sweat, streaked with yellow alkali, puffing and a panting as the rider leaped from the saddle.

"Hi-i!" the man shouted. "They've seen Sime Mideau! He's coming!"

And then he just keeled over—but White-wing's original-recipe corn liquor revived him, and the music in the dance-hall alarmed him, until he was assured it wasn't heaven where he was, not by a long shot. And so, revived and reviving, he gave kind of a version of that meeting out on the Trans-Missouri Empire trail—and other versions came in with new arrivals; and camps, tepees, buffalo-hide stiffs and so on spread out around Genun's place, just waiting.

Sime Mideau came right along, but it was a long way, and horses and mules could stand just so much, day after day;

and Sime neither tarried nor overdid. He and his partners came through settlements, express and wagon-train stations, through villages and cities, heads up and eyes squinting, looking up to reputation and occasion. And when the procession went by, men and women turned to look at one another. Little children ran out into the middle of trails to watch the dust of the cavalcade on its way.

Yes sir, they had seen Sime Mideau now! Some never did really entirely get over it, if the truth were told.

Sime Mideau was a tall, spare man, with two revolvers in scabbards hung from a wide shell-belt around his waist. He carried across his pommel a repeating fourteen-shot forty-four-caliber rifle. Ma's boy had her blue eyes; he had long silky whiskers, and he rode with squared shoulders and his back straight, with his dark elkskin pants and a bullhide shirt, a coyote-hide cap with the tail dangling down his back, setting off the glory of his golden hair that rippled and shone over his shoulders. People had the feeling that they hadn't asked in vain, now that they could say they'd seen him. He looked like a man who minded his own business, and even if he had been just his mother's son hardly grown up when he started to roam, no wonder Mrs. Sariah Mideau had written around, hoping to hear from him, for he had been a good, clean boy, and by the looks of him, damned good too.

Sime rode along, just kind of naturally getting into the lead. He didn't like it. He would pull back and try to be one of the crowd, but when horsemen, and some wagons and so on pulled along, going in the same direction, he couldn't escape the embarrassment and authority of his fame. Nobody asked him—he told no one what was on his mind. And when three days' march from the Sink-hole Crossing a kind of a reception-committee came out and met him and his crowd, he just looked at them. They just looked at him. They dropped in behind, same as the others.

At last there was Genun's Place, the genuine, original Sink-hole Crossing, with its freshened-up sign "Genuine Genun Corn Liquor." It was a good thing that a herd of Texas beef had come up. But for them, a lot of people would have gone hungry. Long before he reached the lane, those rows of men, beaver-trappers and Indian scouts, pioneers and homesteaders, cattle-grazers and farmers, gamblers, bad men, fugitives and packers, camp-women and home-women, they whooped and yelled; but as he rode on through, the noise subsided and the voices lowered till when he arrived at Genun's, and Whitewing himself stood there with a waistcoat of green-neck duck feathers, a stovepipe hat, a black cutaway, gray stripe pants and cavalry boots, polished for the occasion, nobody made a sound—Genun was himself speechless. He opened his mouth three or four times in brave attempts, while people held their breath.

Genun lifted his hand, weakly, beckoning. The big saloon was filled. The pro-

prietor made a last attempt at buoyancy and nonchalance, and tripped over his own left foot, but it didn't matter. Sime Mideau leaned with eagerness and shining eyes. He reached a hand to steady himself against that wild cherry broad-axed bar—it shook a little. The knuckles whitened as he squinted and read:

Sindustér, Ohio.

Dear Mr. Genun:

Can you tell me if my son, Sime Mideau, has been through your country anywhere? Three years ago he left his home for the Cattle Country and mines out West. I aint heard from him sinct. He is a good, clean boy, tall with blue eyes. Work wasn't plenty here, nor paying much, and like his father he was impatient to be where times is better. If he comes by, I wisht you would tell him to write me he is safe.

Yourse Respect Fully
Sariah Mideau

A hundred sputtering molded candles and grease-lamp wicks flickered and smoked, lighting the scene, mingling odor of buffalo-tallow with bear-oil, human sweat and barbecue fires, strong liquor and hot rum punch, chewed tobacco and attar-of-roses perfume, beaver musk and cow's, the dark red bar shining with the polish of palms, chamois-skins and fusel oils.

Sime Mideau didn't breathe while he read. Then he filled his lungs. Standing there, everyone looked at him, seeing Sime Mideau—at Genun's where his fame had begun. Of course he had some idea of his reputation, but only just an edge or whimper of it. The crowd stood with bated breath, staring. It takes the real stuff to be great when the occasion calls for it.

"Ma's good, clean boy!" his whisper, though he didn't know he said it audibly —men who roam alone in the wilds talk to themselves—struck ears that could hear a cougar walk or a redskin breathe. They nodded. So far—so good!

THERE was a breach, but White-wing Genun stepped into it, there in the familiar environs, behind the bar.

"Well sir, what'll it be, Sime Mideau?" Genun asked, and waved his hand along the bottles, flasks, demijohns, kegs and barrels. There steamed the hot rum punch, with nutmeg-shakers ready—there stood two twelve-quart milking-pails chock full, with screens and rags to strain the milk for more punches to come—there being a tart tang to the night air.

Sime Mideau hesitated. There was the genuine Genun Original Recipe! All kinds, brought in for this occasion!

"A glass of milk!" Sime Mideau looked up from his far-away survey.

White-wing Genun blinked, stood nonplused, his lips parted. Then he nodded, glancing at that letter—and the newspaper pieces around it—smiling.

"By God!" he exclaimed. "You shall have it!"

JUST like that, free and easy, nonchalant and glad! He heard the hissing whisper carrying the information clear to the outskirts of the throng gathered around. For a minute the silence was like the quiet of the prairie with a windstorm about to come.

Then there was a yell, spontaneous and glorious. Whatever the individuals here and there may have thought, not grasping the significance of that choice by the good son on his way home from the pinnacle of his fame, the crowd, the great concourse of Westerners gathered in spontaneous welcome and delight for the occasion recognized—as mobs do—that Sime Mideau had not disappointed them.

From first to last he had been equal to the unique occasion. And when he raised that big glass mug in his mighty calloused hand, saluting the letter, bringing breathless pause and quiet, whatever he was, whatever his thought in his speechless astonishment, he was Mamma's Boy—Sime Mideau!

And he drank it down, a full quart of milk at a single draught!

White-wing Genun lifted both hands and beckoned to the music—all the instruments in one grand orchestra, so that cymbals clashed and string instruments twanged and wind-horns blasted, drums booming and rolling—and ten thousand, or so, sang with one mighty voice "The Girl I Left Behind Me!" And at every fire across the sod, all hands formed on and some danced Indian-fashion and some white—each according to his race and place and time, clog and minuet, reel and hornpipe.

And in the morning they all lined up and watched the tall boy on his way, watched till down the trail even his dust vanished in the east. Yes sir, by God! They had seen Sime Mideau!

"Mississippi Medicine," a novelette of shanty-boat life on the Father of Waters will be Raymond Spears' contribution to an early issue.

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

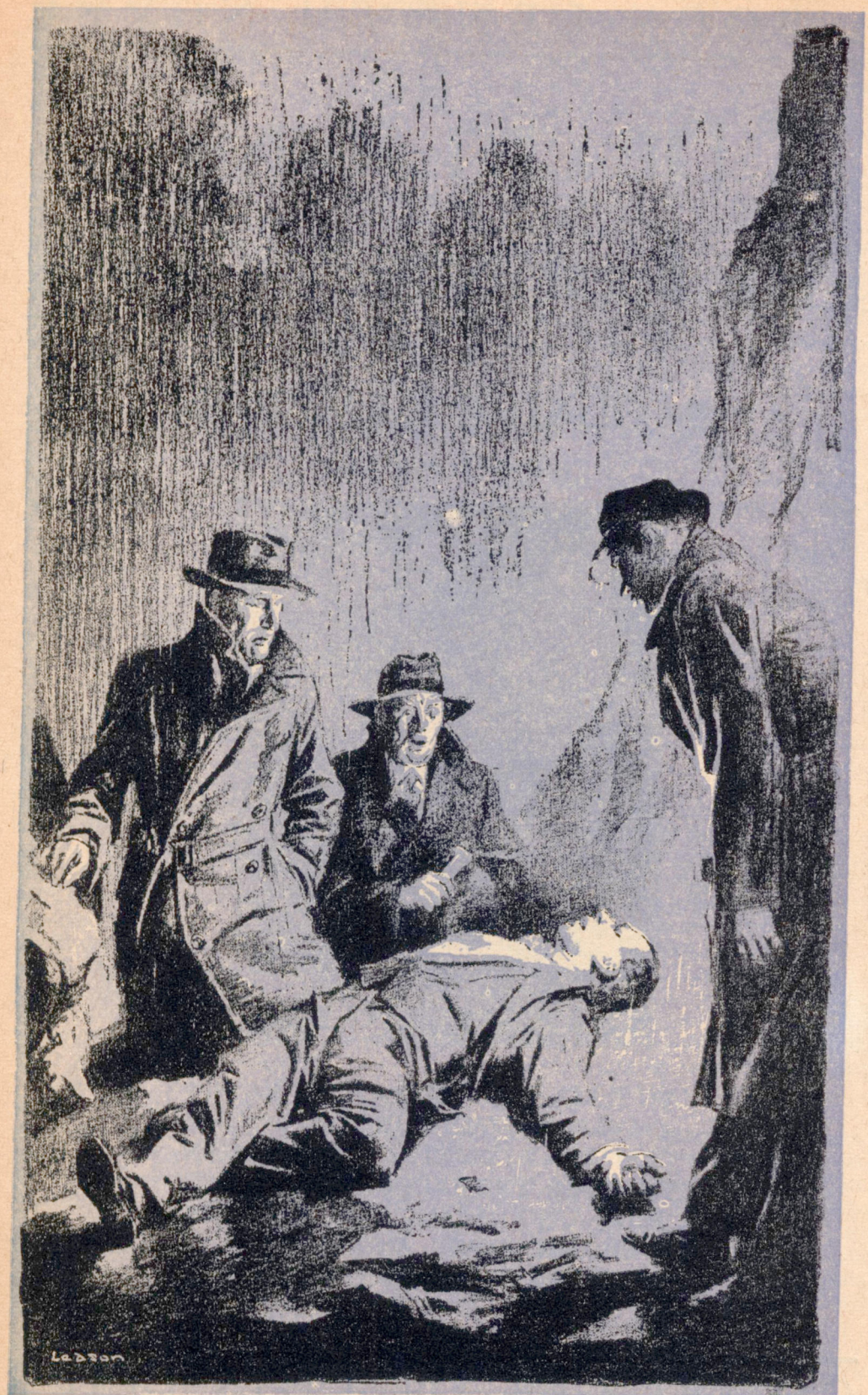
DEATH JOINS THE COUNTRY CLUB

By CLAIRE CAMERON

Illustrated by Percy Leason

A GOLF-CLUB, A "DYNAMITER," PROVES A WEAPON DEADLY INDEED IN THIS SPIRITED DETECTIVE NOVEL—SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ACCUSED "PRO" WHO IS ALL TOO FAMILIAR WITH THE LOVES AND HATES AND JEALOUSIES OF HIS SMART CLIENTELE.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



For a matter of seconds I stood staring at the body of the man I had almost hated.

DEATH JOINS THE COUNTRY CLUB

By CLAIRE CAMERON

THERE was something wrong. I knew it the minute I reached the top of the long flight of steps to the country-club porch. Connie tilted her golden head to smile up at me, but her dark eyes weren't smiling; they were grave, almost sad.

"You needn't have stopped practicing, Don," she said. "I didn't mind waiting."

"What? Stand on the tee and wear myself out hitting iron shots—when I could do this?" With a swift glance around the deserted terrace I bent down and kissed her.

But there were tiny lines of worry creasing her forehead as I sat down opposite her and ran a comb through my unruly red hair.

"Something bothering you this morning, Towhead?" I asked lightly, hoping that the hated nickname would start an argument so I could find out what was troubling her. It wasn't like her to be depressed.

Connie shook her head, but her eyes slipped away from me to the rolling green fairways. It was early Saturday morning, and there was no one else in sight except the caddy who was picking up the golf-balls I'd shot; but I watched her lovely profile as she scanned the empty course, and I knew she was worrying about that confounded Curtis woman.

Her next words confirmed it. "Don," she asked, "is Norma out playing?" She didn't look at me.

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Her car's in the parking-lot—or one just like it," she answered; "and she's always here when you are."

I had known that she resented the other woman's behavior; but it wasn't pique or jealousy, because Connie knew that I loved her. It was something more—something I couldn't quite understand.

"Connie, you're not letting Norma get you down, are you? She's just amusing herself by pretending she's fallen for me, because she knows you don't like it and that it makes me uncomfortable. It doesn't mean a thing."

"That's what I thought for a long time," she said slowly, "but it's not true. She's crazy about you."

Clumsily I took her small hands in my big ones and made her turn to look at me. "Darling, you mustn't let it hurt you. You know how I feel about you, and so does Norma. She doesn't care anything about me at all; she's just doing it to annoy us and get even with her husband."

"You don't understand!" she burst out. "You think she's just flirting, but she isn't. It's something I can't explain—a feeling that somehow she'll wreck our happiness. She isn't happy and she doesn't want us to be. Sometimes it frightens me and I wish we never had to see this place again."

As she talked she gazed out across the lake to the barren brown California hills where the white stucco and red-tiled roof of a long low house stood out sharply against the clear November sky. I knew what she was thinking; and I too wished once more that we were married and living in the rambling old house away from the people whose selfishness threatened our future.

IT was the old story so many young people had learned in the past few years—lack of money. I had grown up in the house on the hill, Connie next door, and somewhere along the road from childhood we had fallen in love. It had seemed so simple then—even after Dad's plane crashed; but in my senior year at college when Mother slipped quietly

after him, I found the business gone, what remained tied up in real estate, and our hopes of marriage very far away. Because I had won a few golf-tournaments, and because I held a life membership at the club, they had offered me the job of manager and golf professional, and I had leased the house to pay taxes on the other properties while I lived at the club. It had seemed a very good arrangement—until Norma Curtis decided to add me to her long list of conquests.

"Honey, please don't let it make you miserable," I coaxed now. "Norma'll get tired of it soon and go to work on somebody else; but right now I can't tell her to stay away from the clubhouse—after all, her husband's president."

Connie's small figure jerked swiftly erect in the low chair. "Yes, and he hates you! I've watched him when you were dancing with her. Will's never minded her affairs with other men, but he envies you because you're younger and better looking, and because he could never beat you at golf. He'd do anything to hurt you!"

"About the only thing he could do would be to fire me; besides, I don't really believe he cares what she does. Lord knows he's caused enough scandal of his own with Grace Redling; and now he's chasing after Judith Lookwood." I tried to change the subject: "Will and Art Lookwood ought to have a real battle this afternoon in the finals of the championship, anyway. I'm going to referee, by the way."

Connie sank back against the white leather cushions, dismay widening her brown eyes. "Oh, Don, you mustn't! Art's insanely jealous of Judith, and he's been ready to fly at Will's throat for weeks."

"I can't get out of it now—I've already told Will I'd do it; but I'm not going to referee their quarrel—just a golf-match. Now let's forget the whole mess and go feed the ducks."

When I had pulled her to her feet, she stood for a moment regarding me soberly; and I thought she made a very lovely picture in her dark green sweater and skirt against the sunlit white walls of the clubhouse; but I'd have liked it better if she'd been smiling.

ON the way to get some grain, I talked at random about anything I could think of that might amuse her and make her forget her fears, and I was glad to see that she could smile back at the grinning negro faces in the kitchen windows as we started down toward the lake. If I could only think of the right things to say she might recover her usual cheerfulness.

"The wind's from the south, so it's going to rain tonight," I remarked, adding with feigned anxiety: "D'you think your Aunt Alice will have oyster stew the way she always does the first cold rainy night in the fall?"

It worked. Connie gave me a scornful glance. "You haven't changed a bit since you were five," she snapped, "except that your hair isn't quite so red, and you're the same general size as a moose; but you still think about food on all occasions."

WE were about halfway down the hill now and I stopped and whistled shrilly. From the lake came splashings and quackings, and presently the half-wild mallards straggled up the path in single file, an old drake in the lead, for all the world like a comic-opera parade. They halted a short distance away, watching Connie warily until I walked toward them, leaving her behind.

"Too bad they don't like blonde women," I teased as they clustered around my feet.

"They don't know anything about color," she objected. "They come to any of the clubhouse force, and most of them are black! Let me see if they don't know me well enough now."

She moved forward as she spoke, and the ducks retreated, protesting vigorously. Above the noise I heard the screen door of the golf-shop slam, and my young assistant, Tommy, calling something to me about a lesson.

"Just my luck," I groaned. "Probably it's Mrs. Peck or some other old sister who couldn't learn to play golf in a hundred years."

But it wasn't Mrs. Peck. It was Will Curtis.

Connie saw him first; for as I held the door open for her, I saw her stiffen. A bulky man above average height, Curtis was beginning to acquire a paunch; and his brown hair was thinning even at thirty-five, but constant exercise had enabled him to retain much of the fine physique of a former all-around athlete despite his steady drinking, and time had increased his arrogance in direct ratio to his wealth and influence as president of one of the largest banks in the State.

"Good morning, Constance," he said in the special tone he reserved for attrac-

tive women. He smiled at her. "Can you spare Don for a few minutes while he straightens out my putting?"

"Of course. We were only feeding the ducks, and they certainly can wait."

"I wish they'd starve or somebody'd shoot them," he said irritably. "Always squawking about something just at the time a man has a difficult shot to make."

"Just like some golfers," Connie said sweetly.

My back was turned while I took half a dozen balls from the shelf, so I couldn't see Will's face, but he was notorious for his growling and moaning on the course; and I wanted to hug her for the remark.

We walked out to the practice-green in the patio, and I asked him abruptly what was wrong with his putting.

There was a faintly cynical smile on his heavy face as he took the putter and walked to the center of the green before he answered: "Nothing, really, Sheridan. I just thought we'd better have a little talk and that possibly you'd prefer that Constance wasn't present.

"For four successive years," he went on, "you held the club championship, and I was runner-up because I couldn't beat you; but when you turned pro last winter, I was pretty sure I'd win easily this fall—until the Lookwoods came back from the Islands and bought the Gray place."

I waited without comment, curious to know what he hoped to gain by either bribery or threat. After all, a golf referee merely interprets the rules, and seldom affects the outcome of a match.

Will Curtis flicked his cigarette into a hibiscus where it glowed like a firefly against the green leaves for an instant before it dropped to the grass and lay smoldering.

"There are numerous reasons, Sheridan, why I intend to win from Lookwood," he stated in the tone he might have used to a caddy; "but the point is that I *do* intend to win."

"What's that got to do with me?" I inquired.

SWINGING the steel putter lazily, he regarded me insolently for a moment before he answered: "You understand quite well, I think. Lookwood never violates the spirit of the law, but he's inclined to be a little careless as to the letter. I shall expect you to abide strictly by the rules where he is concerned."

"Hadn't you better get another referee?" I suggested. "Redling would do."

"No," he said softly. "It would be simpler to get another professional afterward—one who might not prove so attractive to my wife."

"I don't give a damn about your wife!" I said hotly. I saw now that he hadn't expected me to agree to his proposition—he was hoping I'd do something that his Board of Directors could use for an excuse to get rid of me. I wanted to knock him halfway across the green, but I knew I must keep my temper.

Curtis smiled mockingly but I saw his hand tighten on the putter as though he read my thoughts. "No?" he inquired still in that soft sarcastic way. "I'm afraid even Miss Stanton might doubt that, if she learned I have a witness to the fact that Norma spent all one evening in your room."

Rage swept caution away. His putter came up too late; I felt the jarring impact as my fist crashed against his jaw. He staggered and went down.

CLOSE at hand a cool, amused voice said: "Nice going, Don."

Norma Curtis!

Startled, I turned quickly to see her standing a few feet away—tall, slim and entirely composed, her long black eyes regarding us with malicious humor.

"I'm damned sorry you heard him, Norma," I said awkwardly.

"But not sorry you hit him, darling," she added, making of the casual "darling" a term of endearment that increased my embarrassment.

Curtis got unsteadily to his feet, and I watched him warily, for he still held the club. He ignored his wife as he stood breathing heavily an arm's-length away.

"You're a bigger fool than I thought, Sheridan," he said in a voice that was low but filled with venom. "I might have been satisfied to see you leave, but now I'll enjoy making public the details of your affair with my wife."

"If you do, I'll beat you to death," I promised him grimly.

He left without another word and in a moment the thick carved door of the central lounge thudded dully behind him. Norma smiled and ran a slim white hand lightly over her shining dark hair.

"Do you know, Don, I believe he would enjoy it," she observed as though she found it highly diverting. "He does want a divorce."

I stared at her, astounded, but the smooth perfection of her face showed no

hint of her real thoughts, no trace of anger or dismay at the possibility of what would surely be front-page scandal if Will carried out his threat.

"And whatever Will Curtis wants he gets," I said bitterly. "You don't seem to mind, but I do. Has it occurred to you what it'd mean to both of us?"

"Don't be absurd, Don. I only said he'd enjoy doing it—not that he would do it. Will's bluffing. He wouldn't dare try it after his own affair with Grace. He knows he couldn't get away with it."

"Maybe not, but you'd better remind him, because if he makes any other cracks like that, he'll need more than a golf-club to protect him. Next time somebody else might hear him and believe him."

Again she smiled. "I hardly think so. Your devotion to Constance is much too obvious. However, I'll have a little talk with my dear husband."

When she had gone, with a gay "See you at the match, Don," I wondered if I had only imagined something almost inimical in the brilliant black eyes when she mentioned Connie.

INWARDLY cursing all women who had too much money and leisure to stay out of mischief, I went into the locker-room. One look at old George's worried black face told me that he had witnessed the scene in the patio, and his outthrust lower lip plainly registered disapproval.

"Mistah Don," he scolded, "you hadn' oughta knock Mistah Cu'tis down. It goin' make trouble."

He'd been at the club so long that he was a privileged character, and I knew he was fond of me, so I didn't mind what he said; but I did want to know if he'd heard Will.

"Did you hear what he said?" I asked.

"No sah! Ah don' go roun' lis'nin'," he retorted indignantly. "Ah couldn' heah what he say, but Ah heared you smack 'im."

There was such evident enjoyment in the final phrase that I had to smile. "Well, you forget it. We've got a lot of things to look after today."

The old negro shook his head dubiously and muttered something as I went on through the men's wing to the golf-shop, but I knew I could trust George.

Tommy's boyish face wore a startled expression when I came in.

"Did he try to fix the match?" he asked immediately.

"Sure he did. You know how he is."

Tommy's pale blue eyes were anxious. "What do you suppose he'll do?"

"Try to get a new pro, I suppose; but don't you worry about it; everybody likes you, so you won't lose your job even if I do."

"I wasn't thinking about that," he said. "Anyway, the other members wouldn't let him get away with it."

"We'll hope so," I answered and went to work on the score-sheets and the thousand and one details of a tournament, glad that Tommy, too, thought the quarrel originated over the match.

DURING the balance of the morning I had so much to do that I had little time to think of my own affairs, and shortly before noon I went in to lunch. Staring gloomily through the window to the winding drive below, I saw Bob Wintsor's long brown roadster rounding the last turn, and presently he walked lithely up the steps in the terraced lawn, very tall and slender, his fair head uncovered. Impeccably dressed as usual, Wintsor was outwardly a soft-spoken easy-going Texan, but he owned a fleet of top-notch gambling-boats anchored off the coast; and while his integrity was unquestioned it was rumored that he could be entirely ruthless if necessary.

When he entered the big foyer between the lounge and dining-room, I hailed him with an invitation to lunch. A warm smile lighted his handsome but usually impassive face as he took his place across from me and drawled: "I'm a sorry substitute for Miss Constance, but I'll do my best. What's Sam got that's fit to eat today?"

The grinning negro waiter left with his order, and Bob fell to discussing some minor repairs he had insisted upon making to my house, although under the terms of the lease I was required to do it. As he talked, however, I could feel him studying me.

"What's worryin' you, Redhead?—if you don't mind sayin'," he asked finally.

"Nothing but the tournament and the prospect of refereeing the Curtis-Lookwood battle."

Momentarily his gray eyes were as cold as I had often seen them across a card-table. "At Curtis' suggestion?"

It was more statement than question and I had a swift impression that he had guessed Will's tactics. Bob disliked the man, and Curtis in his turn had opposed the action of the board in granting Wint-

CONNIE STANTON DON SHERIDAN

sor playing-privileges when he leased my house, on the grounds that a gambler couldn't be a gentleman.

Tommy Jones opened the door before anything further was said. As usual the boy was excited over the tournament, and burst headlong into a tale of Colonel McIntyre's missing cleek, a mix-up in starting-times, and the necessity of soothing someone's ruffled feelings.

"Guess I'll have to get back to the shop," I said ruefully. "It's beginning."

"Yes, your troubles are beginning," Bob drawled. "As my old grandpa'd say, 'Better take keer, young fella'."

And I knew he meant it.

By twelve-thirty the golf-shop was the usual Saturday afternoon bedlam and the locker-room was worse. Steel locker doors clanged; voices rose in shouts for George; spiked shoes clattered and scraped on the concrete floors; clubs rattled as Tommy and the caddy master pushed them through the window to the waiting caddies; and a steady procession of men flowed past the counter, laughing, talking and arguing with one another, with me or with Tommy, whom they all liked, but delighted to tease.

About quarter to one I finished wrapping a pet club for Doc Jones, and while I was washing the pitch from my hands George sidled over to me. "Mistah Lookwood jus' now gone out de doah to de green," he volunteered, "but Mistah Cu'tis ain' show up yet. Ah 'spec' he'll be late." His white teeth flashed in a quick smile at the annoyance he saw in my face, for he knew as well as I that it was one of Will's standard tricks to disconcert an opponent.

A NUMBER of the members were gathered on the porch overlooking the first tee, waiting to gallery the championship match. The majority were women, beautifully dressed and artfully made up, and in almost every face I saw carefully concealed but evident anticipation of the bitter struggle they hoped to witness—where the real issue was not a silver cup, but Judith Lookwood.

Connie wasn't in sight; but her uncle, John Stanton, beckoned to me from the first tee, where the last two or three groups of early starters were waiting. John's strong, good-natured face was unnaturally serious as he put a big hand on my shoulder and drew me to one side. "What was Will up to this morning?" he rumbled softly. "He wanted you to help him win?"

"I'll help him lose if I can."

John grinned. "And I'll bet you told him so, too. Well, he'll be after your scalp now; and while I'd hate to see him get away with anything, it might be a good idea if he got you fired; maybe then you'd have sense enough to accept the job I offered you and take that niece of mine off my hands."

"Maybe I'll have to," I answered dryly. "I knocked him down."

His deep laughter boomed out suddenly, and a dozen startled faces turned toward us, significant of the nervous excitement that gripped them while they waited for the show to begin. A short fat man left the porch, and I was conscious that my mild dislike for the smooth round face and catlike walk had increased to hostility as I watched him approach. If Curtis did try to involve me in his domestic quarrels, this blandly smiling lawyer would be in it up to his short neck.

"I'll tell you about it later," I muttered to John. "Here comes Joe Redling."

Stanton's heavy gray eyebrows bristled. He didn't like Redling either.

"Hello, John. How about a game in the morning?" the lawyer asked in his unctuous voice. Stanton replied rather shortly that he had a foursome, and Redling turned to me.

"Isn't it about time for the match to start, Don?" he asked. "Will here yet?"

He knew Curtis hadn't come, and his little eyes watched me curiously.

"Pretty soon," I answered casually. "How's that slice of yours?"

He smiled, but he didn't seize the opportunity to talk about his own game as most golfers would have done. "Oh, I've still got the damned thing," he said indifferently. "Guess I'll never be a champion. Who do you think'll win today—Art or Will? Will must be pretty certain; I hear he bet a thousand on himself with Bob Wintsor."

"Curtis could never beat Don," John said brusquely, "and maybe Lookwood won't be as easy as he thinks."

THE interruption gave me time to recover from my surprise and avoid the necessity of answering. I left them and went back to the golf-shop, thinking it was typical of Bob to say nothing to me about the bet.

"He hasn't come," Tommy answered my question about Curtis; "but Mr. Lookwood was in, and checked his watch against the clock a few minutes ago. He looked pretty mad. What'll you do if he doesn't come soon?"

"We'll see when the time comes," I said. "He'll probably get in just under the wire."

Through the patio door I could see Lookwood alone on the practice green. His broad powerful back was turned, but his jerky stabbing putting-stroke was eloquent of tightly drawn nerves.

"Want to putt me around—two-bits a hole?" I asked as I walked across the green toward him.

Lookwood straightened. With his high cheekbones, aquiline nose, and skin darkened by years of tropic sun, he resembled an Indian, and the likeness was increased just now by the fires that burned in his dark eyes. The thought flashed through my mind that Will Curtis was a fool to try to take this man's wife from him. There had been whispers that Lookwood had killed a man in the Islands.

He smiled. "So I'll calm down before he gets here, eh? Thanks, Don."

The minutes slipped by while we putted; and it seemed to me that the voices of the men and women on the porch rose higher and higher with suppressed excitement as they waited. Connie had joined a group of older women on the terrace outside the women's wing, and from time to time she smiled encouragement to me.

Lookwood was beginning to show the effects of the effort he was making to control his temper; and at length I suggested we quit before he wore himself out. I added that it was just about time for Curtis to make his entrance.

His glance moved slowly over the crowd on the terrace, coming to rest at the end table nearest the swimming-pool. "Yes, the audience is here," he said. "It would be a shame to disappoint them." His voice was harsh, but his dark eyes held a strange mixture of anger and pain, and all at once I felt very sorry for him. His wife was sitting at that table, and I knew he loved her deeply.

Somewhere a door slammed. The talk and laughter on the porch dropped to a lower level. Will Curtis strolled jauntily around the corner of the clubhouse and stopped at Judith's table; as she turned her childlike profile toward him he bent solicitously over her bronze curls.

I had one glimpse of Lookwood's face before he strode away across the green toward the first tee, and the hair on my neck rose. It was the face of a man mad with jealous hatred. He didn't look at the porch again, but took out his driver and swung it viciously.

Curtis sat down on the arm of Judith's chair. I picked up the balls and walked back to the porch.

"It's after one-thirty," I said abruptly when I reached Curtis' side, "and if we're to get in before dark we'd better get started. The match was called for one, you know, and your opponent is ready."

Curtis' fingers moved gently over a slightly swollen spot on his jaw. "Good of you to remind me, Sheridan," he said evenly.

He turned to Judith Lookwood, holding out his hand. "Come on, Judith. Art seems to be impatient to pit his luck against mine. He doesn't know yet that I always get what I want."

She rose obediently—a tiny, childlike creature beside his bulk; but her gray-green eyes slid from Curtis' face to the figure of her husband. I could have sworn that there was fright in them.

Chapter Two

LOOKWOOD won the toss, and the game began.

Both hit fine drives; and Lookwood, without so much as a glance at his wife, stalked off with his caddy. Curtis, how-

ever, sought Judith out as she stood with the crowd, linked his arm in hers and started down the fairway, laughing and chatting as though they were alone on the course. Norma watched them go, her fine brows arched in polite derision, then followed the hurrying gallery.

STANDING at my elbow, John Stanton grumbled something about my not hitting Will hard enough to affect either his swing or his impudence; and Connie came up just in time to hear him.

"Don! You didn't!" she said breathlessly.

I nodded, and John said indignantly: "Will wanted the match fixed. Why shouldn't Don sock him?"

She gazed steadily at me for an instant, and her eyes darkened slowly. She guessed that I hadn't told John the whole story, and she was again worried and fearful.

"John says the job's still open with him," I said with what I hoped would appear cheerful indifference, "and if worst comes to worst I suppose I *could* accept that."

"Oh, if you only would!" she said urgently. "Anything to get away from here for a while!"

Her uncle stared at her in amazement. "What do you want him to leave for? I thought you agreed with his confounded stiff-necked refusal to work for me just because I'm related to you."

Connie's answer came with a rush: "I only want him to get away from constant association with these people. Just look at them! You never see a man with his own wife—they'd think it was stupid and old-fashioned to be seen together. Everybody hates everybody else, and they're envious of anyone who's happy. It's bound to affect us in spite of all we can do to keep out of it!"

Over her head John's eyes met mine in a look that said this was simply a woman's imagination; but I knew it was more than that. Her intuition had been right so far.

Aloud I said: "What do we care how they act? We still have John and Alice for a good example. Now you quit worrying, and I'll go see that the boys behave."

