THREE SHORT NOVELS, COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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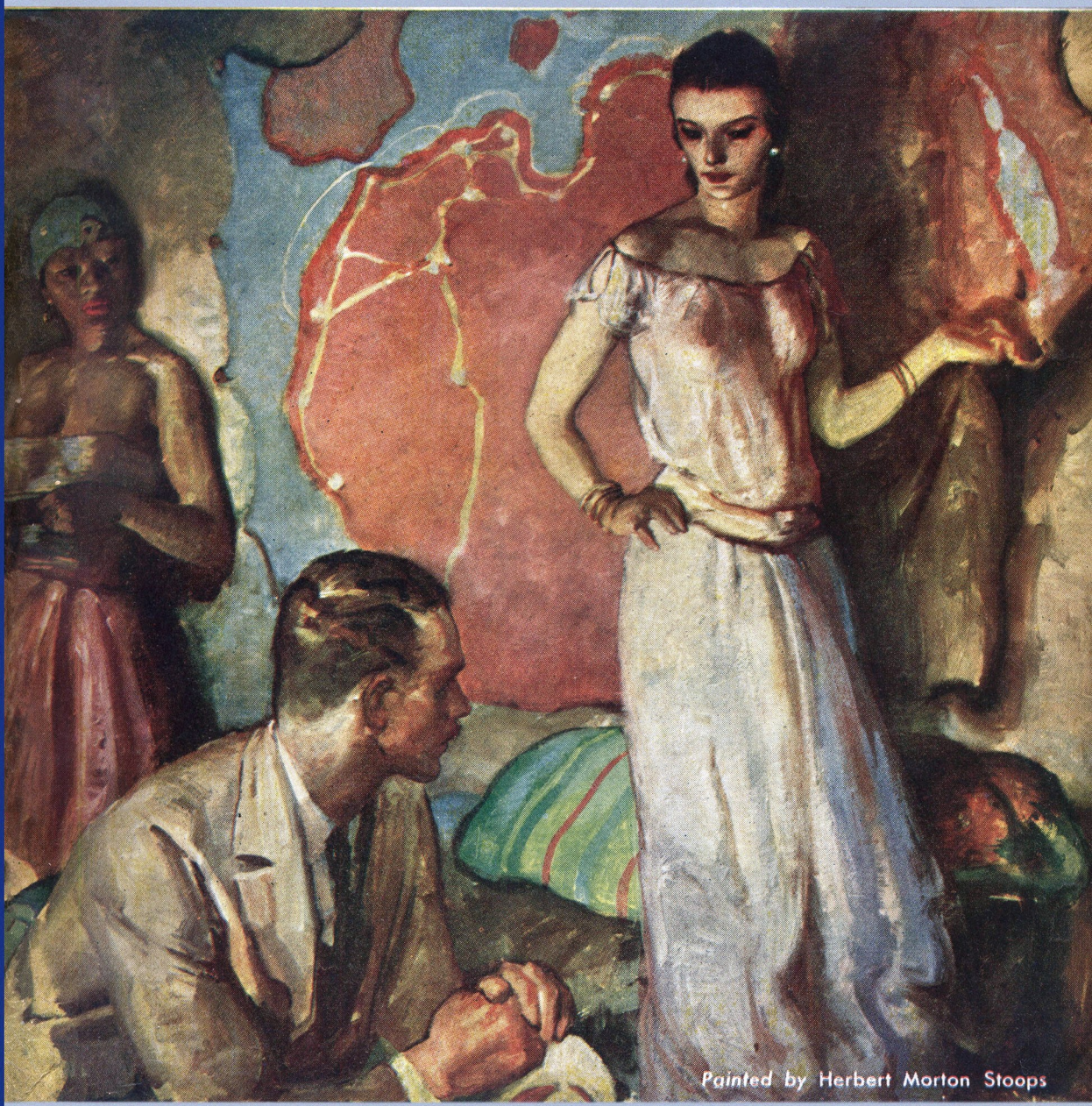

Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

"Hag Gold," by JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

HUGH PENTECOST • FULTON GRANT • ROBERT MILL

MAX BRAND • H. BEDFORD-JONES

The Return of the Mayflower

Painted by
BERNARD
F. GRIBBLE

This painting of the American destroyers coming into Plymouth hangs in the United States Naval Academy, at Annapolis. It was painted during the last war, but has real significance today also, though our flag and our men are not (as this is written) on them. . . . Read, for example, the story which begins on the next page.

Reproduced by courtesy of the U.S. Naval Academy Museum.

Your Orders, Captain?

The memorable story of an American officer and an American destroyer in action against the Axis forces in the Mediterranean.

By FRANCIS COCKRELL *and* FORD MACELVAINE

WEARING her new name and somber war-paint, flying her new flag, H.M.S. *Corinth* lay in the harbor at Lisbon, taking on fuel. Toward evening her navigating officer, Lieutenant Kenneth Milton, went ashore and in a hotel up the hill ran into Bart Walsh, an American newspaper man he'd known five years before in Shanghai. Walsh, and a newsreel camera-man named Carter who was with him, were on their way to London by air, and the three men spent the evening together.

The *Corinth's* executive officer, second in command, was also ashore that evening, and they encountered him later on in a cheap *bistro* down near the quays, where they had stopped for a final drink before Milton went out to the ship.

They were standing at the bar, in profile to him, and he would have passed on behind them if Milton, turning his head, hadn't caught sight of him. "Lorne!" he said. "I say, see what I've found! Some Americans for you! Have a drink with us."

Lieutenant Stephen Lorne stopped and was facing them with his hands jammed deep in his jacket pockets: a man some ten or fifteen years older than Milton, growing a bit thick through the middle, with a reddish face and sandy eyebrows and light blue eyes with something noncommittal, or withdrawn, about them.

Milton introduced Bart Walsh first.

Lorne and Walsh said, "How do you do?" almost in unison, and when Walsh extended his hand, Lorne's came forth easily to meet it. But it had not moved until Walsh's did, and a moment later when Carter merely nodded and murmured, "We've met," and did not offer his hand, there was no slightest twitch of movement in Lorne's own arm to indicate he had held or caught himself. In a small flash of thought that brought a faint dismay it came to Milton that Lorne had learned this control from other times when he had put out his hand to other men and it had been left unclasped.

"We were about to have a drink," Milton said again, quickly. "Won't you join us, old man?"

Lorne smiled briefly. "Thank you. That's very decent. But—some other time, perhaps." And with a nod to them which was as noncommittal as his eyes, he moved on to the back of the room.

"Have you known Lorne long?" Walsh asked presently.

"Only a few days," Milton said. "This is his first duty, I believe."

Walsh's brow wrinkled. "I know him," he said. "Or know of him. Or something. You said you knew him, How?"

Howard Carter gave a little nod. "That's right."

"What am I thinking about?" Walsh asked. The frown was still on his round face, and his eyes were troubled. "Something—I don't know. Wasn't he in our navy?"

"They let him resign," Carter said. He was a lean, brown man, with the remains of a Georgia accent. "He got into a jam—one of those weird things that happen sometimes. And he took the rap rather than let a woman be compromised and a fellow-officer broken. The few who knew him well were sure that was what happened; but he never talked and—they let him resign. —What I don't get," Carter said to Milton, "is how a man with a record like that—on the surface, at least—ever got in your navy?"

Milton smiled very politely. He was young and blond and looked very spruce in his uniform. "I should imagine," he ventured, "that the Admiralty was chiefly concerned with whether he was a seasoned destroyer-officer or not, rather than with his—ah—his personal life."

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Cover Design — Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops to illustrate "Hag Gold."

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

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(Continued from page 1)

DESTROYERS are singular craft, vulnerable to punishment, built so light and flimsy as to be called the "tin-can navy," but at the same time with very powerful machinery which makes them fleet and highly maneuverable. Their performance is peculiar to them as a class, and now and then a particular ship will also have some purely personal eccentricity which distinguishes her even from her sister craft.

But there had been no hint of such in the *Corinth,* and there was none in her run between Lisbon and Malta. Her performance was in complete conformance to the data in her "bible," that large volume of blueprints and data-sheets which must be compiled by the builder and furnished with every naval vessel. It gave her top speed, for instance, as thirty-three knots, and listed that also as her critical speed—the speed at which her propeller-shaft and turbine vibrations fell into such a harmony as would shake her apart if it continued long. Her top for purposes of use, then, should be about thirty-two; this she accomplished handily; she would log an even thirty hour after hour, as smoothly as anyone could ask.

By the time they reached Malta, her skipper, Commander Hawthorne, was well pleased with her in all respects, considering her age; she would hold her own with any of the seven other destroyers which, with four cruisers, already lay moored in Valletta basin, beneath the protection of the high surrounding cliffs.

They were eight days at Malta without action; in the monotony the Italian air-raids became an almost welcome diversion since small damage was ever done. But the recent attacks of the German dive-bombers had done some real damage, for they had come down past the two-hundred-foot cliffs. And the possibility of their return kept everyone on the alert.

Lorne made no particular friends during that time, or seemed to make any effort to, though he was not unfriendly. He was older than the other officers, of course; even Hawthorne, a lean, serious, dark-eyed man of thirty-seven, was probably ten years his junior. He was more casual, too, more careless, in his speech and actions as well as in his appearance.

Young Milton probably spent more time with him than anyone else. They played cribbage now and then, and twice went ashore together.

As they climbed from the dory to Grand Masters' Landing the second of

these times and cast a look backward to the *Corinth,* the light was falling in a way to make her old number show through the war-paint. Lorne stared at it while a small, annoyed frown came on his face.

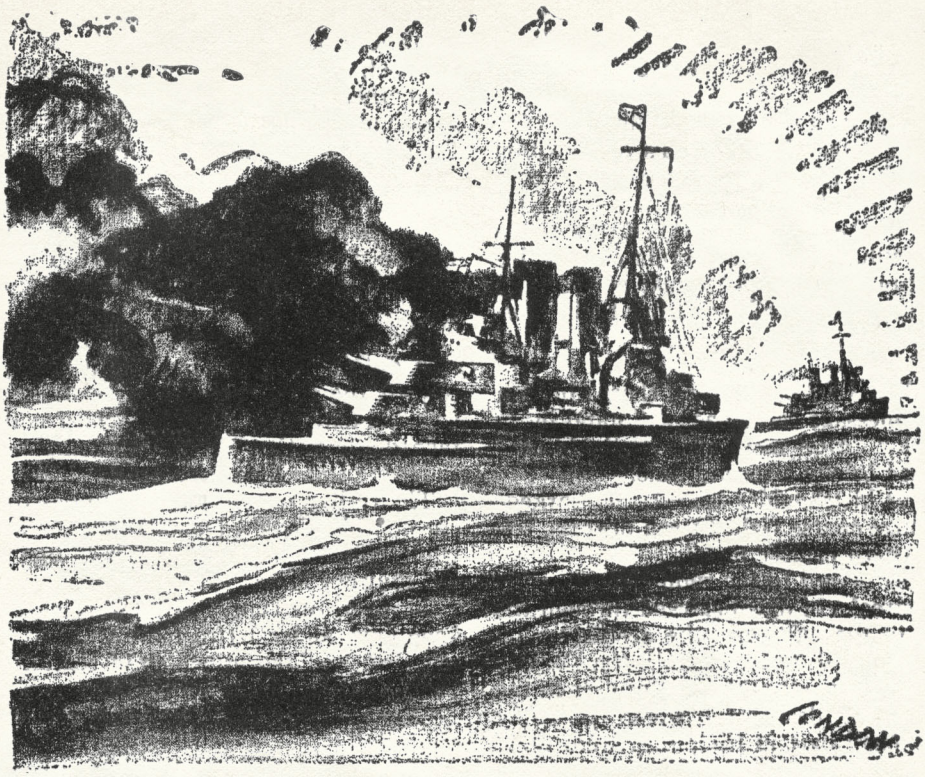
He looked at Milton. "Do you know her old name?"

Milton didn't. Later, when they had climbed the two hundred feet of steps cut into the cliffside, up to the plateau and city of Valletta, and were having a drink in the Cornwall Club, Lorne thought he would look it up.

They found it easily enough in a Navy Register in the club's library. She was the former *U.S.S. Rogers,* commissioned in 1918 and retired without service after her acceptance tests.

Lorne shrugged. "I don't know. It doesn't mean anything. I guess I was just one of her test officers, is all." He closed the book. "We used to give 'em hell," he said. "Our shakedown runs aren't like yours, you know. We'd shake their plates loose if we could. Sometimes, that way, you'll turn up stuff that isn't in the bible. I remember once—" His voice trailed off, and he stood there staring at the empty glass in his hand.

Milton waited for him to finish the sentence but he never did, for the air-raid signal sounded just then. They



stepped to a window for a look before scurrying attendants closed the heavy shutters, but they couldn't see anything because it was only an Italian attack, and they flew carefully high above the anti-aircraft fire.

The siren droned to a silence and Lorne observed absently:

"They sound like the quitting-whistle on the sawmill back home."