And it was something of a job, at that. The match seesawed back and forth all through the first nine, for while Lookwood was the better golfer, Curtis was master of every trick to divert his opponent's concentration, and adept at taking every possible advantage under the rules. Although I tried to be fair,—even to the point of causing Lookwood to forfeit one hole for an unintentional breaking of a rule,—I had to call Curtis again and again for deliberate violation of the etiquette which is so much a part of the game; but in no case could I impose a penalty, and I couldn't prevent him from devoting conspicuous attention to Judith.

Even the gallery was silent and uneasy when the match reached the eighteenth hole all square.

Curtis had the honor on this last hole—a short one-shotter over the narrow end of the lake to a small elevated green, made treacherous by the sun in a player's eyes in the late afternoon, and by the shifting wind; and he took an inordinate amount of time to choose his club. I watched carefully because I suspected a final trick, but eventually Curtis played safely to the back of the green, then turned to me with a frown.

"Isn't this damned hole tough enough without your letting McLean put the cup just ten feet in from the cliff so a man doesn't dare shoot at it?" he asked me irritably. "Now I'll be lucky not to three-putt."

HE didn't mean a word of it. He knew the pin wasn't that close to the edge, and he wasn't worrying about three-putting. He was trying to tempt Lookwood to go for the cup in its dangerous position just over the lake.

I glanced quickly at the other man and felt better. His look showed plainly that he too understood, and he took a club that should carry him safely to the green.

Lookwood teed his ball and took his stance carefully. Curtis walked back into the edge of the motionless crowd so that he now stood on Lookwood's right, some fifteen feet distant but slightly ahead of him. The blade of Lookwood's iron caught fire from the setting sun as the club moved rhythmically to the right in its slow sweep to the top of the backswing. It paused almost imperceptibly at the apex as he set himself for the flashing speed of the downswing; and at that precise second Curtis took a quick step toward him.

Lookwood, whose gaze was riveted on the ball, caught only the sudden blur of a moving figure in what must have seemed to him the very path of the clubhead; and in his mind was the dread of every golfer that he may some day hit someone. For an instant the club ap-

peared to hesitate in midair as he fought to check its impetus. It was too late. Centrifugal force pulled it downward irresistibly. Curtis slipped safely into his place once more.

But now the split-second timing was gone. The blade cut too deeply into the turf, and the ball rose sluggishly. It struck the steep face of the cliff below the green, and dropped beside the rocks in a shallow pool at the edge of the lake.

In the crowd someone gasped, a hissing indrawn breath. Lookwood turned to stare at the gallery in angry bewilderment, trying to discover whose carelessness had probably cost him the championship. Below us, the ducks quacked raucously.

Norma Curtis spoke lazily. "Terribly awkward of you, Will," she said. "You might have been hurt."

AS Lookwood realized it was a deliberate trick, his face darkened slowly with rage; his head seemed to sink between his hunched shoulders, and his big hairy hands clenched the club so tightly that the muscles in his arms stood out like thick ropes. He stood for a moment facing the man he hated, and before the fury in his eyes those nearest to Curtis hurriedly moved aside.

The triumph faded swiftly from Curtis' heavy face, and behind it there was naked fear. He took a quick backward step.

Lookwood snarled at him, "I'll break your damned neck!"

Something in the sudden poising of his huge bulk warned me; but before I could reach him, Judith Lookwood flung her frail body upon him. Her voice was a terrified scream.

"Art! Art! *Don't!*"

He tried to shake her off, but she clung to his arm with both hands. I stepped between him and Curtis.

"Come on, Art," I said quietly. "Play out the hole. I'm sorry the rules don't provide a penalty for a thing like that, but you still have a chance to even it."

Almost imperceptibly the madness in his eyes receded. He glanced down at his wife's imploring face; then during the space of five seconds he stared past us both to Will Curtis.

"That's right, Don," he said hoarsely. "I still have a chance to even things."

As Judith and I stepped away, I had a glimpse of Curtis. The tiny broken veins in his cheeks were livid against the pallor of his skin.

Lookwood played another ball and strode ahead across the bridge; but with the penalty stroke for the water-hazard, he now lay three to Curtis' one, and the match was virtually over. The gallery followed in silence, Connie with her arm around Judith's pitiful figure.

Curtis was still white and shaken, and he putted badly. Lookwood missed, and conceded the match by knocking Curtis' ball away; but he didn't shake hands. Ignoring everyone else, he nodded to Judith. She joined him without a word, and they walked directly from the green to the parking-lot.

Norma Curtis murmured softly beside me: "So much excitement in one day is positively devastating."

The sun, sinking behind the sprawling Spanish clubhouse above us, tinted her white skin with copper, narrowed her brilliant black eyes. I thought of an Indian woman I once saw watching a bull-fight. Norma had made very sure that Lookwood understood.

"Did you get a chance to talk to Will?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Not while his jaw still ached. Now that he's won, he'll be more amenable to reason."

Redding was working his way toward us, hoping to hear what we were saying, so I excused myself and joined Connie and John.

"Poor Judith!" Connie said pityingly.

Her uncle gave a disgusted snort. "Why waste sympathy on her? The whole thing's her fault. Been a fine mess if Art had half-killed Curtis with a golf-club, wouldn't it? And he meant to do it—he was entirely crazy for a minute. He may do it yet. I hope Judith has sense enough to keep him away from the victory dinner tonight."

"Maybe Curtis has learned his lesson and will stay away from Judith," I said.

"Maybe," John repeated skeptically. "Come on, Connie. Let's go home so you can get ready for that damned dinner. I'd give a lot to get out of going."

So would I, I thought wearily, as I went back to the clubhouse alone; but it was part of my job.

I DRESSED; after a while I walked through the men's wing and the main portion of the clubhouse to be sure everything was in order for the dinner dance. From the bar and grill-room to the dining-room and lounge, the big rooms were spotless; the floors were gleaming mirrors that reflected the lights,

the flowers and the silver trophies; and the long table was a triumph.

The door to the women's lounge was open, and George's young coffee-colored wife Daisy was inside reading a magazine. "Everything all set?" I inquired.

"Yes, thank you," she answered pertly. "I've plenty of aspirin and spirits of ammonia—in case any of the ladies eat too much."

There was unmistakable emphasis on the word *eat*, and I frowned at her. She was an excellent maid, but she had none of her husband's often scandalized but always protective tolerance for the foibles of his "gen'lemen an' ladies;" also, she treated George abominably and I had no use for her on that account.

Smiling slyly at my disapproval, she added: "And I have a first-aid box, too. I thought I'd need it this morning."

Her eyes traveled down the length of my arm and back again. I could have shaken her. She'd seen me hit Curtis; and if she hadn't heard him, it wasn't for lack of trying.

BEFORE I had a chance to say anything further, the first group of diners entered the main lounge and the women in the party came toward us.

Curtis and Norma came in with the Redlings and Easts; and a short time later Lookwood and Judith made their appearance with a second group. There was no occasion for them to speak until we went in to dinner, where according to custom the champion and the runner-up were seated with their wives at the head of the table; and then they behaved like chance acquaintances who were guests of honor at a club dinner.

From my place beside Connie a short distance away I watched the four people sitting together with no outward indication of friction, and recalled how often before I had seen catastrophe threaten over these domestic entanglements, only to end in a brief flare-up, a reconciliation followed by good behavior, and in a little while the beginning of another affair. Perhaps everything was going to work out all right after all.

"Notice how everything has quieted down?" I asked Connie as soon as we began to dance. "The match is over; Curtis has learned his lesson and is leaving Judith alone, and everybody feels better. Things'll go along much smoother now." I smiled down at the gold-topped figure in a dress that caught and repeated the lights in her hair.

"For a little while, perhaps," she said soberly, "but it hasn't changed them. Art hasn't forgotten, nor has Grace; and Norma will keep right on spending all the time she can in the golf-shop."

"Then I'll move out to the caddy-house. In the meantime, how about letting me have all your dances? Then I won't have to dance with Norma or anyone else."

She agreed, except for the two dances she'd promised to her uncle and Judge McCrary, and when that time came, I took refuge in the men's wing because I saw that Norma Curtis was temporarily without a partner.

As I passed through the service bar, George was just picking up a tray of drinks. His lips were moving as he muttered to himself, and his black face wore a scowl.

"What're you sore about?" I asked.

He gestured indignantly at the tray. "Drink, drink, drink! Dat's all dey knows how to do, an' de mo' dey drinks, de wuss dey acks. Goin' be a killin' roun' heah some day."

"And you'll be the first victim if you don't quit singing the blues," I told him cheerfully. "The only things they murder around here are reputations."

In the locker-room, the usual poker-game was going. Across the table Bob Wintsor looked up and smiled as I came in, and I remembered all at once that Will's trick on the eighteenth hole had cost Bob a thousand dollars. The bet itself wouldn't mean anything to the gambler, but he hated a cheat. I wondered if they had met since the match.

Wintsor invited me to kibitz over his shoulder, and I watched the play of a few uninteresting hands until I thought it was about time to go back to Connie. Just then there was a pretty big pot on the table, so I stayed to see Bob and Jack White fight it out. Bob won, and was raking in the chips when the door opened to admit Redling and Curtis.

THE gambler's lean face was inscrutable as Curtis swaggered across the room, but I saw at once that the latter had been drinking just enough to be quarrelsome. He glanced at his watch and pulled up a chair. "Deal me in on the next one, Henry," he said to Callahan, "and we'll see if Wintsor can get his thousand back as easy as I won it."

Bob's slender fingers went on stacking his chips expertly and calmly as if he hadn't heard, but the other men at the

table looked uncomfortable. Henry Callahan began to deal hurriedly while Curtis was buying chips.

"Been a right pleasant game, gentlemen," the gambler drawled quietly. He pushed his stack over to Jack White, who was banking. "Guess I'll cash in now, though, and pay my respects to the ladies."

He stood up, his gray eyes very cold, and for the first time spoke directly to Will. "Yes, you won easily; but you're playing a dangerous game, Curtis. Win easy today, lose hard tomorrow. So long."

At a table in the far corner of the room, a man nervously spilled dice from a box and they rattled sharply in the stillness.

Curtis' voice came to us just as we reached the door. "D'you know, Joe, it's simply amazing how well-bred women fall for men whose professions permit them to haunt the fringes of society."

I turned halfway around and Bob took my arm in what seemed a friendly gesture, but his strong fingers bit into the flesh. The door closed behind us, and he released his grip.

"No call for *you* to start anything over that, Don," he said gently. "He was shooting at me."

"At you? You're crazy! He's got an idea I'm carrying on with his wife."

Wintsor smiled. "He may learn better —if he lives that long."

A couple strolling along the terrace toward us stopped further discussion, and Bob claimed the woman for a dance as light-heartedly as though he had already forgotten the scene in the locker-room; yet his eyes had showed implacable enmity when he stood looking at Curtis.

PUZZLED, I stared after him, and saw Tommy stop him just outside the lounge. The boy handed him an envelope which Wintsor put in his pocket unopened, after a brief glance at the outside, and Tommy came over to me, grinning.

"That was a pretty easy way to earn a dollar," he said. "Some lady wanted to send a note to Mr. Wintsor, so she gave it to Daisy, and Daisy gave it to me. The address was typewritten."

"Well, I hope her husband doesn't find out you're acting as a go-between, or I'll have to find a new assistant while you're in the hospital."

As I went to find Connie, I wondered if perhaps Curtis had intended his remark for Bob as well. Wintsor was a handsome man and a popular bachelor.

We left after a few more dances, because Connie said she was tired. I didn't altogether believe that; I was pretty sure she wanted to leave because the more conservative members had gone home, and with their departure the drinks began coming faster to the others.

THIN streamers of fog were beginning to drift before the south wind—a forerunner of rain—as we drove slowly along the winding road to the Stantons'; we planned a quiet lazy Sunday if the rain closed the course. Connie seemed relieved and happier than she'd been all day; but when I kissed her good-night she clung to me, and I knew she was reluctant to have me return to the club.

"I'm going to bed as soon as I get back," I told her firmly, "and I don't want you worrying about me. Now run along in and get some sleep. I'll call for you before lunch, if it rains." I drove back to the club without meeting anyone.

When I had put my car away, I cut across the end of the patio past the women's wing to my own quarters adjoining the golf-shop opposite, noticing as I did so that someone had turned off the flood-lights. A number of couples were dancing on the terrace in the shadows, graceful silhouettes against the lighted windows, or vague blurs in the dark corners. Inside, the light picked up flashes of color from the women's jewels, glints of metallic thread and the sheen of silk from their gowns. It poured its radiance over them, softening hard lines in their faces, enhancing the beauty of flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes; yet many of them shunned it for the dimness of the porch. From there it was easy to slip away to more secluded spots—the parked cars, the benches on near-by tees.

Tonight as I smoked a final cigarette their behavior didn't seem merely cheap and silly; I realized that it might also be dangerous, where a man like Lookwood was concerned. If one of those couples should be Judith and Curtis—but Lookwood wasn't in sight either, although I caught occasional glimpses of Norma through the lounge windows.

Shrugging impatiently at myself for being in the least interested in other people's difficulties when I wasn't sure my own troubles were solved, I began to undress. It was only five minutes of one, but I was dead tired and oddly irritable, cursing aloud when I stumbled in the dark room. It had been a tough day!

The wind carried most of the music and laughter away from me, and I dropped off into a fitful doze to the distant throbbing of the drums and the faint threads of melody. On the very edge of sleep I heard the ducks squawking, and thought vaguely that the coyotes must be stalking them again. After a few minutes they subsided only to break again into frenzied clamor that stopped abruptly as though their alarm had been without foundation.

The mist was thicker now, drifting in before the rain and bringing with it into the room the mingled odors of the sea, the sage-covered hills, and the reeds and willows around the lake. I could still hear the intermittent beating of drums across the patio, fainter and fainter. . . .

The thudding of the drums grew louder, and I turned restlessly, trying to shut out the thunderous sound that was oddly without rhythm. It ceased, and suddenly I was sitting upright in bed.

A hoarse voice was calling: "Sheridan! *Sheridan!*"

The pounding began again frantically as I fumbled in the darkness for the light.

The clock on the table said four-thirty as I flung back the door. Water dripping from his oilskins, the greenskeeper McLean stood squinting in the shaft of light.

"What the devil's the idea?" I shouted.

His voice rose huskily:

"There's a dead man on the rocks below the eighteenth green! It's Curtis!"

Chapter Three

WILL CURTIS dead on the rocks! Rain dripped steadily from the tiled roof, the soft murmur of its fall loud in the silent blackness of the night. Its chill dampness touched me with clammy fingers as the meaning of the words filtered slowly into my sleep-numbed brain. I shivered. Again I remembered Lookwood's threat as he towered over Curtis on the eighteenth tee. *"I'll break your damned neck!"* With deadly certainty I knew the answer to my question even before McLean spoke again.

. "His neck was broken," the greenskeeper said. He was regarding me with a curious look. With an effort I pushed back the thoughts that paralyzed my initiative. Until I was sure, I must act as though Curtis' death were a tragic accident—and I must call the police.

"He must have taken the shortcut home and missed the path in the fog," I stated as if that were the only possible explanation. "He'd been drinking pretty heavily."

McLean's gaunt Scotch face wore a look of doubt. "Perhaps," he said cautiously; "but drunk or sober, he'd been walking that path for five years."

FOR a moment we stared at one another in silence.

"Whether accident or not is for the police to decide," I said presently. "I'll get some clothes on and then call them."

He nodded slowly. "I'll wait for you in the shop, if you'll give me the key. They'll be wanting to talk to me, because I found him."

His rubber boots clumped dully along the tiled terrace that a few hours ago had echoed to the tap of dancing feet. The door closed behind him. A bright square of light fell upon the wet grass of the patio. Sudden panic gripped me.

Curtis had fallen there only yesterday morning—and I had threatened to beat him to death!

The angry words were entirely figurative—I had no thought of their literal meaning then; but Norma had heard them, and perhaps Daisy as well. Now Curtis was dead!

What if the police found signs of a struggle? As I dressed with feverish haste the question was all at once of paramount importance. There was no way for me to tell how long Curtis had been dead, but I must know if he had fallen.

Then I remembered McLean. He was waiting for me. I must be careful!

The greens-keeper was standing in the middle of the floor, the water from his raincoat making tiny pools at his feet. His somber eyes followed me as I entered the shop and crossed to the telephone.

"D'you think we should call his wife?" he asked. "It'll take the Sheriff's men a good hour to get here."

For just an instant I wondered if there was any meaning behind the inquiry; then I discarded the idea. It was natural for him to think of her. But there was grim humor in the thought of Norma worrying over Will's absence.

"As soon as I phone the Sheriff, I'll call John Stanton and Judge McCrary," I answered. "We'll let them make the decisions."

Someone answered, *"Sheriff's office,"* with bored disinterest; but the man's attitude changed immediately when I mentioned Curtis' name. I could almost see the quickened activity in the room behind him as I gave the location and brief information I possessed. Afterward I called John and the Judge, and sat down to wait for them.

LESS than fifteen minutes later, John's car came roaring up the hill.

Stanton's rugged face was grave—he remembered; but the weazened little Judge was querulously angry as we started down to the lake, our flashlights casting dim circles of light ahead of us on the wet concrete steps. Judge McCrary was chairman of the board, and he was worrying only about the adverse publicity the club would receive because Curtis' death had occurred during or after a party. He kept muttering to himself about drunken fools and accidents. . . . I hoped the police would see it that way!

We followed the small arroyo leading from the first fairway into the end of the lake. The distance was comparatively short, but the rain had made walking treacherous on the adobe ground, and McLean moved with maddening deliberation. At last we passed under the end of the bridge, and McLean's light cast its steady beam upon the pile of rocks in the edge of the lake.

Rain trickled from the rocks in tiny glistening streams. It darkened the huge mass until it blended with the blackness of the water beyond it and the duller black of the figure upon it; it shone luminous upon the white face.

For a matter of seconds I stood staring at the body of the man whom I had almost hated. He had brought unhappiness to many people; and yet—

Judge McCrary spoke sharply as I moved forward. "Don't touch anything until the Sheriff's men get here."

I nodded. It was the last thing in the world I wanted to do; but I had to know. Carefully I stepped from stone to stone to obtain a better viewpoint. I could hear John Stanton's heavy breathing as he followed past the pool where Lookwood's ball had fallen only a few hours ago. Just beyond it were the rocks.

Curtis lay on his back, his head twisted queerly, so we could see how the base of his skull was crushed as though from the impact of his fall. With slowly growing hope, I saw that there was no other visible wound, no mark of violence on his face. It had been an accident, after all; death had come to him alone and by chance.

John's eyes met mine across the body of the dead man. "He must have walked right over the edge," he said gruffly. "A little distance one side or the other, and he'd have had a chance—he'd have fallen in the water instead of on the rocks."

The reaction left me badly shaken. I nodded without speaking, and we climbed down to where the Judge was waiting for us.

McCrary's face was drawn, and his voice was no longer sharp. "It's partly my fault," he said. "I should have insisted that we have a fence put up here; then this couldn't have happened. It's the only really dangerous place on the course."

"It was Will who always defeated us on that," Stanton reminded him. "He said it would spoil the eighteenth hole."

From the shadows beside us McLean spoke. "The rain's cold, Judge, and you're shivering. You'd best go back to the clubhouse, all of you, before you get chilled. I'll stay here. I'm used to it, and my slicker keeps me dry."

He was right; we could do no good there. We left him standing below the towering cliff, a dim figure behind the glow of his light, alone in the rain except for that dark huddle on the rocks.

When we reached the fairway, we turned and walked to the top of the bluff. There had been no evidence below of a large earth slide, and now we found the graveled path stretching unbroken and firm, the width of the narrow strip of turf beyond it unchanged. There was no sign of a struggle, nothing but sodden grass and the marks of hundreds of footprints in the pebbles—footprints which the rain was slowly erasing.

WE returned to the clubhouse, going directly to the kitchen, where I turned on one of the electric ovens for heat, and set about making coffee.

"What about Norma?" I suggested. "I didn't call her."

Judge McCrary's temporary depression was gone now, and he was once more his caustic self. "She's used to having Will stay out all night," he said dryly, "and she probably won't miss him this time. There's no sense in calling her until the

Sheriff's men arrive. Not that she'll go into hysterics,—I don't believe anything could ruffle that woman,—but because I'd rather tell her after I know what they're going to do. They may want an autopsy."

My back was turned as I poured water on the coffee, and I hoped my voice sounded as if I were simply asking information. "Why should they want an autopsy, when it's so obvious what happened?"

"Because of the damned newspapers," he snapped. "It'll make a fine story for them—prominent banker, exclusive country club, hints of a drunken orgy, scandal, suicide, and God knows what else!"

IT seemed a long time while we sat waiting, sipping coffee and speaking infrequently, with the incessant dripping of water from the roof forming a dreary accompaniment to my thoughts. Shortly after six o'clock I heard cars in the parking-lot, and in the half-light of dawn I could see the dark forms of several men climbing the steps as I opened the front door of the clubhouse. The lights were on in the foyer, and in a moment or two a deep resonant voice called from the group: "Well, Don, I never thought I'd come out here officially. What's all this about Will?"

The big form of the speaker was visible now, and some of my nervousness vanished. Dr. Blackey had been Judge McCrary's guest at the club many times, and I'd simply forgotten that he was county coroner. Now they wouldn't all be strangers, suspecting anything we said.

"I'm sorry you had to come this way, too, Ralph," I answered as his powerful surgeon's fingers gripped mine, "but Will fell over the cliff last night. It was pretty foggy before the rain."

He shrugged. "And he had a skinful too, if I know anything about it. However, I've no doubt he'd have preferred it that way—a sudden exit after a gay night. I expected him to get it in an automobile accident any time."

I said: "He'd been drinking quite a bit—celebrating winning the championship yesterday."

Dr. Blackey turned to the tall slender man beside him. "Well, Ed, there goes the possibility of suicide, anyway. Will Curtis had been trying for years to win the championship, and never had a chance until this big lug turned pro." He gestured at me and went on: "No wonder he forgot about the lake."

The other man's lean tanned face wore a slight smile. "Got it all worked out, haven't you, Doc?" he said. "I don't know why you brought me."

"Neither do I," the coroner retorted. "Don," he admonished, "watch your step around this guy, or he'll have you in jail in no time. Shake hands with the famous criminal investigator—Ed Hazelton."

The name was like a blow. Edward Hazelton, whose specialty was homicide cases!

Blackey went on blithely: "Sheridan's member, pro and manager, so he knows all the answers around here, Ed. Just ask him. . . . Well, let's get going."

To my surprise, when I had led the way to the kitchen, John Stanton smiled widely at sight of Hazelton. "Ed, you old son-of-a-gun," he bellowed with a mighty thump on the detective's shoulder, "I haven't seen you in ages! How'd you happen to come down?"

"I guess the Chief thought I wasn't earning my salary, John, and a lot of the boys were busy on other jobs—the usual Sunday morning clean-up," the deputy answered.

They talked for a minute or two about their families. The other men who had come with the deputy and the coroner were evidently subordinates, for they waited quietly in the background while we told what we knew, and I offered to show the way to where we had left McLean with the body.

Hazelton had his back to the light as he listened, and without the reflections on his glasses, I saw that his eyes were dark brown and very keen. He made no comments whatever until we had finished and Judge McCrary had assured him that we had disturbed nothing; then he said pleasantly: "It's a big help to us when people leave things alone at the scene of death—even accidental death."

McLEAN was still standing where we had left him, but now there was no shrouding blackness to obscure the rocks and the grim burden they carried. Against the background of the lake, gray and sullen under the rain that roughened its surface, the inert dark form seemed to cling to the rocks as though fearful of the water that waited silently below, and I knew it would be a long time before the macabre picture faded from my memory.

To the coroner and the police, however, it was part of their routine. Dr.

Blackey clambered up on the rocks immediately, while Hazelton's men went about various tasks, and the detective questioned McLean.

The greens-keeper explained that he had been on his way to work just before four-thirty, and had flashed his light from the bridge to see if the rain had caused any run-off into the lake from which the course was watered. It had been sheer chance that the light had fallen upon the rocks where Curtis lay, he said; and it was apparent that he was telling the truth.

Presently Hazelton thanked him, and McLean left. The deputy turned to me. "Doc and I will be up in a little while, Sheridan. You might as well keep dry in the meantime." He joined the coroner upon the rocks, and together they bent over Will's body.

The courteous dismissal left me no option, and I retraced my steps to the clubhouse, speculating uneasily upon his reason for getting me out of the way.

Judge McCrary looked up sharply when I came in. "What did he say?" he demanded.

"Nothing. They hadn't started yet, but he didn't seem to want me around—suggested I come up here and keep dry."

"That doesn't necessarily mean he wanted to get rid of you," John Stanton observed. "Ed's always been a thoughtful cuss. I've known him for years, and he's just about as good as they come. That reminds me—we'd better get George over here and have him make coffee for all of them when they come back." He started for the house phone.

"Never mind," I told him quickly. "I'll do it."

I had just recalled the negro's mournful predictions, and I didn't want him in the kitchen when Hazelton was there.

IT was an interminable time before we heard them coming up the steps. Dr. Blackey stopped talking as they came in; and although he began almost at once to growl about the rain spoiling his Sunday golf, it didn't ring true, somehow.

Hazelton didn't leave us long in doubt. "John," he asked as he accepted the coffee I had poured, "you attended the dance. Just how drunk was Curtis last night?"

"I went home at ten-thirty, and he was going pretty good then. Maybe Don knows how he was later."

"No, I'm afraid I don't," I said. "I left quite early to take Miss Stanton home. Curtis was drinking a lot, but he wasn't out by a long way, at that time. I got back about twelve-thirty, but I went to my own quarters, and I didn't see him again, though the party went on for a long time afterward."

Judge McCrary's sharp voice broke the momentary silence. "Doc can find that out without any trouble. Witnesses' testimony about the stage of a man's intoxication are useless. What are you leading up to, Hazelton?"

The coroner put his cup down softly. "Just this," the detective said bluntly: "As near as Doc can tell now, Curtis died from the effects of a broken neck and a fractured skull—either one was enough; but he was dead before he touched the rocks. The answer is murder!"

THE room was utterly still save for the slow heavy thudding of my own heart. Murder! And I had no alibi!

"You can't be sure of that without an autopsy," the Judge said challengingly.

"No, not from a medical standpoint," Hazelton admitted, "but there are other things: There were two severe wounds—one on the neck and one higher up on the head—both of approximately the same magnitude; and it would be a thousand to one against the chance of a body striking the rocks so that could occur. Curtis' clothes show that he was dragged a short distance, and there was a piece of gravel caught inside one of his shoes. I found the spot where he went over the edge, and it is *not* directly above the rocks. Actually the murderer miscalculated in the darkness, and the body fell in the pool of water beside the rocks; but he wanted it to appear an accident, so he pulled the body up to where we found it. He gambled on the chance that it would rain before Curtis was discovered, and the wet clothing would pass unnoticed; but a sharp point of rock caught and tore the coat and threads of the material adhered to it. The direction of the tear is very plain, and the point of rock is below the place where the body lay. All of these things taken together show that it was murder."

There was no longer room for hope that he was wrong, but there was just a bare possibility that Curtis had died before I returned to the clubhouse.

"About what time do you think it happened, Ralph?" I asked the coroner. "Perhaps it was already raining."

Dr. Blackey shook his head. "The service-station man in the village told us

it began to rain about three o'clock. We stopped there on the way up. Roughly, Curtis died somewhere from twelve to two."

And for the greater part of that time I had been alone. But what of Arthur Lookwood? It couldn't be coincidence that Will had been killed at that particular point; yet if Arthur had done it, he must have been crazy not to have seen that it was inevitable that the police would learn of the scene on the eighteenth tee. They would see it as an act of insane revenge—and perhaps they would be right.

In John Stanton's rugged face the lines were sharply etched, and his deep-set eyes were very tired. "I just can't believe it, Ed," he said huskily; "but I'd be the last one to doubt your judgment. Someone must've waylaid him on his way home. Will always carried considerable money with him."

Hazelton shook his head. "I'm sorry, John, because I know most of these people are your friends. Curtis' jewelry was intact, and his billfold held a lot of money. It wasn't robbery."

Dr. Blackey coughed and moved restlessly. The Judge stirred his cold coffee mechanically. John and I watched Hazelton, and waited for what we knew was coming.

"Because these people are your friends," the detective went on after a slight pause, "you know a great deal about them, and you can help me if you will; but because you have known most of them so long, it will be hard for you to speak the name of anyone who might have had reason to kill Curtis."

"Rubbish!" Judge McCrary broke in rudely. "If we knew who killed Curtis, we'd tell you. He probably had enemies, but it's ridiculous to think that anyone at the club would commit murder—if it was murder."

Almost imperceptibly Hazelton's face hardened.

"Very well," he said quietly, "but there's this for you all to think about: the killer knew Curtis' habits intimately, and he went to a good deal of trouble and risk to make it appear an accident. An outsider wouldn't do that. Sooner or later we'll get him, with or without your help; but in the meantime don't forget that if you know anything and don't talk, you're helping to keep a murderer running loose."

There was a stifled gasp from the pantry door behind him. Old George stood

Grace Redling

John Stanton

gazing wildly at us, his black face gray with terror.

"Oh, Mistah Don, Ah done tol' you," he moaned. "Ah tol' you they'd be a killin'!"

"Shut up, you fool!" the Judge shouted angrily.

It was too late. The detective turned quickly in his chair.

"So you told Sheridan there'd be a killing?" he said softly. "Why?"

George had seen only his back. He had not known there were strangers present, and now he tried to cover it up.

"No sah—Ah means, Ah tol' Mistah Don somebody goin' drink too much and kill hisse'f in his cah some day."

Hazelton eyed him steadily. "Who did you think was going to be killed?" the deputy asked.

The question was as quietly spoken as if he merely asked the time, but I knew he'd keep on asking questions until he had the answer. George would do all he could—but there was Daisy.

A gust of cold wet air cut through the warmth of the kitchen as one of Hazelton's assistants came in. The detective told the man to bring the others in for coffee before they started back to town, and he appeared not to notice it when George slipped noiselessly away.

BUT the respite was brief and soon the men had gone, taking the coroner with them. I held my breath as Hazelton stood up and looked around at us.

He said politely to Judge McCrary: "I believe you said you would call on Mrs. Curtis very shortly. I'll appreciate it if you'll phone me when you're ready, and I'll meet you there."

The Judge grumbled agreement. John Stanton looked uneasy; he'd have to take Judge McCrary home, since he'd brought him, and leave me alone to match wits with Hazelton.

They left and I braced myself for the barrage of questions. Hazelton smiled ironically at me.

"Relax, Sheridan," he said. "I don't believe in the third-degree stuff unless

I have to use it. I know what you're up against—you not only don't want to throw suspicion on your friends, but you've got a job to think about even if you are a club member. I suppose Curtis was playing around with somebody's wife—he had quite a name for that, so I'll find out about that pretty easily. In the meantime let's go see if that shine has got over his fright enough to cook us some breakfast."

"I'm afraid the third degree would be a waste of time, anyway," I told him as I rang George's quarters on the house phone.

Probably the negro had been expecting and dreading the summons, for Daisy answered. I didn't leave any chance for argument; simply told her to send George over to fix breakfast for us while we cleaned up a little bit, but I thought I detected more than the usual insolence in her voice. I reflected grimly that she'd enjoy telling Hazelton about my fight with Will. I'd have to have a talk with her as soon as possible.

HALFWAY through the men's wing Hazelton stopped and looked around. "Hmmm," he mused. "Quite a place. Looks as if they might do a little gambling too, from the stuff in sight. By the way, Curtis must've been pretty good with the cards—he had a thousand-dollar check with him signed by Robert Wintsor. That's Tex Wintsor, isn't it?" He walked on toward the shower-room.

"He won that on a golf match," I answered mechanically, for the scene in the locker-room was coming back to me, and the memory of Bob's voice saying *"—if he lives that long."*

And then quite suddenly I saw what I had entirely overlooked. Lookwood wasn't the only one who might have killed Will Curtis. There were Grace and Bob and Norma. They all hated him—yes, and even Joe Redling, for all his pretended friendship for the dead man. Any one of them might be the murderer!

There might even be others: Curtis had always ridden roughshod over everything. It might be almost anybody at the club. But would Hazelton accuse the right one?

The detective had taken off his glasses to wash, and I surveyed him covertly in the mirror. In repose his face was intelligent and thoughtful, and even kindly. But he glanced up quickly and caught me watching him. "Mirrors are old stuff, but still good, aren't they?" he asked with a chuckle.

"I suppose they are, in your business. I've never tried them in mine, but it might be a good idea to use mirrors to show some people around here how funny they look swinging a golf-club."

Hazelton reached for a towel. "Unless I'm pretty much mistaken," he commented dryly, "one of 'em swung a golf-club on Curtis last night, and there's nothing funny about that."

A golf-club! It was a logical thing for a golfer to use; but that would mean it wasn't done on impulse.

"What makes you think that?" I asked. "A golf-club would be more awkward to handle than a lot of other weapons. Did you find a club there?"

"No, it's probably in the lake; but something damned near took Curtis' head off, and Doc says it looks that way to him. If it was a golf-club, even a woman could've done it, especially since he had his back turned; still, whoever did it was fairly husky."

He buried his face in the towel while a dozen different thoughts jostled one another in my brain: *Even a woman.* Even Norma, whom Will had threatened to divorce; Grace Redling, whose name had been linked with his; Judith Lookwood, whose real feelings no one knew. But—I was the most expert with a golf-club, and I was husky enough!

The detective's head came up swiftly. "What woman are you thinking of who might have killed him?" he demanded; and when I started to deny it he cut me off short. "Now look, Sheridan: I know you're lying. You're scared to death I'll find out something you know—or maybe something you did; and you're damned poor at covering up. Why don't you tell me about it? I'll find it out sooner or later, so you'd better come clean—unless you killed the guy yourself and think you can get away with it."

"Don't be a damned fool," I snapped. "I didn't kill Curtis."

He grinned disarmingly at me. "Well, it's nice to know that, anyway. Let's go eat."

But all through breakfast the question haunted me: was that a trick to find out what I knew, or did he really suspect me?

AT last Hazelton tilted his chair back against the kitchen wall, and while fishing in his pocket for a cigarette inquired casually: "Pretty late when you got to bed last night, George?"

"Yes sah," the darky answered grudgingly.

"About what time?"

"Don' know jus' when. Afteh all de membahs was gone—'bout three o'clock."

The detective exhaled smoke slowly. "Most of them pretty drunk by then?"

George bristled. "No sah!" he replied indignantly.

"Then Curtis was sober when he left," Hazelton said slyly. "What time was that?"

"Don' know what time Mistah Cu'tis leave," George answered, sullenly determined to tell this police officer no more than he could help.

Hazelton ignored it, going on to other questions, principally about the employees. At length he uncoiled his long legs from around his chair and stood up. "That was a fine breakfast, George," he said pleasantly as he sauntered to the door. Then he turned. "Why'd you think there'd be a killing?" he asked sharply.

"It was in de keerds," George said barely above a whisper. "De death-keerd kep' comin' up."

"You're lying. Why did you think Curtis would be killed?"

Terror shook the negro. "Didn't say Mistah Cu'tis would be killed," he cried shrilly. "De keerds say only someone goin' die."

"The death-card doesn't mean murder, and you said a killing," the detective said brutally. "If you don't stop lying to me, I'll put you in jail. Who was going to kill Curtis?"

"NOW, wait a minute, Hazelton," I broke in. "He *didn't* say anything about Curtis. He just doesn't believe in liquor; and last night he was grumbling to me that there'd be a killing some day if they didn't stop drinking so much. That's all there is to it."

The deputy stared at me coldly for a moment from behind his glasses. "Quite a coincidence," he said sarcastically. "Where's the rest of the staff?"

"The kitchen and dining-room force live in the village just outside the gates. George'll see to it that they're all here if you want to talk to them later."

"Have 'em here when I get back from seeing Mrs. Curtis," he told the darky curtly. "Maybe they'll know something besides what the cards say."

He strode through the doorway, and I followed. He'd think I was conspiring with George if I stayed.

"I didn't like to butt in," I remarked, "but I don't believe George really knows anything. If he does, I think I'd have more luck talking to him than you would. He's scared of you because you're an officer."

Hazelton gave me an odd look. "He knows something, all right. He lied about not knowing when Curtis left; but I don't see what good it'd do me for him to tell you the truth. You're not telling all you know, either. Perhaps the widow won't be so reticent."

"I told you exactly how George happened to speak of killing," I said as I opened the door leading from the locker-room into the golf-shop. "What makes you think I know something?"

WHATEVER reply he might have made was lost in the sound that met us—the whine of a motor and the snarl of steel on steel. Tommy Jones was cleaning the clubs the members had used yesterday. The irony of it struck me, and I wondered if he thought anyone would be playing golf at the club for some time.

From the workbench in the far end of the shop the boy caught sight of me in the doorway. He turned at once to shut off the motor; and before the noise had entirely subsided, he shouted: "Mrs. Curtis wants you to call her right away, Don. Her husband didn't come home—"

His voice stopped abruptly as he saw the man behind me, and a slow flush spread to the line of his pale touseled hair. He might be embarrassed because a stranger had overheard some private scandal about the Curtises, I thought angrily, but he had no idea how much damage he might have done. Right now it might seem to the detective a perfectly natural thing for Norma to call the manager of the club when her husband failed to come home; but later, when he began to hear the gossip, he might not see it the same way.

"I know," I said before Tommy could make it worse. "We haven't told her, but Will was killed last night. This is Mr. Hazelton from the Sheriff's office." And to the detective: "Tommy Jones, my assistant."

The boy's thin face was horrified. "Killed? In his car?" he began, then as he looked at Hazelton his voice changed. "But you're the man I read so much about in the papers—the one who just caught that fellow up north who murdered his wife. They call you the murder specialist."

"It wasn't an automobile accident," I said quickly. "McLean found Curtis down at the lake with a broken neck, and Hazelton says it's murder."

Tommy wasn't stupid, although he often spoke before he thought.

"It couldn't be murder!" he protested. "Mr. Curtis drank an awful lot last night, and he must've fallen. Oh, why didn't he let them put that fence up?"

HAZELTON gave me a look that showed he hadn't missed my effort to warn Tommy. "It was murder, all right," he said. "Got any idea who might have done it, Tommy?"

"Nobody here would commit murder," the boy insisted. "Mr. Curtis often walked home after a party. I'm sure of that, because one time he passed out on the way, and the men found him the next morning when they went to cut the greens. That's probably why his wife called up—to have us look for him."

The detective shook his head. "Maybe he did start to walk home, and maybe neither of you know who killed him; but you both know who *might* have wanted him out of the way."

Just then the telephone rang, and Tommy said after a moment: "Yes, Judge, I'll tell him. In five minutes."

That at least was something to be thankful for. Now I'd have a chance to talk to George and Daisy, and think things out without feeling that Hazelton was watching me every minute, trying to read my thoughts.

"Well, Tommy," the detective said, "we'll see what Mrs. Curtis thinks of your accident theory. She ought to know what enemies he had, and that'll be a start even if it isn't supported by evidence just yet. I've had cases like that before."

Tommy looked shocked. "You're not going to tell her right away that Mr. Curtis was murdered, are you? Don said she didn't even know he was dead."

Hazelton shrugged. "I don't like it, either; but I've got to get a line on the people who hated her husband enough to kill him." He moved to the door and turned with his hand on the knob. "Come on, Sheridan," he said; "we don't want the Judge to get there first."

"D'you need me?" I asked. "I'm hardly presentable. I dressed in a hurry, and I'm not shaved."

He ran a slender hand along his own chin, where a dark stubble was already visible. "Neither am I, but I'm sure Mrs. Curtis will overlook that under the circumstances. Murder cases have an unpleasant habit of breaking at inconvenient hours."

Damn the man! Norma's house was the last place in the world I should go now, but I didn't dare offer any further argument.

In the doorway the deputy turned again to Tommy. "I don't want this announced as murder yet," he said; "so no matter who asks, just tell 'em Curtis was found with a broken neck. I'll be back soon and take care of the reporters, so refer the newspapers to me. You just pretend you don't know anything."

As we crossed the foyer, I caught a glimpse of Daisy's pale brown face watching us from the women's wing. Her eyes met mine for just an instant, and in them I read vindictive triumph.

Ed Hazelton saw her too. "Ladies' maid?" he inquired. "I'll have a talk with that high-yaller. They always know all the dirt in a place like this."

Chapter Four

JUDGE McCRARY'S chauffeur was parking before the high-walled garden of the Curtis home when we arrived, and the Judge's manner plainly indicated that he was surprised to see me with the detective and displeased with Hazelton's conduct of the whole affair. He had telephoned Mrs. Curtis, he informed us stiffly, but he had merely made an appointment through the butler and her personal maid without stating the purpose of his call.

Inside the somber high-ceilinged living-room done in the pretentious elegance of the pseudo-Spanish houses of California, the Judge paced jerkily up and down and Hazelton lounged easily in a deep window embrasure while we waited. Then the sound of her footsteps in the tiled hall forewarned us, and Judge McCrary went to meet her at the door, a tall and graceful figure in white. Her glance swept past the Judge to me, and her dark eyes widened with sudden apprehension.

"What is it?" she asked sharply. "Has something happened to Will? Is that why you didn't answer my call?"

The Judge cleared his throat nervously and she turned to him impatiently.

"Norma, my dear," he began, "I'm sorry to tell you that Will met with a serious accident." He paused to seek

Robert Wintsor

Edward Hazelton

Arthur Lookwood

the proper words, and she asked quietly: "How badly is he hurt?"

His voice was very solemn. "He died early this morning."

There were no tears, no hysterics—she knew that we were too familiar with her domestic life for that; but she put a slender hand on the back of a tall chair as though for support, while the blood drained slowly from her creamy skin.

"Poor Will," she said softly. "Just when everything seemed to be going right for him."

She sank into a chair. Then: "Was—anyone else hurt in the accident?" she asked slowly.

Then I saw her stiffen, and knew she had just noticed the detective.

"Judge!" she demanded. "Who is this man?"

Hazelton came forward into the room. "My name is Hazelton, Mrs. Curtis," he said, "and I represent the Sheriff's office. I'm sorry to intrude upon you at this time, but I had no choice. Judge McCrary has been trying to tell you as gently as possible that your husband was not killed in an accident, but that we have reason to believe he was murdered."

She sat perfectly still in the high-backed chair. Only her black eyes seemed alive, as she stared straight ahead at the deputy. "Murdered?" she repeated scarcely above a whisper. "Will murdered?"

No one else spoke, and after a moment she asked in a tone that was oddly flat and expressionless: "What happened?"

Hazelton told her as briefly and as kindly as he could, and she listened silently.

"It was a brutal, cowardly murder," the detective concluded, "committed by someone who knew Mr. Curtis well; and it was not done in sudden anger—it was too well planned for that. Yet neither Judge McCrary nor John Stanton nor Sheridan is willing to tell me the name of anyone who hated him sufficiently to kill him. You, as his wife, would know what they may or may not know; so that's why I'm here."

Norma had long ago ceased to look at him. She sat with her dark head bent, her hands locked tightly in her lap. Seconds elapsed before she began to speak, still in that peculiar monotone so unlike her rich contralto.

"You say I would know because I am his wife; but Will and I knew little of each other these last few years, Mr. Hazelton. We lived in the same house, but we were strangers in many ways."

She stopped, raised her eyes to his impassive face. In a moment she went on with something of her normal inflection: "Will never tried to conceal the fact that he had various—women friends; and if someone killed him, it was because of that. Perhaps one of them resented it when he tired of her. Some of them were married, and their husbands may have been jealous. Will's latest infatuation was for Judith Lookwood and it infuriated her husband. Then during the championship match yesterday Will tricked him, and Arthur threatened to kill him."

"Now, now, Norma, you don't mean that," the Judge protested hurriedly.

"A number of people heard it," she insisted quietly; "and last evening before dinner Will told me that he was afraid of Arthur Lookwood and was going to stay away from Judith."

"Were the Lookwoods at the dinner dance?" Hazelton asked with a sardonic glance at me.

SHE told him they were; and in response to other questions she said Will had left the lounge sometime between twelve-thirty and one o'clock the night before, though she had not actually seen him leave. She had been tired, she said, and thought he might have gone somewhere with the Redlings, with whom they had come to the club; so

when she learned that Dr. and Mrs. Brewster were going home about half-past one, she had asked them to drop her off at her house. She didn't know whether the Lookwoods were still at the dance when she left.

"Did you notice anything unusual in this man Lookwood's behavior toward your husband during that time?" the detective asked. "You were in the lounge most of the evening, I take it."

Norma Curtis met his eyes squarely. "No, Mr. Hazelton, I noticed nothing unusual—and I *was* in the lounge all evening, in the event you see in me a possible suspect."

"Everyone is a *possible* suspect, Mrs. Curtis," the detective answered smoothly.

SHE leaned forward as she said: "I realize that, and I know my evident lack of grief is suspicious in itself; but while the news of Will's death shocks me, it would be hypocrisy to pretend the sorrow most wives would feel. You would soon learn the truth—I didn't love my husband; but neither did I hate him, and I was entirely indifferent to his affairs with other women."

Ed Hazelton nodded approvingly and after a few more questions got up to go. I breathed a little easier. She hadn't mentioned my name. Now if I could find some way to shut Daisy up—

Judge McCrary left us at the gate and as we got into the car, the detective said: "Looks as if we'd better call on the Lookwoods. Where do they live?"

He headed the car in the direction I gave him, and asked dryly: "So you didn't know anything about Lookwood's threat to kill Curtis?"

"Well, yes," I admitted; "but it wasn't quite as bad as Norma made it sound. Arthur just blew up because Will pulled a dirty trick. He didn't say he'd kill him; he cussed him out and said he'd break his neck."

"And somebody did break Curtis' neck," he reminded me. "Tell me exactly what happened."

So I told him, omitting any reference to myself. "You can see how we felt," I concluded. "We didn't want to accuse Arthur of murder over a golf match, especially since Will stayed away from Judith that night, and Arthur had apparently calmed down."

"Oh, I'm used to that," he said wryly. "Most people hate to tell the police anything. Just the same, Lookwood has some explaining to do."

But when we reached the Lookwood place, built on an irregular point of land high above the sixth fairway, the maid told us that they had left early that morning in their car and were not expected back until very late. She didn't know where they'd gone, but they had taken no baggage.

"The grapevine hasn't started to work yet," Hazelton remarked as we went back to the car. "George must be too scared to talk."

He sat for a moment gazing down at the golf-course below and at the clubhouse facing us across the valley. "About how long would it take a man to cut across from here?" he asked.

"Less than five minutes."

"That makes it just fine in case Lookwood says he was home," he said ironically. "Wonder if George knows when he left."

"Maybe, but the club-rooms are pretty well spread out."

Hazelton started the car. "Well, if he doesn't, the maid might know when Mrs. Lookwood got her wrap."

Daisy would know; she always knew things like that. I had often suspected her of keeping tabs on the women members for the purpose of petty blackmail; and if I was right she might or might not tell him about Judith. She wouldn't if she thought she could make something by keeping still; and I reflected hopefully that she might keep silent about me until she'd tried to sell her information.

The chef and two of the waiters were talking excitedly as we entered the back door to the kitchen. They stopped abruptly at sight of Hazelton, dark faces apprehensive. And while he questioned them, I volunteered to find George and Daisy in the hope that I'd have a chance to talk to her first.

AS I went through the dining-room I heard George speaking; I couldn't understand what he was saying, but from the tone I guessed that he was quarreling with his wife again, and in a moment her high insolent voice cut through his rumbling words.

"I aint going to talk to him, I tell you! I don't know anything!"

"Shut yo' lyin' mouth!" George growled hoarsely. "You bettah tell what you know."

Daisy said shrilly: "Think I'm going to tell what I know for nothing when I can get good money for it—money that'll get me away from this damned place?"

"Soon's eveh de po-liceman gits done, you c'n leave an' nevah come back," George retorted; "but ontil he's gone, don' you try an' git away with no money f'om de membahs, you yaller hussy! Don' you forgit if'n somebody done one killin', it won' trouble 'em none to do anotheh!"

They *couldn't* be talking about me. Daisy must know something else!

"You tell him I know something, and I'll tell him what happened in the patio yesterday morning," she began. There was a sound of swift movement, and the door of the women's lounge slammed violently. George cursed, and I heard him coming back through the main wing.

Stepping quickly back into the passage to the kitchen, I called, as though I had just come in. And I turned back to the kitchen without waiting to speak to him. I'd have to have time to think.

THE first thing Hazelton said was: "Where's the maid?"

"Mah wife is feelin' poo'ly," George said apologetically. "She mighty upsot 'bout Mistah Cu'tis."

"She was well enough to be up a long time ago, because I saw her," the deputy said sharply. "You go and get her *now!* Understand? I wouldn't like to have to go after her."

George fairly ran from the room. He returned almost at once, looking still more frightened. "She done took my cah an' lef' de club," he said.

"Oh, she did," Hazelton said grimly. "Well, I'll have her picked up, and she'll wish she hadn't. Now you'd better see if you can't remember just when Curtis left the dance, because I want to know; and I want to know when Mr. Lookwood left, too."

Maybe the old darky realized the futility of evasion; anyhow, I was sure that this time he was telling the truth when he said that Curtis left about twelve-forty-five, and he had last seen Lookwood a little before one o'clock. He insisted, however, that he had been very busy in the bar, and either of them might have remained in the clubhouse for some time afterward.

As we went back to the golf-shop, I remarked that I'd have thought the club would be swarming with reporters before then. He grinned at me. "It would be, only I had a couple of my boys at the gates with orders to hold 'em until I was ready to talk to the whole bunch at once. Besides, so far as they know Curtis' death was accidental—that's the way you reported it, you remember."

Tommy Jones raised a harassed face as we came in. *"Everybody's* been calling about Mr. Curtis, and I've been having an awful time," he said breathlessly. "The people here are all right, but—" He seized the telephone as the bell buzzed sharply, then handed the instrument to the detective.

The conversation was short. Hazelton said yes and no and little else; and when he had hung up, he put on his raincoat, saying: "I'm going to give out the dope to the papers now, so you can tell your members anything you please—only don't do any guessing about who killed Curtis, Tommy." He turned to me: "While I'm talking to the boys and showing them the layout down at the lake, I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a list of the guests at the dinner-dance, and mark those who are particular friends of the Curtises."

As soon as he had gone, I called Connie. John had told her, of course; and the first thing she said was: "Does he know anything about your fight with Will?" I told her he didn't, but that there was nothing to be alarmed about if he did find out.

There was a momentary silence at the other end of the line; then she asked: "But what about her?"

"He's working on another angle, I think. I can't get away right now, but as soon as he leaves, I'll call you again. I may have to stay here, but you can come over then and we'll have a chance to talk. Now don't worry!"

I BEGAN on the list for Hazelton, but I found it almost impossible to concentrate. From my desk I watched the reporters and camera-men tramping over the greens and fairways, along the top of the cliff and down to the lake with the detective. It was still raining, though not so hard, and presently I saw them climbing the steps to the clubhouse. They trooped through the golf-shop to the locker-room with scarcely a glance at Tommy or me, and I was glad. I could only hope I wouldn't furnish them with a front-page story.

Somewhere around eleven, when Hazelton had finally dismissed the newspaper men, he came in.

"Thank God that's over," he said fervently, "even if they'll be back tomorrow. I told 'em this was all private property but if the folks around here want any

peace, they'd better put a string of 'Private' signs around the fence."

He took the list, ran swiftly through the names. "Wintsor—now there's something else to think about. He wouldn't appreciate Curtis' crooked work in that match that cost him money."

"Bob wouldn't kill a man over a thousand dollars," I retorted. "If you know him, you ought to know that."

He regarded me humorously. "Guy must be a special pal of yours," he remarked. "I know him, all right—in my business I get to know a lot of people, some of 'em good but most of 'em bad. A grand wouldn't mean much to Wintsor, but a dame might. Mrs. Curtis isn't exactly ugly."

The answer confused and startled me. Was that a shot in the dark?

"No, she isn't," I said carefully; "but so far as I know, Bob never devoted any special attention to her."

Hazelton picked up his hat. "Well, you never know," he said cheerfully. "You'll be around when I get back about five, won't you?"

I said I would, and when he had gone, Tommy remarked diffidently: "I don't think Mr. Wintsor and Mrs. Curtis are such awfully good friends; it's Mrs. Redling who likes him."

It scarcely seemed like the fastidious gambler to fall for a woman of Grace Redling's type, but Tommy saw a lot and he might be right.

"I don't know, Tommy," I said. "It's hard to believe that anyone here did it. However, Hazelton already knows about Will and Arthur—Norma told him."

"She didn't tell him about you, did she?" he asked anxiously. "I mean about yesterday morning. He doesn't need to know anything about that."

"No, she didn't. She knew I socked Will because he wanted me to help him cheat, but I don't suppose she thought I'd kill him for it." I watched the boy's face closely as I said it, to see if he'd heard enough of our conversation in the patio to know I wasn't telling the truth; but I saw with relief that he hadn't. Then perhaps Daisy hadn't either; and if not, I was safe in the story I'd decided to tell Hazelton.

Tommy said stoutly: "Of course she knows better than that. People don't commit murder unless they have to. I'll bet somebody killed Mr. Curtis over money—I've heard he was pretty mean at his bank; or maybe he got tired of some woman, and she killed him for revenge."

"That's the way it'd be in the movies," I said; "but I'm afraid it looks pretty bad for Arthur Lookwood unless he has a good alibi."

Nevertheless as I went to the kitchen to find George, I recollected how Grace Redling's pale eyes had followed Will.

"Mistah Don," George inquired hopefully when he saw I was alone, "is de Hazelton man gone?" The other black faces shone with the same hope, and clouded when I shook my head. "Only for a while," I said. "Sam, send a chicken sandwich into the shop for me, will you?" I beckoned to George to follow me to the lounge.

"Now what's all this about Daisy?" I asked when we were out of hearing. "What does she know that she doesn't want to tell?"

"Ah don' know what she know," he wailed. "She won't tell me nothin'. Firs' she say she know somethin' impawtant; then she lie an' say she don' know an' won't talk. That yaller gal got no respec' for nobody. She too smart fo' her own good."

He didn't want to tell me she'd threatened to make trouble for me, I knew, so I said: "Maybe she only thinks it's important. I believe she saw me knock Will down yesterday morning, but I'm going to tell Hazelton about that myself when he gets back, so that doesn't need to worry her. There's no sense in trying to hide something from him that he's bound to find out anyway. This isn't going to be a pleasant place until he solves this murder, so if *you* have any information you'd better say so."

GEORGE thought for a long moment. "Mistah Don," he said then, "Ah don' know what to do 'bout somethin' Ah seen las' night. You see, Miz Lookwood was with Mistah Cu'tis when he lef' an' Mistah Lookwood look fo' 'em, an' Ah see him go out de do' afteh 'em. Ah don' know did he find 'em or not."

"And none of them came back?"

"No sah."

So it was Arthur after all. Again I saw those three faces as I had seen them yesterday on the tee—Will alternating be-

tween surprise and fright, Judith terrified and pleading, and Arthur towering over Will like an infuriated bear. He must have found Will and Judith together and killed in a blind rage.

But Curtis had been killed with a golf-club. Arthur had been dancing, and there was no logical reason for him to have a club with him unless he planned to use it.

George watched me, supplication in every wrinkle of his dark face. "D'you want me to tell Hazelton for you—is that it?" I asked finally. "He'll have to know."

The negro's anxiety vanished. "Will you-all do that fo' me, Mistah Don, please sah?" he begged.

"Oh, all right," I said wearily; "but for heaven's sake, if you know anything else, tell me now, or Hazelton'll think we're all in this business."

I WENT back to the shop to eat my lunch while Tommy Jones speculated aloud on a dozen different theories. Eventually he left; and when I had called Connie, I went to the club storage-room, which opened from the golf-shop. I took Lockwood's bag down from the rack which bore his name. Just as I expected, his clubs were all there, a matched and registered set that I knew perfectly.

The new clubs in the display-cases in the shop proper were the most convenient, but I found they were as I had left them. My own bag came next, for it was leaning against the work bench in its usual conspicuous place, but I saw with relief that my set was intact. I began to check the racks closest to the door; so far as I could determine, there was nothing missing.

At last I gave up. Perhaps the club hadn't come from the storage-room at all. Lookwood might very well have some odd clubs at home as most golfers do; and after all, I wasn't sure that he was the murderer. He might have a perfect alibi—a witness.

A witness! Curtis had said *he* had a witness! Suppose that witness was already coached in the perjured testimony he was to give? It could only be someone close to Will—*someone who might be the murderer!*

What if he told his lies to Hazelton? It would be so simple to shift suspicion to me, and so safe. Something very near to panic shook me as I saw the inevitable outcome if the accusation were made.

They might not be able to convict me of murder, but the voice of scandal would never afterward cease to whisper. I couldn't ask Connie to face that.

BY the time I heard her quick light footsteps on the porch, I had been through hell. If it did happen, I couldn't save her from pain; but she must be spared the ordeal of publicity. John would help me; he'd have to. He'd find some excuse for a trip.

I went to the door to meet her.

Rain sparkled on her cape, and a drop or two had fallen from the hood to lie glittering like tears on her golden lashes. My throat tightened. They weren't tears now, but tomorrow—

I scowled at her and told her with mock anger that she'd kept me waiting. It was easier than smiling just then.

She laughed at me, but when I had taken her cape and hung it in the far corner of the shop, I found her watching me gravely. She had known me so long that she'd sense something wrong if I weren't careful. She must be made to think I was only tired.

"Hazelton's gone for a while," I said, "—for which I'm devoutly thankful. I didn't get much sleep last night, and I'm pretty well all in."

"I know," she said sympathetically; "you've had a tough day. I've been so worried about you."

"No reason for that," I assured her. "He's after Arthur. Norma told him about Judith, and practically accused Arthur."

Connie nodded slowly. "I suppose she would; but I can't help feeling that Will was to blame if Arthur did it. He knew it was dangerous. Why didn't he leave Judith alone?"

"Hazelton hasn't seen Arthur yet—he's away for the day; but maybe Arthur can prove he didn't do it. I think Hazelton's pretty well convinced there's a woman mixed up in it, and Norma told him the same thing. They'll probably dig into every one of Will's past affairs and there'll be hell to pay."

Through the smoke of my cigarette I studied her as I added casually: "I don't think Hazelton'll overlook very much, so I'm going to tell him about losing my temper and socking Curtis when he propositioned me about the match yesterday. It'll look better if I tell him first."

Connie's eyes widened with apprehension: "But Don, suppose he finds out about Norma?"

"What if he does? After all, there isn't anything to find out. Everybody knows how I feel about you, and that I simply couldn't see her at all."

"*We* know that," she persisted, "but the police might think you quarreled over Norma instead of the match."

Miserably conscious of the possibility as I was, I tried hard to sound perfectly confident. "Not a chance. She's always worked on all the younger men and Will never made any objections. She told Hazelton herself this morning that she and her husband were virtual strangers living in the same house, and when he checks up, he'll find out it's true. They won't bother me at all, because they'll know I had no reason to kill him, and because they know the murder was premeditated."

Connie's small hands creased and recreased her tiny bright handkerchief while she listened. When I had finished she said quietly: "No, he'd know that you wouldn't do anything so cowardly as that; but you're not telling me all the truth, Don. You're worried about something—something I don't know. Is it fear that the papers will unearth some of the gossip about Norma and you, and that it'll hurt me?"

"Of course not," I lied. "I'm not worried at all—just tired."

She went on as if I hadn't spoken: "Because if it is, just forget it. It can't hurt me, because I know it isn't true."

So there we left it for the time being—Connie determined to stand beside me whatever happened, and I adoring her for her courage and heartsick at the thought of losing her.

EARLY dusk was settling when I watched her drive away, and the big clubhouse loomed dull and somber as I climbed the steps to wait for Hazelton. Walking slowly along the inner terrace to the locker-room door I became aware of voices in the kitchen and remembered that the staff was still on duty. I whistled for George, and presently he appeared in the passageway.

His black face was very solemn, and he shook his head with grave disapproval. "You hadn' oughta whistled, Mistah Don," he muttered. "It'll bring bad luck. We done had trouble an' it ain' finished yet."

"Well, tell Sam and the boys to go home and then lock yourself up in your quarters if you're afraid," I said impatiently. "Did Daisy come back?"

Again he shook his head. "She ain' come back." He came closer to me, and his voice was little more than a whisper: "Mistah Cu'tis dead, an' somebody kill him. Ah don' know what it is, but Daisy know somethin'. Dat's why Ah'm afraid of bad luck."

"She'll be all right," I told him reassuringly, but I saw that my words were meaningless to him.

FOR what seemed a long time I sat in the golf-shop smoking innumerable cigarettes. Lack of sleep and the strain of a day of alternate fear and hope combined to fill me with a depression, in which I could see nothing but disaster.

It was full dark when I heard someone walking on the graveled path. Then the door opened and the detective said cheerfully: "So you didn't run away! It's just as well—the main roads out of this place are full of cops, especially at the border, and I told 'em to look for a big red-headed guy."

"I didn't think I could get away with it," I answered in the same tone, "and I don't care much for Baja California anyway, since they closed Agua Caliente, so I decided to stick around."

Hazelton's grin grew wider, but as he took off his raincoat the movement disclosed for an instant the butt of an automatic thrust into the waistband of his trousers. Instantly he was once again the law, grim and implacable, and his joking manner but a trick.

"Well," he observed as he dropped wearily into a chair across the table from me, "I've seen worse dives than this; and if I've got to chase murderers, I'd rather do it in comfort. What did George tell you?"

He listened without comment while I told him that Judith Lookwood had left the dance with Will, that Arthur had followed and none of them had returned.

"So Lookwood had a hunch," he remarked when I had finished; "and he had a golf-club all ready to use on Curtis. It was a golf-club, by the way. Curtis was sitting down, and the murderer stood behind and above him. He figured to hit Curtis at the low point of the swing where the force would be greatest, but he didn't dare stand too close, so the club was rising just enough to show that the blow was slightly upward. That's what first tipped us off that it was a golf-club, because it would be unnatural to strike upward with the usual weapon, especially with that much power."

A vivid picture. It made me a little sick.

"Gets you, doesn't it?" he asked dryly. "Murder's never pretty—even if you don't like the guy who got killed."

"None of Lookwood's clubs is missing," I said. "I checked up after George told me, and so far as I can see, the club didn't come from the shop or storage-room."

Hazelton shrugged. "We'll have to fish for it in the lake tomorrow and hope we find it. Maybe we'll have better luck than we've had in finding that high-yellow."

Now was the time to tell him.

"I don't know what it is that Daisy knows," I said slowly, "but she believes it sufficiently important to use as blackmail."

"Did George tell you that?" he asked quickly.

"Not all of it. He told me she first claimed to know something, then lied about it when he wanted her to tell you. I'm sure he really doesn't know what it is, though, for when I went to look for George this morning, I heard them quarreling because she wouldn't tell you. She said then that she was going to get enough money for what she knew to take her away from here for good."

Hazelton didn't move, but the tiny lumps of muscle on his jaw hardened his face into cruel severity. His lazy drawl was intentionally insulting. "And you've known that since morning, but you wouldn't talk. Who in hell told *you* to act as judge and jury?"

With an effort I kept my voice level. "O.K. I had that coming, I suppose; but I had a good reason for keeping still."

"They always have," he said. "What was it—a woman?"

"No. I didn't tell you because I was afraid you'd think I killed Curtis."

IF he was surprised, there was no slightest trace visible, and his question was slow and unconcerned. "Well? Did you?"

His nonchalance angered me. "No!" I retorted sharply. "I didn't kill him; but I did quarrel with him yesterday, and I hit him—with my fist, and not in the back of the head in the dark!"

Tiny lines appeared around the edges of his glasses as his glance moved in leisurely survey from my face to my hands, and the grim line of his mouth relaxed. "Doc said he'd had a sock on the jaw," he said pleasantly. "Too bad you didn't make a good job of it, and maybe he wouldn't have been wandering around where he was when he got knocked off. What was it all about, and what's Daisy got to do with it?"

"Daisy saw it happen," I explained, "and she threatened to tell you about it if George let you know she possessed other information. They both knew that I simply lost my temper when Curtis said he'd have me fired if I didn't help him win the championship by crooked work; but she could have made it sound pretty bad for me."

HAZELTON crossed one leg over the other. "Probably you haven't an alibi, either, eh? I suppose you had visions of being hauled off to jail to uphold my reputation." He took off his glasses and polished them absently. "I knew you had a guilty conscience," he resumed, "and I thought perhaps Curtis had been treading on your toes where some woman was concerned; but John Stanton tells me you're pretty well occupied with his niece. Now that you've told me what had you so scared, however, it looks a little different; so if you had no better motive than that, I think I'll let you run loose for a while."

I was conscious of great relief; there'd be no scandal now to hurt Connie. And then I thought of the witness.