THE boreas were blowing now—chill winds from the steppes of Siberia that come and blow across the warm waters of the Mediterranean; each night there were drifting banks of wet, misty fog. On a thick, moonless night—which was the eighth after the *Corinth* had come into Valletta basin—she moved out again. The line of cruisers led, the four of them, and the eight destroyers came to flank them, four to each side, with the *Corinth* leading on the port.

They cleared the breakwater, and Hawthorne set the course for slightly south of east; continuing on it at their speed of thirty knots, they would come at dawn to a point on a route from Italy south to Tripoli, Libya, along which the Italians were making desperate efforts to convoy supplies, and German troops, to stiffen the defenses of Graziani's last stand. Again it was the German dive-bombers that were the real danger to the British; and this would be a quick surprise raid. The most important factor to its success was in making contact just at dawn, when the supply ships would stand up clearly against the pink of the eastern sky while the British squadron lay almost invisible in the mist.

The Italians might or might not risk their war vessels to convoy the supply ships. Usually they stayed safe in harbor, but Graziani's desperate plight might spur them to come out. Anyhow, the cruisers were to swing in and do their work before the Italians could radio to Sicily for German dive-bombers to come to their rescue.

That contact would involve some close, sweet navigation and a good deal of luck besides; even if it missed, the raid could still be brutal—if the Italians risked no battleships; and whatever happened, there seemed scant chance of any serious British loss.

Lorne was on the bridge at three-thirty when Hawthorne came up.

"Now steaming gyro course one-oh-five, sir," Lorne said. "Speed thirty, leading the port flank, distance from flagship about twelve hundred, all boilers under steam."

Hawthorne nodded; fifteen minutes later he ordered: "Sound all hands to General Quarters! Stand by battle-stations!"

Gongs rang out over the ship with the shrill twitter of the bosun's pipe cutting through. Milton came up, and Lorne moved to his position on the starboard wing of the bridge and followed the dim gray silhouette of the cruisers with his night-binoculars. The mist periodically obscured them, hiding all but their phosphorescent wake.

MINUTES passed, and then a blinker message came back: "Stand by to attack." After more minutes the blinker winked briefly a second time.

Over his shoulder Hawthorne barked: "Change course right fifteen degrees, follow astern cruiser line."

They veered to the right almost as the first streaks of dawn showed through the mist to the east, and the destroyers on the port flank fell back until the *Corinth* was slightly astern the last cruiser in the line. The destroyers would probably have small part in this; they were there only to protect the cruisers.

A rift showed in the mist for a moment; and Milton, on the port wing of the bridge, caught a quick short breath; for there they were!

There steamed a column of freighters and transports, not ten thousand yards away, guarded on this side only by a few small destroyers and torpedo-boats. They were fast vessels mostly, some of them troopships, probably. Before he could count them the fog rolled back again, but they would be clear targets from the higher cruisers. For a moment a small feeling of uneasiness went through him, for they were sitting birds, pinned there against the pinking eastern sky; slow-moving ducks in a shooting-gallery.

The speed-cone at the yardarm of the flagship raised, and Hawthorne yanked the telegraph. "Increase revolution both engines forty!"

Then, in a moment, a quartermaster was singing out, "Actual speed thirty-two knots, sir," and from above the bridge the range-finder had begun calling into his telephone: "Eighty-one hundred yards, bearing two-eight-five; eight thousand yards, bearing two-eighty—"

There came a flash from the turrets on the flagship, and a blast like thunder was immediately echoed from the other cruisers.

It had begun.

The acrid smell of ammonia from smokeless powder drifted back through the cool, damp dawn, and in the clearing light there was visible a bright flash from one of the transports, followed by the faint echo of an explosion.

The cruisers swept on, all turrets blazing now, pounding the transport line with tons of exploding projectiles. There was no return of fire which would indicate battleships beyond the transport line.

Lorne, methodically occupied with his own duties, only now and then glanced toward the main action; his expression was unexcited, touched only with a detached admiration when he contemplated the firing from the cruisers.

The Italian torpedo-boats and destroyers on this side had fled, too light and vulnerable to stay in the direct line of the cruisers' fire.

Three of the supply ships were clearly gone now, at least two more were badly crippled, and the others were scattering wildly, like quail in a blasted covey.

"Torpedo boats coming up on the port quarter!"

Hawthorne's quiet order, "Open fire!" went through the telephone to the gunnery officer in fire control on the after bridge, and almost as an echo to his words the *Corinth's* four-inch guns spoke sharply.

There were four of those torpedo-boats, but none ever closed the range enough to fire.

With a lucky direct hit the *Corinth's* first salvo took the leader, and the tiny vessel flew apart; her men's bodies floated into the air like pieces of broken china dolls, floated down into the splash again and vanished.

Presently the other three were gone, less dramatically, no less finally.

There was nothing to it. And then—

Then as from somewhere an Italian salvo came over, and on the tail of its ascending shriek there followed an enveloping, rumbling roar that said those shells were of heavy caliber.

So this time there *were* battleships! But the shot had been a mile high, blind apparently; the cruisers would finish their work and be out of range before the battleships had visibility enough to make them dangerous.

And then the second salvo came—it fell scant yards short of the flagship.

Two minutes later the second cruiser in line jumped as if struck by a lightning bolt, as two of those twelve-inch shells

plunged into her vitals. There was the roar of some internal detonation, and she rolled heavily to port, swung crazily out of line. She was gone.

So the mist had thinned more quickly than it had seemed to thin; the cruiser line was in good visibility from the battleships—two of them, from their fire—and it was a different picture now. The Italians had the heavy guns and were hard on the range, and everything was changed. The cruiser that got home now could be counted very lucky, even if the dive-bombers didn't show up.

But Stephen Lorne took in this situation with the same look of detachment on his face, a look such as a man might wear when the plot of a rather dull play shifted unexpectedly.

The visibility advantage was gone, but there was nothing to be done about it. Only a smoke-screen would be of any use; and with the wind brisk from the port quarter, no cruiser could run a screen for the others, and none of these destroyers was fast enough to do it for them, with a top of thirty-two.

Then abruptly Lorne's hands gripped the rail of the bridge, and he stood still as statuary for an instant; an odd little half-grin tugged at one corner of his mouth.

He grunted suddenly and raised his head.

"Damn! I knew it! The *Rogers,* the old *Rogers!* I knew it!"

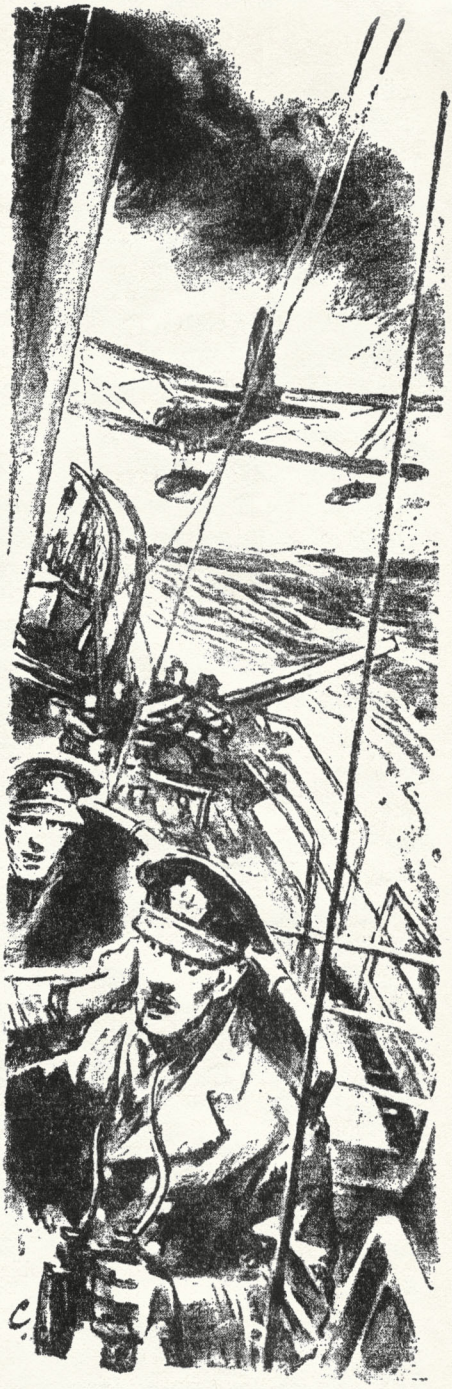
He moved quickly to Hawthorne. "Captain, I was one of the test officers on this ship. I've remembered something," he said. "If we threw full steam-pressure on both turbines and held it there, she would pass her critical speed and do thirty-seven knots! She would," he added, "twenty years ago."

The light in Hawthorne's eyes faded. "Yes," he said, "twenty years ago. I'm afraid that's a bit—"

THE sudden roar of an airplane motor drowned out his words. It was not a bomber, but a spotting plane from one of the battleships, diving low and sweeping in to machine-gun the open decks of the *Corinth.* A spray of bullets bounced like hail; Lorne crouched beneath the protective coping of the bridge and waited for it to pass. It was a futile maneuver; the casualties it might cause were utterly trivial, in this affair.

It was gone, and Lorne straightened up and turned again to Hawthorne.

Hawthorne was gripping the rail, and his face had a set, pale look. He coughed,



and his cough spattered blood on the paint-work. His eyes were wide, astonished and questioning.

He slumped very suddenly. Milton and a quartermaster dragged his limp form into the chartroom, and Lorne moved automatically to the Captain's post and barked to the helmsman to mind his course.

Then Milton was standing at his side. "Your orders, Captain?"

Lorne stared at him a moment blankly, and his hands went into his jacket pockets, pushing down, hard. Then he moved with gathering speed, and he muttered, half to himself: "Well, we can see." He yanked the telegraph far over and left it jangling, and his words went flat and crackling into the engine-room tube.

"Wide open throttle! Twist her *wide*, do you hear?"

Then he stepped back a step and stood with his eyes half closed, listening—not looking at Milton or anything.

The engine-indicators swept up, and instead of gaining speed, the *Corinth* seemed to slow perceptibly as her screws raced and slipped.

She began to heave.

Being in the engine-room then was like being inside a pounding jungle drum. Engineer Officer Booth gave his assistant an odd, hard look and advised him grimly to hold on to his hat. The big turbines began to weave and sway before their eyes. That weaving went all through the ship, and then with it came a dreadful, resonant drumming from the hull plates. That weaving, drumming combination is what opens hulls. . . . The decks groaned horribly.

And then suddenly the drumming diminished faintly, and in another breath it all was gone, and the weaving stopped, and the *Corinth* seemed sucked forward in some eerie vacuum. Her turbines purred like a well-tuned racing-car.

Lorne's breath came out with a sudden *"Hunh!"* Then loudly he barked out the order:

"Stand by to lay smoke-screen!"

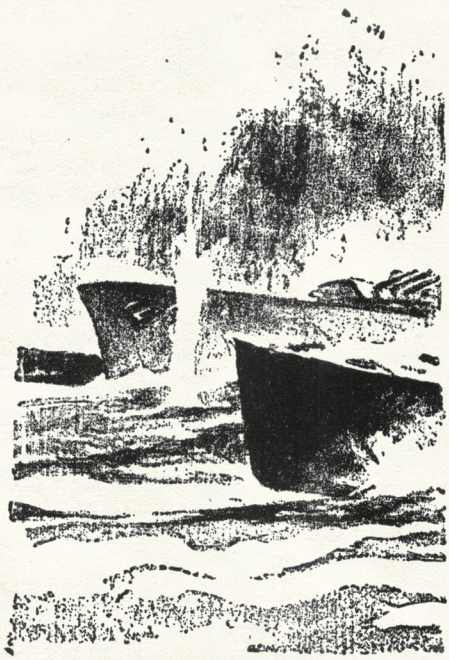
And a moment later, into the fire-room tube:

"Cut the air!"

Dense smoke gushed from all four of the *Corinth's* stacks, and trailed like a black plume back from them to lie billowing close to the waves.

THEY were just astern the last cruiser then, the injured one, which had almost ceased to move. A few men waved from her, and Lorne saluted gravely, respectfully, in return. Five minutes would see her beneath the surface, but she still fired methodically from some of her turrets and secondary batteries.

It must have been an incredible sight from the cruisers: the *Corinth* suddenly belching smoke and sweeping past the last in line with five knots of speed that she had no right to have. But she had it, and that was the important thing; and



with the screen that she might run, they had a fighting chance to get home now. Immediately they began to swing right out of line.

They watched the *Corinth* narrowly, for her success was theirs, and though she had the speed to run the screen for them, they knew the odds she faced.

With her edge on them, she had almost two thousand yards to run at a five-knot excess of speed, a ten-minute job at the least; and through all of it she would be under the concentrated fire now being thrown at the cruiser line. And more than that, as she screened each cruiser in the line, the fire would concentrate on her that much more heavily. One twelve-inch shell could blast her to oblivion, and there would be a hundred thrown her way; and there would be three hundred four- or five-inch projectiles which could pierce her flimsy plates.

Slowly she overhauled the cruisers, one after the other, enveloping each in heavy life-saving smoke. Shells ripped her upper works and twisted her superstructure; her boats were shattered; her hull plates were riddled with countless splinters from the heavy shells.