Hazelton was speaking again and I listened dully: "John was good enough to ask me to stay with them while I'm down here," he was saying. "From what he said this afternoon, they're expecting you for dinner too, so we may as well go together."

Mechanically I agreed, and went to my room for my hat. When I came back, the detective was standing before one of the display-cases, and he asked: "You'd notice if one of the new clubs was missing, but what about those in there?" He jerked his head toward the storage-room. "I was in there just now," he added, "and some of those bags look as if one club would never be missed out of the number they hold. I know you checked them hurriedly, but how about Tommy going over them again tomorrow?"

I agreed. We went out together, and Hazelton walked to the edge of the porch while I was locking the door. He stood there an instant; then with swift silent steps he disappeared around the corner of the building; but by the time I reached him, he had stopped and was

Joe Redling

Norma Curtis

staring into the darkness toward the swimming-pool, listening intently.

Then he shrugged and turned back. "Thought I saw somebody prowling around, but it might've been a shadow. Anyhow, we'd never be able to find him in this God-forsaken wilderness." He made a sweeping gesture that included the course with its tangled thickets of rough, its hills and its deep barrancas. "And I'm not going to mess around in any rattlesnake dens looking for him."

I didn't think it was a shadow—Hazelton wasn't the sort to imagine things; but who would be skulking in the thick blackness outside the clubhouse? There was only one answer to that. It must have been the murderer; and he had heard what I told the detective.

BY unspoken agreement there was no mention of the murder at dinner, but later as we sat drinking coffee before the fire, Stanton asked the detective point-blank if he still believed Curtis had been killed by someone from the club.

"I'm sorry to say I do, John," Hazelton replied gravely. "It's true the murderer left no fingerprints or buttons or cigarettes or other story-book clues behind to identify him, but the choice of weapon, the manner in which it was used—a number of other things—show that. I had thought of the possibility that it was a caddy, although the murderer had a chance to steal a considerable amount of money and didn't; but Curtis seems to have had no regular boy; and while he wasn't popular with any of them, I have discovered nothing so far to show they hated him particularly. That's your feeling too, isn't it, Sheridan?"

Aloud I agreed with him, but inwardly I was wondering how he'd found out. He must have been talking to the boys—if so, just how much had *they* talked?

"But surely there weren't many people who would want to kill Will," Alice Stanton protested.

Ed Hazelton handed his cup to Connie with a polite "May I?" before he answered. "He seems to've had a gift for making enemies," he said, "not only among husbands but others. I understand he did his best to insult Bob Wintsor after pulling a fast one on him; and even Sheridan, here, told me tonight that he got mad enough at Curtis to pop him on the chin yesterday morning."

He paused. The crackling of the fire was loud and alone in the stillness save for the faint tinkle of Connie's necklace as she lifted the heavy silver coffee-pot.

She smiled. "And does that make him one of your suspects, Mr. Hazelton?"

Hazelton chuckled. "You take it calmly enough," he observed, "but I'm afraid I'll need more than that before I can include him in my list."

John spoke up. "Ed and I have both done our share of fighting when we were younger, and he knows how it is. It's one thing to knock a man down and quite another to sneak up behind him and kill him. Whoever killed Will didn't do it over some petty disagreement; he had a driving motive for it."

"Yes," the detective agreed; "and there aren't so many motives when you come right down to it—love, hate, fear, envy—"

"And money," Connie put in. "It seems to me that money is the reason for most murders I read about."

"You're as bad as Tommy," I told her. "He still won't believe it wasn't an outsider. He has an idea that because Curtis was a banker, he was killed over money."

Hazelton put down his cup. "Not such a bad idea, at that," he said. "We're already checking on disgruntled clients, although for various reasons I don't expect anything to come of it. Curtis was very wealthy, and his wife profits by his death; but her story checks perfectly. She did go home with the Brewsters, and they went in with her for a nightcap and stayed until almost two. Before that she seems to have been very much in evidence in the lounge, as the Brewsters and several others told me."

He stood up and asked John if he might telephone his office, and Stanton went with him to the library. The minute the door closed behind them, Connie danced across the room and gleefully rumpled my hair.

"There! Carrot-top!" she exulted. "Between us we'll lick 'em all—gossiping cats, detectives and all the rest, damn 'em!"

"Constance! Such language!" Aunt Alice said; but there was nothing of disapproval in her smile as she added: "You talk just like your Uncle John."

John returned alone in a little while, saying that the detective had gone out. I could think of no plausible excuse to get John off by himself, and eventually I had to tell him I wanted to talk to him alone.

Connie was suspicious when I assured her that it was nothing serious. "Then why can't you talk just as well before Aunt Alice and me?" she demanded.

I was prepared for that. "It hasn't anything to do with us," I replied; "it's just club business."

For an instant she regarded me without speaking, her eyes narrowed slightly as though she were studying me; then she shook her head. "That's not true, Don, but I think I know. You're afraid there'll be a public scandal over Norma's behavior toward you, and you want Uncle John to take me away before it happens. Well, I won't go; I won't run and let you fight it out alone."

Her uncle said gruffly. "What the hell kind of woman do you think she is, to run when you're in trouble? By God, I'd disown her if she did!"

Perhaps it was cowardice—I don't know—but I couldn't bring myself to tell them of Curtis' accusation against Norma and me. Perhaps Curtis had been bluffing and there would be no witness to accuse me. Even if they knew, Connie wouldn't go; and if nothing came of it, I would have caused her needless anguish.

Chapter Five

DRUGGED with fatigue, I slept heavily, and when I woke up, the sun was shining brightly and the lake was once more calm and deeply blue. It was as though the night and day of rain and sordid tragedy had never been. But inside the golf-shop a newspaper lay on the counter, and its black headlines shouted:

MURDER!

Tommy Jones raised indignant eyes from the columns of type. "They shouldn't let them print such things," he said angrily. "It's awful the way they talk about the club."

"It's the sort of thing people like. Has Hazelton been here?"

Tommy gestured toward the lake. "He's down there with some men trying to find the thing Mr. Curtis was killed with. I wanted to wake you up, but he said you needed the rest."

"Did he say anything about Daisy?"

"He used a lot of words," the boy said with a grin, "but what they added up to was that they haven't found her."

Hastily I skimmed through the paper in search of some word that might hint at trouble over Curtis' wife. There were photographs of the lake, of the rocks and of the clubhouse, diagrams showing where and how the murder was committed, and they had made much of the fact that a gay party was in progress in an exclusive club; but apparently they had not had time to unearth the gossip and scandal.

I found Hazelton leaning on the railing of the bridge watching the operations of the men below him, and I saw with astonishment that there were a dozen or more caddies wading and groping in the shallow water around the rocks.

"How did you ever get those lazy devils to do that—and on a chilly morning?" I asked.

He replied with perfect gravity: "By asking them, and offering to pay for it, of course." He grinned at my look of disbelief. "And," he added, "I might have suggested to them that the water wasn't half as cold as the county jail."

"Get any information about Daisy?" I asked.

He snorted disgustedly. "No! But it's only going to make it harder on her when we find her, if she does know something." He flung his cigarette into the water. "I wanted to talk to her before I saw the Lookwoods, but I can't wait, so we may as well go now.

"I don't blame you for not wanting to go," he added as if he felt that I was reluctant, "but since I'm working on this alone, I'd like to have you along for a witness; besides, you know these people, and you might catch them up on something that I'd miss."

"I suppose it's because I do know them that I don't particularly like the idea," I said, "but I'll be glad to go with you if you think it'll help."

WE found the Lookwoods at breakfast in a sheltered corner of the huge patio that was checkered with sunlight and shadow from the odd tropical foliage they had planted. Judith was sitting in a Chinese fan-chair that seemed to emphasize her fragility as she smiled and waved to me, and Arthur came forward to meet us quite as though he knew why we had come and was entirely undisturbed; but as he turned to present Hazelton to Judith, I thought he moved

with an odd stiffness of his big frame as if holding himself in rigid control.

There were faint shadows under Judith's eyes, gray now in the sunlight, but they seemed to enhance her wistful child-like charm. "Aren't we lazy, having breakfast at this hour?" she asked. "Anyway, I'm glad it is so late, for now you must have some coffee with us."

"I don't know about Hazelton, but I'm certainly going to accept," I assured her.

The detective thanked her, and while the maid was bringing fresh coffee, Hazelton complimented Arthur upon the patio garden as though this were simply a social call. Judith watched them and I could almost see her relaxing before the man's smooth courtesy.

"Arthur never reads the society section, so he hasn't seen the announcement in this morning's paper," she said softly, "but I think it's splendid that you and Connie are to be married so soon."

AMAZEDLY I realized Connie had announced our engagement! Whatever happened now, there would be no shielding her from notoriety. It was her answer to the whispers about Norma. With a strange admixture of pride and dismay I saw that Hazelton was regarding me thoughtfully.

"I met Miss Stanton last night," the detective said, "and I think Sheridan is a very lucky young man."

The words and the tone were commonplace, but I had the feeling that he was thinking fast.

"I know I am," I said. "You know, Judith, Connie finally decided that if she didn't marry me, soon I'd become a confirmed bachelor who wouldn't give up the comforts of a club."

"Or else," Hazelton said smoothly, "she didn't like the idea of your living alone there from now on."

There was a moment's silence, and I was uncomfortably aware of Lookwood's fierce dark eyes.

He sat perfectly still, and Hazelton turned to Judith. "It's unfortunate that I must bring up so unpleasant a matter, but I find it necessary to ask you a few questions about Will Curtis. You have already heard, no doubt, that he was murdered some time after midnight Saturday."

She met his eyes steadily, bronze head tilted slightly from the sun. "Yes," she replied evenly; "we read it in this morning's papers."

Lookwood moved in his chair as if he wanted to go and stand beside her, but he didn't rise.

"I am told," the detective went on, "that you were the last person seen with Curtis, Mrs. Lookwood. I don't mean to convey the impression that I believe you were present when he died, but I thought that perhaps you left him with someone else, or that you can tell me where you left him and about what time you returned to the clubhouse."

The color had drained from Judith's cheeks again, but her voice was entirely controlled.

"I didn't really leave the clubhouse with him, Mr. Hazelton. Arthur and I had decided to go home, and while I was waiting for him to get the car, Will asked me to walk as far as the swimming-pool with him. He told me he was going to walk home to clear his head; and rather than argue with him when he had been drinking, I did walk to the pool with him and then saw him start down toward the lake. He was alone, and it was a little before one o'clock, I think."

"And did you go back through the clubhouse on your way to the car?" the detective asked.

"No," she answered quickly. "I went along the outside path so no one would detain me in the lounge. It hadn't begun to rain then."

Lookwood added carelessly: "It was just about one when we got in, I think, but Pete might know. There was a light in his room over the garage when we drove in. We'll ask him. I suppose it will help you to know pretty definitely when Curtis started home."

JUDITH rang for the maid, and in a few minutes Pete clumped across the tiled floor. The gnarled old man was a local character, stubborn and surly, but the finest gardener in the country, and uncompromisingly truthful. He glanced at Hazelton once and then ignored him, answering Lookwood's question in his own way. "It was one minute before one o'clock when you got home, and the only reason you didn't wake me was because I was already awake," he said resentfully. "That trifling cook came in just ahead of you, and I was reading a bit in my Bible to put myself to sleep, else I couldn't be bothered to know when people come home in the middle of the night."

Lookwood thanked him; and as Pete turned away, he flung over his shoulder

a curt statement that his clock was correct by the radio.

"Same old Pete," I smiled at Judith, "still disapproving of people who dance into Sunday, and still minding the business of all the other servants."

Lookwood shrugged. "And their employers too; but this time I'm glad of it. You've been told, of course, that I quarreled with Curtis over the match, Mr. Hazelton."

THE tall detective leaned back in his chair until a shaft of sunshine fell on his glasses before he answered. "I was coming to that, Mr. Lockwood," he said. "Someone to whom I talked yesterday—it wasn't Sheridan, because he seemed surprisingly ill-informed—told me that you quarreled so bitterly with Curtis that you threatened to kill him. I was told also that your hatred for him originated in his attentions to Mrs. Lookwood, and when I learned that Curtis left the party with your wife and that you followed them, there was both motive and opportunity for murder."

Arthur laughed, a bitter mirthless sound that startled Judith's macaw in the acacia above us, and there was a flash of brilliant red, yellow and blue as the bird flew protesting to some other part of the gardens.

"Gossip!" The word was a curse the way he said it. "My wife was with Curtis only a moment, as she has told you. I did resent the way Curtis had been making a nuisance of himself and so did Mrs. Lookwood. We tolerated him only to avoid unpleasantness in so small a community. Were it not for that, I might have given him the beating he deserved; but the situation scarcely called for murder."

"It would seem so," the detective said pleasantly, "and perhaps my informant was biased—it was Mrs. Curtis who told me."

A flicker of surprise crossed Judith's delicate face, but she didn't speak. Arthur hesitated, then shrugged.

"Perhaps," he said; "but she seemed more or less indifferent to Curtis' behavior."

"So I've been told," Hazelton commented dryly, "but—" He paused, then turned suddenly to Judith. His voice was sharp, commanding.

"Isn't it true that you were going to divorce your husband and marry Curtis, provided he could secure a divorce from his wife?"

"No!" Judith gasped. "Who told you that?"

Lookwood half rose from his chair, surprise, suspicion and anger blending in his face; then his big body slumped again into his seat, heavily, as his wife's eyes turned to him.

"It doesn't matter who told me," Hazelton said suavely, "so long as it's untrue. A great deal of the information that comes to me is exaggerated or false, but I'm forced to use it until I know the facts."

He rose and apologized gracefully for the necessity of his probing. Lookwood walked with us to the gate, and we left him there; his parting words were a friendly remark to me that he'd be over in a few days to win back the money he'd lost to me in our putting-match.

"Maybe they're telling the truth," I said to the detective as we drove away. "Anyway, you made that up about the divorce."

"Did I?" He grinned irritatingly at me and I wasn't at all sure that he had. Norma had said Will wanted a divorce.

We drove in silence for a short distance but presently Hazelton said almost as if thinking aloud: "Lookwood started to say something about Mrs. Curtis when I mentioned her, but he changed his mind. I got the idea that it was something about people in glass houses. Has she any heavy boy friends?"

"I don't know of any," I replied. "She flirts with all of us off and on. Why?"

"Just another angle to check on. It's a helluva case," he added ruefully. "Let's go see Bob Wintsor. If he was around that night, he might know something—unless he's got a reason for keeping still too."

Again Bob's odd remark came back to me—"if he lives that long"—and I reflected that he'd be difficult to pin down if he didn't want to talk. Knowing when to keep still was part of his profession.

IT seemed queer to be standing outside the door of my own house, with Bob's Filipino boy treating me courteously as a friend of his master's but yet a visitor; and I felt a kid's homesickness at sight of the place with its many wings spread out on the hilltop to catch the sun and the view. Bob wasn't home, and as we walked back to the car, I wondered dejectedly if the time would ever come when Connie and I would realize the dreams we'd woven around the old house.

The detective's keen eyes must have seen my depression. "John told me you'd leased your place to Wintsor; but I imagine you'll be needing it yourself soon." He chuckled. "I'll bet that gal of yours has it all figured out how she'll rearrange things to suit her—women always do."

It was a friendly, human gesture, and I warmed to the man for it, until a small cold voice within me reminded me of that other man up north.

"Wonder if the boys have checked up on that goo-goo yet," Hazelton said as he started the car. "Guys like that one in the doorway make nice playmates, but they do their killings mostly with knives—not golf-clubs."

NEXT we stopped in to talk to the Easts, for they had accompanied the Curtis party Saturday night. Bill wasn't home, but pretty, dumb Mary East was. She didn't know anything that would help, except we did learn that Will Curtis had been dancing with her just before twelve-forty-five, because she remembered asking him the time. She said he had told her that he wasn't going to stay much longer, and she hadn't seen him again. The information checked with George's recollection of the time, but it didn't help us to find out who had killed Curtis.

On the way back to the club we passed the Redling house, and I mentioned the fact that they too had attended the dance with Will and Norma.

"I've already interviewed them," Hazelton answered.

"Did you find out where they were at the time of the murder?"

He glanced sharply at me. "They're supposed to've been in the clubhouse until two-thirty. Any reason why I should know more about it?"

"Only that Grace Redling and Will Curtis were pretty good friends until Judith Lookwood appeared."

"So? The cast-off woman, eh? Maybe Mrs. Curtis had her in mind when she spoke of resentful women. Funny, Mrs. Redling told me quite a few things yesterday, but that was one thing she didn't mention."

He lapsed into silence again, and I thought I knew now where he'd received his information about the divorce question. Leave it to Grace to make all the trouble possible for Judith, particularly if it helped to divert the detective's attention from herself.

There were several cars in the parking-lot, and at sight of them Hazelton cursed softly. "Press cars," he growled.

He started down the hill, and I went around the locker-room to the golf-shop reflecting uneasily upon the caddies' love of gossip. There were a few men in the room, and Tommy watched them trail out, then seized the broom and began cleaning up the ashes and dead cigarettes they had scattered about the floor. From what he said, I gathered that they'd asked him questions about Curtis' love-affairs, but he said nothing to show they'd mentioned Curtis' wife.

From the outer porch I watched them as they talked and listened alternately to Hazelton. I was so absorbed in the scene that I was startled when someone spoke my name softly from just inside the window.

Bob Wintsor chuckled as I whirled quickly. "Tommy tells me that those gentlemen are reporters, and I dislike publicity," he said, "but you might come inside where they can't see me and tell me why you and the law were calling on me this morning."

"I'll bet you were home when we called," I said accusingly. "You're a fine pal."

WE went into my room to talk. Bob tossed his heavy walking-stick and a small package onto the bed, and settled down comfortably in a chair beside the window where he could watch the reporters while I told him Hazelton had thought that since he attended the dance he might know something.

"And he wanted to see me because I lost a bet to Curtis?" Wintsor's voice was a lazy drawl. "Come on, Redhead, tell me what else he has ag'in' me. It won't hurt my feelin's."

"Someone—I think it must have been Grace or Joe Redling—told him you quarreled with Will, Saturday night," I answered. "You remember that Joe was with Curtis at the card-table."

His even white teeth showed in a slow smile. "That was right neighborly of them."

All at once I recalled what Tommy had said about Grace and Bob, and the note the boy had given him. "Maybe it wasn't Grace," I said quickly. "I'm only guessing."

"Mighty hard to tell about a woman." Without a change of tone or expression he added: "Come on in, Ed. I hear you're looking for me."

Hazelton's rubber heels had given no warning of his presence, but Wintsor's alert eyes missed nothing, and his mind always worked rapidly.

The two seemed to know each other.

"I wouldn't exactly say I was looking for you, Tex," the detective said as they shook hands. "Just checking up. This job wasn't quite in your line, although I am surprised at you betting on one of these golf-games—and betting even, too."

The gambler shrugged. "I prefer the odds even, as you might say."

"But I understand they weren't—not the way Curtis played them."

Wintsor smiled at the man lounging on the bed beside him. "You wouldn't be hinting that I resented losing to Curtis to such an extent that I'd commit a crime like murder, would you, Ed?"

The detective smiled but didn't answer at once. He had picked up the gambler's stick and now sat turning it over and over in his hands.

"No, Tex," he said presently, "and certainly not over a bet as small as that. I've known of your losing as much as twenty-five thousand at one sitting to Joe Schwartz, and he's still living. But there might be something else—a woman, for instance."

"I've learned it doesn't pay to gamble with or on a woman, Ed," Bob said gravely.

Hazelton put the stick down on the bed and leaned back against the footboard. "That's not just the way I heard the story, but we'll skip it for the present. However, somebody told me that you weren't round and about at the time Curtis was killed, and inasmuch as you quarreled with him, it might be a good idea if I knew where you were supposed to be just then."

"Hard to tell," softly countered Wintsor, "but if I knew about when he was killed, I might be able to recollect where I was."

"You read the papers, don't you? It was some time between one and three."

The gambler stretched his long legs out before him and reached for his cigarettes. I waited anxiously to see if he'd fall for the trick; regardless of what the papers might have said, I'd heard the coroner fix the time as between twelve and two.

Bob smiled. "I left the clubhouse at twelve-thirty, and at that time Curtis was dancing—with Mrs. East, I believe. I should say it took me no more than five minutes to reach home. My boy

was waiting up for me, and he can no doubt tell you exactly when I arrived."

Hazelton snorted contemptuously. "That shifty-eyed bandit? They all hate the cops, and he'd lie like hell just for the fun of it—even if you hadn't told him what to say."

Again the gambler shrugged. "Too bad I haven't a more reputable witness; but you see, I didn't know I might need an alibi." He grinned and added: "As for my stick that you were examining so intently, I wouldn't think of killing a man with anything of my own—I'd borrow the weapon I needed."

The detective laughed without a trace of annoyance. "I hope you'd have sense enough to throw it in the lake where we could find it. So far, we haven't had much luck with our fishing." He stood up. "Well, thanks for dropping in, Tex. I'll be seeing you."

Wintsor rose lazily. "Reckon I'll run along and feed the ducks. You've scared them with your boats and your men until they're afraid to come and eat at the clubhouse, so I'm taking some grain to the other end of the lake for them. Well, good fishing, Ed."

He picked up the small package he had brought, and the walking-stick. As he passed me, he dropped a strong slender hand on my shoulder. "Congratulations, old man, on getting Miss Constance to say yes. Any time you want to break my lease, I won't kick at all."

We heard him bid Tommy a cheerful good-by as he went through the shop, and then we saw him walking down toward the bridge, the stick swinging, as if he had merely interrupted a pleasant stroll with a call on some friends.

"Him and his alibi—a goo-goo house-boy!" Hazelton said disgustedly. The screen door slammed shut behind him.

IT must have been about an hour later when Tommy came tearing along the porch to my room.

"Daisy's back, Don!" he said excitedly.

"Did Hazelton's men bring her?"

"I don't think so. I haven't seen her, but Sam just told me she phoned George from their house. Are you going down there?"

Tommy's blue eyes were shining with curiosity to know what Daisy'd have to say. As for me, I simply had to know!

AS I came near their little house, I heard George's deep voice rumbling complainingly, but they didn't hear me until I had almost reached the end of the path. The door was open and Daisy was standing in the middle of the floor, still in her maid's uniform, while George stormed at her.

"You tryin' to git us both killed?" he was saying. "Ain' no money in de world wuth takin' chances like—"

He broke off as he saw me, consternation in his eyes.

"Like what?" I asked sharply. "Why should you both be killed?"

"Like makin' believe she know somethin' when she don'."

"Then she should have kept her mouth shut instead of yelling at the top of her voice that she was going to make somebody pay for what she knew," I said grimly. "I heard her yesterday morning, and I told Hazelton."

George's black face was a dirty gray, and his eyes were wide with fright as he fairly shouted at me: "She don' know nothin' 'bout who kill' Mistah Cu'tis. 'Fo' Gawd, she don'!"

"Shut up, you old fool!" Daisy yelled at him. With a quick movement she brushed past me and ran up the path toward the women's wing.

George was almost incoherent with terror, and now I knew it wasn't fear of the law. It was fear of the murderer. He too had heard the prowler around the clubhouse the night before! It was the first thing he told me.

Little by little I learned that Daisy had not left the club at all—that was why Hazelton's men hadn't found her; she had simply driven into one of the many small side roads inside the estates and taken refuge in the servants' quarters of the Steele place. The Steeles were away, but the negro caretaker and his wife were friends of Daisy's and they'd accepted her story that she'd come for a visit.

George and I locked the car so she couldn't take it, and I went down to the gate to warn the men to watch for her until Hazelton took charge; then I went to the women's wing.

Daisy knew I had keys to all the doors and it wouldn't do any good to try to lock me out; but she simply wouldn't talk—just stood there glaring at me with her hands clenched in the pockets of her apron. But finally the fury that burned in her little eyes broke through her silence.

"Do you think you can scare me?" she spat at me in her shrill piercing voice. "I want ten thousand dollars! Ten thousand dollars—d'you hear? And if I don't get it, I'll talk."

Her voice dropped suddenly until it was little more than a whisper. "But I'll get it. I'll get it!"

She whirled and ran into the shower-room as if aware that she had said too much. I didn't try to stop her; Hazelton would soon return; and he'd know how to make her tell where she hoped to get ten thousand dollars.

As I cut across the patio to the golf-shop, I was thinking hard and I didn't notice that Tommy was no longer alone until Grace Redling spoke.

"Don," she said sweetly, "I hate to bother you right now, but I lost a jeweled compact Saturday night, and I was wondering if it had been turned in." Her voice changed, took on a note of sadness. "It was a gift from Will and Norma, and I'd feel terrible if anything happened to it now."

It was no doubt a gift from Will—there were people who said his gifts to her were many and costly; but I didn't believe Norma had known anything about it; and why had Grace found it necessary to explain?

"It hasn't been turned in at the office," I said; "but Daisy might have forgotten—she's on the warpath."

Grace smiled brightly. "Perhaps your detective is the cause of that—I heard her screeching just now. I'll go and see if she found it."

The compact was merely an excuse, I surmised: She had come to see Daisy—Daisy, who had screamed a demand for ten thousand dollars.

Chapter Six

CONNIE came in while I was eating lunch in the empty sunlit dining-room. Just the way she walked told me she was prepared for whatever argument I might make over the wisdom or folly of announcing our engagement; and she said emphatically: "It won't do any good

to fuss about it; it's printed. I know you think it was foolish, but it'll make people think twice before they do any silly talking about you and Norma."

"Darling, you know how proud I am to have people know," I said, "but I'd never forgive myself if some damned columnist got started on the triangle theme."

Connie's chin went up a notch, and I wanted to kiss the soft round throat above the high collar of her red-and-brown plaid dress. "Let them," she said. "People here know the truth, and we don't care about the others. Anyway, they'll forget it as soon as we're married." Suddenly she giggled softly. "Of course, you didn't really ask me to marry you in January, and maybe you'll want to print a retraction."

In spite of my anxiety, the absurdity of her suggestion made me laugh, and although she had only come for a brief few moments so the yardman could pick up John's station-wagon, nevertheless I felt immeasurably better.

IT was almost three o'clock when Hazelton returned.

"Nice work, Sheridan," he greeted me as he came up on the porch. "Letting the boys know Daisy was around was a good idea. She do any talking?"

As nearly as I could, I described what had happened, including Grace Redling's visit to the clubhouse ostensibly in search of her compact. He made no comments until I had finished; then he said: "Let's go."

We found Daisy ensconced in a chaise-longue with the inevitable Hollywood gossip magazine, and she didn't move.

Hazelton stood looking down at her for what seemed a good many seconds. When he did speak, his voice was quiet.

"So," he said, "you're going to get ten thousand dollars."

Save that her small eyes turned toward me, she ignored the remark and turned a leaf in her magazine.

"Put that damned thing down!" Hazelton said. He didn't shout, but there was something in the command that made Daisy lay her book aside immediately.

He sat down and stared at her until she moved uneasily. "Now listen, you," he began presently. "This 'no savvy' stuff isn't going over, so don't try it. You know something that you think is going to get you something—you told Sheridan you did. That's where you made your big mistake, because now *I've* got something—enough to hold you in jail until hell freezes over. Understand?"

Daisy nodded sullenly, but kept silent.

"You can't get away," he went on, "because you're being watched; and if you don't talk pretty soon, you'll be in jail where you can't collect blackmail from anyone."

The information was no surprise to her evidently. At any rate, she said hoarsely: "All right. I'll talk." Suddenly she turned on me. "And you'll be damned sorry I did. Why don't you tell him what *you* did Saturday morning?"

"Never mind that," Hazelton snapped. "You didn't expect Sheridan to give you ten thousand to keep quiet about that, if you mean knocking Curtis down. Now quit stalling and talk!"

"O. K.," she said flippantly. "I heard them quarreling Saturday night, and I heard him tell Curtis he was going to kill him, so I watched. Later that night when Curtis and Mrs. Lookwood left the clubhouse, I saw him sneaking after them. They didn't come back, but *he* did in about thirty minutes; and he had a golf-club in his hand."

"Who did?" I yelled at her frantically.

She smiled unpleasantly. "Too bad it wasn't you. It was your dear friend the gambler."

The detective cut in. He sounded pleased and hopeful. "Now we're getting somewhere," he said. "Did you hear what they were quarreling about?"

"Something about putting his gambling ships out of commission."

Was she telling the truth? I'd been positive Bob wouldn't commit murder over a trivial bet, or even a woman; but if it concerned his business—

DAISY went on answering Hazelton's questions. There was, she said, no doubt of the gambler's identity; she had seen him plainly, and had seen that he carried a golf-club. She couldn't remember the exact wording of his threat, but the import had been unmistakable.

"That's just what we need," Hazelton said approvingly, and the maid looked complacent as he stood up and looked down at her.

"By the way," he said as if he had just thought of it, "this Grace Redling, who was just here after her compact—she was a pretty good friend of Mr. Curtis', wasn't she? Did you happen to see her around that night?"

"I'll say I did," she answered in a tone of disgust. "She passed out a little before one o'clock, and I had to put her to bed. She was pretty sick, and I didn't want her in here, so I put her on the couch in the linen-room." She gestured toward the door. "That's where she lost the compact she came for."

Hazelton opened the door into the linen-storage closet, glanced at the walls of what was really a small room lined with steel cabinets, and at the small high window. "Guess that lets her out; she couldn't get out of here without you seeing her."

Daisy shook her head with its too-straight hair. "She didn't have a chance to get out and even if she had, she couldn't have stood still long enough to swing on him."

The detective nodded as if satisfied, but he paused at the outer door. "If you've been trying to collect from Wintsor and failed, it might be a good idea for you to stick around where my men can keep an eye on you. I wouldn't like it at all if anything happened to keep you from testifying."

We left her to her glamour book; and when we were out of hearing, I said: "I don't believe a damned word of what she said about Bob, and you don't either. She's lying until she sees a chance to get away."

He grinned. "She'll find she's mistaken. I've a couple of men watching for just that; and no matter how dumb they are, they ought to be able to get the best of that yaller gal."

"But what about Bob—you don't believe that, do you?" I persisted.

Hazelton shrugged. "I don't know. Curtis might have had something to do with the heat on the gambling boats. Let's go see Tex."

BOB'S car wasn't in the garage, and his boy said he wouldn't be home until late. Hazelton didn't question the statement; instead he drove away.

"Are you going to call on the Redlings?" I asked after a moment, for he had taken the road that led past their place.

He nodded. "You sure don't like Mrs. Redling, do you? Why?"

"Well, for one thing, she's always been a trouble-maker. For another, she can get madder than any woman I ever saw; and while I don't know that I've ever seen a murderess, she looks like what I'd imagine they'd be."

"Hmmm, rather involved, but I think I get it," he commented. "That might explain it."

He didn't say what it explained, however, for just then we reached the Redling house. It was typical of Grace—showy and overdressed. And when she came in, you might have thought from her make-up and elaborate coiffure that she had dressed for a Hollywood party. I knew at once that she had expected us, and I had a momentary qualm.

Joe Redling's bulky figure filled the doorway behind her; his good-humored smile was a perfect shield as always, and I hadn't the least idea what he thought or felt as he shook hands.

We all sat down, and Hazelton began abruptly, "I just had a little talk with Daisy, and I learned some rather surprising things."

Joe Redling said nothing; he was used to all the tricks. Grace, however, was nervous. She showed it by the quick jerky puffs she took on her cigarette and by her remark that Daisy probably knew a good many surprising things.

THE detective continued, ignoring Grace and addressing himself to her husband: "Daisy isn't what I'd call a reliable witness, but inasmuch as you were Curtis' lawyer and his friend as well, you might know if there is anything in what she said."

Redling folded his hands across his fat stomach. "If I can help at all, Hazelton, I'll do whatever I can."

Hazelton leaned forward. "The maid says she heard Wintsor threaten to kill Curtis. That was Saturday night. It appears that the quarrel was with reference to the recent agitation to close up the gambling boats, and I thought perhaps if Curtis had been instrumental in it, he might have discussed it with you."

"Oh!" Grace gasped. "Why, I heard them arguing that night, but I didn't dream—"

"Yes?" the detective prompted. "Could you hear what was said?"

"No, but later on I was dancing with Will, and he said something about showing Bob Wintsor that he wasn't afraid of any gambler that ever lived."

"Was that after Wintsor had left the party?"

"Yes."

"Grace, my dear," Redling interposed smoothly, "it's dangerous to make such a statement. You mean you didn't see Wintsor again that evening, don't you?"

A flash of irritation that was almost anger crossed the woman's face. Hazelton said curtly: "This isn't a witness stand, Redling. Mrs. Redling need not be so explicit. Wintsor himself told me that he left about twelve-thirty. Is that right?" He asked the question of Grace, and she nodded assent.

"And Curtis never mentioned any trouble with Wintsor to you, Redling?" the detective probed.

The lawyer's mild blue eyes were troubled. "Well," he answered slowly, "he did tell me he was going to do his best to put Wintsor out of business, but I had the impression that the original cause of their quarrel was some woman. He told me that he'd tired of the woman, but had intended making a considerable settlement on her until he found she'd been two-timing him. He didn't mention Wintsor's name, however, so my assumption may have been erroneous."

"Did he tell you who the woman was?"

"No, he didn't tell me that," Redding answered slowly.

"Is that all he said?" Hazelton inquired with a shade of impatience.

The lawyer seemed to consider his reply carefully; and Grace lit another cigarette, the hiss of the match-flame loud in the silence. Her fingers weren't quite steady as she held it, and all at once my suspicions crystallized: Redling was talking about his own wife!

The lawyer took his cigar from his mouth and let smoke drift lazily from between his lips. "In a murder investigation," he said unctuously, "I feel it my duty to withhold nothing which might be pertinent, and therefore I think you should know that Will also told me he intended to confront the woman with his knowledge Saturday night."

MUCH as I disliked Grace Redling, there was something horrible in the thought of her husband calmly pointing her out to the police, whether as a murderess or an accomplice. She was staring at Joe, her strange light eyes a curious mixture of incredulity and hatred.

Hazelton must have understood, but there was no hint of it in his next question. "Then you think Wintsor might have been present at the meeting of Curtis and this woman—unknown to Curtis—and killed him either with or without her help?"

"Perhaps," Joe Redling answered slowly; "or perhaps the woman killed him herself for revenge."

"And you don't know who the woman was?"

"Will only told me that it was a woman who, as he expressed it, 'belonged' to him, and whom he and a certain witness had caught with the other man," the lawyer replied.

The reply startled me, and I glanced at Redling's placid face. The palms of my hands were suddenly damp. From under those heavy lids his bright blue eyes were fixed not upon his wife but upon me, and in them was malicious amusement.

He knew! He lied when he said he didn't know the woman's name. He had chosen his words carefully, so they could apply either to Grace or to Norma. But the woman was Norma; and I was the man; Redling was the witness!

IN the stillness of the room I could hear Grace Redling's short uneven breathing. Her husband's gaze slid slowly from my face to hers, and as I looked at her, I understood why he had lied.

She was terrified. I thought of her visit to the clubhouse this morning, and Daisy's story of Grace's stay in the linen-room. She had no real alibi, and Joe Redling knew it. He didn't care if I had killed Curtis. It wasn't because he was protecting me; it was because he hated his wife. But how long would he keep quiet?

Grace Redling's skin was blue-white, and the bright lipstick was a mockery, but she had nerve. She looked straight at her husband before turning to Hazelton, and she actually smiled.

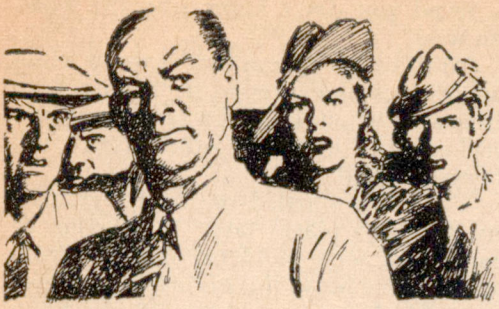
"I'm sure my husband is allowing his professional ethics to influence him," she said, "because he knows as well as I that Will was speaking of Norma, whom he intended to divorce. He had suspected her of an affair—"

Through the roaring in my ears came Joe Redling's sharp interruption. "Grace!"

She left her sentence unfinished, and it seemed to me that my heart stopped while I waited for her to speak my name.

"You forget, Grace darling," Redling's soft lazy voice went on, "that Norma has considerable money of her own, so revenge would be an unlikely motive; besides, she has two reputable witnesses—the Brewsters—who will testify to her whereabouts on Saturday night."

For just an instant I thought she would defy him; then she said dully; "I'd forgotten that. But as Mr. Hazel-



ton suggests, Bob Wintsor might have killed Will."

Dazed with relief, I was dimly conscious that Hazelton had not spoken during the interchange between the Redlings. Now he shook his head and the flashes of light from his eye-glasses danced an accompanying protest.

"It wasn't entirely my suggestion," he said. "I simply wanted to get your husband's idea on it, in view of what he had told me, Mrs. Redling. Why did *you* think Will Curtis intended to divorce his wife?"

She sat staring straight before her, while I waited. She was desperately afraid. Something had gone wrong with her plans. Had she actually killed Curtis, and did the lawyer know it?

Her voice was curiously flat and expressionless when she answered:

"So that he'd be free to marry Judith Lookwood if she'd divorce Arthur."

"Was that the only reason?"

Her head nodded wearily. . . .

Outside in the chilly dusk, I shivered and closed the window of the car. Hazelton's profile was grim and forbidding, and he drove in silence at high speed.

How much did he know?

He left me without a word when we reached the clubhouse. He strode along the outer porch to the women's wing, and I had a brief glimpse of Daisy's figure outlined in the lighted doorway. The door closed with finality as if to emphasize the fact that this time he didn't want me to hear the questions he would ask her—nor her answers.

I called Connie and asked her to have dinner with me at our favorite café.

It was not long afterward that Hazelton entered. He nodded absently toward me and picked up his overcoat.

"Did you find out anything more?" I inquired.

He pulled the soft gray felt hat down over his eyes. "Not much. She's still lying about some things. Tell Alice and John I can't make it to dinner."

With a gust of cold wind he was gone, and I had learned exactly nothing. Cursing savagely to myself, I locked the shop and stalked across the patio to the garage.

Connie was waiting for me, and we drove for miles along the coast highway. The little inn where we stopped was quiet, and we lingered over our dinner on the glass porch jutting out over the water. Across the candle-lit table we smiled at one another and spun our shining web of plans and hopes for the future, while I tried to forget that the breath of scandal might become a gale, rending and tearing the gossamer fabric of dreams.

The enchantment held even after I had kissed her goodnight; but as I passed the clubhouse gate, the beam of a flashlight swept over the windshield and the gruff voice of a deputy told me to go ahead. The spell was broken, and I was back once more where death had joined the country club.

Chapter Seven

IT was no use; I couldn't sleep. Lying there staring into the blackness until my eyes ached my thoughts went round and round in a dreary circle. I sat up and reached for a cigarette, but the package was empty. I knew there was a carton in my desk in the golf-shop. In slippers and robe I crossed the porch and without turning on the lights, groped my way to the corner where the desk stood, returned, and after locking the shop door, stood for a moment or two on the terrace listening to the tiny night sounds in the patio.

There was no moon and the darkness pressed in so thickly that the stars were hidden and I couldn't see the white wall of the wing directly opposite. Dampness from the high fog made the tiles cold and slippery and brought to mind that other night when the rocks were chill and treacherously wet; that other night when murder stalked.

It was growing light when I went to sleep, and I woke to find old George plucking at my arm. "Mistah Don, wake up!" he breathed. "It's me—George. Daisy's done gone!"

"How did she get away with Hazelton's men watching her?" I demanded.

"Ah don' know, but she gone when Ah wake up dis mawnin'. What'll de policeman do? Ah couldn' he'p it."

"Do his men know she's gone?"

George shook his head emphatically.

It was still very early, but the detective must have trained himself to awake instantly and completely, for there was no necessity for repeating. What he had to say nearly burned the insulation from the telephone wires, and I took a certain mean but natural satisfaction in seeing his composure blasted. He'd given *me* a good many uncomfortable moments.

When I had sent George back to get dressed, I pulled on my own clothes, meanwhile reflecting that someone must have helped Daisy to get away, and the logical person was Grace Redling.

Hazelton came storming into the kitchen in a very short time. George gave him the best description he could of the few clothes she had taken—a street outfit and a prized evening dress—and Hazelton phoned the details to the highway patrol and Sheriff's office.

The detective disappeared for a few minutes while George was making coffee, and upon his return he told us that he had found her footprints under one of the side windows of her house. The deputies had made periodical rounds of the buildings that night, but in the intense blackness she must have walked across the golf-course to some point where, he remarked grimly, "she either caught a ride by pre-arrangement, or else was being hidden again by someone at the club."

Hazelton gulped some fruit-juice and black coffee and then snapped, "Come on, Sheridan, let's go see your friend Tex Wintsor. My bright assistants couldn't find him yesterday, but they've just advised me that he drove in about one o'clock this morning. A fine lot of help they are!" He trailed off into picturesque profanity and stalked out.

I grinned at George, but he looked solemn. "Ah wish Mistah Hazelton wouldn' talk so 'bout Daisy bein' a impawtant witness. Ain' safe t'know too much 'bout some things."

ON the way to Wintsor's I told the detective, "George doesn't think it's a good thing for you to broadcast Daisy's status as a witness. He seemed to think the murderer might repeat."

His face was still set and angry but he said soberly: "I don't blame him for feeling that way. When a man has killed once, he knows he can only be executed once, no matter how many people he murders, and I try never to forget that."

We found Bob Wintsor in the sunny little breakfast-room overlooking the golf-course. He was an elegant and gracious figure as he rose from the table to greet us with a friendly smile.

Hazelton wasted no time. "Tex, three people have told me you and Curtis had a hell of a quarrel Saturday night. What was it all about? Also, somebody saw you following Curtis and Mrs. Lookwood that night with a club in your hand, and that same person heard you threaten to kill him."

The gambler's face was calm and unperturbed. He drawled: "Nice case—if you can prove it, Ed."

"Maybe I can. At any rate, motive isn't lacking. You'd have known all along that Curtis was trying to put you out of business, and then he found out about his wife's visits to your private rooms on the *Dicebox*."

"If Daisy told you that," I broke in, "Grace Redling put her up to it."

WINTSOR shrugged. "Cain't imagine why Daisy'd lie to you, Ed. As for Mrs. Curtis visiting the *Dicebox*, women love to gamble, though most of them hate to lose—Mrs. Redling, for example."

Hazelton grunted disdainfully. "O. K., fella, but you'd better come clean about the fight you had with Curtis. I've got better witnesses than a colored maid on that; and I wouldn't be at all surprised if that goo-goo mightn't change his tune about your being in the house after twelve-thirty that night. That'd make Daisy's story a lot stronger."

"If," Wintsor said softly, "Daisy is available for a witness."

"Oh, so you helped her get away, eh? Well, we'll find her by the time we need her. Tex, you're trying to bluff with a busted straight."

The tall gambler rose gracefully, his movements lithe as a cat's, and his eyes as inscrutable. "If you don't mind, Ed," he said evenly, "I'll bet my hand as I see fit."

Hazelton rose too.

"O. K., gamblin'-man," he said coolly. "But don't forget what I said about a busted straight."

As soon as we reached the car, the detective snapped at me: "What's the idea of butting in and tipping Wintsor where I got my information?"

"Bob's my friend, and I hadn't promised to keep still," I retorted. "You know damned well that Grace Redling

bribed Daisy to tell you that yarn about Bob sneaking around the clubhouse at night. Daisy didn't mention Norma at all until after Joe Redling told you Bob and Will quarreled over a woman, but Grace probably phoned her to add that stuff about Norma visiting Bob's private rooms."

Hazelton's laugh held no humor. "I didn't need Daisy to tell me about Norma Curtis' visits to the *Dicebox;* I knew about it. Gambling's a favorite sport of bored women. What I don't know is whether she went there to gamble or to see Tex."

"I suppose Daisy couldn't help you on that," I said sarcastically.

"No," he said after a moment, "she couldn't. Daisy's story is that where Norma Curtis was concerned, *you* were the fair-haired boy. What about that? After all, you did smack Norma Curtis' husband down, you know."

"What of it? I told you about that, didn't I?"

"Yes, you told me about it, and so did Daisy, but Daisy added that Mrs. Curtis came along just as you let Curtis have it; and Mrs. Curtis has never mentioned it to me."

"Why should she?" I asked. "She knew what caused the trouble, and she knew I wouldn't murder a man over a silly argument."

Hazelton parked his car before the clubhouse. As the sound of the motor died away, the cheerful chattering of women's voices came to us from the west wing. Hazelton's eyebrows shot up.

"It's Tuesday," I explained, "and Tuesday is ladies' day. A little thing like a murder couldn't keep them away if there was a tin cup at stake."

He shook his head. "'The female of the species!' You go ahead and take care of them; I'll stay out of sight." He turned in at the men's locker-room.

FOR a while I wandered restlessly around the golf-shop; and when I couldn't stand the inaction any longer, I decided to practice. Perhaps if I concentrated on that I could stop thinking in circles for a while. For a few shots I swung viciously, ripping spoon and brassie shots from the thick turf of the practice tee savagely and mechanically, without thinking at all about the clubs I was supposed to be testing; but presently I began to notice what a sweet-feeling set of sticks I was using. The driver was a little head-heavy, and I had to work to get my hands in fast enough for an intentional hook; but after a few shots I got it. The club whistled as it came into the ball with a sharp crack, and the ball sailed out over the fairway for a country mile before it broke sharply to the left. The force of the swing carried me around, and the never-failing thrill of a good shot filled me; then I caught sight of Hazelton standing just behind me, and my elation died swiftly.

"Hmmm," he said thoughtfully, "now I understand better what Doc meant. I'd hate to be standing too close to you when you swing that thing. Anybody else here who hits 'em as hard as you?"

I picked up the clubs and together we walked up the hill to the outer porch. "A lot of men hit 'em harder than I do," I answered, "but there's only two who swing almost as fast, if that's what you mean—Lookwood and Bob Wintsor."

"Doc Blackey said a club might travel as fast as—" He stopped, and I followed his gaze to the patio porch.

MORE beautiful than ever in black, Norma Curtis was sitting just outside the door, looking fixedly across the course.

Tommy said nervously: "Mrs. Curtis is out on the porch, Don."

At the sound of the boy's voice, Norma called softly, almost pleadingly: "Don, I've been waiting *so* long. I *must* talk—"

She had turned toward the door as she spoke, and she broke off in apparent confusion as she saw the detective. "Oh! Mr. Hazelton," she said, "can you spare a moment?"

He agreed politely and went out to take a chair opposite her on the porch. I was retreating toward the locker-room when he said: "You needn't leave, Sheridan. I'm sure Mrs. Curtis won't mind."

"Of course I don't mind," the liquid voice assured him. "Mr. Curtis and I were both very fond of Don, and of Constance too, naturally."

Reluctantly I sat down on the porch railing, inwardly cursing.

"Mr. Hazelton," Norma began, "I have had a great deal of time to think in the last few days, and I am afraid that I may have done Arthur Lookwood an injustice. In the first shock of Will's death I told you of Arthur's violent outburst during the match; but since then I have been haunted by fear that I was wrong, and someone else might have killed Will that night, relying upon the quarrel to protect him from discovery."

The detective nodded. "I hadn't missed that possibility, Mrs. Curtis, but you mustn't permit yourself to brood over it. I should have learned of Lookwood's threat in any event."

Her long dark eyes were black with emotion, and her soft voice was husky as she asked hesitantly: "But you will not let my accusation influence you?"

Hazelton's face was grave and sympathetic, and I thought bitterly that she had taken him in, just as she had intended.

"I try not to let anyone influence me, Mrs. Curtis," the detective replied, "and Lookwood seems to have a good alibi."

Norma said with a pathetic smile: "Thank you, Mr. Hazelton. You see, I had a slight heart-attack last night, and it made me think; but now I shall not worry so much."

She looked pale and ill as she left her chair and walked to the railing; then without a sound she crumpled to the floor.

Hazelton reached her before I did, and he carried her to a chair, calling sharply to Tommy to bring some water. She was entirely limp and her eyes were closed as the detective began to chafe her hands and wrists, and I found my suspicions fading. . . . Surely Hazelton would know if she was faking.

Tommy came running from the shop with a glass of water; both of us stood there helplessly while the detective tried to revive her, until he sent Tommy to the women's lounge for some smelling-salts; but before the boy had time to return, Norma moaned softly and moved her head uneasily.

Her long lashes flickered, and her eyes opened slowly. They swept unseeingly over Hazelton's face and fastened themselves on me. "Don," she breathed, "why didn't you wait?" Her eyes closed again.

The glass slipped from my hand to shatter into fragments on the tiled porch.

She thought I had killed her husband!

A LONG way off I had heard footsteps, and I now saw someone step onto the porch from the shop door. There was an explosive *"Well!"* and Connie stood beside us.

Little flames danced in her eyes as she said coolly: "Daisy is quite expert at first-aid, Don."

The shock of Norma's words had left me speechless. Connie snapped at me to get Norma into the dressing-room. Mechanically I lifted her from the chair and carried her inside. We met Tommy in the doorway, and when I had laid Norma on a couch, Connie dismissed us both curtly.

Tommy gave me one bewildered glance and left without a word. I blundered into the main lounge. . . . Norma thought I had killed Will to keep him from talking. She had heard the threat he made. . . .

For a long time I stood there. There was no sound from the women's rooms. Then the door opened, and Connie and Norma came out together. Norma murmured an apology for her illness, but she avoided my eyes. Her chauffeur was waiting, she said, and she left at once, walking unsteadily, with none of her usual languid grace.

CONNIE watched her go, a faintly puzzled frown creasing her forehead. Then she turned to face me.

"I'm sorry I was so hateful, Don," she said, "because I realize you hadn't done anything. I thought Norma was pretending, and when I saw her here at the clubhouse with the two of you hovering solicitously over her, I was so angry at her that I took it out on you."

"Forget it, darling," I said awkwardly. "I don't blame you for being sore."

She kissed me. "I was on my way to the village and just dropped by to tell you both that Aunt Alice is having a very special dinner tonight and she expects you to be there."

I walked with her to the parking-lot and watched her drive away. . . .

For once in my life I was glad it was ladies' day; I saw to it that I was too busy to talk to Hazelton for a while at least. I got busy with the score-sheet, figuring the points play against par as the players began to come in.

Shortly after the last card had been figured, Mary East returned from the women's locker-room to ask me to come over and open the towel-cabinet. Daisy had taken the keys with her.

Mary called through the door that I was coming in, and there was some scurrying and subdued giggling as the women disappeared. Ordinarily it would have amused me, but today it only irritated me. Gossiping cats!

There were about twenty keys on my ring, and I didn't know which one opened the big green steel locker in the linen-room. My irritation grew as I tried one key after another with Mary East offering unasked advice; and when

at last the lock snapped, I jerked the door open savagely.

With a soft rustling sound a figure in oilskins toppled slowly from the locker and fell heavily to the floor. Daisy!

Chapter Eight

GEORGE had been right: it was a house of death.

For one appalling moment I heard nothing, saw nothing but the contorted face of the dead woman sprawled at my feet; the grotesquely shapeless body huddled in stolen boots and rubber coat far too large for it.

Daisy had been too clever; and not clever enough. Disguised as a watering-man, she had gambled that the deputies would ignore her as she walked openly across the course; but the murderer had been waiting, and Death had ended the game, blotted out the flickering lights.

Noise beat at my eardrums, penetrated my stunned senses. From Mary East's throat scream after scream reverberated in the small space, amplified by the metal cases and echoed in the larger room by the women who crowded the doorway.

"Stop it!" I shouted. "Stop screaming—and one of you go get Hazelton."

I shook Mary roughly, and the shrill outcry ceased, but her eyes were blank and uncomprehending with terror as I pushed her through the knot of women at the door.

"Mrs. Clark," I pleaded with the one who seemed least hysterical, "please keep them out of the linen-room while I get the detective."

There was a sound of running feet. The outer door burst open, and Hazelton strode into the room, his face set grimly, his glasses gleaming fiercely in the light. Over his shoulder I had a glimpse of Tommy's pale hair and the dark blur of negro heads.

Fast as I moved, it was too late. George had seen her. Above his white coat his skin was the color of blue clay, and in his eyes abject terror crowded out whatever grief he might have felt.

"Daisy! She daid!" he croaked.

Hazelton stood immobile beside Daisy. The others in the doorway drew away from George, but he remained rooted there staring dazedly at his dead wife, his lips working soundlessly; then as if he were alone in the room, he whispered: "Daisy—daid! She was a-walkin' in de shadder, an' now she daid. Ah knowed it—Ah done tol' her an' tol' her, ain' no good come o' messin' in white folkses troubles. But she wouldn' listen. Now somebody done kill 'er fo' it."

"Who killed her?" Hazelton asked quietly.

For the first time George seemed to become aware of the detective and of the group of awed women. He shook his grizzled head stubbornly. The detective didn't insist. Almost gently he urged the old negro to go, and the darky shuffled on out with the others from the kitchen.

Hazelton turned to the women. "All right now, calm down," he ordered brusquely. "Your names are on the score-sheet, I suppose, and Sheridan will have your addresses, so we won't bother with that," he said; "but I want to know who asked to have that locker opened."

No one spoke—each was afraid to admit the commonplace request. Mrs. Clark recovered first. "What difference does it make who asked for the first towel?" she snapped. "It's not a crime to want to take a shower, is it?"

The detective shook his head.

"Then perhaps it was I," she admitted, "because I did send Mrs. East for the keys."

Hazelton said patiently: "All I want to know is this: Was it coincidence that there were no towels available, or did the maid customarily keep the towels locked up and distribute them when you ladies played golf?"

A dozen voices tried to answer at once. Eventually Mrs. Clark explained that Daisy had always issued the towels so they would be fresh. In her absence they had sent for the keys, without any idea, she added, that they would discover another murder had been committed under the very noses of the police!

THE detective ignored the thrust. Jerking his head for me to precede him into the linen-room, he told the women curtly that they were free to go home, and closed the door upon them. Then he knelt beside Daisy's body.

"Believes in knocking 'em in the head," he remarked over his shoulder, "but this time it was only enough to put her to sleep; then he strangled her. He took the cord off again—probably for fear it could be traced to him—but why did he go to the trouble of choking her? It would've been easier to beat her to death."

In silence I listened to the whispering of the raincoat as he moved her.

"Maybe," he mused aloud, "maybe he strangled her so there'd be no blood and we wouldn't find her at once, figuring that whoever owned these oilskins would report the loss and we'd figure she got away."

Unwillingly I glanced over his shoulder. "They're probably McLean's—he's tall—and he hasn't missed them yet," I suggested. "His name might be in the hat."

He turned the sou'wester over in his hands. "No, no name—might be in the coat, though." He laid the hat down and with it his notebook. There was a mark on the black rubber where the murderer had struck, but the crown hadn't been heavy enough to save her. She hadn't thought of that; she'd probably been thinking how clever she was when she tied it on with the black thread that lay half-hidden under it; yet the rustling of the oilskins had made it easier for someone to steal up behind her.

Hazelton sat back on his heels and surveyed the other lockers. "What's in the rest of them?" he asked.

"I don't know exactly. Some of them must hold supplies, cleaning-tools and equipment, and probably Daisy used at least one of them for her own stuff. D'you want them opened?"

HE nodded, and together we opened the other steel cases. They were all narrow except one which was a duplicate of the towel-locker, and in that one large case we found the maid's personal belongings—extra uniforms, magazines and odds and ends—and her handbag and small overnight bag. Hazelton pounced on these last two items.

"The guy who did this certainly knew she had that bag somewhere in the room," the detective said thoughtfully; "and since he had her keys, he could just as well have put her body in there. Now why did he put her in the locker with the bath-towels?"

"Maybe he thought George might open Daisy's locker to see if she'd taken all her things, but figured the towel-locker wouldn't be opened for some time," I suggested. "He mightn't have expected the women to play today under the circumstances; but how do you know he had her keys?"

"Her keys are in her pocket, but I don't know that he used them," he shot at me. "*You* had a set of keys, and you were in the clubhouse last night when she was killed!"

"You don't know what time she was killed," I retorted. "She'd already done as much as she could to make trouble for me; she couldn't make it any worse. Why should I kill her?"

"Couldn't she?" he asked softly. "What else did she know about your affair with Norma Curtis? And what did the Curtis woman mean when she asked you why you didn't wait? Wait to do what—kill her husband?"

"I DON'T know what she meant," I flung back angrily. "I didn't kill Curtis, and I didn't kill Daisy. What're you trying to do—pin this thing on me because you let the murderer kill a witness you were supposed to be guarding?"

Hazelton smiled, a definitely unpleasant smile. "I'll ask the questions; you just answer 'em. Getting tough about it isn't going to help. It wouldn't be such a hard job to pin it on you—you fit the picture pretty well! Now what did Mrs. Curtis mean? She came here to see you—not me; and you know it. Why is she afraid you killed her husband?"

I answered as quietly as I could: "She was simply upset and hysterical—she wasn't even conscious of what she was saying. I don't know what she was talking about."

Abruptly he turned toward the locker again and picked up Daisy's pocketbook. "Guess I'll have to ask Mrs. Curtis why she's afraid of you," he remarked in a conversational tone; "and in the meantime don't go wandering around alone after dark. I'd hate to have another murder."

I watched him as he checked over the contents of the two bags, the gaudy trinkets and few articles of clothing. Presently he held up a sheaf of bills. "Nice little roll," he commented, "but hardly enough for the amount of lying she did on Mrs. Redling's account. I'll bet this ring changed hands sometime yesterday, though. Recognize it?"

The center diamond was magnificent; and even the smaller stones were beautiful. It was a ring that wouldn't be hard to trace. Although I told him I couldn't identify it, I had no doubt that it would prove to be one of Grace Redling's gifts from Will Curtis.

He held out a second ring—a single large pearl set in a veritable thread of white metal; and he saw that I recognized this one.

Will Curtis

Judith Lookwood

"So it is real," he said quickly. "Who owned it?"

"Judith Lookwood. I've often admired it and I noticed it particularly Saturday night. She was dancing with Curtis, and her hand looked so fragile with that big pearl against his black coat."

Hazelton looked slightly surprised. "So? Then she was over here either Sunday or yesterday and forked over to little Daisy. Now, aint that somethin'?" Very carefully he wrapped the two rings and put them in his watch pocket. "Guess I've found out enough for a while. I'd better go call Doc."

He locked the linen-room and went to the phone-booth to make his call instead of using the phone in the shop.

THE women had long since scattered with the news of Daisy's death, and I found the clubhouse employees completely demoralized. George wasn't in the kitchen but the other negroes were huddled together in a corner of the big sunlit room. I knew they would have lost no time in leaving if I hadn't talked to them right away, pointing out that there was no danger in the daytime and exacting a promise that they'd stay, provided they could go home before dark each day.

The chef told me George was alone in his own quarters. I thought a lot of the old man and I wanted to help him if I could, so I cut across the patio toward the path to his house. I had a glimpse of Tommy's face in the pro-shop window, and he looked like a ghost of himself.

George's door was closed, and I knocked. After a moment I heard the key turn, and then Hazelton's voice saying ungraciously: "Come on in. As long as you're here you might as well stay."

Angry at myself for not having foreseen that he'd be talking to George, I said: "Thanks. I can see George some other time just as well, but don't get the idea I was following you. I've still got a job to do taking care of this club and I thought there might be something I could do for him."

"Yeah? Well, I've got a job to do too," he said sardonically, "and as I told you before, it won't help any for you to get tough with me. Sit down and listen!"

I knew it would be silly to make an issue of it, so I stayed, sitting stiffly in a chair while he questioned George. And he exhibited the same ruthlessness now with the old negro, hammering away at him until George told him the little he knew to rid himself of his tormentor:

George had known for a long time that Daisy was engaged in petty blackmail. She had made a practice of following the women who slipped through the side door of the ladies' lounge at night, timing them and if possible identifying the men they met, then threatening to tell their husbands; and in most cases they paid her a small amount for her silence. George had disapproved violently, and they had quarreled continually about it. On the night Curtis was killed, she had been wildly elated over something she had learned; she had begun her recital of spying, but George's protestations had angered her and she had told him nothing. The next morning after Curtis had been found, George remembered her unusual excitement, and had been afraid she possessed some clue to the murder; but she had told him mockingly that since he hadn't kept still the night before, she wouldn't tell him anything; she said *she* was going to keep still, and this time she'd collect some real money.

There was something that closely resembled sympathy in Hazelton's voice when he said he was sorry things had turned out the way they had. "But," he said grimly, "if she was going in for blackmail all along, she was asking for it. We don't want the killer to get the idea you know anything," he added, "so you stick close to the clubhouse in the daytime, and don't leave your house after dark for anybody. You'll be safe enough with my men watching from the outside —*if* you stay put; but don't forget one thing: the murderer is someone you know well, so don't trust anybody—*anybody*—understand?"

The grizzled head nodded dismally, and Hazelton turned his attention to me. "And that goes for you too, Sheridan. I don't even want you to go over to Stantons' without me."

Without another word he went out and left me with George.

It wasn't as difficult as I had thought; George and Daisy hadn't been happy together, and he had soon learned that

she cared nothing at all for him, only the money he had saved. For his part, her blackmailing activities had disgusted him. Once the shock had passed, I saw with relief, George would be happier than he'd been for months; and presently I left him.

HAZELTON called me as I passed the women's wing. He grinned at me as I came up to the side door where he was standing. "Don't like to take orders, do you?" he asked cheerfully.

Before I had time to think of an answer Arthur Lookwood's big roadster took the turn into the parking-space at a speed that threw a fan of gravel from beneath the wheels.

He banged its door behind him and his dark aquiline face was blazing with anger as he thrust a newspaper at Hazelton. "Did you give them that information?"

"Some of it, probably," Hazelton answered noncommittally, "and some of it they got elsewhere. Why?"

"Why? *Why?* Did you read it? It doesn't matter what they say about me, but I won't have my wife's name tossed about. Did you mention her to those ghouls?"

"No," the detective replied evenly; "but they were bound to find out that Curtis had been dancing attendance on Mrs. Lookwood. Perhaps it was Daisy who told them."

The veins in Arthur's throat swelled dangerously. "Damn her!" he growled. "It'd be just like her. By God, I'll see that she's fired."

"I'm afraid it's a little late for that," Ed Hazelton said easily. "Somebody strangled her last night—*somebody else* who didn't want her to talk."

Lookwood's big shoulders hunched slightly like a man flinching from a physical blow and his face was suddenly haggard.

"Somebody should have done that long ago," he said harshly. "They handle such things better in the Islands."

"So I understand," Hazelton agreed pleasantly, "but I have been told also that occasionally the natives resent it to the point where it's no longer safe for certain white men to live there."

Lookwood's dark face became darker and small crackling sounds came from the newspaper as his fingers tightened upon it, but he didn't speak. Rumors had followed him to the States that he *had* killed a man there. Again a picture flashed across my mind: Judith clinging terrified to his arm as he faced Curtis on the tee. There had been death in his eyes.

The detective went on: "They do considerable pearl-fishing over there, I've heard, and Sheridan tells me that you have some fine specimens. What would you say this is worth?"

In the bright sunlight the pearl shone softly luminous against the tanned skin of Hazelton's hand. Deception doesn't come easily to a man such as Lookwood; yet his face reflected only surprised pleasure.

"Why, that's Judith's ring!" he exclaimed. "The one she lost."

"When did she lose it, and where?"

"Several days ago, probably here at the club. Where did you find it? Had Daisy found it and hidden it?"

"Daisy had it," the detective replied, "and she also had this." He placed the diamond beside the pearl.

LOOKWOOD looked puzzled but somewhat relieved. "She must have made quite a good thing out of it, if many such rings were lost," he observed; "but that diamond doesn't belong to my wife."

"Quite a coincidence!" the detective remarked. "You reported the loss, of course; when?"

"Mrs. Lookwood wore the ring Friday night at the bridge tournament here," he answered without perceptible hesitation. "She didn't miss it until she was dressing Saturday evening, and then she wasn't sure just where she had lost it. We did, however, mention it to Will Curtis during dinner that night, and he was going to post a notice and have the clubhouse gone over for it next day."

Hazelton shook his head. "Sorry, Lookwood," he said. "It's a good story, because Curtis can't disprove it—he's dead; but a little while ago Sheridan identified the ring because he remembered the contrast it made with your wife's small hand against the black of her dancing partner's coat *Saturday night*. Like the owner of this other ring, Mrs. Lookwood gave it to Daisy to hush something up. What was it?"

Lookwood's eyes blazed at me. "By God, if you're trying to involve Judith in this to save your own neck, I'll kill you if it's the last thing I do," he roared. He whirled upon Hazelton: "Why don't you investigate some of the others—Curtis' 'friend' and her husband?" He jerked his head scornfully at me. "And why don't you investigate *him?* Why does he

pretend to be in love with a fine girl when he never lets Norma Curtis get far from him? Why—"

I seized his arm and swung him around to face me.