But she kept on—a tattered, battered remnant of a ship, slitting her way through the morning sea with a speed which had been built into her through some unknown mistake or accident.

She hid the flagship. On the cruisers they told her good-by then. She had done her job, a gallant and foolhardy one, but now she was the only target, and she wouldn't have a chance.

Even with a destroyer's short turning radius she couldn't swing in behind her own smoke yet, for she would catch the flagship, which had not completed its longer swing around. She could only keep on until she was clear, with a slender wisp of a chance, or if her skipper had the stubborn audacity to try a second screen, swing out toward the Italian line, on dead man's corner—cold-blooded suicide.

So they had no hope of a second screen, though they would have liked one mightily, for the first one, in the wind they had, was holding none too well.

Lieutenant Milton looked at the skipper as the *Corinth* finished that first run down. He knew what their chances were now, but he didn't care; the excitement of success was in his eyes.

And then Lorne said, "We'll give them another one," and Milton laughed aloud.

"Captain, it's been damn' nice knowing you."

Lorne gave him a tight, sardonic grin, but there was anticipation in his eyes. "You think you've seen a trick?" he said. "Well, get a load of this."

And he threw the telegraph to *Stop* on the starboard engine.

"Rudder hard right!"

They didn't capsize, though they should have; at that speed, under that treatment, there was little else for the ship to do; and Milton, frozen, hung to the rail and waited for it.

But they didn't. The port rail went deep under water, but instead of swinging into the normal arc, the *Corinth* spun in a wild, quick skid, like a car on wet asphalt, and in a matter of no more than seconds she had come around to the right. Having used what amounted to no turning radius at all, she had come completely around to the right in that queer, skidding flip which had been the second of her two freak traits discovered on her shakedown runs.

NOW she was steaming back under the protection of her own first screen, her gaping stacks pouring smoke for a second one. This was no ten-minute run; there were no speeding cruisers to overhaul. In less than three minutes her job was done; done twice now, which was incredible, and she was through it safely, which was impossible.

She was astern the last retreating cruiser, coming into the fading gray of the beginning of her first screen; she had only to come around to the left now, duck in behind her smoke and go.

Milton couldn't restrain his jubilance. "We've made it! By God, we've made it!" he cried.

THE German dive-bombers came then, probably summoned by radio from their Italian base. They were too late to save the transports and freighters of the convoy; and the cruisers beat them off. But they ganged up on the *Corinth;* and one bomb struck her fair on the stern.

The explosion raised the whole stern of the *Corinth* from the water; her plates opened, and her decks rolled back like the jagged cover of a sardine can. Water poured in and the steam lines parted; live steam roared up from below, and men came with it, scalded, in screaming agony.

The stern settled immediately, rapidly.

"Stand by to abandon ship!"

But that was a purely routine order; in a space of seconds the ship would abandon *them!*

The rush of water was breaking the bulkheads, one after the other; and as each one went, she settled farther, leveling off a little each time.

Lorne and Milton had caught the rail side by side, and Lorne gave him that odd grin from one corner of his mouth.

"You didn't make such a bad guy, did you?" he said. "On this one, anyhow."

Milton swallowed. "I think," he said, "that we did rather well on—both of you, sir."

Lorne chuckled. "Carry out your orders, sir."

The choppy swell was breaking over the decks then. . . .

There were seven altogether, from the original one hundred and sixteen; seven who were lucky, more than anything. There had been no boats to launch; they had been picked up clinging to an emergency raft which had floated free. Three seamen, a bosun, two torpedo-men and the navigating officer, Lieutenant Kenneth Milton.

They were brought back to London of course, and were much in the papers for a time; Bart Walsh sent home some dispatches concerning their ship's exploit,

and Howard Carter was one of the newsreel men who shot the event when the King expressed to them the pride and gratitude of his people and pinned the Victoria Cross on each.

Walsh got hold of Milton later, before he returned to duty. With Carter they spent another evening together, over drinks in a small café, and they got the story in its complete detail from Milton then. When he had finished, there was silence for a moment; then Carter drained his glass and set it down; and Walsh, looking into his, said:

"Things happen that are plenty queer."

Carter nodded. "A guy like Lorne turning in a card like that. Can you tie it?"

Milton was looking at them uncertainly. "But why not?"

"Oh, you know," Carter said, "it's just funny. He was the only one knew the boat had that speed, and he knew you were in for an awful kicking-around if he used it, didn't he?"

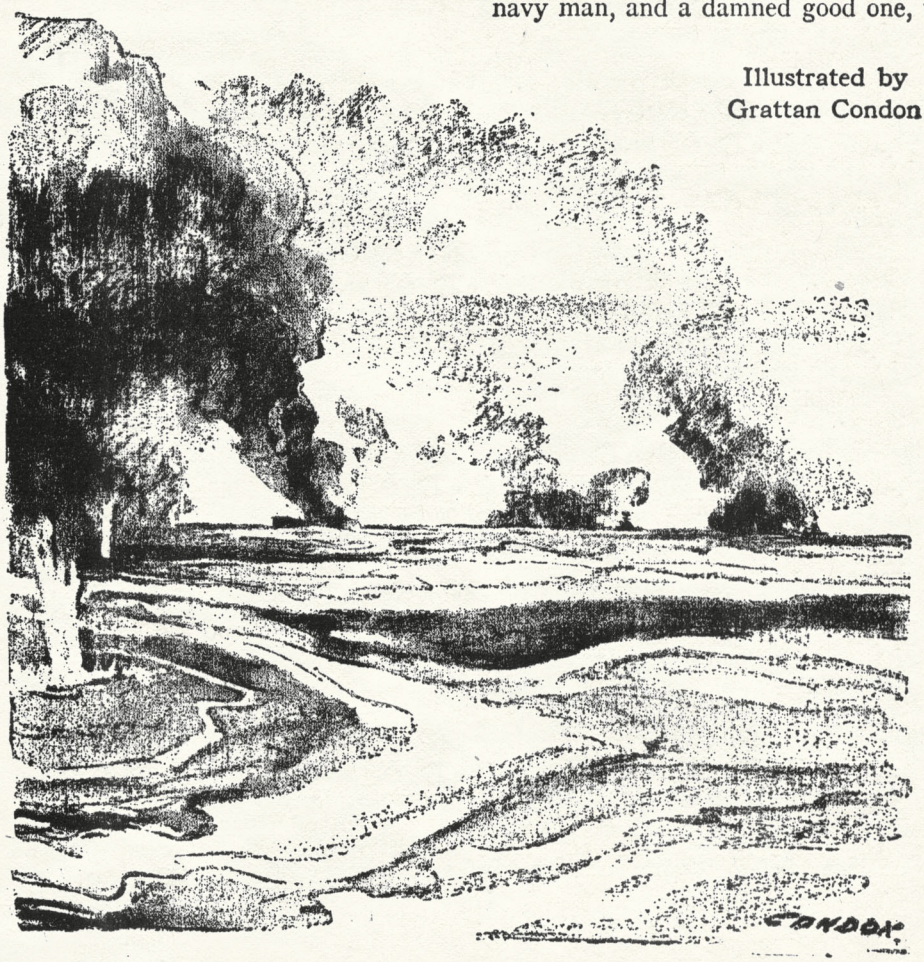
"But destroyers," Milton said, "are *supposed* to protect cruisers. What else could he do? He was in command."

"Skip it," Carter said. "Nothing, I guess. Anyhow, the guy turned in a sweet job. Maybe the fates picked him for a hero from the start. . . . Let's have a drink."

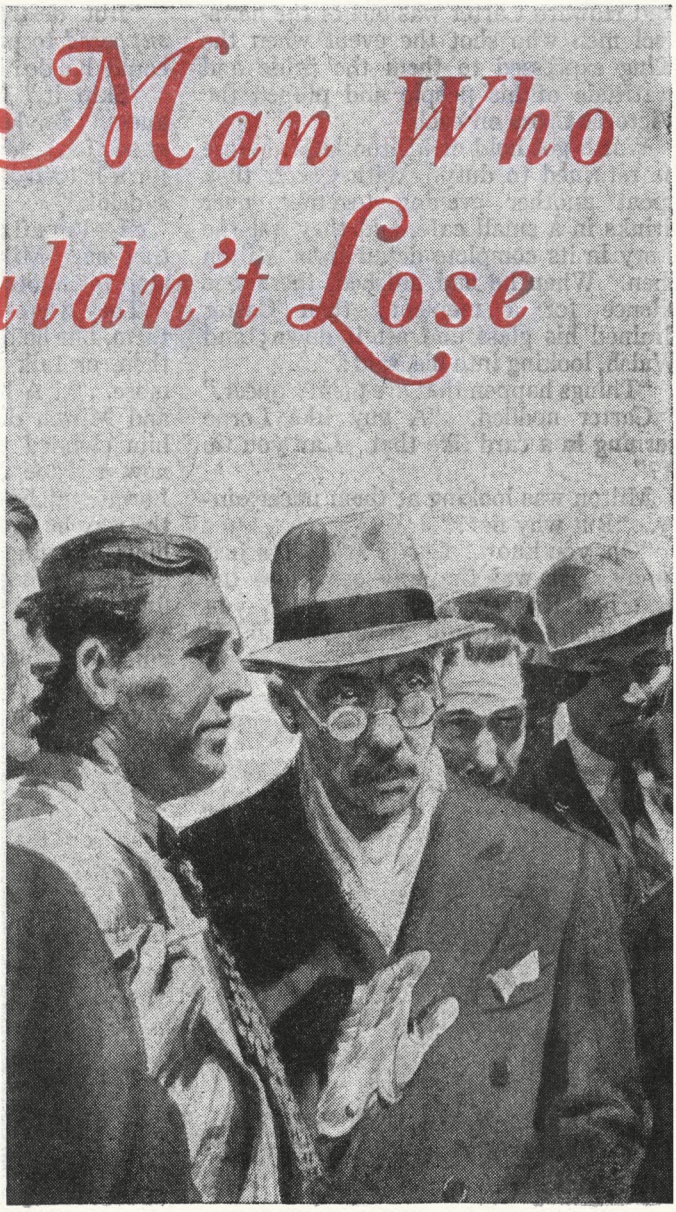
"I—I'm afraid I'd really better be getting on," Milton said. "Sorry I can't stop for another, but—"

They were nice chaps, and he liked them, but he didn't want to stay on right then, or talk to them about Lorne any more. . . . A hero? Lorne was no hero, and Milton didn't want his memory of him clouded with such rot, for he had now a grave and permanent respect for Lorne and he wanted to remember him the way he was, the way he last had seen him: standing there on the steep slope of the *Corinth's* bridge, just before her final dive; a red-faced, middle-aged man, a long way from home, his shoulders humped a little and his hands jammed deep in his bulging jacket pockets: A navy man, and a damned good one, too.

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon



The Man Who Couldn't Lose



By

FULTON GRANT

The third story in this series describes the amazing results of that strange Formula K-11, in applythe thePratte Theory to games of chance.

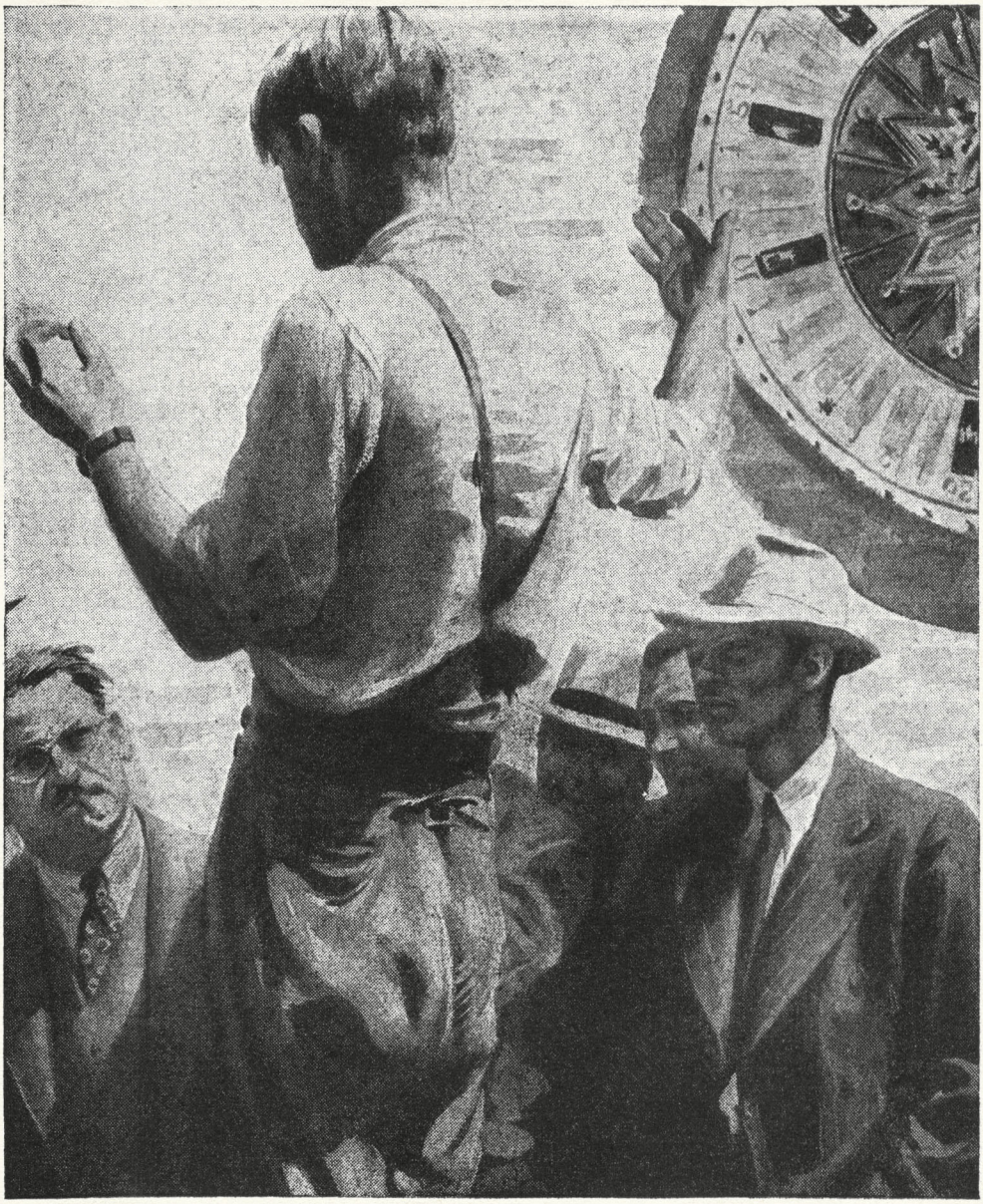
Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

THE morning of the seventh day of October had been a very trying one for Professor Claude Wilberton Pratte. A pain, first noticeable a few days earlier, was attacking his right side; and as the hours passed, it became a sheer agony.

This being the opening day of the new term at Firmingham City College, Prof. Pratte had three lectures in higher mathematics that morning and two more in the afternoon. The importance of this first day was such that he preferred not to risk the disapproval of the dean; otherwise he would have remained at home in bed awaiting his doctor. And so, fortified with aspirin and smelling-salts, he set out for classes and did his academic duty.

A bad morning became worse. Firmingham students did not love Professor Pratte. His courses were dry and his personality desiccated. They mimicked his groans and wheezes. They creaked their benches, shuffled their feet and behaved generally like the little ruffians he knew them to be.

But what wounded him most deeply, perhaps, and augmented his physical suffering with spiritual chagrin, was an incident which showed their complete lack of reverence for the thing which was most dear to his heart. They made a mockery



of his book and the profound theory it contained, and in so doing stabbed the poor man where he had no defenses.

For Professor Pratte's book, a document from which he quoted or read to his class upon the slightest—or without any—provocation, was the very quintessence of his thinking life. It dealt with the accepted theories of chance and probability. It held that the so-called "laws of chance" were misconceptions. It asserted that human thought had been misguided by an abracadabra of absurdities, and that given the proper education for a century or so, the human race might evolve a purely mathematical function of the mind by which an *instinct* would be created to calculate such chances, risks or probabilities as now we labor over—and almost invariably fail—by processes ponderous and inexact.

Said one facetious student:

"Gee, Professor, wouldn't it be swell if your theory could work out in real life! Think of how a feller could sit in a crap game or poker session and just rake 'em in!"

Crap game! Poker! What a debasement of a thesis to which he had devoted forty years of thinking! Pratte stood, inadequate and humiliated and suffering, unable to reply.

And then the noon-day bell rang and ended his morning of misery.

So great was his pain, now, and his depression, that he determined to brave the dean and go back home to bed. He staggered out of the Science Building, crossed the campus, took a trolley at the Willow Avenue corner and descended from it at the corner of Vreeman and Adam Bede, only a few doors from his lodging-house. It was there that catastrophe struck him, as he was mounting his own steps.

An inexpressible anguish in his middle paralyzed his lower body. Darkness smote his vision; he was conscious only of universal pain. He gave a cry. Then he collapsed swooning on his own doorsill.

THE Professor's cry was not heard in the street; but at that instant another tenant of his rooming-house came out the door and nearly stumbled over the prostrate man. This gentleman was something of a character in the house, and for reasons valid, notorious and even tragic:

His name was Medlow. Once he had been a doctor, but he had been discredited and deprived of his license when, years ago, he had been involved in a scandal.

A Russian, a German, a Hungarian, a Pole (could *Medlow* be a corruption of *Medlov* or *Medloff?),* Dr. Emil Medlow had lived in the poorer section of Firmingham and had devoted his early life to research in the then-little-understood field of the endocrine glands. His findings had been rejected by the medical authorities when he claimed to have found new and almost unbelievable processes for changing the human functions. His work as a practitioner, while limited almost entirely to charity patients, earned him a considerable reputation. As a surgeon, he showed a skill seldom if ever seen before. His cures were considered miraculous. But the medical profession would have none of Dr. Medlow. And when, in 1929, he performed a delicate operation upon a year-old infant (born a cretin) which resulted in the child's death, he had been convicted of homicide and condemned to prison.

Released from prison and living in semi-seclusion, Dr. Medlow had been followed by a most amazing legend: He was able, so the whisper ran (nor would he confirm or deny it) to make new human beings out of old ones, to control and to modify the mental and physical functions by means of some process secret to him, so that the weak would be strong, the timid audacious, the backward thinkers given a new and dynamic life. There were those in Firmingham who shuddered at the very name of Medlow and thought him a "monster-maker;" others thought of him as a pilloried saint who had suffered martyrdom for the benefit of humankind.

In the rooming-house at 41 Adam Bede, however, he now lived undisturbed. So kindly, so retreating, so self-effacing was his behavior, that none of his fellow-lodgers could find reason to fear or resent him. They saw him seldom. . . . This was the man who stumbled upon the swooning Professor Pratte.

He bent over the fallen man, felt his pulse, inspected him briefly, and dashed into the house for aid. The housekeeper, Mrs. Gath, and Medlow managed between them to carry the Professor to his room and to get him somehow into bed while a physician was called.

This young mediço, named Putley, arrived presently, diagnosed appendicitis, complicated with the rupture of the appendix, and decided it was necessary to operate then and there. This he did, aided by the housekeeper and the elderly Medlow, knowing that such cases are serious indeed unless caught in time.

When he was done, Dr. Putley shook his head ruefully.

"About a chance in a thousand," said he. "Surgical science even today has its limits. God knows, I've done what I could, but we'll need a miracle. Perhaps you'd better call the dean of the faculty, Mrs. Gath—"

When Putley had gone, the mild little Medlow was heard to mutter quietly:

"Surgical science today—limited. *Ach,* but that is so."

And he went out of his neighbor's room with a grumble of impatience.

WHEN Dr. Putley returned next day, he received a surprise. The incision was healing—revealed a healthy progress which normally could not have been reached in a week of the best care. The drain had slipped somehow from the wound and the bandages had somehow loosened and altered their form; the pulse, and temperature, however, were satisfactory. Save for one puzzling thing, that "miracle" for which Putley had prayed, had come to pass: The patient was still unconscious.

"Extraordinary!" said Putley. "Never saw the like of it. It's a wonder the man didn't die. And here he is, doing better than I'd expect, if it were no more

than a simple appendectomy. I must have some specialists look him over. . . . I don't understand this coma. . . . And we must risk no chance of that drain falling out again. He needs a competent nurse, day and night. Not that you haven't been excellent, Mrs. Gath—but a professional, experienced nurse, you know."

And when it was revealed that Professor Pratte might not easily be able to afford a professional nurse, it was the little Medlow who made the suggestion.

"I think," he said, "if I may be permitted, that I can arrange for that. There is a young woman attached to the Municipal Hospital—Gainsway is the name, Miss Phyllis Gainsway. A very able nurse. For me, I think she will come here like a personal friend. You will allow it, Doctor?"

There seemed no good reason to refuse such aid, and so Miss Gainsway was called on the telephone. Mrs. Gath herself made the call. At first the nurse said her time was taken and she could not come; but when the name of Medlow was mentioned, she said, surprised:

"Dr. Medlow? Very well. I shall be there immediately."

And so the nurse came. She was a young woman of evident culture and quiet, forceful charm. She took hold of matters at once. And when Putley put in his appearance in the morning, she impressed him as entirely competent.

BUT what impressed him still more was the new condition of his patient. For here was a miracle indeed:

Professor Pratte was all but well: The wound was healed, would leave barely a scar.

But the patient was still unconscious! The consulting physicians and surgeons who, at Putley's request, came to inspect the case, were amazed and incredulous. This was something new; the impossible was taking place.

Before the month was up, the Pratte case had become medical history. Medical journals wrote of it. The local association sponsored a special investigation to discover whether young Putley was perpetrating a hoax or whether this was a phenomenon never before recorded. The patient was doing as well as though he had never been touched with a scalpel, but he would not return to consciousness.

Mrs. Gath's place in Adam Bede Street became a Mecca to medical men. A group of the country's most eminent scientists projected a visit to Firmingham to witness this phenomenon.

But the dignitaries of the Academy never saw Professor Pratte for, on the twenty-eighth day of October, at his usual time in the morning, Professor Claude Wilberton Pratte awoke, found himself sound in wind and limb and alone in his room, dressed himself, shaved and made ready for his routine of classes. Then he stepped out of his door, left the house and—walked out on the whole show. He did not see, as he strode down the hallway, the bearded face of Dr. Medlow at his part-open door, watching him go. Nor did he see the pretty nurse, Miss Gainsway, beside the former convict nor hear the girl say to the old man:

"God help him, Doctor! I pray that you haven't made another—mistake. Oh, I hope it is not wrong—this time."

Nor the whispered reply:

"It cannot be. It must not be. But I have promised you, my good friend, that it shall go no further than you say."

NOW, only in a manner of speaking was it Professor Claude Wilberton Pratte who, on that late October morning, walked innocently out of his rooms and followed his customary route toward the Avenue bus station. The body was his. The look of him, the clothes, the expression and even the characteristic walk belonged to Professor Pratte. But in truth, it was a new man who, awaking from his coma, walked that brief distance. The body was old, but never had the irritable and desiccated Pratte known such a spirit as was now in him. It must be said of the Professor that he had not been a lovely man. Like many who are too weak to impose themselves upon the pattern of their own destiny, he had lived a life of constant alarms and grievances against a society which refused to recognize him for the great man he knew himself to be. He lived alone, friendless, poor and frustrated. He hated his very name—Claude Wilberton, forsooth. He hated the academic life.

But on this morning that had changed. He had almost forgotten his pains and ailments; he knew nothing of his weeks in bed, nor that he had become a living phenomenon sought out by famous doctors all over the land. He could remember only that damnable sophomore in class and the humiliation of his disrespect. And as he walked, a sudden and new firmness swept over him.

At the intersection of Vreeman and the Avenue, he stopped abruptly in careless disregard of the heavy avenue traffic which thundered down upon him. Stopping, he spoke aloud, to himself, to traffic, to the whole wide and unsympathetic world. He said, in terms which had never before crossed his lips:

"Ah, to hell with it!"

Whereupon he turned on his heel and walked down the Avenue. He would hold no classes in Mathematics A and B, that October morning.

FIRMINGHAM'S Willow Avenue is to that snug little city what the boulevards are to Paris, or the Strand to London. At so early an hour, it is not at its brightest; but at any time of day, it is a sight worth having seen. And to Claude Wilberton Pratte, the sometime mathematics professor, it was like the unfolding of a magic carpet of adventure.

Shop-window radios blared. Anxious job-holders urged themselves to jobs. Chattering shopgirls jostled the Professor. Gay little groups of wasters dressed for evening tumbled out of tarnished doors from establishments which, at night, were night-clubs. Taxicabs rattled. Vendors shouted; newsboys cried. The city lifted her head from the pillow of the Avenue and began life, with a yawn.

He had gone nearly a dozen blocks in the thrill of this new freedom when, at the somewhat notorious corner of Havens Street, Adventure began. At this corner is one of those establishments which offer ten-cent amusements. It contains pin-ball machines, ski-ball, slot-machine movies, a shooting-gallery and an infinity of other devices for spending time and petty cash. A barker stood at his post in front of a gigantic lottery-wheel, drumming up morning trade.

"Hiya, hiya, hiya, hiya," he bellowed. "Right this way, gents, step up and take it—" Then seeing the Professor's expression of interest: "Hiya, Mister, this is your day for luck. Right this way, Mister, spend a dime and take a dollar—get your lucky number. This is your lucky day, Mister, hiya, hiya, hiya—"

The word *"luck"* did the trick. It was the key to one of the Professor's more profound quarrels with society.

There is, he knew, no such thing as luck. All mathematics. Boils down to law of averages. Luck and probability, as commonly understood, were a popular legend. Mathematicians could use formulas, but people in general were hopelessly inadequate in the face of such jargon. Nobody (except Pratte) had ever thought of developing a mathematical *function* in the intelligence. Everyday decisions, common estimates of probability, could then be regulated by a process resembling pure instinct.