"That's a lie!"

He tried to pull free, but my grip held. Hazelton's sardonic voice cut through the fog of anger. "All right, boys, break it up. End of Round One."

My own rage cooled as swiftly as it had flamed. This was a sucker's game we were playing for Hazelton's benefit!

"Come on, Arthur, snap out of it," I said. "This isn't doing us any good—or Judith either."

The detective said dryly: "This isn't doing me any good, either. We'll just go inside and wait, and I'll send Moran over for your wife. I want to hear her story about the ring."

Lookwood's reply carried a note of triumph. "My wife isn't home—and won't be, until you've cleared out of here!"

"Where is she?" Hazelton's question cracked like a shot.

The big man laughed jeeringly.

The detective's voice was a snarl. "So you think you can get away with that, do you? You might've been the law and God Almighty where you came from, but if you try to pull any of that stuff on me, I'll put you in jail on so many charges it'll take the whole Bar Association to get you out."

He glanced over his shoulder as a car and a hearse came into view, then back to Lookwood. "Now get this straight," he said harshly. "There's the coroner, and I'm going to be busy for a while, so I'll give you time to think it over; *I'm going to see your wife!* Two of my men'll go home with you, so don't try to leave the house; and by the time I get there, you'd better be ready to talk."

Lookwood glared in frozen silence for a moment, then turned and stalked across the terrace to his car.

"WHAT'S the idea of the raincoat?" Blackey asked when he saw Daisy's body.

The detective answered grumpily: "I had men on the roads and a couple of saps watching her house for a get-away, but between their rounds she got as far as here and dressed up like one of the night water-men so she wouldn't be noticed when she walked across the golf-course. The killer got this far too."

"Took a chance, with Sheridan sleeping right across the patio," Blackey said. "Better sleep with a gun under your pillow these nights, feller, and be darned careful about investigating any strange noises."

With an odd sensation of chilliness I recalled standing on the terrace last night with the darkness hiding the wing across from me. That was at two o'clock; was the murderer in the clubhouse then?

FINALLY the coroner reached for his hat, and announced: "Approximately the same time as the other one—maybe a little later."

The detective called to the fingerprint man to get my prints because I'd opened the locker and found Daisy; then he walked out of the room with the coroner. As soon as the prints were taken, I went out onto the patio porch and saw them talking in low tones a short distance away. Hazelton handed the Doctor an envelope and Blackey left.

"Come on," the deputy called. "You heard the story of one ring; let's go find out about the other."

He took the road to Redlings', and I knew I was in for a bad time when Grace was confronted with the diamond.

We found them at lunch, and the detective simply followed the maid into the dining-room without waiting to be announced. Mrs. Redling seemed annoyed; but her husband smiled genially and invited us to have lunch with them.

Hazelton declined almost rudely. "Sorry, but I'm pretty busy right now. We had another murder last night—Daisy, this time, in case you haven't heard of it."

Grace Redling seemed suddenly ten years older, her pale eyes bits of glass.

"Daisy was a blackmailer," the detective went on, "and she knew something about Curtis' murderer. She was killed because of that, and some of her secrets died with her, but she left some evidence behind her."

He paused. The woman sat motionless, her light eyes fixed on his concealing glasses; Redling puffed meditatively on a cigarette.

"This is part of it," Hazelton stated. He drew the magnificent ring from his pocket, and the diamond sparkled with cold fire as he held it out toward Grace.

"Sheridan thinks it's yours," he said.

"No!" she said shrilly. "It's not mine! I never saw it before! He's lying to make trouble for me!" Whirling upon me, she screamed: "Daisy was blackmailing *you!* I heard her, and Tommy heard it too."

"Just what did she say, Mrs. Redling?"

Her answer came with a breathless rush. "I heard her shouting at him that he couldn't scare her; then she said: 'If you don't give me ten thousand dollars, I'll talk!'"

"That isn't what she said at all," I began, but Hazelton cut me off.

"Please answer my questions, Mrs. Redling," he said sternly. "How did Daisy happen to have your ring?"

"It isn't mine, I tell you!"

But Joe Redling interposed blandly: "Grace, dear, I think you'd better examine the ring closely. It resembles the one you received for an anniversary sometime ago from the—ah—Curtises, and the jeweler will have a record of it. Perhaps you lost it, although I don't recall your mentioning it."

She stared at him for an instant as if she didn't quite understand; then the utter brutality of his pretended helpful advice struck her, and the words she flung at him were in the language of the gutter.

The fat man, unmoved, said politely: "Mr. Hazelton isn't interested in our family quarrels; he's investigating a murder."

The detective's voice was as courteous as the lawyer's. "On the contrary, they may have a bearing on the murder. Perhaps *you* killed him at a time when you knew Mrs. Redling might be accused of the murder, thus indulging your hatred of both Curtis and your wife."

Redling's fat lips pursed in a half-smile of derision. "But you have not proved that I left the clubhouse at all at the time of Curtis' death; therefore the premise has no foundation in fact. Moreover, I had no opportunity whatever to kill Daisy, for both my wife and I were at home last night. Surely she will be more than willing to testify to that effect."

The triumph in the woman's face faded slowly as it was borne in upon her that she must protect her husband or be without alibi for herself. She said drearily: "Yes, we were both home."

Joe Redling smiled very slightly.

Hazelton said: "We'll come back to that later. Right now I'm particularly interested in Saturday night."

MRS. REDLING half rose from her chair. "Ask Sheridan! He killed Will because of Norma!"

"Why should I kill Curtis?" I asked furiously. "I didn't want his wife or his money, and I wasn't looking for revenge!"

Redling coughed softly. "That's logical enough. You forget, my dear Grace, that Sheridan is engaged to Constance; and even if he did covet Will's wife, there was no need to kill him. Will and Norma had already agreed to an amicable divorce. Under the circumstances, murder would have been ridiculous. The settlement and agreement papers are on file in my office, and Mrs. Curtis had ample time to tell Sheridan of the arrangement, which I am quite sure she did."

So that was what Norma meant when she'd cried out: "Why didn't you wait?"

Hazelton had risen.

"I think, Mrs. Redling," the deputy said coldly, "that you'd best concentrate on your own situation, which is far from enviable. I'm not overlooking Sheridan or anyone else who had the opportunity and a possible motive for murder. You, apparently, had both. . . . I should be very reluctant to have you or your husband leave this vicinity just now."

And Hazelton strode to the door. I followed quickly.

Chapter Nine

THE reporters had descended on the club by the time we returned from Redlings', for the death of Daisy had made of the Curtis investigation a spectacular story. They seized upon Hazelton, as I left them to telephone Connie.

The news had long since reached her, and she'd had time to think of the murderer lying in wait in the darkness not fifty feet from where I had been sleeping. She was frantic with anxiety and there was no reasoning with her until I had promised to stay at Stantons' during the night until the danger was past. I didn't tell her of Hazelton's warning, nor of Dr. Blackey's, but I left the phone feeling silly for having agreed.

By five o'clock the clubhouse was quiet. The reporters had left; the negroes had gone home; George had driven into town to make arrangements for Daisy's burial when the coroner should have finished; and even the men who had been searching the lake had left, taking their equipment with them because their quest had failed. There were only the three of us remaining in the building.

After a while the detective glanced up at Tommy. "You'd better run along home, Tommy," he said. "Both you and Sheridan must be careful. I don't want any more murders, and unless either of you did the killing, I want you to be careful. I can't watch you both."

There was no doubt of his earnestness.

Presently we heard Tommy's old roadster sputter away and I reminded Hazelton that we'd better get going if we weren't to be late for dinner. He made no comment whatever on my statement that I intended to stay at Stantons' for the night; nor did he object when I said I'd take my own car so I wouldn't have to borrow one to get back in the morning. Far behind, as I drove along the crooked road, I could see his headlights following me.

Constance must have been listening for the sound of my car, for she ran lightly down the steps to meet me.

"Darling, Uncle John has the most wonderful news," she burst out excitedly as I opened the coupé door. "Your corner property went into escrow today!"

She half-pulled me from the car, laughing and talking so fast that it took me a moment to grasp what this would mean to us. "Then we can be married in January?" I asked, incredulous of this added happiness. For answer she raised her lips to mine, and in the ecstasy of that kiss I knew that it was true. . . .

The detective went out right after dinner, but now I wasn't worried about what he might learn; I felt only a tired impersonal curiosity. It was good to sit before the crackling fire with Alice and John and a radiant Connie; tonight the friendliness of the house would be all about me when I went to my room, and Connie would be sleeping peacefully but a few doors away, secure in the knowledge that I was safe. And if the gods were good, there would be other nights before the fire in our own rambling house, where loneliness was a forgotten word and fear could not enter; nights when I need not lie alone staring into the dark.

HAZELTON and John had breakfasted and gone next morning before I got up, and Alice had a tray sent to her room, so Connie and I had a gay meal together on the terrace. When at last I did leave, it was with the feeling that nothing disagreeable could possible happen on a day that started so joyfully.

The golf-shop was empty although the doors were opened, but there was the familiar and pleasant sound of practice balls being struck, a sound that except for my own brief workout had been missing since Saturday; I heard Tommy saying, "Gee, you sure socked that one!"

From the porch I watched Bob Wintsor's swing for a moment or two before I strolled down to the tee. As usual it was smooth and apparently effortless, but his shots were going out there just the same. For just an instant I remembered the picture Hazelton had drawn of the timing and cool calculation of the man who had swung a golf-club in the darkness on the cliff.

Wintsor turned as I approached, and his eyes warmed at my friendly insult concerning the drive he'd just hit off-line.

AFTER a while we walked up the hill together and sat in the sun in a sheltered corner of the porch. Tommy volunteered to bring some drinks from the service bar because George wasn't on duty, and when he had gone, I found out that Wintsor had come to the club that morning primarily to see the old negro. He didn't say why, but I knew he thought George might need money.

"I asked him about the financial angle," I said casually, for I knew the gambler never talked about his own philanthropies, "because I thought the club ought to do something about it; but he said he didn't need any help. So far as George himself is concerned, once he gets over the shock, he'll get along better without Daisy; she'd caused him plenty of grief with her blackmailing."

He nodded. "She thought she was a pretty smart yellow gal, but she picked the wrong one that time."

All at once I remembered this gambler who was my friend saying softly: *"If* Daisy is available for a witness." That was after she had disappeared, and before I had found her!

"But my God, Bob," I protested, "I just recalled that you told Hazelton it'd happen. He'll think you were mixed up in it."

His eyes lost their guarded look, and his even teeth flashed in a smile. "I don't doubt he's already thought of it."

He turned to thank Tommy for bringing the drinks.

"Just the same," I insisted, "he won't overlook it. He practically accused me of killing her because she'd made some crack about Norma Curtis hanging around the shop so much. He knew I had the opportunity, because I was here when she was killed, and Grace Redling was kind enough to point out the motive —she told him she heard Daisy demanding ten thousand dollars from me."

Wintsor's smile vanished. His voice was sharp, imperative: "Grace Redling told him that? When?"

"Yesterday. Oh, she heard it, all right, and so did Tommy; but Grace twisted the words to suit herself. Daisy wasn't trying to collect from me; I was trying to get her to talk, and she was telling me to go to hell, that she was going to get ten thousand for what she knew."

Tommy was flushed and miserable, and I recalled his belief that Grace and Bob were particularly good friends, but I pretended it was because of what he'd heard Daisy say.

"Can you remember just what Daisy shrieked at me?" I asked.

"All I heard was that she was going to talk if she didn't get ten thousand dollars," the boy answered. "She didn't say anything at all about getting it from you," he added, "and I'll tell Mr. Hazelton so just as soon as I see him!"

An ironic voice spoke from the doorway behind us: "Since you've all been obliging enough to sit and discuss the matter within my hearing, it won't be necessary, Tommy."

"'Morning, Ed," the gambler said as the detective seated himself in a glider near by. "I thought after reading the papers this morning that you'd be calling on me, so I came over to save you the trouble—and incidentally get in a little practice."

"Thoughtful of you, Tex," Hazelton replied in the same even tone, "and I'm glad to have a chance to look at this particular outfit of clubs—they weren't in the storage-room earlier this week." He leaned forward and pulled Wintsor's golf-bag from the floor. "Mighty fancy-looking outfit," he commented.

WINTSOR smiled with polite cynicism. "By all means, Ed; if you should want to send them to the laboratory for analysis, go right ahead. Don can fix me up with another set."

Hazelton grunted. "I wouldn't be sap enough to expect to find bloodstains on these. You've already told me you'd borrow the weapon." He examined the slender shaft of the driver. "Seems to me that hitting a guy's head with one of these things would put a kink in it or even break it, wouldn't it, Sheridan?"

"Probably."

He drew one of the irons part way out of the bag. "These would be better; they look as if they'd stand anything."

Did he expect to make Bob nervous?

"They would," I answered; "and the shorter the iron, the heavier, and the stiffer the shaft."

He nodded and laid the bag down indifferently. Because he hadn't pushed the iron all the way down, the head scraped against the woods, and Tommy picked the clubs up and carried them into the shop, casting an indignant glance at the detective.

BOB looked at me and we both grinned at the little by-play. Hazelton had not seen it; he said dryly, "Glad to see you both so cheerful. You, especially, Tex. You don't seem at all worried because Daisy got knocked off and you knew about it before the police did. You were supposed to be sitting in a private game Monday night when it happened, I understand."

Wintsor crossed one knee over the other carefully and smiled at his questioner. "You do get around, don't you, Ed?" he drawled.

There was no answering smile on the detective's firm mouth. "Suit yourself, Tex, but I'm warning you there's a joker in this deck that you haven't even thought of," he replied steadily. "You see, I know your one weakness—friendship."

Wintsor's perfectly controlled facial muscles didn't change, but for a brief flash his eyes were frosty with hostility. He stood up and remained so for a moment, gazing down at the other man.

"That's always possible when there's a woman in the game," he drawled lazily. "Go ahead and use it if you're a mind to, but recollect that I back my friends to the limit, and I'm not squeamish about how I do it."

Hazelton nodded thoughtfully, but all he said was: "That's what I've heard."

Bob smiled at me as he walked toward the steps. "Give my regards to Miss Constance, Don, and don't forget what I told you—I'm ready to move whenever you say the word."

"What makes you think he knows anything that will help?" I inquired as the detective sat in silence looking straight ahead of him. "You don't really think he killed Will himself; and unless he saw the murder happen, I can't see what good it would do for him to tell you what he thought. It seems to me that you've heard plenty of reasons why Curtis might have been killed, and no real evidence against anyone."

Without moving, he said finally, "I have the evidence."

Very slowly he turned so that the light no longer shone on the lens of his

glasses. Behind them his eyes were now neither sad nor thoughtful; they were hard and brilliant—accusing.

"Against *you!*"

A queer sense of shock numbed me. I forced myself to relax, to keep the panic out of my voice.

"Evidence against *me?* You're crazy!"

He shook his head. "No, I'm not crazy; but for once in my career I'm almost sorry—because of Connie."

That hurt. Then I realized that it was part of a trick, and a slow anger began to build up inside me.

WHEN I didn't answer after several seconds, he went on: "From the very first, certain things have pointed to you; but from a psychological standpoint you were ill-fitted for this crime. You're hot-headed, not given to careful planning, physically brave, not too hard up; and above all you're engaged to a beautiful and lovely girl, so you had no apparent reason for murdering Curtis; whereas the killing had been cleverly calculated, executed with the least possible risk, and must have been committed by someone to whom the man was a source of frustration or a definite threat."

He paused, waiting; but I waited too.

"In my business," he continued, "I've learned never to ignore a hunch, and I got a hunch the minute Blackey introduced us. You were afraid of me. From that time on, as the evidence began to pile up against you, I was forced to the conclusion that some desperately compelling motive might exist. The most powerful motive for you would be love—or the mad infatuation that sometimes poses as love."

Behind my eyes a tiny pulse began to beat. This was no trick; he was in deadly earnest.

"I had no motive," I said.

"That's what you might be expected to say," he said without heat, "and there's a chance in a thousand that such combination of circumstances could happen fortuitously. That's the only reason for what I'm going to do—tell you just what you're up against. If you're guilty, it won't hurt my case for you to know; if you're innocent, you may be able to explain it; and for your own sake as well as Connie's, I hope you can."

Hazelton stopped speaking as a man from the greens-keeper's crew trudged slowly around the corner of the clubhouse, whistling....

"What circumstances?" I asked.

"To begin at what was apparently the beginning," he said unhurriedly, "you quarreled so seriously with Will Curtis Saturday morning that you knocked him down—an unusual thing to do to the president of the club and to a man nearly ten years your senior. It's true you told me about it—as much as you wanted me to know; but you knew that Daisy had witnessed the fight, and perhaps some others had seen it. There was friction between you all that day, and during the card-game that evening he made insulting references to you as well as to Tex Wintsor. Later you took Miss Stanton home, leaving her about twelve-thirty. Then, although the dance was still in progress, you returned to the clubhouse grounds, but you didn't make your appearance among the guests; and no one seems to have seen you until Curtis' body was found."

None of that meant anything. Why didn't he come to the point?

"Then Daisy talks too much," he resumed. "She threatens you and demands ten thousand dollars. You knew she was trying to escape—you might even have arranged it; and you had keys to the women's wing, so you could lie in wait for her when she came to get the money and rings she had hidden. You thought you knew that the towel-locker wouldn't be opened until I had taken the guards from the clubhouse and the men from the lake. It would have been easy to dispose of her body then."

AGAIN that prolonged pause, more cruel than his words.

"Most of these things are equally true of a number of people," the even voice began again, "but Will Curtis was killed with one of *your* golf-clubs."

"One of *my* clubs?" I broke in. "You're lying, Hazelton! I checked every club in my bag Sunday afternoon. They were all there."

"There is a club missing from your bag—the one that was used to kill Curtis," he went on inexorably. "And there is something else: you always put rosin on the leather grips of your irons; and there was rosin on Curtis' collar—the mark left by the murderer when he dragged the body to the edge of the cliff."

"But anyone could have put rosin on his hands!" I protested desperately.

He ignored that. "And on the night Daisy was killed," he continued calmly, "you were supposed to have been in your room; but you didn't stay there. The

GEORGE

DAISY

TOMMY

dew was heavy that night, and next morning your slippers were still wet from walking in it. You would have had to cross the tiled porch to reach the linen-room even if you went by way of the main clubhouse, so the guards wouldn't see you; and you could have returned the same way. There was nothing but your wet slippers to show what you had done, and they would have soon dried—if Daisy hadn't been found. Even then I might have overlooked them but for a piece of string that lay beside her—a fatal bit of string, because it traces directly back to you."

For one blank uncomprehending moment I sat motionless; then I saw again the steel-lined walls of the linen-room, the misshapen heap of raincoat and boots on the floor, the sou'wester and the thread of black half-concealed under it.

With a feeling of utter despair I recognized what that black thread had been: the special linen twine used by golf professionals. I had thought it only a bit of string, a part of Daisy's disguise; but I knew now it was a grim and deadly snare, a part of the murderer's plan.

Fear sharpened each sense; it drove home the conviction that this evidence was deliberately manufactured; and it thrust upon me the dreadful realization that safety at the price of a third victim was the natural device of this coward who was twice a murderer.

Hazelton was watching me, watching me and waiting, hoping I'd say something he could use against me. He wasn't sure of the reason yet, and he must not learn what Curtis had said that morning in the patio. If I could keep him from arresting me today—

He moved slightly, listening. Light footsteps crossed the patio to the shop.

Connie!

With a silent appeal to the detective, I got stiffly to my feet, trying frantically to erase from my face any telltale signs, and to smile as though she found us simply chatting. I heard Tommy's voice saying loudly: "Don? He's out on the porch."

Hazelton had risen too. I had one swift glimpse of him as the door opened. He was composed, smiling.

The brilliant morning light shone full upon her as she hesitated for an instant in the doorway, and against the dimness behind her she was so lovely that my heart caught painfully.

"Hello, darling," I called. "Come and join a couple of hard-working men."

CONNIE smiled, but as she took the chair I pulled up beside me, the smile gave way to a faintly puzzled frown. "Did I interrupt something important?" she asked.

"Not so very," I lied. "Just something Hazelton was telling me about police work."

The frown was deeper now, and there was an unnatural sharpness in her voice. "Then why was Tommy so startled when I came in? And what has upset you so since you left the house?"

Desperately I lied again. "Hard to tell about Tommy—he's been scared since yesterday morning; but there's nothing the matter with me unless it's the atmosphere of this place." My face felt stiff as I tried to grin at her.

There was no answering smile on her delicate lips. "Please, Don. . . . I always know when you're not telling the truth. It's something terribly serious—something that concerns you. What is it?"

Hazelton looked at his watch and remarked that he'd better see Moran before he went off duty; but Connie was too quick for him.

"Wait, please," she said imperatively. "This is no lovers' quarrel. It's something you've said or done to him; I *know* it is!"

She leaned forward facing him, daring him to deny what she knew intuitively. Hazelton remained silent.

There was no way out of it now; she'd have to know. "Connie, darling," I said hoarsely, "don't blame him. What he's done is just part of his job. It's my job to tell you."

SHE just sat quietly, her eyes darkening with fear while I related to her how circumstantial evidence had piled up against me; as my story progressed and she saw how skillfully the murderer had involved me, fear gave way to incredulity and then to horror in Connie's face; but when I had finished, she reached across to lay a hand on my arm for a moment in a gesture that made unnecessary any spoken expression of confidence.

She turned to the detective, her small head held proudly. "And do you think, Mr. Hazelton, that Don would have been foolish enough to use one of his own clubs and to strangle Daisy with his own twine when there were a dozen other things he could have used?" she asked.

He answered gravely: "It wouldn't have been foolish to use one of his own clubs if the club were never found—it was sheer coincidence that I found there was one missing; and from long usage he might well have forgotten the rosin that furnished the clue."

"And the twine?" she insisted.

"You forget that the twine was not on the woman's throat; it might have been dropped while the murderer was putting the body in the locker."

Connie's eyes blazed at him. "So with those two fantastic clues, some bits of gossip, and the lies of two women, you're ready to accuse him of murder! Have you even tried to prove that Mr. Lookwood or that slimy Redling pair did it? Do you know that Grace Redling and Norma Curtis both hated Will, and that Norma hates Don because she couldn't take him from me? And you call yourself a student of psychology and a detective!"

Hazelton made no effort to defend himself. He answered quietly: "There is nothing I'd like so well as to prove Sheridan innocent, both for his own sake and for yours; and while I've shown him how strong a case circumstantial evidence makes against him, I haven't definitely accused him of murder. As I told him at the beginning of our conversation, the commission of premeditated murder is foreign to his character; but there have been instances of entirely abnormal acts carried out under compulsion of a motive so strong as to overpower inherent traits —if, for example, Curtis stood between Don and someone he loved."

"That's the second time you've said that," I said angrily, "and I've told you that it wasn't true. Don't you think Connie would have known it if there was anything to the gossip about Norma and me? You're playing right into the murderer's hands. Curtis was killed by someone who wanted you to do just what you're doing!"

Connie said quietly: "No amount of evidence could make you believe Don a murderer, Mr. Hazelton, if you knew him as my aunt and uncle and I know him; but even without that knowledge, you aren't wholly convinced of his guilt, or you would have arrested him before this. Isn't it because you can't believe he killed Will because of Norma?"

Ed Hazelton's gaze was fixed on the distant fairway as he polished his glasses.

"MISS STANTON," he said gravely, "it was not my intention that you should learn of these circumstances until I was positive that Don was guilty. I wanted him to have the chance to tell me the precise truth if it would help him, or if he wished to do it—"

"But I *have* told you the truth," I said.

"Have you?" he asked softly.

"Yes," I said firmly, "even about the clubs. They were all there Sunday afternoon."

"Get your bag and look again," he suggested; "but aside from the missing club, there's the rosin to be considered."

Connie protested: "Other people use rosin, too, if the grips are slick or if their hands are dry."

Tommy came out on the porch carrying my golf-bag. There was apologetic defiance in the look he gave us as he set the clubs down on the tiles. "I tried not to listen, Don," he said, "but you were right outside the window." He jerked his head at the detective. "He's all wrong. I cleaned your clubs Sunday morning—and every one was there!"

Connie's cry echoed my own wild hope that the detective had been wrong. I ripped open the zipper in the hood, noting automatically that the three woods and putter were in place. Hurriedly I sorted the irons—1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9. Hope died abruptly.

"My dynamiter's gone," I said dully, and watched the gladness go out of Connie's eyes.

Tommy grasped the bag, peered into it. "But it *can't* be!" he yelled. "I *know*

it was there Sunday." He whirled to face Hazelton. "I can't be mistaken," he said urgently. "Don nicked it on a rock Friday afternoon. I knew he wasn't going to play Saturday, and I was busy, so I didn't clean his clubs until Sunday morning, but then I had to file down the edge—that's why I'm so sure."

The detective didn't answer; he sat looking at the boy steadily.

"It's true!" Tommy burst out. "I know you think I'm lying for Don, but I'm not!"

"Wait a minute!" I said suddenly. "Hazelton, do you remember the prowler you thought you heard around the clubhouse Sunday night? That's when the club was taken, and that's when the wrapping-twine was taken too."

He seemed about to speak, then hesitated while an indefinable change took place in his thin dark face, and I thought he glanced at Connie for an instant.

"Yes," he said, "I remember; and it's possible."

"You see?" Connie asked excitedly. "That proves what I've been saying. Whoever took that club knew you wouldn't believe Don alone, but he didn't know Tommy would remember."

Hazelton looked down into her glowing eyes. "You're right," he said. "He wouldn't know that Tommy would remember. Perhaps I've been wrong in the case I've built up—I don't know; but I want you to know that I shall do nothing until I'm sure. I want the murderer—not a victim."

Connie hadn't cried before but suddenly she was sobbing against my shoulder.

Hazelton and Tommy had disappeared; and for a short time we sat in the warm sunshine, Connie and I; but now that we had time to think, I knew she too must realize this was only a reprieve. Hazelton had said only: "Perhaps."

Chapter Ten

HAZELTON and Tommy were out in the patio when I returned, and the detective held a new dynamiter, a duplicate of my missing one.

"Tommy says this is just like yours," he remarked, "and that it's very much like the club Doc Blackey called a 'sand-wedge.'"

"It's similar," I said. "They're both heavy irons with rounded blades and convex flanges forming a half-circle on the lower edge of the reverse side. I suppose that's how you knew what to look for in my bag—Ralph told you."

He nodded. "Doc said you were an expert with it when you got in trouble." He turned the club over in his hands, and the sunlight threw tiny points of light over us as it reflected from the metal. He swung it awkwardly to and fro, but slowly and clumsily as he moved it, the club was a deadly thing.

AFTER a moment he pointed toward the ninth green. "Let's go out there. I want to see something." He handed the dynamiter to me.

It was a familiar thing, that club, but as I took it from him, it was no longer simply an iron with which to blast a tiny golf-ball from its lie in the sand or the rough; it was a grim and terrible weapon with which to crush a man's head.

Lest Hazelton should see the revulsion in my face and misinterpret it I walked swiftly to the sloping side of the bunker. The detective showed only a detached interest as he asked me to demonstrate; but I saw that Tommy felt as I did, for he was staring at the gleaming blade with horror in his eyes.

The sharp edge of steel bit into the soft turf; the heavy club thudded dully in the earth; and I flinched as it tore through, leaving behind it a gaping wound.

Twice more I swung it, and each time I felt the jarring force of the impact in my nerves as well as my hands. In imagination I saw Will Curtis, saw behind him a shadowy figure, heard the crunch of metal on bone.

Abruptly I straightened. "Hazelton," I said sharply, "Curtis wasn't hit with a club like this; his head was crushed, not cut." I showed him the marks on the ground where the sharp cutting edge of the steel had slashed through everything in its way. "This club would almost have taken the back of his head off, moving at that speed."

Tommy said jubilantly: "And it would be the same way with any iron if it was used by any of us who knew anything about golf!" He grasped the detective's arm and shook it. "Do you understand? It couldn't have been Don's club; but even if it was, he couldn't have used it without making it look as if Curtis had been hit with an ax."

Hazelton looked down at the boy. "I know, Tommy," he said; "but you see, the murderer thought of that. He used

the *back* of the club. Try it and see, Don."

It wasn't necessary, because I knew at once he was right; but I tried it. The club was awkward when reversed, but it balanced well enough to swing. This time there was no divot in the inclined bank, merely an indentation in the soft ground.

The murderer had thought of a good many things. . . .

When Hazelton had gone, my first impulse was to call Norma Curtis. I *must* convince her that I hadn't killed Will. But the more I thought of it the more I was certain that to telephone her was dangerous, and to go to see her openly was worse. I'd have to wait.

SOMETIME about three-thirty John Stanton and Judge McCrary came. John's craggy face was wrathful and the Judge had none of his customary benignity as they went through the shop into the locker-room, pausing long enough to ask me to join them.

"That damned Redling woman is spreading the story around that you killed Will over Norma," John said explosively. "She says Hazelton practically accused you of it yesterday in her house! What's the matter with her—is she crazy?"

"Not Grace," I replied. "She has the story twisted—she was the one who accused me to Hazelton. She's pretty scared on her own account, and Hazelton's smart enough to know it and discount her ravings."

Stanton swore fluently. "Grace had better sense than to talk to Alice, but she's been keeping the telephone hot. The Judge got wind of it and told me about it when I picked him up just now to bring him to the directors' meeting."

"Yes, and that isn't all," Judge McCrary sputtered. "I've heard that Judith Lookwood has disappeared. What in the name of common sense is Hazelton doing? Letting witnesses disappear or get killed! Gross inefficiency!"

Three of the other directors arrived while he was speaking, and I left them talking while I went to see that the lounge was arranged for their meeting.

The meeting was very short, and they didn't linger after dusk. Restlessly I left my desk to pace aimlessly about the shop. Outside it was full dark when I realized with a sudden sense of guilt that I had forgotten to tell Tommy to go home. He was sitting in an old wicker chair in the windowless storage-room, reading one of his favorite magazines. I envied him his absorption in the story.

"Sorry, Tommy, but I forgot all about you; you needn't stay just because I do."

"Oh, I don't mind. I haven't anything else to do."

"But that light is terrible. Why don't you finish the story at home?"

He hesitated. "Why—I thought I'd stay and help you lock up, and maybe you'd drop me off on your way to Stantons'." He looked embarrassed and it came to me that he hadn't stayed because he was afraid, but because he knew how I felt and he thought his company was better for me than solitude.

"Thanks, Tommy," I said simply. "It's pretty nice to know I still have some friends."

The boy flushed, still further embarrassed, and buried his face in his magazine once more and I went back to the main room.

It must have been quite a while later that a tiny sound on the patio porch intruded itself into my consciousness. For a long interval there was silence; then the sound came again as if someone were walking stealthily on the tiled floor. Without raising my head I glanced at the French doors. The glass reflected my own image against the blackness outside; inside the lighted room I was a perfect target—if the murderer had come back.

Silence wrapped the clubhouse, but the sense of someone watching me increased with each second. My cigarettes lay on the table beside me, the package half-full. I picked it up, then crushed it in my hand as though it were empty, and walked over to my desk near the locker-room entrance. Here the display shelves partially concealed me; and with my back to the doors, I pulled open the drawer in which I kept an automatic.

It was gone!

FOR an interminable moment I stood staring into the drawer, every muscle rigid against the anticipated shock of a bullet from the darkness. The light-switch was on the opposite side of the room.

From another drawer I took a fresh package of cigarettes, opened it with stiff fingers, then dropped it behind the case. I stooped for it, and now hidden entirely from the patio, I slipped through the locker-room door, taking with me an iron from the rack beside the

door. It wasn't much good against a gun, but it was better than nothing.

I walked softly to the door that gave entrance to the patio, paused, listening, then opened it noiselessly. Accustomed now to the darkness, my eyes sought for some alien shadow in the familiar place beyond the faint illumination from the windows.

There was nothing.

YET I could not have been mistaken. Somewhere across that stretch of grass someone was waiting in the black mass of the shrubbery. I took a cautious step onto the porch.

Just beyond me on the terrace someone laughed softly. Beside a porch post, something moved. The dazzling beam of a flashlight struck me blindingly.

An ironic voice said: "Now, you'd play hell sneakin' up on *some* people, wouldn't you?"

Hazelton!

"A golf-club may be all right for slugging a man when he isn't looking," he added mockingly, "but it'd be a damned poor defense against a man with a gun."

He was much closer now, although I hadn't heard him move; and suddenly I knew that he had meant me to hear him that first time. He had acted the furtive prowler to trick me into the very thing I had done.