"Right this way, Mister—"

Centuries have fed upon this sort of poison. Ought to erase the word *luck* from the vocabularies. If people were only properly educated in the Pratte Theory, any person could estimate in advance his positive or negative occurrences, and the useless abracadabra of luck would be forgotten.

"Dime gets you a dollar's worth. Right this way, Mister—whaddya say? Here she goes, thirty-six chances, thirty-six little numbers! Take your pick—one is your lucky number—"

The man gave the wheel a spin. It clicked while tiny lights played around its rim, and tinny music sounded. And while it turned, the reincarnated intelligence within Professor Pratte was stricken with revulsion.

"Stop that thing!" he cried. "You should be ashamed of yourself. You are fostering fatalism and fable in the minds of ignorant people. Even an imbecile should know that luck is pure fantasy. I protest it; I cry out against it; in the name of future generations, I lift my voice—"

"Whassamatter, stringbean? You got a gripe? This here aint no crooked wheel, brother. I got a license to run this wheel. If you don't wanna play, you get to hell outa here and lemme alone."

"Stringbean!" Now the thing became more personal.

"I have no doubt," said Pratte, with high dignity, "that your wheel may be licensed. Quite beside the point. It is the whole *principle* which is involved. The very idea of luck as promulgated by such as you, fellow, is a poison to the public. Already mankind is sadly rooted in the belief that some legendary deity or fate must govern what is in reality the simple mathematical process of estimat-

At that instant another tenant came

ing the likelihood of favorable or unfavorable occurrences. Such devices as yours are contrived to keep the world in black ignorance; I resent it. I find it intolerable. In short, I repudiate it."

Surely this little guy was nuts. Such words as he used! And could anybody at all understand them, much less this barker?"

"Aw," he rejoined finally, "go peddle your papers, brother. I don't want no trouble. I got me a license from the cops for this wheel, and I gotta make a livin'. Lay off me, Mister."

A crowd of curious had already gathered and were taking sides vocally in the discussion, albeit understanding it little.

"Attaboy, Stringbean!"

"You tell him, Four-Eyes!"

"Hey, lay off Gussie. Gussie's okay."

"Don't let that punk get into yer hair, Gussie," another advised.

BUT one man who stood quite near to the Professor seemed to be of a slightly different frame of mind. He was flashily overdressed in a pearl-gray suit and cream-colored soft hat, and sported yellow chamois gloves with a cane of rhinoceros horn. His skin and flesh were soft and a shade too pink. His eyes were tired and sleepless but intensely alert.

"Maybe," he said, "the gent is smarter than us. Maybe he thinks this wheel is such a kiddie-toy he can pick a number when he wants to. How about it, Mister?

out of the door and nearly stumbled over the prostate Professor Pratte.

Wanna show us how it's done, since you say it's so simple?"

And the crowd shouted its approval.

"How about it, stringbean? Put up or shut up."

The great wheel itself had come to a stop while the argument had taken place, and the barker turned to spin it again. Professor Claude Wilberton Pratte's indignation had reached a zenith. Fools, these people. Must treat them as such. Children—give them an object-lesson!

And so he stepped angrily to the wheel. He saw that the indicator pointed to the pin at Number Sixteen; and seeing it, there occurred in the newfound intelligence of Professor Pratte that which, had he been asked to explain it, would have baffled himself as much as, in an instant, it was to astound bystanders.

For clearly, illuminatingly, two numbers exploded into being in his brain. It was not a *conscious* process. He merely knew.

"Very well," he said. "Spin that thing, and I shall demonstrate to you what mere child's play this is. Spin it, and you shall see that the number sixteen will repeat again, followed immediately by the number twenty-seven. I want these gentlemen to see how absurd is this hoax of luck and fortune and chance. Spin it, fellow."

The crowd cheered and jeered. The wheel spun, and the voices stopped abruptly when the indicator settled back on that same number sixteen. "I'll be damned!" said a voice, and that expressed the feelings of the others.

But the barker was a business man.

"This aint no charity game, Mister. Let's see yer dime. You got luck that time. Now ride your hunch."

Professor Pratte found a dime in his pocket and tossed it down. The wheel turned again. Uncannily the indicator, when it came to rest, pointed clearly at Number Twenty-seven.

Someone said: "Gee, he done it!"

Another said: "Gee, he called 'em!"

The wheel operator narrowed his eyes and asked:

"What kind of a gag you pullin' on me, brother? Say you win a dolly or a safety razor—take your pick. Take 'em and get to hell outa here. You aint good for business."

But the man in gray broke in:

"One minute, Mister." He laid his hand on the Professor's arm. "I've been hearin' what you said just now. You said, just now, any fool could pick numbers like that. What you mean by that, Mister? I'd like to know. What's the catch in that, brother?"

"There is," said Pratte indignantly, "no catch, as you call it. I said it, and I repeat it. With the proper kind of training, any person can acquire a judgment of a purely mathematical pattern. I assert that by the proper education, any simpleton can arrive at a point where the calculus of positive or negative occurrences becomes a matter of instinct. Now my theory holds that—"

"Hold on, Doc," said the man in gray. "That's all just ducky if you can understand the words, but it's over my head. What say you and I go off into a huddle so's you can put it simple? Maybe you and I could make a dollar or two."

The suggestion scandalized Pratte.

"I'm afraid you fail to understand the purpose of my—"

"The hell I do!" said the man. "Listen—you know who I am?"

The Professor did not.

"The name," said the overdressed gentleman, "is Nielen. Silk Nielen, that's me. I own this joint. I own a lotta these joints. I got a cut in most of the joints in this town. And when I see a guy which can call the right numbers out of a three-six dolly wheel, that guy is right up my alley, see? I can go for that guy. I can be real friendly with that guy. And it looks to me like you're that guy, Mister. What say you come back there into my office and lemme buy you a breakfast while you give me some of that education which you say would make any jackass so he could call his numbers? You don't look as if you was in the rocks, Mister. How come you don't clean up? Well, if you come along with me, Mister, I can put a whole lot of cash right in your way. You can ask anybody about Silk Nielen."

IT was not the name, of course, for the world in which Professor Pratte moved did not encompass the Silk Nielens of Firmingham, nor any gamblers, race-track touts and gentlemen of border-line business. More than anything else, it was the mention of breakfast, the sudden feeling of hunger which surged in him at the utterance of that prandial word. For had Professor Pratte been a man of the world (or even a man of ordinary awareness of what is commonly published in the newspapers), he would not have remained five minutes in the company of the celebrated gambler, Mr. Adelbert (Silk) Nielen.

But being no such worldly thing, he looked up with friendly appreciation.

"Why—I should be pleased to join you for a drop of coffee, Mr. Nielen; and if you care to listen to the Pratte Theory, it would give me—ah—pleasure!"

"Okay, Mister, let's go," said Silk Nielen, and then turned to the barker.

"Listen, Gussie: this never happened, see? Especially if those newspaper boys get wind of it and want a story. It just never happened at all. You wouldn't wanna make any mistakes, Gussie."

And Gussie said positively:

"Okay, boss. I catch on."

And then Mr. Silk Nielen led the Professor away.

SILK NIELEN'S office was a revelation to Professor Pratte. And so, moreover, was his experience there.

The place was filled with grotesquely ornate furniture and walled with what seemed to be several thousand photographs of horses, prize-fighters, ladies in very little, and framed checks or banknotes. A Negro servant brought breakfast on a tray. It was a good breakfast, and welcome. What was less welcome was the rest.

The rest came in the shape of three gentlemen whose faces, brows and general deportment told even the Professor, largely uninitiated in such matters, that they were members of the "undesirable class." They were big men, hard men, strong men. They smoked cigars; they wore silk shirts which they proceeded to reveal at once by removing coat and vest. Each carried, strapped under the left armpit, an instrument in a holster which even Professor Pratte recognized as an automatic pistol.

"Meet the boys," said Silk Nielen as the "boys" came in. "Get acquainted, brother, because you're going to see a whole lot of the boys for a while." And before either the Professor or the boys could find a response to that, he added, for the benefit of the new arrivals:

"Look him over, boys. Know what he is? He's a million dollars in gold. He's rat poison to Joe Pellucci. I tell you what the gentleman is, boys: he's God's little gift to Number 317. Believe it or not, he's the guy that has all the answers. He don't know how to lose. Look him over. He's gonna be with us for a spell, and I want you boys to see that nothing happens to him."

Then he told the story of the Professor's demonstration.

"Damnedest thing I ever saw," he said. "First he comes up and bawls out Gus Aichem like he was one of them Holy Harrys that goes around trying to stop our wheels and our little machine-games. Then he makes the crack that put me hep. It's kiddish, he says. It aint dignified. Any sap, he says, can call any number if he only learns how. So I tells him to show us how—and he did! Just like that—he pulls two numbers out of the air. Gus spins the wheel, and up comes those numbers. Now I ask you, boys, can we afford to let a guy like that run around loose? The answer is no, we can't. So I brought him in."

It was at this point that the Professor grew convinced of the undesirability of his new associates. He got up.

"Well—ah—sorry, gentlemen. This is very kind of you—very hospitable. Very kind indeed. But I—I must be going along now. Getting late—ah—must be going."

He made one little step toward the door when one of the "boys" (by name Ziggie) laid the flat of his hand against the Professor's chest and pushed him back with such good will that the little man collapsed into his chair like a punctured balloon.

"You aint," said Ziggie, "goin' no place, Doc. Didn't you just hear what the boss said? You're gonna stick around here a little."

"But I—" Indignation, however futile, began to surge in the Professor's blood. His face assumed that look of an outraged crawfish which, occasion demanding, he assumed in his classes. His indignation began and ended there, however, for Silk Nielen broke in on him bluntly:

"Don't," he said, "make no mistakes, friend. These boys don't fool. They play for keeps. Now you relax, friend, and keep your shirt on. You won't have no trouble if you keep quiet and pay attention to business. If you don't, it might be just too bad. See?"

The Professor could not miss the implied threat behind those words and the menacing face of Ziggie.

Deflated, he sat back in his chair and only asked:

"What—what is it you—desire of me? I have no money. I'm a poor man. I—"

"What you need, friend," said Silk Nielen, "is a manager. And right from now on you get one. The first thing you'll do is to show the boys some of your stuff." Then to one of the boys: "Mitzie, you got a pair of bones? *Honest* bones, I mean. Let's see them."

The man addressed felt in his pocket and produced a pair of ivory dice. Silk showed them to the Professor.

"Ever play with these babies?"

"Certainly not!" said the Professor.

"It aint," said Silk, "too late to begin. Look 'em over. They got number spots on them all around, from one to six. You toss them out—see? And you must toss 'em again so the same number you got the first comes up. Seven or eleven is lucky. If you toss it on the first roll, you win."

And he continued his explanation of the ancient game of craps.

It had already grown upon the Professor that he was a prisoner—nothing less—in the hands of ruthless, unprincipled if not criminal persons.

But they had unmindfully challenged him beyond his powers of endurance. They had said: "Seven—is lucky."

"Seven!" The word fairly exploded from his lips. *"Tripe!"* and *"Balderdash!"* he exclaimed.

"Let me tell you, gentlemen, that the number *seven* is associated with one of the greatest absurdities of all time. Of all fantasies concocted by human superstition and ignorance since the beginning of time, the ikon-worship of this numeral *seven* is the greatest. It is a falsity. It is a process of self-hypnosis. It's origin is with the Hebrew Kaballah. The misconception begins with the fable of the ten Sefiroth or spheres, of which the seventh is Triumph. In the Sefer ha-Zohar attributed to Moses de Leon, which is a purely esoteric and fictional conglomeration of lies—"

But Silk Nielen interrupted him.

"Easy, Doc, easy! Anybody can see you're plenty smart. You don't have to make us look like punks. And all we know is the American language, see? Now maybe all this seven-come-eleven business is the bunk—I wouldn't know. But I do know that in craps, it's lucky if you roll a seven on your first toss, see. That's good enough for me. And maybe you can call your shots with these ivories like you did with the wheel. That's what I wanna know, Doc. To hell with your penny lecture. Can you call 'em?"

SOME impulse prompted the Professor to say:

"Certainly. . . . But I refuse to be a party to any such ridiculous manifestation of the human love of black magic. I refuse to debase—"

He got no further. The man called Ziggie had heard that word *"refuse"* and he acted accordingly. He slapped the Professor across the face with the flat of his hand and sent him reeling into the breakfast dishes with a clatter and a din of broken crockery.

"You don't," he said, "refuse nothin', Doc. If you can call them dice, you call 'em. You heard the boss." And he made a gesture with his other hand whose meaning was terrifyingly clear.

Professor Pratte's personal chances—or occurrences?—were distinctly in the negative at this moment. He would be a fool indeed by any code, not to recognize that fact.

"Very well," he said, coming gingerly nearer the rough Ziggie. "I will try."

"Nine is my point, Doc," said Silk Nielen. "I just tossed a nine on the first roll. Do I make it?"