"I suppose it would," I said with cold anger, "but I didn't care to be shot while I was sitting in the shop trying to figure out who stole the gun I did have in the drawer. Of course *you* wouldn't know anything about that."

"I didn't take it, if that's what you mean," he said calmly and with an effect of truthfulness.

"You knew I owned one," I retorted; "and unless you knew it was gone, it wasn't very smart to turn your light on me that way."

He made no comment, and it occurred to me that he might be telling the truth. Well, if he hadn't taken it, the murderer had.

"And if the next victim is found shot—" I added, and left the sentence unfinished as I turned back through the locker-room to the golf-shop.

Tommy Jones was standing just inside the door to the storage-room, and he cast a quick startled look at the iron I still held. I'd forgotten he was there.

"Hazelton's been playing a practical joke," I said sardonically. "He sneaked around in the patio, making just enough noise so I'd hear him. Unfortunately, somebody got away with my gun, so this was the best I could do." I put the niblick back in the rack. "He couldn't see you because of the blank walls, or I suppose he wouldn't have pulled it."

The boy's blue eyes widened in sudden fright. "Somebody took your gun?"

"Yes," I snapped, "and we'll probably have another murder with something that belongs to me—unless Hazelton took it, and he *says* he didn't."

The detective's voice was coldly contemptuous: "I'm afraid that's pretty thin, Sheridan. You might convince a jury that someone stole your dynamiter, if Tommy makes his perjury stick, and you might even convince them that the murderer stole the twine at the same time in order to commit the second murder; but I don't believe they'd swallow your story that he took the gun too, just in case—*especially* if it was used. I don't know who might be next on the list, but I don't intend to have another killing."

The suspicion that had been growing in my subconscious mind all day forced its way to the surface.

"I don't believe the murderer planted the clues at all," I snarled at him. "I think you did it because it was easier than finding out the reason behind this. If you don't want another killing, you'd better quit trying to frame me and find the real motive!"

His mouth was a straight hard line and a knot of muscle showed at each side of his jaw. "So now I'm trying to frame you, am I? And you think I ought to find the real motive. Well, I've found it. You didn't think she'd talk, did you? You thought I wouldn't find out what Curtis said to you that morning. Daisy was dead, and you were safe. But it didn't work out that way—someone else heard him, and she talked!"

"Who?" The hoarse question burst from me without volition.

HAZELTON smiled unpleasantly. "I think you know the answer to that. It was Mrs. Curtis. She told me her husband threatened to name you as co-respondent, and you promised you'd beat him to death."

"But she knows it was a bluff," I said desperately. "You heard what Joe Redling said—Curtis didn't intend to use it. They'd already signed a friendly divorce agreement before he was killed."

He took his time about answering; then he said: "Whether or not she knew

it was a bluff, you didn't. I heard what Redling said about the agreement, and I heard your answer to Mrs. Redling; also I watched you. You didn't know about it until that moment. It's true enough that you didn't want Curtis' wife, but you wanted to marry John's niece, and you were afraid you'd lose her if Curtis made good his threat, because he had boasted to you that he could prove it."

"He was lying!" I shouted. "Norma knew he was lying. Didn't she tell you that?"

I took a step forward. The flashlight stopped swinging as his shoulders tensed; then they relaxed.

"Was he?" he asked dryly. "The fact remains that he told you he had two witnesses who'd swear that on a certain evening about two months ago Mrs. Curtis was seen leaving your room at two o'clock in the morning."

JUST in time, I caught myself. He had very nearly trapped me with that! Curtis had said he had one witness, not two. The detective must have sensed that I had been about to speak and checked myself abruptly, for he smiled faintly as if to say it didn't matter now whether I talked or not.

"In so far as Mrs. Curtis' knowledge of her husband's intentions is concerned," he added smoothly, "she didn't know until just before dinner Saturday evening, when she informs me that agreement was signed. She says she had no opportunity to tell you later that evening because you avoided her, and next morning it was too late—Curtis was dead."

"What if he was?" I said. "I didn't kill him. After I'd calmed down I didn't even take him seriously, because he couldn't prove it. Norma Curtis has never been anything to me, and she's never been in my room at any time when I've been there. Didn't she tell you that?"

Hazelton shrugged. "No, but it wouldn't make any difference what she said now."

"What do you mean—it wouldn't make any difference?" I asked quickly. "Why wouldn't it?"

"Because," he answered slowly and deliberately, "Curtis embodied the whole story of his wife's infidelity in the agreement, and she signed it."

She signed it! The words repeated themselves over and over maddeningly, closing all other avenues of thought.

His voice penetrated the wild confusion that filled my mind. "Furthermore, although Daisy is dead, the other witness is very much alive. Joe Redling was not only one of Curtis' witnesses; it was he who drew the agreement, and he was present when Norma Curtis signed it. He told us that yesterday. He tried to protect you then by saying that you knew of it, but you gave yourself away. Perhaps he really thought so, but Mrs. Curtis had already told the whole story when she whispered: 'Don, why didn't you wait?' "

"But it isn't true," I said dully, "and Joe Redling knows it. He'd do anything for money, but there's no reason for lying now. Let me talk to him. I'll make him tell the truth."

Slowly he shook his head, his face weary and almost sad. "It won't work, Sheridan. Now that I have the motive, every tiny detail fits into a perfect case against you. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is, and I wish someone else had the job of taking you in."

He meant to arrest me now, tonight, and Connie was waiting for me! And how Norma Curtis would laugh, Norma who had signed that lying agreement!

A hundred wild thoughts flashed through my mind: Why had Norma done it? She hadn't killed her husband, but what about Redling? Was he the murderer, and was she protecting him? If I could only get away from the detective for a little while! Norma might not talk; but Joe Redling was a coward.

And Connie? If she had to hear it, she must hear it from me.

"Hazelton," I said earnestly, "you're making a terrible mistake. No matter how perfect your case is, I'm not guilty; but if you arrest me now, it'll be too late to correct it afterward. Think what it'll mean to John and Alice and Connie if you're wrong. Can't you wait a little longer? I can't get away. Give me one more day; it might mean all the difference in the world to all of us."

Tommy grasped his arm. "You've got to wait!" he said passionately. "You've got to, d'you hear? I told you the truth about that club!"

FOR a long moment I was afraid it was useless.

"I told you once before how I felt about that," he said gruffly, "but I'm a cop and it's my job to catch a criminal, even though there are times when I hate the job and myself for having it. This

is one of the times, but the best I can do is to give you until tomorrow, and hope to God something turns up."

Perhaps I thanked him; I don't remember. We took Tommy home. At his gate he stood holding the car door open, struggling to find words.

"That's O. K., Tommy," I said. "I know how you feel, and thanks. Probably something'll turn up yet, so don't give up. Good night, old man."

At the Stantons' driveway the man beside me slowed the car. "I won't say anything to them," he said, "so you can use your own judgment until tomorrow evening, anyway. There's just one thing: I won't be far away, so don't be a damned fool."

"If you mean either trying to run or commit suicide, I won't," I promised, "because I still hope something'll happen to convince you you're wrong."

We went in to dinner, Connie and I, each of us trying valiantly to deceive the other with an air of cheerful assurance; each of us failing miserably. Two people who loved, and were afraid. . . . There was so little time left.

Chapter Eleven

IT might have been imagination, but it seemed to me the club was unnaturally quiet the next morning, holding its breath, waiting. And as the forenoon dragged along with no sign of Hazelton, it seemed to me that the very silence was clamorous with the word *murderer!*

After lunch I paused at the shop-door. There was a man sitting comfortably on the patio porch, a stranger; and everything from his thick shoes to the angle of his hat said *"Police."*

The man spoke softly as if he didn't want his voice to carry beyond me. "Sorry, buddy, but the boss wants you to stay put until he gets back." His tone and his rather heavy face were alike impersonal. . . . Hazelton was taking no chances. The walls were closing in.

After a while the telephone rang, and Tommy called me. I felt like an old man as I went in to answer it, each step bringing me closer and closer to the instant I dreaded—the instant when I must tell Connie I was under arrest.

But it wasn't Connie; it was her aunt, to say that Connie had gone into town and would stop at the clubhouse for me about five-thirty. I thanked Alice Stanton and returned to the porch.

By four o'clock there was still no sign of Hazelton, and I found myself listening intently, starting at every sound. Why didn't he come? Another misty rain was drifting in before a south wind. It forced me to go back into the clubhouse with its barred windows, where the early dusk darkened the big high-ceilinged rooms and cast grotesque images upon the white walls; it dripped steadily and monotonously from the tiled roof; and its chill damp breath invaded the island of light that was the golf-shop.

THE darkness thickened outside, and the hands of the clock moved relentlessly toward five. A gust of wind swept through the room. I turned quickly to face the patio door, and drew a deep breath of relief. It was Hazelton.

"Nice night for ducks," he remarked sourly as he shook water from his hat, "—or," he added grimly, "for a murder."

The time-worn phrases fitted far too aptly to be accident—but I couldn't afford to resent the deliberate cruelty; his coöperation was vital.

"Hazelton," I asked urgently, "did you learn anything new? Connie will be here in a few minutes. I was hoping—"

He seemed to hesitate, then shook his head. "Nothing that changed my ideas. However, in justice to you, it seems only fair to clear up the conflicting stories of those others who also had reason for murder, and I've asked each of them to be here at five. You'd better phone Miss Stanton to wait."

"But she's coming direct from town! It's too late to stop her!"

"All right, Sheridan, calm down," he said gruffly. "I don't want her here any more than you do. I'll have one of the boys catch her at the door." He turned to Tommy, who had been standing white-faced beside me. "Tommy, go find Moran and tell him to ask Miss Stanton to wait for us at the house; then get George to bring in some more chairs, and see that all the employees on the house staff are present in ten minutes."

"You can't do it!" the boy cried shrilly. "You—"

"Shut up!" the detective growled. "Who says I can't? You go get those chairs! I'll see Moran." The patio door slammed violently behind him.

"Go ahead, Tommy," I said bitterly. "Hazelton wants everybody to enjoy the show."

I have no clear recollection of the next few minutes, only confused memories of

old George shuffling in with some chairs, black face somber and fearful; of Tommy's frantic eyes; of Hazelton methodically arranging table and chairs without a word or glance in my direction.

SOMEWHERE outside, a man's voice exploded in a startled "Hey! *Wait!*" There was a swift rush of feet, and the door crashed open. Connie stood there, her breath coming in sharp little gasps, her skin dead-white. Behind her was the man who had been my guard all day, his expression embarrassed and exasperated.

"I couldn't help it," he said hastily. "She slipped by me, and I couldn't catch her."

Before I could reach her side, she found her voice. "Don! These chairs!" she exclaimed. "It's true, then. Norma told me, but I didn't believe it." Her voice fell: "She said—he'd arrest you—tonight."

I took her hand and drew her away from the men facing her uncomfortably.

"Connie," I pleaded then desperately, "won't you go home and wait for me? *Don't* stay and listen to these people. I promise you I'll come when it's over—that's why Hazelton tried to stop you."

"Norma's not crazy—she's not afraid—it's true!" Her voice rose wildly. "But she hates us! She *hates* us! She's done something! What is it?"

I seized her arms and shook her roughly to pierce the hysteria that gripped her. "Connie! Listen!" I ordered sharply. "Someone's coming. It may be Norma. Don't let her see you like this."

Almost instantly she straightened. Fear still stared from her eyes, but her chin went up. I whispered softly: "Hold it, now!"

In the center of the room Hazelton stood near the table with Wintsor. They were talking in undertones. Their conversation ceased as Connie sat down. Bob came to us at once, took a seat beside me; and in the smile he gave Connie as he leaned across me to greet her, was approval and admiration.

"Miss Constance," he said softly, "you force me to cast aside one of my lifelong principles and admit that sometimes it *does* pay to gamble on a woman."

He turned to me; but before he could speak again, Arthur Lookwood's wide shoulders filled the doorway. His dark face was grim and sullen, his powerful hands were half-clenched at his sides as though prepared to fight his way out of a suspected trap; then he drew back a trifle, and Judith's slender figure stepped past him. Hazelton had kept his word; he'd found her.

She seemed more fragile than ever as she hesitated uncertainly just inside the door, and smiled at Connie. She crossed the room and took the chair next to Connie; Lookwood followed heavily.

Hazelton glanced at his watch, and Wintsor drawled softly: "Reckon Mrs. Curtis has forgotten, Ed?"

The gambler's mask was in place now, but there had been sardonic amusement in the question. Thoughts of kidnaping, of the disappearance of important witnesses in other cases, raced through my mind. If Norma failed to testify, there was a chance that a clever defense attorney could break down Joe Redling, and win an acquittal.

The detective shook his head. "Reckon not, Tex. I provided an escort, and she's on her way."

In the moment of silence that followed, the steady fall of rain was the only sound; then from the last row of chairs George coughed harshly; just behind me Tommy shuffled his feet, and Judith winced nervously. Then Norma Curtis' slow languid footsteps echoed on the tiled porch.

She wore the trailing black of mourning; and like the actress she was, somehow she had achieved an air of tragic composure that hinted of the pose she intended to take—the erring woman who had unwittingly been the cause of murder. There wasn't a jury in the world who would believe me if once she took the witness-stand.

Hazelton stood up. Madness seized me. To hell with these people! "Connie!" I said hoarsely. My hand shook as I caught her arm. "I told you the truth, Connie."

Hazelton spoke coldly. "If you don't mind, Sheridan, we'll go ahead with this meeting; otherwise—"

He paused significantly.

THE watchful faces of the two quiet men at the doors were turned to me. The walls of my golf-shop appeared to close in, the ceiling to bear down upon me. And the barred windows seemed very near.

A match flared in Bob Wintsor's hands, and he thrust a lighted cigarette between my fingers. Mechanically I put it to my lips, and something in the familiar habit steadied me. Hazelton was speaking again.

"Many of you who are here tonight had reason to kill Will Curtis," he began abruptly; "and one of you did!"

For the space of ten seconds there was no sound but the rhythm of the rain.

"Most of you have lied to me," he went on, as if it were quite natural that we should lie, "but tonight those of you who are innocent can safely tell the truth—because I know the murderer."

A SHUDDER shook Connie's slim shoulders, but no sound escaped her.

"Without going into minute details," the detective's level tone began again, "let it suffice to say that investigation showed Curtis was killed some time between twelve-fifty and two; that the murderer used a golf-club such as this—known locally as a 'dynamiter.'"

The steel shaft of the club flashed back the light as he turned it slowly in his hands.

"Also," the detective continued, "the wound was made with the back of the club, so it would appear to have been caused by the rocks. A reconstruction of the crime showed that Curtis didn't struggle with his assailant; instead, he remained sitting—probably on the sloping side of the eighteenth green—while the other stood. It is almost certain that they engaged in conversation, because the killer had to have time to get into position where the dynamiter would be most effective—above and behind his victim. He couldn't afford to miss; and he didn't. He struck with accuracy.

"The first blow caught the base of Curtis' skull, traveling slightly upward in the arc of the swing; but the murderer wanted to be sure, and he hit again—downward on the back of the prone man's neck. He then dragged the body to the edge of the cliff, intending it to fall on the rocks; but in the darkness he misjudged the exact spot. It was then necessary to go down to the lake, and the tears in the clothing showed he pulled the body upward onto the rocks. That done, he hoped the police would believe Curtis died as the result of an accidental fall. There were, however, two flaws in the carefully conceived plan: the police and Daisy. Daisy knew something, so it became necessary to kill again. Then we began to learn things about the murderer and his motives."

He paused for just an instant. "Tonight," he added, "I hope that for your own sakes, those of you who had both motive and opportunity but took no part

in the murders, will clear up any lingering suspicions which might attach to you, so you can resume your normal lives." He sat down and picked up a sheet of paper.

Ironical phrase: *Normal lives!*

Hazelton was speaking once more. "We will take one person at a time, and I hope each of you will answer truthfully. Let me repeat: you have no cause for fear if you are innocent."

He raised his voice slightly: "George, when Mrs. Lookwood left the clubhouse with Curtis on Saturday night, did you see her clearly?"

"Yes sah."

"She had no golf-club in her hand?"

"No sah!"

Bob Wintsor said quietly from beside me: "I saw them too, as they walked past the swimming-pool. Mrs. Lookwood carried only a small evening bag."

Hazelton nodded. "I was sure that was the case, although there was a possibility that she had a golf-club with her. Then, since she left here on Saturday afternoon immediately following the golf-match, returned just in time for dinner, and could not have approached the club locker without being noticed during the dance that night, she could not have secreted the club near the green. True, the club might have been left there by someone else, but if so, Mrs. Lookwood knew nothing of it; and if she used it then, it was in self-defense. Furthermore, a woman striking a blow in defense of her own safety would neither time the blow so nicely nor would she be likely to strike again when the man was already dead or unconscious; so she can be eliminated."

Judith said nothing, and her strained expression didn't change.

"Yet Mrs. Lookwood permitted Daisy to blackmail her," the detective said after a moment, "and she ran away during the investigation. It was not fear for herself, however, but for her husband."

JUDITH caught Lookwood's arm as he moved suddenly; but Hazelton appeared not to notice. He continued:

"It isn't necessary to recount Lookwood's motives—you all know them—and

his alibi was weak. His gardener stated that the Lookwood car drove in at one minute to one, but since the man didn't see who was driving, it might have been Mrs. Lookwood. Furthermore, Lookwood could have walked back across the golf-course within five minutes."

ARTHUR sat in grim silence. Judith said in a frightened voice: "But Art's clubs are all in the storage-room; he couldn't have brought one from home if he walked back; and he had no more opportunity than I to hide one near the green."

Hazelton replied gravely: "The door between the golf-shop and the locker-room was open all evening, and while *you* would have attracted attention, Mrs. Lookwood, no one would have noticed it if your husband went into the room where the clubs are kept. There is only one thing that would eliminate your husband—if it could be proved that it was *he* who drove the car home. Will Curtis was killed a few seconds before one-three. His watch stopped when he fell. . . . It was therefore impossible for whoever reached your house at twelve-fifty-nine to return in time to commit the murder."

Judith turned to her husband, tears streaming down her delicate cheeks. He put a big arm around her with clumsy tenderness as she said wonderingly: "Oh, Art! It's going to be all right!"

Connie's hand tightened fiercely on mine. It wasn't all right for us!

The detective's voice was almost gentle as he asked: "Can you give us any proof, Mrs. Lookwood?"

Her answer came with a breathless rush: "Yes, I can prove it, but I'll have to tell you from the beginning. You see, I had been trying all evening to reason with Will, to make him see that I loved my husband, to plead with him not to make trouble. I had only been foolishly flirting with him, but I had begun to be frightened. Finally Will asked me to walk by the swimming-pool with him, where we could talk uninterruptedly. I didn't want to go, but I thought no one would notice, and that the cool air would clear his head. When we were outside, he insisted that we walk along the cliff, because we could see a man sitting near the pool. We walked down to the eighteenth green, but Will had been drinking heavily all evening, and he didn't behave well—"

Her words faltered, stopped for an instant; then she went on: "My dress was torn, and I stopped near the golf-shop to try to fix it. I didn't want my husband to know, because I was afraid there'd be trouble; but as I stood there, I happened to glance across the lake and saw the lights of our car near the house—they're amber, and there are no others like them around here—and then I didn't know what to do. After a while I decided to walk home, but my dancing slippers were useless for that, so I slipped around the back of the patio to the women's wing. Daisy loaned me some shoes, and I went home. Art was waiting; he had seen me leave the clubhouse, and thought I was in love with Will. He knew if he stayed, he'd do something dreadful, and for my sake he left."

She smiled at her husband, and the big man took her tiny hand in his as if to reassure himself that she loved him.

"And Daisy demanded the pearl for keeping still about the shoes after the murder was discovered?" the detective inquired.

"Yes. You see, if she told you about it, you would have known I didn't go home with Art, and you might have thought he came back. I still have the shoes at home, in case you want to see them; I don't know what Daisy did with mine, but they'll be easy to identify."

Hazelton's voice took on a harsher note as he said abruptly: "With the elimination of both the Lookwoods, only one of you who had a motive for murder has also a real alibi."

"I was waiting for Bob Wintsor near the tenth green," Grace Redling broke in shrilly. "He won't dare deny it! He was to meet me there—he has admitted he was still near the clubhouse just before Will was killed. Ask *him* what *he* was doing!"

The gambler crossed one foot over the other and turned his fair head slightly to meet the blazing light eyes. "A lady never lies," he drawled softly. "I *was* near the clubhouse just before one o'clock, and I *did* know that Mrs. Redling expected me; but I considered the matter she wished to discuss, and since from my viewpoint at least it was entirely a business affair, I preferred to talk about it elsewhere."

JOE REDLING laughed, and before the mockery in that laugh Grace's fury burned away every semblance of control. In her wild rage she corroborated what Hazelton had guessed: she had haunted the gambling boats, recklessly

throwing away the money Curtis gave her, in her efforts to attract the handsome Texan; but the gambler had remained aloof from any personal entanglements, treating her merely as one of his best customers. Curtis had learned of her infatuation, and seized upon the excuse to rid himself of her demands for money, and she had been making a last desperate effort to win Wintsor's favor —on the night that Will Curtis died.

THE gambler sat unmoved while she talked, and her husband watched her from beneath heavy lids with malicious satisfaction. When she had exhausted herself, Hazelton said brutally:

"None of this provides you with an alibi, Mrs. Redling; if anything, it makes you a most logical suspect. There is, as I said before, only one real alibi among you—and that is Mrs. Curtis'; but fortunately for some of you, a proof of your innocence exists—*because there were witnesses to the murder!* Listen!"

During an interminable moment the rain beat upon the roof, louder and clearer as someone opened the door. The light ran swiftly across the porch, and into the darkness toward the lake, stopping as if afraid of what it might see.

Then the frenzied clamoring of the ducks rose from the blackness. For the space of half a minute the terrified calling swelled. Then it died away.

"Listen!" Hazelton commanded.

The strident chorus burst forth once more. It rose and fell in waves of sound against the rock walls of the lake. Above the din of squawking came the beating of wings on the water. Slowly the cries lessened in the distance.

"The ducks saw the murderer," the detective said in the intense silence that followed; "and in their way they told the story, tonight and on that other night when some of you heard them; but this time it was a dummy that fell from the cliff."

Wintsor said evenly: "And their story was not quite the same, because they didn't cross the lake that night; they stopped their second outburst abruptly."

"I remember it too," Judith Lookwood agreed. "They didn't leave that night."

"It was one of my men who climbed down the cliff this time," Hazelton said grimly. "They didn't take to the lake when the murderer went down to the rocks, *because he was someone they knew and trusted!*"

The words beat upon my brain like the blows of a hammer. There were so few people the ducks trusted. And *I* had placed this weapon in Hazelton's hands; I had told him, among other things, of the squawking of the ducks.

Grace Redling's voice rose triumphantly: "But *I* hate the squawking things, and everybody knows it. They wouldn't come near *me,* but they're so fond of Don Sheridan that they follow him up from the lake!"

Connie's golden head bent; she covered her face with her hands.

A fierce hatred of the detective grew within me until I could see nothing but the cold thin face and the shining disks of light like the eyes of some inhuman thing. It was deliberate torture planned for me; and now Connie was enduring it, too, because she loved me.

The gambler drawled lazily: "I believe the ducks are also very much attached to me. Kindness to them doesn't necessarily prove one a murderer."

I caught my breath as I realized what Wintsor was doing. He was purposely calling attention to himself, giving up his own alibi, showing Hazelton how his evidence might apply to either of us. He must have seen the gratitude in my face, for his white teeth showed in a flashing smile for an instant. "Although," he added dryly, "Curtis did irritate me, and from a purely commercial angle, I benefit from his removal."

"I'm aware of that, Tex," the detective answered, "but in addition to the ability to quiet the ducks, there are many other things that point to the murderer. He was expert with a golf-club, and he had the opportunity to take the club that was used; he was so accustomed to the presence of rosin on the leather grip that he might disregard it, and there was rosin on Curtis' collar; also the dynamiter is missing from the set of clubs rosin had been used on. Again, when Daisy was strangled, we found near the body a piece of black linen twine of the type which he used constantly. And he has no alibi."

HE paused, glanced around at the men who waited at the doors as if wanting to be sure they were ready. "As for motive," he went on calmly, "Will Curtis announced on Saturday morning that he intended to divorce his wife and make public the fact of her infidelity. He had a witness to testify to her visit on a certain night with the murderer."

Norma Curtis sobbed chokingly: "Oh, it was all my fault. I knew Don didn't love me. I knew he wanted to marry *her;* but I was mad about him. And then Will found it out. They quarreled about it, and my husband taunted him, told him *she* wouldn't marry him if she knew. Don threatened to kill him to keep him quiet; and that night I agreed to a divorce for his sake. All that evening I tried to talk to him, to tell him that he was safe, but he stayed away from me; then he left the dance, and I thought everything would be all right until the next morning, when I could phone him."

A storm of weeping shook her black-clad shoulders. I watched her helplessly. It was so damned plausible, because so much of it was the truth.

"Why didn't you tell *me* about it immediately?" Hazelton asked sternly. "Before Daisy was murdered."

"I couldn't believe he'd done it," she cried passionately. "Even yesterday—"

The flood of words ceased as if she couldn't go on. Someone drew a long shuddering breath. If I thought at all, it was, dully, that it would soon be over.

Hazelton stood up. All the light in the room seemed to be concentrated on his glasses. His voice crashed upon the stillness.

"*You* killed him!"

My throat had an iron band around it. The words were tightening it slowly so I couldn't answer, and my tongue filled my mouth. I tried to swallow so that I could speak.

"No," I said leadenly, "I didn't kill him. She's lying, because she hated us. She—"

A startled sound burst from Judith Lookwood, but it was lost in the rasp of Hazelton's voice:

"*You* didn't kill him. It was Tommy!"

MY mind was stunned; the words had no meaning. Someone was crying, I thought stupidly; Connie was digging her fingers into my arm. She was looking at something behind me, and she was crying. Slowly I turned. I had one glimpse of Tommy's tortured eyes.

The boy's fair head dropped onto his narrow chest; his thin shoulder-bones showed through his coat. I turned away.

Hazelton's voice was almost sad. "He never meant you to suffer for it, Sheridan, although he killed them both. It was *she* who did all that. You see, he loved her."

Norma!

In one brief flash of horrified understanding I remembered a thousand little things that were meaningless until now. Tommy had always worshiped Norma; and she had driven him to murder.

"She is the real murderess," the detective said grimly. "She planned it, and Tommy did what she told him. She was clever except for one thing—she tried too hard to convict Sheridan."

The woman's beautiful face was still serenely confident.

"I have tried to convict no one, Mr. Hazelton," she said quietly. "I tried to believe that Don was innocent, but I couldn't. Perhaps what you say is true—that Tommy killed my husband; but if it is true, it was because Don Sheridan made him do it."

Tommy neither moved nor spoke. Hazelton's smile held no humor, only contempt, as he answered her challenge.

"You made him do it; but I couldn't prove that you had, until today. I had the goods on Tommy, but it was *you* I wanted to get, Mrs. Curtis, so I let you think I believed Sheridan guilty. It was damned hard on him, and I hated to do it, but it was the only way to catch you, and at the same time clear him."

JUDITH LOOKWOOD'S soft voice said as she paused; "But *I* could have cleared Don, Mr. Hazelton. He was in his room when the ducks squawked that night. I was standing just outside his window. He stumbled over something and swore just before he got into bed."

She had held my freedom in her tiny hands all along, and I had not known!

The detective nodded. "The irony of fate! So for all her cleverness he would have escaped, because he swore aloud in the darkness."

After a moment he said: "There is no need to go into details here, but it's only fair to Sheridan and Miss Stanton to tell you briefly what happened: The planning of both murders centered my attention on fewer suspects—Redling, Wintsor, and Mrs. Curtis; and when evidence began to appear against Sheridan I began to wonder about Mrs. Curtis in particular, for revenge is characteristic of certain women. I learned of her behavior toward him, and I learned also that she gambled so heavily that her large private fortune had dwindled to nothing. It was therefore conceivable that she had killed her husband for his money and intended that Sheridan be accused of it to repay him for his indifference. She,

however, had a real alibi; and in my search for an accomplice, I discovered Tommy's infatuation for her. It wasn't difficult to trap him, but I began to see how cleverly she had avoided anything that could be used against her."

NORMA watched him unblinkingly, but I saw that the two silent men at the doors had drawn closer now.

"It took time," Hazelton went on, "for Mrs. Curtis had laid her plans well. Tommy hadn't wanted to kill Curtis, but she knew how to take care of that. On the night when Curtis and Redling saw her coming from Sheridan's room at two o'clock, it was Tommy who was there with her—Sheridan was a hundred miles away, attending a bachelor dinner; and she had made sure that Daisy would notify Curtis of his chance to catch her. Both Curtis and Redling really thought it was Sheridan who was with her; and when Curtis accused her, she didn't deny it. She told Tommy, however, that if he wanted to continue as her lover he'd have to kill her husband or Curtis would kill her; and because of her dominance over him, Tommy agreed. He did exactly what she told him to do, using Sheridan's dynamiter, and cleaning and returning it to the bag next morning, without in the least realizing that it might be traced to Sheridan; but when we discovered that Curtis had been murdered, Mrs. Curtis went to the clubhouse on Sunday night, stole Sheridan's club and automatic, and began her campaign to have him accused of the murder."

"Then Daisy entered the picture. Daisy knew all about Mrs. Curtis and Tommy. She had seen them meet outside the women's wing for a minute on the night of the murder, and she threatened to talk. Tommy strangled the maid, and again Mrs. Curtis had an alibi; but she came over next morning and planted a piece of wrapping-twine near the locker so that it would appear Sheridan was the murderer. The thing she overlooked was that the twine contained pitch, and there was no pitch on Daisy's throat. She then pulled a fake faint in order to direct my suspicions to Sheridan by her behavior, and I saw how I might trick her into giving herself away."

Still the woman sat unmoved. Connie pressed closer to my shoulder, and I could feel her trembling with the reaction from the unendurable moments that had just passed.

"Tommy was too loyal to Sheridan to have any part in the scheme," the detective said; "so in his hearing I told Sheridan I had a perfect case against him. Tommy was frantic. He phoned her immediately, and I heard part of the conversation on an extension. I was waiting for her next move, because I suspected Mrs. Curtis would kill him when she no longer needed him. That evening, while Sheridan was alone in the clubhouse except for Tommy, she was waiting for Tommy to meet her. She must have had Sheridan's gun, and she intended to kill Tommy with it; but Tommy was afraid, and he stayed in the windowless storage-room until I took him home. We were watching her, hoping to catch them together before she killed him, for if we could prove to him she was only using him, he might talk."

A shudder ran through the slender cowering figure of the boy as I turned to look at him, and there was a lump in my throat. I think I hated her more then, than in all the days that were past.

"That was the beginning of the end," Hazelton concluded.

"While she was absent from the house today, we found Sheridan's gun; and the club from which she had unwrapped the twine we found near Daisy. The twine fits exactly into the marks it made on the club as it would fit no other; and I'm quite sure it will tie the case together so completely that even a very clever woman cannot escape."

Bob Wintsor swore huskily.

TOMMY raised his dazed blue eyes; and I hope never again to see so much despair in a human face.

"I didn't know," he said tonelessly, "I didn't know it would hurt you, Don."

Connie buried her sobs in my shoulder as I said gently: "I know you didn't, Tommy. Don't give up; people'll understand that she's the one to take the blame; they can't be too hard on you."

The quiet men moved swiftly forward.

Dimly I was aware of Hazelton coming toward me, hand outstretched in apology; of Norma Curtis' proud beautiful face, dead white against her black hair and dress as she went through the door. She never looked back; Tommy stumbled as he walked past the barred windows into the rain and the darkness.

A complete novel by William Edward Hayes, who wrote "Black Chronicle" and "Before the Cock Crowed," is scheduled for our next issue.

When Tex Tried to Shoot Me

Good friends now, they fought on opposite sides in Mexico. Each tells his side of the fight.

By TRACY RICHARDSON

WHEN, after a spell in the States, I rejoined the Red Flag forces of General Salazar at Ojinaga, Mexico, I thought they were unusually glad to see me. I didn't actually cross the Rio Grande River to join the fighting forces; their numbers were up, and I knew it; and so I took a camera and went out to make some money for myself. But Salazar had other ideas.

"Villa's army will be here almost any time," the General told me. "We've plenty of men and guns, but we've got to hold off the Rebels until we can get in more ammunition from the States. We've got two machine-guns but no one to run them. That's your job."