Just what intuition prompted the Professor to reply, he did not know. There was a sudden lucidity within him. Some process which he had often considered as a possibility but never with direct application to himself, took function in his mind. He felt suddenly sure of himself, suddenly aware of a new power. He said, very simply:

"No. It will be a four."

"Yeah? Watch this, Mister," said Silk—and rolled a four.

"I'll be damned!" muttered Mitzie.

"Me too," said another.

"Nuts, that's just lucky!" said Ziggie. "Roll 'em, Silk."

"It will be a seven," said the Professor, though he knew not whence the information came into his head. And promptly Silk Nielen rolled a seven.

Remarks became more appropriate if more profane. The experiment continued and was repeated. And miraculously, Professor Pratte called each sequence, named each recurrent number or warned that the point would succeed or fail. He demonstrated that he could estimate before the dice were thrown precisely what numbers would show uppermost. And his involuntary séance was greeted with shouts of excitement and wonder by his audience.

Mr. Silk Nielen was a practical fellow. He did not allow his awe and surprise to interfere with his plans.

"Okay, boys," he told his retinue after the Professor had called five successive returns of the legendary seven in advance. "I told you this guy is Lady Luck in disguise. Now we got to use him, and use him fast. Ziggie, take him down to 317 and keep him out of sight. Treat him

good. Give him anything he wants. Make him happy. But don't let him get loose. The suckers begin to come around eleven, and they stay until after one. I'll be down and I'll handle our lucky pal. If it works now, we'll clean up some real dough tonight. And maybe we'll fix Joe Pellucci's wagon for him. Are we in the velvet," he concluded, "or are we in the velvet?"

TWO items of more than usual interest appeared that afternoon in the three Firmingham papers. The first, noted below as given in the headlines of the *Daily Courier,* was the natural result of the Professor's sudden and perhaps ill-advised return to consciousness and his obedience to an urge.

COMA PATIENT VANISHES FROM SICKBED: PROF. PRATTE MAY BE AMNESIA VICTIM

The medical specialists who had come to investigate Dr. Putley's phenomenon, (said the stories in general) were annoyed and were already muttering darkly about hoaxes and falsehoods, to the discredit of the young practitioner.

In gist, the reports said that Pratte's absence was first discovered by the nurse, Miss Gainsway, who had left the room while the patient was quietly sleeping off his supposed coma, and had returned later to find him gone. She had telephoned Dr. Putley at once, and then had searched the premises on the chance that Pratte had not actually left. Her apparent laxity might, said the papers, deprive her of a nursing license.

The other item was carried in one paper only, tucked away on an inside page generally devoted to items called "human interest." Its caption read:

MAN OUTSMARTS WHEEL IN AVENUE GAME JOINT: CALLS WINNING NUMBERS BUT IGNORES PRIZES

The reporter, combing the city for just such human interest items, had paused at a street-corner to watch the idlers at their pin-ball machines. He had learned of the remarkable feat of a stranger who had foretold three winning numbers on the 36-number dolly wheel and then had gone away. The reporter had endeavored to confirm this fact from the wheel operator, Gus Aichem, but found that gentleman unwilling to talk about it. Other hangers-on, however, gave it confirmation enough to warrant a brief article. . . .

A famous if not notorious address, in Firmingham, is Number 317 Willow

The nurse, a young woman of evident charm, took hold of matters at once.

Street. Before the panic of 1929 a banking firm had erected the sumptuous marble building and had its offices there. But the bank had failed, and the building had declined in social position. It is now a night-club owned and operated by the holding company known as Social and Amusement Enterprises, Inc., which is, as nearly all Firmingham knows, a somewhat more respectable name for the person of Mr. Adelbert (Silk) Nielen.

Were 317 merely a night-club, this history would have little point, but it also catered to a set of socially elite gamblers and was a sort of local Monte Carlo. True, there existed at the time another place only slightly less notorious than 317, owned and operated by one Mr. Joe Pellucci. But although it had cut seriously into Silk's trade and although Mr. Pellucci was Silk's most hated enemy, "Joe's Golden Door" at Number 234, was golden only in name. Actually it lacked the luster and the glamour of the older, better-protected establishment.

The rumor, that Saturday night in Number 317, was the kind of thing that

stimulates business for the house. It was reported that an unidentified person, thought to be a stranger in town, had "cleaned up in a big way" at the crap-tables during the early afternoon session. Somewhat more than a rumor, in fact, for at least two eyewitnesses whose words could not be doubted told of the phenomenon. These were "Colonel" Aristide Kent, and rich Mrs. Annesley-Bickers, both insatiable gamblers at Silk Nielen's Number 317.

"Never saw anything like it," said Colonel Kent. "That chap simply couldn't lose. Didn't touch the dice himself, you know, but stuck to side-bets. And he hardly ever lost, all afternoon. He knew nearly every time a natural was coming up or when a man would make his point, and he usually guessed when to stay out, too. By Gad, suh, but he must have taken thousands—yessuh, thousands, and all house-money."

But no such phenomenon appeared at the crap-tables that evening. Instead it was the big roulette-wheel that was favored.

He came in trailing Silk's man Ziggie. He did not look the part of a gambler. He had a frightened look to him, an apologetic manner, a queer absent-mindedness about him. But he made gambling history that night.

He was introduced as plain Mr. Jones. He did not attract attention at first. He had no small-talk and had not been places. He seemed a complete tyro of the kind who exasperate both croupiers and players by their mistakes and endless chatter.

But when Silk Nielen himself came in and said, "This is my party, folks. Jonesie, here, is gonna show us all how it's done," a series of minor miracles began.

Nielen played on his own wheel. ("I gotta prove it's honest, aint I?") He was seen to whisper with Mr. Jones before placing his tokens. He began with the simple play of colors only. He placed a hundred dollars on red. And red won.

Then, on Mr. Jones' advice, Silk moved to the numbers. Still he won. His tokens began to run high. In half an hour Silk had amassed literally thousands of dollars in token money. He laughed like a schoolboy. He let his money double or pyramid, or shoved it about as this meek little man whispered to him. And before midnight Silk Nielen had won—from his own bank, naturally—over fifty thousand dollars!

The guests had profited too. Colonel Kent had won three thousand. Mrs. Annesley-Bickers had won five. Others, playing for lesser stakes, had won hundreds. And clearly it was all due to the "system" of this innocuous little Jones.

Then Silk stopped the play.

"Sorry, folks," he said. "I gotta close. If this keeps on, we bust the bank. I'm gonna make a proposition to friend Jonesie here, though. I'm gonna give him all these chips I won—they don't cost me nothing, you know. I'm gonna let him put the whole pile out on the table to win—on the numbers. None of your *carrés* and your hedging. And I'll take a thousand-dollar bet with anybody he doesn't lose a pile. Then I'm gonna toss you all a party. Here goes, folks. Who's gonna bet?"

They all bet. No fewer than seven thousand dollars was bet between them all and Silk Nielen. And then they crowded around the table while Mr. Jones placed that pile of chips.

He was not an inspiring sight. Mr. Jones seemed to be suffering from sleepiness. He did not exhibit the zest and joy usually associated with placing sure-winning bets upon the green of a roulette table. But he carefully stacked all of those silver tokens upon a single square, all carefully butted upon the one number, 27.

It was a shocking thing to those gambling folk. They knew of systems, owned systems, had read of systems. But this little Jones had the rashness—or foolhardiness—to put all his eggs into one basket. It was fantastic.

But 27 won, and all the dissenters lost their thousands to Silk Nielen.

THEN Silk made his proposal:

"This closes this joint for tonight, folks, but here's what I wanna do. When a feller's luck is hot like Jonesie's, he aint got no right to stop, see? So I'm gonna take Jonesie on a visit. A personally conducted visit, folks—right over to the Golden Door to see Mr. Joe Pellucci, where he can get some real action for his money. And if you folks wanna come, I'll buy the champagne."

There were raised eyebrows and exclamations of puzzled surprise. Was it not rumored that Joe Pellucci hated Silk Nielen (and vice versa) to such a point of ferocity that Silk had been forced to surround himself with a bodyguard?

It was, however, the Golden Door to which Silk Nielen took Mr. Jones. Fully

fifty per cent of the "house" at 317 followed Silk's sedan down to Number 234, keen on seeing the fun. The Golden Door's doorman turned rainbow colors at the sight of Joe Pellucci's sworn enemy entering. Grim-faced muscle-men, in response to the doorman's signal, came shouldering through the lobby. Tension was high. But Silk Nielen, exquisitely attired and attended only by a somewhat pathetic and rather mouselike gentleman who at sight was as harmless as a kitten, merely ignored these demonstrations and asked bluntly for Joe Pellucci.

"You boys can relax," he said. "This is just a friendly visit. I had a run on my bank earlier, and I closed down for the night. But I wouldn't wanna disappoint my folks and send 'em away home early, so I brought 'em all down here. In person. Tell Joe I'm here, boys, and tell him I brought him a lot of guests."

Joe Pellucci was neither a fool nor a coward. Not for one minute did he, on hearing this story, believe it. That he had taken fifty per cent of Silk Nielen's hitherto unchallenged and illicit dominion away from him in a single year, was a fact that he knew perfectly well. That Silk Nielen would gladly have eliminated him by fair means or foul, was as certain and clear to him as the fact that Silk Nielen was not a man suffering from a plethora of human altruism. And that if Nielen came to the Golden Door for any purpose, it was certain to be a bad purpose was to Joe Pellucci another absolute certainty. Nevertheless, Joe Pellucci came down from his little upstairs office, after carefully concealing two pistols and a small knife on his person, and greeted his rival.

"Whatsa gag, Silk?" was his greeting. "You lookin' for trouble?"

But Silk assumed an injured air.

"Is that any way to talk to a feller that brings you a couple dozen good customers, Joe? We been a couple suckers, you and me. This is the first time I been to your joint. Say, you got a nice joint, all right. . . . Hell, no, I don't want no trouble. I just come down to look-see and maybe watch some of my friends play your wheel a bit." And he introduced his crowd.

Play began innocently enough. Mrs. Annesley-Bickers was eager to try her latest "system" on the Golden Door's wheel, and immediately lost several hundred dollars. The little man named Jones who had crawled into an armchair and gone to sleep like a dormouse, was certainly innocuous, even if he was attended by evil-looking Ziggie Schultz, one of Silk's muscle-men. And when, after Mrs. Annesley-Bickers' debacle, Silk himself woke Mr. Jones up and urged him to come to the table for play, Joe found no reason to give it much thought.

Mr. Jones played, and won. True, his winnings were rather small at first, for he played only *pairs* or *impairs*, and took even money on a few hundred dollars. He was not impressive. He puttered and doddered, and behaved like a man awakened from sleep and unhappy about it—which, indeed, he was. But just after Colonel Kent won a few hundred and then lost it to the house, this Mr. Jones began to play more seriously. After a whispered conversation with Silk Nielen, he began to lay out his tokens with some care, and in such quantity that it cheered the heart of the croupier.

Mr. Jones was bewildering. He seemed to choose the most ridiculous numbers, piling his tokens in such a manner that he had no chance to protect his losses should his number come wrong, as was most likely in roulette. He ignored the band-play. He ignored the colors. He spurned the simpler play of odds and evens. He placed hundreds of dollars frankly upon a single number. . . .

And the number usually won.

MR. JONES merely shoved the bulk of his increasing pile from one square to another, allowing his winnings to accumulate and to increase in a weird progression as winning odds accumulated. His few hundreds became thousands: then his thousands totaled six figures. Silk Nielsen was soon to draw him aside into conversation again, whereupon the little man paused, passed to the cashier and received bills in exchange for his tokens.

Joe Pellucci protested, but his protest was aimed at Silk.

"What's eatin' you, Silk? You want to make me out a crook?"

"Hell, no," said Silk genially. "But the poor guy never played before. I like to see a beginner get the feel of his money. His luck can't last all night, hey?"

But Joe Pellucci walked away, his face clouded. This man Jones had taken nearly a hundred thousand dollars in cash.

"Faites vos jeux!" cried the croupier, and yet no money but Mr. Jones' came out on the table. *"Rien ne va plus!"* The croupier spun the wheel and held the little ball ready to toss into the whirling

saucer. No one else cared to break into this. But all watched, breathless.

Then it happened.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Jones suddenly, just as the ball was on the point of leaving the croupier's hand. "Stop! I withdraw."

And he scattered his tokens, which had been neatly piled on Number 32, broadcast over the table.

Then pandemonium broke out.

"*Mais, monsieur—*" began the croupier, then abandoned his artificial French for native and very American English. "You can't do this, Mister. . . . What kind of a joint do you think this is?"

Silk Nielen's eyes fairly popped.

"Why, the damn' little rat, he can't do this to me!"

And Joe Pellucci, just stepping back into the room as the sacrilege occurred, exploded into his own Sicilian dialect.

Unmoved by the general protests, Mr. Jones solemnly shook his head.

"I will not play. There is something wrong here—something wrong. . . . I don't know—occurrences have changed their pattern. . . . Don't care what happens, I won't do it."

Joe Pellucci had regained his professional manner.

"Now, what's the matter, Mr. Jones?" he said with an effort at being suave. "That isn't any way to do in this place. Are you trying to make a monkey out of us? In a game of roulette nobody can."