After all, I thought, I'd been fighting with these people for two years and just couldn't let them down at a time like this when they had their back to the wall, and so I got busy with the guns.

It would have taken a dozen guns to cover the hillsides and beat off attackers. So in order to spread myself and create an impression of false strength, I had a dozen machine-gun positions prepared. I taught the men how to grab a hot machine-gun so it would not burn them, and we practiced rushing the guns from position to position. By the time Pancho Villa's army came up, we had things pretty well worked out. In fact, we had everything but sufficient ammunition.

It was almost a shame to see the way the Rebel soldiers came up against our positions. They acted as if they thought that at first sight of them we would turn and run. A lot of soldiers down Mexico way preferred to fight with their backs to the United States border. They couldn't be outflanked, and there was somewhere to go if the fighting got too hot.

But our Federals didn't run. Instead they almost blasted the Rebels out of the country. If Pancho Villa had not been waiting back in the hills, I don't think they would have ever stopped. Pancho drove them to the attack again, and we drove them back faster than they came. My scheme of rushing the machine-guns from point to point was working perfectly, and I usually had one gun in reserve, cooling.

FOR a week we managed to hold off the Rebel army of Pancho Villa, and that was something new for that bandit leader to think about. But still our new supply of ammunition did not arrive. We searched out every round we could find, and took most of the shells from the riflemen, to use in the machine-guns.

It was a rather pretty spot from which to fight. A more or less flat plateau with steep sides and a shelter on the river side for our horses and camp. Villa brought forward some light artillery, and now and then he'd make it rather uncomfortable for us, but he didn't do much real damage. We could look down on the enemy; in fact, some of the soldiers, when they ran out of cartridges, rolled rocks down on the Rebels. But with all our advantage of position, we could not hold them forever without ammunition. We knew it, and finally decided that as soon as night came, we'd retreat across the river and take our chances of escaping from the American troops guarding the border.

The trouble developed when our men started to run. They did too good a job of it, didn't wait for anything. The Governor of the State of Chihuahua was with us, and he had a lot of papers and valuables that had to be transferred across the river. At the last minute I knew that if half of them were to escape, I'd have to do some drastic holding with my machine-guns—and the Rebels were advancing up the slope on a wide front.

I got so busy I didn't realize I was alone. General Salazar dashed up on his horse and shouted for me to get the hell out of there, and I realized it was high time I did. But at that I figured that at some time I might fight again

(Please turn to page 187)

REAL EX-

For details of our Real Experience

When I Shot Tracy's Horse

Villa ordered Tex to shoot the fellow who was swimming his horse across the Rio Grande.

By MAJOR EDWARD (TEX) O'REILLY

PANCHO VILLA reined in his horse with a violent pull that set the animal on its haunches, right on the edge of the steep bluff that led down from the plateau of Ojinaga, Mexico, to the Rio Grande River.

For a moment Pancho sat there peering into the darkness, and I wondered if he was gloating over the defeat of his old enemies the Red Flaggers, or planning whether or not to pursue the fleeing Federal soldiers across the river into the United States and into what, down on the border, we call the free and independent State of Texas. Instead he turned to me and said:

"*Amigo,* see that man just entering the river? He's the last man to leave this side. He must be the one who destroyed the machine-guns. Look at them, all smashed to pieces, and those two guns would have doubled the strength of my army! Get that man for me!"

"Too late, General," I told him. "The man's already crossing the river; it would be impossible to capture him."

"Name of a dog!" shouted Pancho in a rage. "Who said anything about capture! *Kill* him! Shoot him down! Everyone fire! *Fire!* Don't let him cross the river!"

I had a thirty-forty rifle in my saddle boot; and without further orders I threw myself from the saddle, brought out the rifle, and from a prone position, took long and careful aim at the horseman now lashing his horse through the muddy waters of the Rio Grande. I drew a fine bead and tightened the pressure on the trigger; but something seemed to be holding it; my finger was weak—it wouldn't do the job I was calling on it to do.

All around me others were firing madly, but the distance was a good five hundred yards, and you couldn't expect a Mexican soldier intentionally to hit anything at that distance. But the bullets were making little fountains in the water, like raindrops.

Again I squeezed the trigger and felt the recoil against my shoulder, but I'd missed—and I didn't often miss even at that distance. I levered another shell into the chamber. At my elbow Pancho Villa was almost foaming at the mouth with rage. "Get him! *Get* him!" he screamed as he vainly emptied his revolver into the air.

PERIENCES
story contest, see page 3.

I sighted fine. I had the spot just under the left shoulder marked for my bullet; then the horseman turned in his saddle, sensed that he was the object of the bitter fusillade, and threw his hand high in a derisive salute. I dropped my aim a bit, and this time my bullet sped to its mark—and the horse went down with a bullet through its brain.

I breathed easier. I watched for the rider to pull to his feet and make his way through the shallow waters to the American shore, but he didn't. I saw an arm come up, then the head, just barely clearing the water, and I realized that the man was pinned to the river bottom by the horse I had killed under him. I didn't know who he was. It didn't make a bit of difference to me; he was just another soldier, an enemy. But at that, I didn't like the idea of his drowning out there like that.

And as I sat there and watched, expecting every minute for him to be hit by a wild bullet or to be drowned, I wondered if by any chance this could have been the man who had held up our attacks for a week with his machine-guns, the man who had almost made a raving maniac of General Pancho Villa.

FIVE thousand of the Red Flag revolutionists had retreated across the desert of northern Chihuahua and taken up positions on the plateau of Ojinaga, deemed in those days to be almost impregnable. Villa had his spies, and they kept him informed of what was going on inside the Federal ranks—only, the spies' reports had not been very accurate.

Villa had expected to be able to run right over the exhausted Federals, and he had tried it, only to be hurled back with heavy losses from machine-gun fire. I was with Villa's staff, and we did not go into the fight. Villa figured it was not worth bothering with personally; he'd wait until the end, then go in and gloat over his old enemies Orozco and Salazar.

DEFEAT crazed him. He ordered attack after attack, first from one end of the hill and then the other. He sent his mounted troops charging in against the hill, and they were withered by machine-gun fire. Fifteen minutes later machine-gun fire blasted them from the other side of the hill as they crawled forward on their bellies, trying to hide behind rocks.

I'd known Villa for many years, but never had I heard him rave as he did during that week. It was dangerous to remain near him, lest his violent temper flare up at the wrong time—and Villa's temper often resulted in murder!

The thing that Villa, and the rest of us, could not understand was where the Federals got all their machine-guns. We knew they had one gun, but no one to operate it properly; and here on the hill above us they must have at least twenty, and men who certainly knew how to make them talk.

Villa pulled his men off for a couple of days, just keeping a few within rifle-range, and bombarded away at the plateau with light artillery. Everything was comparatively quiet when Villa decided to make his last attack. It wasn't dark when the Rebels surged forward and up the rock-strewn slope. Rifle-fire greeted them, and short bursts of machine-gun fire. The Rebels were stopped again, dead in their tracks. Villa's voice could be heard in loud curses, urging his men on. Suddenly it was noticed that the fire from the top of the hill had died away; and with that, they drove forward again.

I rode beside Villa as he crossed the crest, jumped his horse over the shallow trench so recently held by the Federals. But not an enemy was in sight.

Above the sudden quietness we heard the ring of steel on steel, and with a curse Villa shouted: "Someone is destroying my property. Kill them!"

We raced forward, and near the center of the small plateau came upon the wrecked remains of two machine-guns—two, and we thought there had been twenty! We wasted precious moments looking them over. The wrecker had not stopped at removing the handles. With an ax he had smashed the gas-lever that operated the breech mechanism. The sights had been knocked off. The canvas belts that held the cartridges had been hacked to pieces, and the elevating and traversing mechanism of the tripod had been smashed beyond repair. Some one had done a perfect job of putting those guns out of commission forever.

At the sight of the damaged guns, Pancho's heart almost broke. In Mexico a machine-gun was estimated of more value than a thousand men. Then Pancho seemed to realize what had happened, and he quit cursing for a minute to shout: "Get that man! Get him! Ten thousand pesos to the man who brings him!"

If we had not stopped to inspect the damages, there is little doubt the man would have been killed or captured; but by the time we got to the edge of the plateau where it looked down over the Rio Grande and away into the United States, the desecrator of machine-guns had already reached the river, and with the aforementioned results.

"THERE are American soldiers on the other side of the river," I said to Pancho. "Some of our bullets may hit some of them and cause trouble."

"I'm not firing on the United States," roared the arch-bandit. "That river's half Mexican, and if some of our bullets go farther, it's the fault of the Gringos for not building a wall to stop them."

That was Mexican logic, and there was nothing I could do about it; but for once in my life all my best wishes were with the enemy—one of them, at least.

I saw movement on the opposite shore, and two men forced their horses out into the water. One of them dismounted when he reached the stricken soldier. They worked for a minute; then one of them turned and rode his horse toward the shore, and I realized what they were doing: One of them had fastened his lariat to the dead horse and was pulling it off the soldier, while the other helped keep his head above water. They made it—and faded from sight amid the mesquite bushes on the American side. The battle of Ojinaga was officially closed, and our greatest concern now was to survive Villa's wrath.

That was also the end of the Red Flaggers, as an effective army. Five thou-

sand of them were shipped to Fort Bliss —at El Paso—and interned. I crossed the river and went to El Paso myself to get a taste of the fruits of victory.

I WAS having dinner with friends in the Shelton Hotel when I heard laughter back of me. Some one was relating a very funny story, and I recognized the voice of Bob Dorman, ace photographer of the border.

"Best picture I ever missed," I heard Bob saying. "There was Tracy out in the middle of the river, held down by his horse, one hand in the air and his head sticking up like a fishing-cork, and me with no flashlight powder to get the picture!"

Someone else remarked:

"That was a tight spot, Tracy! How did it feel?"

"Kinda wet," Tracy drawled, "but there wasn't much to worry about. There wasn't a soldier in the whole Villa army could have hit me at that distance."

And I felt so ashamed of myself for not having recognized Tracy's technique on the machine-guns, and from the thought that I'd almost killed a friend of years' standing, that I kept my back turned to him and stayed bowed over my meal until they had left the dining-room. And it was not until years had passed that I ever told Tracy Richardson that I was the man who had shot his horse from under him in the Rio Grande River.

When Tex Tried to Shoot Me

(Continued from page 184)

against Pancho Villa, and I didn't want to go up against my own machine-guns. They had to be put out of commission, at all costs.

I went to work on the guns with an ax, and it almost broke my heart to see such fine pieces of mechanism destroyed. I quit when I saw the heads of the Villa soldiers coming over the sky-line. It wasn't dark, but it was hard to see clearly.

MY horse was tied under the cliff overhang on the river side. I made it there in nothing flat, jumped into the saddle and drove home my spurs. Wildly the horse plunged downhill, came up short—and I went sailing through the air. In my haste I had forgotten to remove the tie-rope from around the horse's neck. There were a dozen more nags tied there, so I climbed aboard another.

The pursuing Rebel soldiers were making enough noise for a dozen battles, and firing was heavy, but no bullets were coming close to me. I rode into the silvery Rio Grande—at this place half sand and mostly less than three feet deep.

Bullets began to plop around me, not very close, but making annoying sounds as they struck the water. I could see dim forms on the American side, but could not distinguish whether they were American soldiers or Mexican refugees. But I felt safe. I turned and looked back. Silhouetted against the skyline I could see hundreds of Rebels, and the flash of their rifles looked like fire-flies. I waved my hand in a regretful farewell—and my horse folded up under me!

I didn't have a chance to get clear. I had a camera in one hand, a rifle strapped over my back, a pistol belted around my waist and a blanket draped over my back. The horse went down like a pricked balloon, and I went under the water, taking a good mouthful in the process. I tried to pull free, but I was caught tight as though in a vise. I twisted, squirmed, finally felt fresh air on my face, and was able to gulp in a deep breath.

The bullets falling in the water around me sounded like raindrops in the water, but with only my head showing, I knew I was a poor target. But I did begin to worry about how long I'd be able to hold myself in such a strained position. Perhaps thirty minutes, an hour at the most, and then it would be all over. It really did seem like hours, and then I heard my name called. Weakly I responded, and heard an encouraging shout. Two Mexicans rode out into the stream, two men who had been with me since the day Sam Dreben and I had joined the Red Flag revolution two years before. I wondered if Sam was out there with Pancho Villa, for Sam had turned over to the other side sometime before, and Sam was a darned good rifle-shot.

Manuel fastened his rope onto my dead horse's leg, and as Tomas put the rope on his saddle-horn and took up the strain, Manuel helped me to my feet and in a few minutes later we were on dry land. That wasn't the first time those two Mexicans had pulled me out of a tight scrape, and I wondered if I'd ever be able to repay them.

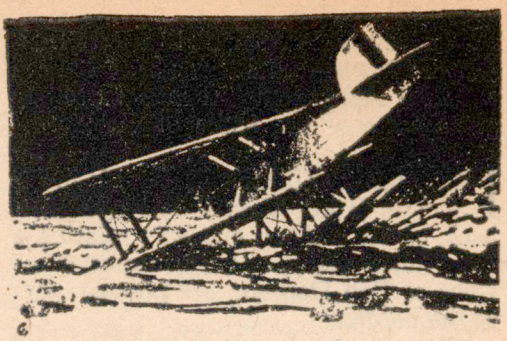
Hundreds of refugee soldiers milled around. I still had a job to do, so I tried to duck out of there, and ran right into an American outpost. I was made a prisoner. They wouldn't believe I was an American; and when they saw all the guns I was carrying, they were sure they had General Salazar himself.

On the way to the guardhouse I passed a group of American correspondents who knew me, and all they did was to laugh. To them it was a grand joke on me, and I knew this mess was going to cost me many a dinner. I finally outcussed a second lieutenant, and as a reward was taken before the Colonel in Charge of the American troops. He was some cusser himself, but I finally managed to get down inside my boot and fish out a piece of water-soaked paper that was still legible. There was a signature on that paper that caused the Colonel to change his attitude with remarkable promptitude. He gave me my immediate release and a good warm meal. I had for some time past been doing some secret—and some people considered it important—gathering of information along the border for certain high-placed American officials.

The reporters made so much fun of my adventures in the river at Ojinaga that I was almost ashamed to come out in the open. George Clements, dean of the correspondents, wrote in his paper that I had remained behind until surrounded by the Rebels, but then had taken to my heels and outran the entire army, Federal and Rebel, to the American side.

So when the two Mexicans who had pulled me free from the river managed to make their escape from the detention-camp at Fort Bliss,—and I got blamed for that,—I joined them, went to New York, then down to Mexico City, where we joined the forces of General Huerta.

IT was fifteen years later in New York that a bunch of veterans of the border days were telling tall tales, and someone was kidding me about trying to drink the Rio Grande dry, that Tex O'Reilly broke down and confessed that he had been the man who shot my horse and gave me the ducking. I never have really believed him, for I never did think he could shoot that well, but every time we meet, we have a drink on it; and I'm glad Tex was such a poor shot, and he is glad he was such a good shot; and as we're about the only survivors of the legions of the border, we have another drink to that.



IT was forty below zero; I was flying at two thousand feet over rough and mountainous country in Alaska; and my plane burst into flames.

Fire, the horror of every flying-man! My mechanic Ernie Fransen got busy with the fire-extinguisher, and I started side-slipping down, first one way and then the other, to keep the flames away from us as much as possible. We were not wearing parachutes, in fact didn't have any, and so it was get down in the plane, or else.

Down I twisted the plane, and I began to have hope we'd make it. Ernie was pouring the juice from the fire-extinguisher onto the flames, which seemed to be coming from in back of the engine. I couldn't see any fire—only black oily smoke. Then we were almost down, and I had to straighten out for a landing; below us was a small lake covered with slush ice. I flattened the glide when I saw we'd made it, and had almost reached the shore when we hit. We took the water and soft ice easy, and we managed to spring clear and make it to shore without getting wet above our knees.

We stood there for a minute, our wet feet freezing, and the plane finally a mass of red flames. In that low temperature, wet feet would prove fatal, and so we rustled, with what haste we could, wood for a fire; and as we dried our boots and socks, we saw the fuselage of our plane burn and sink down into the slush ice, the undercarriage holding the motor out of the water. Rolling up our pants, we waded into the icy water and managed to wheel the wreck the few feet to the shore, and soon had the motor high and dry. At least we'd saved that much from the wreck; and in Alaska and in our financial condition, a motor was of untold value.

We had recently been having a run of hard luck that seemed fair to break our efforts at air pioneering in Alaska.

Pioneer over Alaska

A famous pilot tells what it takes to make a real sourdough.

By JOE CROSSON

We only had four planes, and two of them had crashed the week before, hopeless wrecks. Now the third was gone.

As soon as we were dry, we headed toward the small settlement of Nante where I knew we could get transportation back to Fairbanks. It took us two days of heart-breaking work to make those four miles. The snow was deep, and there was no trail. We had to sleep the one night in the open, with four fires built around us to keep from freezing, but the next day we made it through.

In Fairbanks I got our last plane, and started out to bring in the salvaged motor, a short job that should not take more than a day. We followed the Kuskokwim River, and about an hour after we were out, our motor began to sputter and miss. I didn't want to turn back, and there was not a single place where we could set the plane down for a motor check. We thought it sounded like a fuel-line clogged, but there was nothing to do about it but go on.

Then like a flash the finish came: The motor cut out with a finality that was all-convincing, and the only chance we had of getting down was to land in the river. The shore-line was rugged and broken with boulders, and the river was filled with broken ice. Then I spotted a backwater in the river. There was ice, oodles of it; but it was not moving as swiftly as the main current.

With a flyer's prayer of "Here goes nothing!" on my lips, I set her down, as gently and as flat as I could. The wheels caught on a block of ice, hung there for a minute while the tail slowly cocked itself up in the air.

"Up on the tail!" I shouted to Fransen, and he clawed his way out of the cockpit and upward. His weight balanced the plane for a few more seconds; then I felt her slipping again, and I lost no time in joining the mechanic in his airy perch. I had just grasped the tail unit and kicked a hole through the covering of the fuselage for a toe-hold, when with a lurch and a series of bumps, the plane slid off the ice-block into the water. It brought up with a jerk that nearly threw us off our precarious perch; and there we were several feet above the cold ice-filled waters of the Kuskokwim River, and in imminent danger of going in—the most dangerous thing that could happen to us. I blessed the fact that I had a waterproof match box filled with matches.

At last it seemed as though luck was with us. A few minutes after our plunge a group of Indian hunters who had seen our fall came to our rescue with a canoe. It took them two hours to maneuver their frail canoe through the ice-blocks to the plane. We clung there, fortunately dry except for a slight spray. Ice-blocks kept pounding away at the fuselage, and as soon as our weight had been taken off it, the ice won the battle and the plane disappeared beneath the waters.

That was indeed a blue hour for me. My last plane gone, and miles in the wilderness. We warmed ourselves by the Indians' fire, ate some of their dried meat, and getting our directions from them, we set off for McGrath, about forty-five miles away, a tiny settlement where we were told we might get supplies and help.

We made McGrath in two days, in good condition. But there we could get no help. From there on in to Fairbanks, or the nearest point to the railroad, was two hundred and fifty miles, over an old dog-trail that had been used during the gold-rush of the late '90's.

That, I think, was the blackest moment of my life: All my planes gone, hundreds of miles of rough trail ahead of me, and not much prospect at the end. It was in the year 1926; there was a great deal of pessimism about flying in Alaska, and it would be hard to get another start. The only part of our clothing suited for trail work was our

reindeer parkas; the rest of our outfits was more adapted to flying.

Eighteen miles a day—twenty miles; we lost count. We tried to check off our estimated distance on the map, but it didn't work out. Our feet told us we had covered immense distances, but we knew we were making slow time. There was snow on the dog-trail, but not enough for a sled or snowshoes; the ground was broken and rough, and it stayed around forty below. There was nothing to it but hard foot-slogging, and it was our feet that suffered most. We were flyers, and as such were somewhat like cowboys—we didn't have much experience in walking.

OUR feet swelled until it seemed as though our boots would burst. The tight boots retarded the circulation and increased the pain. During the nights we could hardly sleep, and the first hour of the morning trek was almost beyond endurance. Often we felt like giving up, sitting down in the cold of the trail and going peacefully to sleep. We knew we had to go on, for there was no hope for help. In those pioneering days of flying, a plane had to be missing ten days or two weeks before a search was started for it. They went on the theory that if the crew were not killed in the crash, they would be able to make their way out to some point of communication.

After the first hour or so on the trail the pain left our feet, and they became just heavy lumps attached to our legs, something that had to be moved along if we ever wanted to get to where there was heat and food.

Twice we came to abandoned log cabins that had been the homes of prospectors during the gold-rush. Then there were a couple of relief stations, small cabins that had been built by the Government for people lost or wrecked on the trail. In these stations was a small amount of food, and that was our salvation. But never a human did we meet.

Each day we walked as long as we could push our feet along. It was a case of step after step instead of mile after mile, and every step a painful necessity. Our stomachs revolted at the diet of dried beef and canned beans that we ate cold or sort of roasted by the camp-fire. But there were several nights when there was no wood; then we just burrowed into what snow there was, pulled our parkas over our heads and suffered.

Our food gave out. It seemed strange that over what in Alaska was called a "regular trail" there was not even the track of an animal. It wasn't the time of the year for the Indians to be out on their regular hunts. The thaws might come any day and flood the trails and all the low places. We had to make it out before that time, if we ever expected to make it.

I think that for the last three days we mushed on, hardly knowing what we were doing. I don't believe that during that time we even kindled a fire; I don't know whether we stopped at night or not. We came out of this state to find that our clothes were frozen stiff, and so knew that we had blundered through a stream and got soaked.

Like doddering cripples we blundered about and gathered broken limbs and started a fire; and as it roared and threw out its heat, we sank into stupid sleep, only to be roused by the frost-bite thawing out.

We mushed on again, and I began to have visions. I was tormented with the sight of my home back in the States; I saw the loaded table at Thanksgiving, and smelled the savory roast turkey. . . . With our arms around each other we struggled on; and then without realizing it, we were stumbling over the tracks of the Alaskan railway at Nenance.

A couple of days in bed, plenty of warm food, and we were able to go on again. We took the train back to Fairbanks, and were told that they were just thinking of going out to search for us!

In those early days of flying in Alaska such experiences were not unusual. Today with all the ships equipped with two-way radio, things are different. If a ship is unreported for two hours, another plane is sent out to see what is wrong. But with all that, surprising as it may seem, only one plane in all the history of aviation in Alaska has ever disappeared beyond the ken of man. Sometimes the search has lasted for a year, but the missing plane is always located, with that one exception.

Fransen and I had made it through in eleven days, and that is not bad going for such a trail. But it is due to such hard trips that aviation is what it is today in Alaska—the safest and fastest form of transportation in the North Country; and as a result one of the most important items in building up our northern empire.

Wilderness Symphony

By CHARLES NEWTON ELLIOTT

This experience happened mostly in the author's mind; but is that not the locale of life's most important events?

CEDAR RIVER flows through the heart of a most desolate land. Born in a little spring under a granite cliff, it pours down the uneven mountain-side, noisy and careless. In the valley it winds its corkscrew course through deep blue pools, skirting the feet of mammoth ledges, flowing serenely through forests as ancient and dark and hoary as the wilderness itself.

My memory recalls Cedar River as a sweeping, virgin stream, with Arctic temperatures and hungry trout. I have not forgotten those hours in swirling eddies or when I stood beside some ancient pool which cast back the reflection of the hills and trees and of the very granite into which it was hewn. There were flushed and dewy dawns, and dusks that only the one Master can paint. Tackle-smashing trout appeared like iridescent ghosts out of Stygian depths, and left behind them dangling, broken leaders!

Those memories make Cedar River the most wonderful river on earth to me. But they fall into the list of insignificant events when I remember one of the great lessons of my life, learned from the solitudes of the Cedar River wilderness.

In the surge and flow of this mortal world I have somehow lost count of the years. By the curl of blue pipe-smoke, it was no longer than yesterday that Bradley and I met where a rowdy creek came thundering down its granite bed to join the Cedar. Bradley's creel contained two beauties; my fish had been too small to keep. We sat on a boulder, and I borrowed tobacco for my pipe.

"I thought I heard you talking," I said, "for fully an hour before we met."

"You heard the language of the river," Bradley replied. "The voice of running water is more like the voice of man than any other wilderness sound. There is more music in and along this river than in the greatest orchestra ever assembled."

"I have never heard any music on this river," I stated.

Sometimes Bradley's eyes can look like gimlet-holes in a block of ice.

"Why do you fish?" he finally asked.

"To catch fish," I replied promptly.

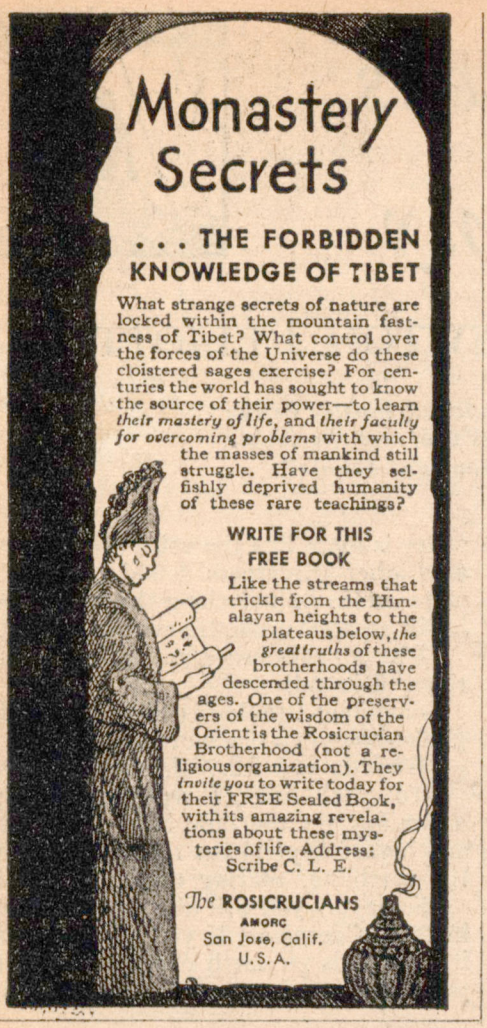
Bradley set the pipe back in his jaw and looked beyond the river, far beyond the tumbling, roaring creek. He said:

"Some day you will discover the music in this wilderness. If you haven't heard it, no words on earth can describe it to you. I hope for your sake it's soon."

WE separated and resumed fishing. But I could not put my mind to the exact task of laying a fly in the shadows or drifting it into the eddy of a pool. My ears were straining to catch soft bars of music. I kept thinking to myself that perhaps I should go back and stay with Bradley. After many years of intensive and useful wear, his mind had finally failed him!

But I continued to fish, following the stream, taking an occasional small trout and returning it to its icy home. Fly after fly failed to raise the big ones. It was simply not my day. Shortly after the middle of morning the trout stopped striking altogether. I had already decided to take down my tackle when a raindrop hit my cheek. I glanced up to find a huge black cloud riding the crest of the ridge. A brilliant flash scorched the heavens, and thunder boomed up the valley.

I splashed out of the stream, running for the nearest rock-cliff. The ledge I



found was overhanging and well protected from the rain. I crawled into a dry, rocky niche and sat down with my face toward the rumbling, storming valley. By now the wind had struck the trees along the river, tearing at their leaves and branches, whipping them unmercifully, screaming in a chorus of fitful voices.

And then suddenly the music came! The smashing crescendo was like a million violins in some mighty orchestra. It faded and came again with its boom of thunderous drums in the background. From the tinkle of the little rivulet near where I sat, to the harmonious fury of the wilderness world outside, I had found the music of the elements!

That night I did not tell Bradley what I had heard. He knew as well as if I had described it to him note by note. He caught me listening eagerly to a tree-frog in the birch tree at the river's edge. The many tongues of the water, the night sounds of the valley, had suddenly become a lovely flowing melody to my ears.

Since that day on Cedar River I have known that no musical notes inscribed by human hands are half so beautiful as the music of the earth itself with all its myriad instruments. Music conceived and executed by human brains can never be as dramatic or expressive as the music in an earth-rending storm which tears and slashes at the wilderness. The quick, vibrant music at dawn, the joyful expression of gladness at the awakening of day, the slow, saddened strains when the sun has gone and night is near—those are a few of the songs which come from the heart of the earth.

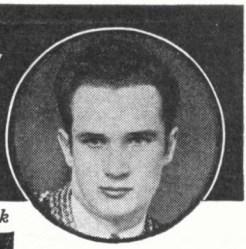
I recall a lonely seacoast where the surf is never still. Day and night it sings a booming bass cantata. To unattuned human ears, that monotonous undertone is the lone sound, but in reality it is only a part of the wild symphonic concert of living throats and quickened elements. It forms a background for the flutelike semitones of the wind. It beats in rhythm to the arias of living creatures in the air, and on the beach, and in the woods behind the booming surf. Stand in that surf, and it is like having your ear against the drum of an orchestra. Move into the balcony behind the first line of trees, and the full melody of the wilderness falls upon your ears.

One who has lived alone in the woods knows that trees do have tongues. The rustle and whispering of leaves is the most expressive language of the forest. A tree has laughter and sighs and secrets for ears attuned to know those sounds. The warning cry of a tree will herald the approach of a storm; the gentle sigh will breathe relief when all the wind has gone.

There are spring songs, summer songs, songs of the harvest moon. Gently sifted snowflakes tinkle when they touch, and in the stillness of the winter forest they are audible to human ears. Birds and bees and insects are a part of this invisible and eternal symphony. Nowhere are the notes discordant. The music is full and satisfying to the hearts of those who recognize it.

To ears which are trained to hear the singing of the earth and all the living creatures upon it, the wilderness means more than a collection of trees and hills and water. And the songs are there, although most of us in this complex urban nightmare we call the civilized world, have ears that hear not and hearts which do not understand.

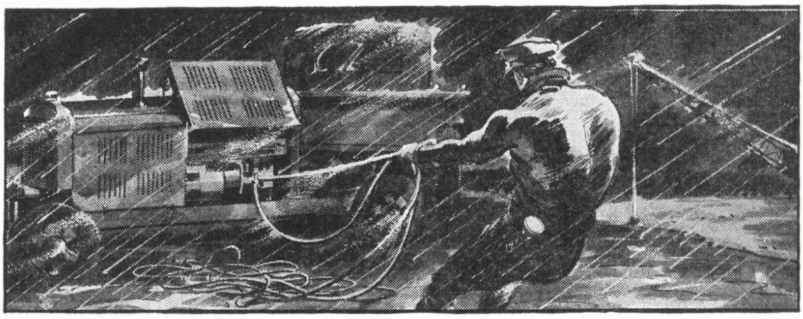
ONE MORE STEP— AND ETERNITY!



A true experience of LYLE EMMONS, *Kildare, New York*

"THE WIND HOWLED and the darkness seemed to increase as I arrived at the quarry, where I was to do a welding job on a big steam shovel," writes Mr. Emmons. "The rain streamed down in slanting torrents.

"IN THAT DRIVING STORM I had to move slowly about, walking with my back to the wind and tugging at my heavy gear. Then suddenly I had a horrible, sickening sensation of danger.



"I GRABBED MY FLASHLIGHT and swung it behind me. I peered straight down a 90 foot drop to a pile of jagged rocks! You can tell the world that I was thankful for my flashlight and its dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries. I'll never be without them!

(*Signed*) *Lyle Emmons*"

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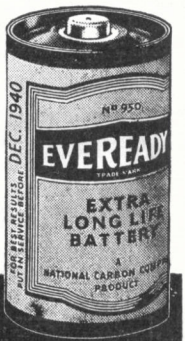

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Actual color photograph—A fine lot of ripe, golden leaf for Luckies.

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Here's the natural result of buying finer, selected cigarette tobacco for Lucky Strike. The average nicotine content of Luckies, for over two years, has been 12% less than the average of the four other leading brands★—less than any one of them. This fact is proven by authoritative tests which have been confirmed from time to time by independent laboratories.

You see, each year we exhaustively analyze tobaccos before purchase. Thus our buyers can select the leaf that is ripe and mellow, yet mild and low in nicotine content—then buy it up.

The result—a cigarette of finer tobaccos—mild and mellow, with a naturally lower nicotine content. Have you tried a Lucky lately?

★**NICOTINE CONTENT OF LEADING BRANDS.** From January 1938 through March 1940, Lucky Strike has had an average nicotine content of 2.02 parts per hundred—averaging 9.82% less nicotine content than Brand A; 21.09% less than Brand B; 15.48% less than Brand C; 3.81% less than Brand D.

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With men who know tobacco best—it's LUCKIES 2 TO 1