"I am very sorry," said Jones, standing firm. "There is something which I do not understand. As I placed these—these tokens on the table, I had estimated the pattern of probability and had calculated the occurrences of my numbers with considerable certainty. It was evident that Number 32 would appear. I played ac-

"Maybe this could be the reason why—" But he got no further.

cordingly. But now—I cannot explain it, but there has been a change. Thirty-two will not show. The number which will show is not clear. Just as the croupier touched the wheel, my pattern was broken. Now I—"

He turned to the others pleadingly:

"Oh, please, I don't want to play any more. Make them let me alone. Let me go home. I am so tired. I am not well. I do not want this money. I do not wish to play this childish game. Let me go home. I cannot continue this farce—"

And then, as though weakened by the effort of speaking, he swayed a little, clutched the table and let himself slide to the floor in a little huddle of frightened, exhausted resignation.

Silk Nielen acted then. He had been shocked at first, then annoyed at this performance; but when Mr. Jones referred to a change taking place as the croupier touched the table, Silk's eyes changed their expression. A smile that was not pleasant came over his face. And just as Mr. Jones slumped down, the gambler took a quick step to the table's edge, kicked the molding trim which binds the thick top of such affairs, and broke it loose with a splintering sound. And then, while all stared, he grabbed the broken molding with his hand, wrenched it and tore it from the mahogany, lifting it high. From it dangled two long thin green silk-bound wires.

"Have yourselves a good look, folks," he said grittingly. "Because maybe this could be the reason why Jonesie said this table didn't feel right—" He got no further.

There was a shot from somewhere in the rear. Silk Nielen's body jerked and spun half around, then folded upon itself, to sink to the floor.

Riot broke loose then. Ziggie Schultz shot from his pocket. Joe Pellucci, who had got his own hand on a gun but had not fired it, sprawled headlong. Women screamed. Feet scrambled over the floor in great haste. From the cashier's cage a man was running frantically. There were screams downstairs as he dived through the lower rooms. More shots were barking. Lights went out, the Golden Door became a place of bedlam, of frightened scurrying in the dark.

But Mr. Jones was not dead, nor yet unconscious. In the dark he crawled from under the table, found his way between running feet, arched himself to a standing position and ran madly without direction. Abruptly a wall stopped him. But the wall was cut by a French window which was partly opened. Mr. Jones darted through it, found himself upon a fire-escape and instinctively dropped down the ladder to the street, where he still ran breathlessly in the semi-dark of Willow Avenue.

HEADLINES in the morning papers next day read:

SOCIETY FLEES LOCAL MONTE CARLO
AS PISTOL BATTLE PANICS AVENUE:
GAMBLER NIELEN IN CITY HOSPITAL

Reports mentioned the bitter rivalry between Adelbert (Silk) Nielen and Joe (the Wop) Pellucci. They flayed the police and other officials, for their inability to shut such houses as Number 317 and the Golden Door. They claimed that the list of socially prominent patrons was the shield behind which Nielen and Pellucci operated in disregard of the law. To explain the shooting, they offered the theory that, due to the considerable trade which Joe had taken away from Nielen, the other gambler had finally chosen the violent way of eliminating competition, but something had misfired and he had himself been seriously wounded, while Pellucci escaped with a sear across his ribs.

But it was not an eyewitness story. The press had not, so to speak, been invited to the fracas. And beyond the simplest facts of a shooting, it was evident that the press knew nothing.

This lack of knowledge was making itself felt in the offices of the Firmingham *Record* that morning. Mr. J. Selzer Hurd, owner and publisher, was not satisfied with the story and was saying so to his managing editor.

"This Nielen ought to be run out of town," he vociferated. "He has been operating every kind of racket and illegal game in Firmingham, and nobody touches him. This paper stands for civil decency. And so long as we print a story in which a man like Nielen gets himself shot, it is our duty to run the thing down and find out why. Now our story is a tissue of guesses, assumptions and hearsay. I want facts, Bush. Send John Garland up here."

And he slammed the house-phone back onto its cradle.

Reporter John Garland came up presently. John enjoyed a rather enviable position with the *Record* staff. He was, if there be any such thing in these modern times, the "star" reporter.

"And so I want you to run down the angles of this shooting, John," Mr. Hurd told him. "It may be only a second-day story, but it's important to me. I intend to clean these gamblers out of Firmingham."

Garland did not reply for some minutes, but smoked his pipe in a contemplative manner. Mr. Hurd urged it upon him again:

"What's the matter, John? Don't you like the assignment? I should think you—"

"Sure, sure, chief, I like it all right. Only I was sort of thinking about another story this morning. It's sort of hard to shake out of it."

"What story?"

"Pratte, the missing math prof—you know, the gent who skipped out on the visiting medicos. That's been on my mind a little—"

Mr. Hurd nodded. "Yes," he agreed, "that is an interesting speculation, but scarcely as important to Firmingham as this gambling business."

"I know, only—well, I have a sort of angle."

"On Pratte?"

"Yes. We sort of know the nurse—it's the Gainsway gal, chief—the one who was Medlow's assistant, the one who was in on the Cavendies-Mason case. She's on the outside list at the hospital, and she took the case for Putley. I had an idea I might give her a buzz and see what she knows. . . . Poor kid, she's likely to lose her license, I hear."

"Your interest, asked Mr. Hurd with apt implication, "would not be sentimental, of course?"

Garland grinned.

"I'd be a sucker," he said, "to commit myself about that, wouldn't I, chief? And by the way, I can't quite go for the

general idea that Silk Nielen went to Pellucci's joint looking for trouble. Not his style. He'd have a smart one up his sleeve, before he'd risk his neck near Joe the Wop. Oh, well, we can't sit here and figure it out. . . . Be seeing you in the papers, chief."

Garland gave his chief a mock salute, walked out the door and sauntered down the hall.

But Mr. Hurd called him back.

"John! This call is for you—they put it through from downstairs. . . . She has a pleasant voice, John!"

Garland took the instrument.

"Hello? John Garland here." Then Mr. Hurd noted a change in his voice as he said:

"Why, hello there, sis. Where are you?"

Mr. Hurd could not avoid overhearing one side of this conversation. At the word "sis" he raised a brow. There had not been, he reflected, a "sisterly" quality in the voice of that woman on the telephone.

But Garland was saying:

"Say, that would be nice, sis, only—well, I'm afraid I can't make it. The big bad boss is sending me out on a story. No, darling, I can't possibly be at Honeywell's restaurant at seven. That was what you said, wasn't it? Honeywell's on the Avenue at seven? No can do. Sorry. You understand, though? Good gal, I was sure you would. Give me a rain-check, though. Another time—say tomorrow or day after. Well, good-by, darling. Care of yourself."

And with a grin at his employer, he made for the door, saying:

"Sorry to bother you with personal calls on your phone. Trouble with families, they think they have priority, eh? Well, so long, boss."

When the door had closed, Mr. Hurd stared at it for some time, reflectively.

"Odd," he murmured. "Very odd. Didn't know that boy had a sister. Could have sworn I knew that voice on the phone, too."

TERRIFIED still, Mr. Jones ran down the Avenue. So great was the wattage of electric fear inside him that he did not perceive that he was being followed from across the street by a running shadow.

The shadow had a name, which was Abe Guzeman. Abe had another name, which was "the Rat." And it was known by persons likely to know such things that Abe (the Rat) Guzeman was employed in Joe Pellucci's Golden Door as cashier in the roulette-room. It had been, in fact, this same Guzeman who, a short time earlier, had handed Mr. Jones a considerable bulk of green bills in exchange for the pile of tokens he had won. And it had been this same man who at the first sign of trouble had dashed from his cage and down the stairs.

Abe Guzeman shadowed Mr. Jones to the Vreeman corner, where he stood concealed in a doorway to watch him cross over to Adam Bede Street, stop at an old-fashioned brick house, open a door with a key and vanish inside. He stood there as though memorizing the look of the place, then departed. For Guzeman, the information as to where Mr. Jones might be living could be an olive branch with his employer. . . .

Meanwhile, Mr. Jones in the dark house felt his way to a staircase, mounted on tiptoes, crept down a hall to a locked door, which he unlocked and shut behind him. He paused and breathed deeply with relief for an instant before snapping on his lights. It was even as his finger pushed the button that the voice came from the darkness of the room:

"Ach, so! It is good that you have come back, Professor."

As the light went on, Mr. Jones froze solid. On his bed sat a little man who peered up at Mr. Jones through sharp, beady eyes and smiled.

"Here is since yesterday everybody looking for you, Professor," he said. "They lock this door and do not think to look here where you live. No. It is only me which is thinking you will soon come back here."

Jones was speechless. The intruder gestured toward a chair.

"You will not sit down, Professor? You are not yet strong from such a long time in bed."

The tone was mild and not frightening. The speech was without inflection. It had a foreign flavor. There was something faintly familiar about this man.

"But—what is it you want? Who are you?"

"Ach, I am forgetting. Since a long time I live across this hall, Professor. Many times I see you, but we do not make the acquaintance. I am Emil Medlow." He nodded, then resumed:

"And sometimes I am reading your book, Professor. I think it is something, this Pratte Theory. I think also by some education maybe you can make in the brain a new function from the mathe-

matic. But me too, I have the science a little, Professor. Some experiment I make, yes. And so I tell you it is not enough, the education only. There is the intellect, but there is also the endocrine. The brain she is good, but she is nothing without the glands. To make better the brain, it is also to make better the glands, I am thinking—to accelerate. And that is why I am making the experiment upon you a little."

"Eh? What's that you say? Experiment on *me!*"

"That is so. I forget you do not know, Professor. For weeks now you are not in the conscious. But now you are well. You can tell me what is it which in the brain takes place when the glands are made to work fast."

SOME rapid metamorphosis was taking place in Mr. Jones. The mention of the Pratte Theory, the familiarity of the ground, perhaps, brought it on. It was as though suddenly the entity which was Jones had ceased to be, and the quintessence of Pratte returned to its habitat.

But Jones was only gone, not quite forgotten. It was like a dream ending or just beginning. Pictures of a classroom, of humiliation at the hands of a student, of agony and his collapse on the doorstep. . . . Then Jones took form, but unwillingly, Jones hemmed in by unpleasant men. Crowds of people, green-felt-covered tables, lights and confusion and silver tokens. And like a contrapuntal throb all through it ran a pattern of chance and risk and luck and money. . . .

Thousands and thousands of dollars. Incredibly there but actually there. Then trouble, violence, shooting, terror, haste. And now this strange word *experiment* flung at him, and this talk about his own Pratte Theory.

He managed to say:

"I am unable—ah—to make any logical interpretation of what you are saying, sir. But you are an intruder in my rooms. You talk of my book, my theory. You give me a jargon of glands and experiments. It is a tissue of absurdities, sir. I demand an explanation. If you do not clarify your intrusion here, I shall be forced to—"

"So? But that is not the reaction of the accelerated brain, Professor. I see now you are returning to the normal again, no? And so if you are being so kind to listen, I will tell you what you do not any more know. You were sick, yes? You had pain? You remember?"

"Certainly. It was yesterday noon. I came home from classes to call a doctor. I—"

"But you are very sick when you get here. You are fainting. That is so, Professor, but it was not yesterday. It is now two weeks ago."

"Two weeks!"

"They are calling it the coma, Professor. You do not come again conscious. But it is not coma; it is something else. So I will tell you true what is happen', Professor, if you will sit down quiet."

Hopelessly confused, the professor fell into a chair, and little Medlow unfolded the very pattern of nightmare.

It began logically enough: the collapse, the doctor, the diagnosis of ruptured appendix, the frantic effort by operation to save a life. But with the account of the miraculous cure, the tale moved into dimensions unknown to our world.

"Long ago," said Medlow, "when I am a doctor, I am discovering what I call the *genoplasm*. It is a culture from the cellular tissue. It is able to mend the wound, to stop the infection, to make you well. The medical science, they do not listen to me then, but it is my genoplasm which make you not to die."

He had secretly augmented the surgeon's work with his own, he said—otherwise death would have been certain. He had also injected a drug which maintained the condition of coma until the patient should be strong enough to move. This, of course, was the factor which puzzled the medical men.

"And so it is then that I am tempted, Professor," he admitted. "Never in the life do I have such a subject for my experiment. The intellect is so strong, the physical nature is so weak. I must make trial of my formula for acceleration."

HE told of his process for speeding up the bodily functions by means of a chemical hormone which he had discovered. It had no name, save only that of its formula, K-11.

"I am thinking that it will contain the future of humanity, Professor," he said, growing passionate in his enthusiasm. "But it is not yet perfect, no. Sometimes I am experimenting when the subject is not in the balance, when there is the bad nature which I cannot control. But with you, Professor, it is the intellect pure. Never do I have such a chance. And when I am reading your book, also I am thinking that maybe with my formula it is possible to make that function in the

brain which is your theory, no? So I will make the experiment a little. A very little, which can be doing no harm at all."

The nurse, he said, had helped him. She was an old friend of his. It was not difficult, with her aid, to administer a small dose of his formula, the duration of whose action would be barely limited to twenty-four hours.

"And so now you are back again, Professor," he concluded. "What has happened? You will tell me, please, the result of the experience—the sensation. It is, then, true, that in your brain you can make this new faculty when the glands are made to work faster? Tell me, Professor. I listen—"

But when he looked, he saw to his regret, that Professor Claude Wilberton Pratte had fallen asleep in his chair.

MISS PHYLLIS GAINSWAY was in trouble, and she knew it. Any nurse might, on urgent occasion, leave the room of a patient who has been unconscious for a fortnight. Provided no accident occur, it is no crime.

But when the patient, already a medical phenomenon, has the bad grace to recover consciousness, rise from his bed, dress and vanish in the quarter-hour of the nurse's absence, the thing ceases to be a mere peccadillo. At the hospital she was on probation. If a satisfactory explanation of Professor Pratte's disappearance did not turn up soon, she would lose her nurse's license.

It was a bad situation. Nor did she deceive herself. For behind it all, of course, was Medlow. She had worshiped Medlow. She believed him to be honest, sincere, and perhaps the greatest scientist of the age. And so instead of pitying herself, her thoughts were full of the threat to Dr. Medlow, her idol.

"They'll never let up on him this time," she told herself. "It will be prison again. It will kill him. And it will end his work. They'll destroy him, if—"

The "if" implied disaster to her idol, if Professor Pratte did not show up again—if anything had happened to him. If, if, if! The "if" boiled down to the thing: Pratte must be found.

It seemed incredible that a man can walk out of his house in a small city like Firmingham and simply—vanish. Still, Pratte had done just this. . . He must be found. He must, he must!

She clutched at a straw of inspiration. A young man's face flashed into her recollection.

"That's it," she almost cried aloud. "John Garland! If anybody could find him, John Garland can. And besides, he knows all about Dr. Medlow. I can trust him."

And so she made her telephone call.

The city desk at the *Record* office told her Garland was in conference upstairs. She insisted. She said it was urgent. And finally the call was transferred.

Mr. Hurd's voice was even, matter-of-fact, dignified. She hoped he would not recognize her voice. Presently John Garland's own voice came through, however, and she almost shouted in her anxiety.

"John? Oh, I'm so glad. This is Phyllis Gainsway. I've got to see you. It's awfully important. I—"

But the reporter amazed her by cutting in abruptly.

"Why, hello there, sis—" and then the rest of it. He had not even listened to her.

"No, darling, I can't possibly be at Honeywell's restaurant at seven—" As if she had mentioned such a place!

She was angry. That wasn't like John Garland. If that was meant to be funny, it just wasn't. Of all fool— "You understand, though?"

There had been a queer little note in his voice as he said that. Maybe he *wanted* her to understand something. Maybe she wasn't being smart. Maybe he meant—Honeywell's at seven!

Honeywell's on the Avenue was not Phyllis Gainsway's kind of place. It was meant for rich slummers willing to pay a two-dollar cover-charge to have sawdust on the floor and other bits of atmosphere. Phyllis was neither rich nor a slummer. Neither was John Garland. Still—

"It must be that," she told herself.

Her watch said six-thirty-five now; by hurrying, she still could reach the restaurant by seven.

"AND that's how it was, Joe." Guzeman was talking in his whining voice. "Honest to God, that's how it was."

The irony of hearing Abe (the Rat) Guzeman pleading honesty in the name of God brought a hard grin to the lips of Joe Pellucci. Guzeman was a rat and Joe knew it. Any minute now, he would fix Guzeman forever, but he might as well listen to this line of double-talk.

"I only done it on account of you, Joe. I seen Nielen jerk them wires out, and I knew what was comin'. Hell was gonna bust loose. It was a natural for murder."

They laid the human bundle on the sidewalk. . . . Phyllis whispered: "It's Professor

Joe still grinned. It was hard to picture Abe the Rat doing anything—even running away—for somebody else's sake. Well, here was another natural like that, only Abe wouldn't know it.

"See what I mean, Joe? There was Shorty and Muggsy both there behind the screen with their guns out. There was Nielen and his big gorilla Ziggie Schultz. And there was all them people, Joe—witnesses, see? And they'd stick by Nielen, on account he's got the Indian sign on most of the high-hats in this town. It looks like a heluva bad spot from my cage, Joe. So I grabs a couple books and I lams out—"

"Yeah? What books?"

"I got the sucker-book—the register, see? I figure it aint smart to let the cops grab it when they come. So I took that and a couple more."

"What books?" Joe's eyes narrowed.

"Why—why, hell, Joe, I took that little black book you keep the New York account in. You see I knew—"

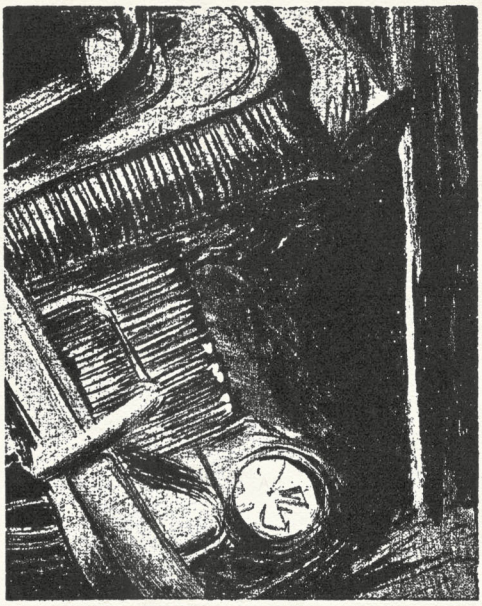
"You lousy little rat, if I—"

Guzeman writhed away. "Now don't get sore, Joe. I didn't do nothing. Sure I knew all about the New York end, Joe. I aint so dumb. I used to be in a bank, remember. I can figure two and two. But you don't have to get sore. I aint no squealer, Joe. And wait till you hear what I come back here to tell you."

The moment passed. Joe Pellucci's fingers on his knife relaxed. If there was something more—about the New York end—he had to listen to it. Things were pretty bad already. The cops had worked on him all day. The D.A. had worked on him for an hour. They were trying to implicate him in the shooting of Nielen. He didn't even know who shot Nielen. Maybe it was Muggsy; maybe it was Shorty. That's what he hired them for—if Nielen ever came to start trouble. But he, Joe Pellucci, hadn't seen who shot. He got wounded himself. His shoulder hurt, and his chest muscles were all torn by a bullet. He was in a bad temper. He was going to kill Guzeman anyhow, but he had to listen now. He had to find out how much he knew of the New York connections. That could be bad.

"Listen, Joe, I tell you what I seen: that little punk who was working a system on the wheel and near busted the bank: He was dropping out of the fire-ladder, see? So I follow him where he goes. I know where he is, Joe. And say, Joe, we gotta get that dough back again. We gotta, is all."

THIS was a new angle. That little punk named Jones had got off with big money. There was something queer about that. There was something queer about Nielen, too. He didn't come down there for nothing. But it wasn't like Nielen to raise hell when a feller starts to turn on the juice in the "influencer." All the houses work an influencer, now and then. Have to do it, to save the bank when a feller gets a streak like that Jones. When Nielen grabbed those wires, it didn't make any sense. It was out of



Pratte! How could he—"

character. A crook doesn't call a crook a crook.

But what was Guzeman chattering about? Did he want Joe to go out and stick up this little punk Jones? That was crazy. Sure it was big dough, but it's better to lose dough than to spend another stretch in St. Jude prison. Hell no, no stick-up—with a city full of cops dogging Joe Pellucci anyhow, on account of the shooting.

"But listen, Joe. I been trying to tell you. It was me that gave him that dough, remember? It was me, only I didn't give him real dough, see?"

"Yeah? Meaning what?"

"That was hot money I give him. Hot money out of the New York business."

"Why, you damn'—"

"Wait, Joe. Listen! I figure the punk is with Nielen. I don't get the connection, see? But if he's with Nielen, then he's bad news in your joint. So I figure I could plant that hot money on Nielen and his crowd, see? That would fix Nielen's wagon, because the G-men and the cops have got the numbers on all them bills. It would fix Nielen and save us nearly a hundred grand. It would be the same as pushing the dough, see? And safe, too, because once the cops had that on Nielen, he'd play hell making them believe he got it from you. The cops have been just looking to get Nielen offside!"

"So," rasped Pellucci, "what?"

"Well, how was I gonna know somebody would shoot Nielen like that? I didn't figure on that when I passed them bills. And so now we gotta get back that dough before that little punk gets to a bank."

Joe Pellucci deflated.

"Yeah," he said slowly. "Yeah, we gotta. That's right, Abe."

And Abe Guzeman knew that his immediate danger was over.

For Abe the Rat, alone of all the employees of Pellucci's enterprises, knew where Joe's capital came from. He knew, for instance, that Pellucci's interests in Firmingham were only a "front" for his major job. This job, he also knew, was that of a cautious, skillful "distributor" of stolen money sent to him by his New York "connection"—which was one of the country's most ably organized groups of criminals. In the vernacular, Joe was a "pusher." Counterfeit money on some occasions, and "hot" money on others, came to Joe, who could, by devices known to himself, allow the bills to dribble out in quantities small enough not to attract attention, and in locations where the numbers of bills taken in bank robberies and similar criminal operations would be slow to get identification.

And Abe knew one thing more: His knowledge of Joe's activities, bulwarked by this small service and the possession of Joe's record of New York transactions, would serve him as a new refinement of blackmail. Properly played, it might lead to his becoming a "trusted" lieutenant of Pellucci—sharing the "cut" from that lucrative New York business. Or (as he well knew) *else*.

But he had won his point and he knew it. Joe knew it too, and the knowledge showed in his altered manner.

"Yeah. Sure. Okay, Abe," he said, relaxing. "So you got ideas? Where you say this Jones punk lives? Think he'll have the dough on him? The banks was closed yesterday and today, and Nielen's in the hospital where he can't—"

Guzeman's fear was gone.

"Sure I got ideas, Joe. I figured all the angles. I seen this punk go into a joint on Adam Bede, see? I seen him use a key, so I figure he lives there. So I goes back there today to case the joint, see? Now I'll tell you how I figure—"

"JOHN?" said Phyllis Gainsway.

There she was by the table where Garland waited at Honeywell's. He had not seen her come in. She looked very attractive, too, in that cropped sheep's wool jacket and perky little hat. Pretty, and smart as a whip, that gal!

"Hello, Florence Nightingale," he greeted her, getting up. "Had an idea you'd figure out my double-talk and show up. Did you think I had gone crazy? Fact is, I didn't think it was any business of the boss' if I take a lady to dinner. Sit down and relax; you look frazzled."

"Frazzled" was not the word. Miss Gainsway looked full of tension and her manner confirmed her look. She ignored his tone and plunged into her worries at once.

"Oh, John, I— You've got to help. You must. I—"

"Well, well, damsel in distress? From what the papers said, you *are* in a jam, I thought. Spill, lady. I'm one gigantic ear."

She hadn't even listened to him. She was saying, in a nervous undertone:

"It's Professor Pratte, of course. If anything has happened to him—if we can't find him, it will be—awful."

"That bad? I had an idea that the story was a little twisted. Did you really walk out on your patient? Well, a pretty gal like you can always get another job, even if they won't let you nurse. Might find you a husband, even—"

"Please!" She was impatient of his manner, and terribly in earnest. "Please, it isn't me. I don't care so much about what happens to me. That's not important. But it's Dr. Medlow. They'll—"

That name brought Garland erect in his seat.

"Huh? Medlow! I didn't know he was in on this! You mean it's another one of *those* things! Like Cavendies? Like Aimée Tuck?"

The recollection of his former contacts with the extraordinary science of Emil Medlow came vividly back to Garland.

But Phyllis shook her head as they both thought of the circumstances under which they had first met—circumstances brought about by the unpredictable results of an experiment of this same Emil Medlow upon two noted citizens of Firmingham.

"No," she said. "Not that. . . . I'm sure it isn't like that. But Dr. Medlow did— Oh, please let me tell you."

THEY ordered dinner, and then Miss Gainsway told her story in a whisper.

"He really didn't have any idea of making an experiment with Professor Pratte," she said. "All he tried to do was to save his life—when he saw that the Professor would surely die otherwise. Hardly any regular doctor could have pulled him through under the conditions. He ought to have been in a hospital, and even then the chances would have been small—"

She told how Medlow had persuaded her to treat the Professor with his healing serum, and how he had introduced a drug which kept the man unconscious for days while the genoplasm was rebuilding the tissue of the wound. And she told how, little by little, this "temptation" had come to the scientist, how he had brooded over the possibility of perhaps realizing Pratte's own theory, of the rare chance of seeing his experiment applied to so special an intelligence as that of Professor Pratte.

"I begged him not to," she said. "I was afraid. It was wrong. I pleaded with him. We haven't any right to tamper with the lives of human beings like that. I reminded him of—of Mr. Mason and Mr. Cavendies and Miss Tuck. But he only half listened. It didn't really change him. And when he began to tell me how important it could be for the whole world if his formula really could change people into better, stronger men and women—how civilization would grow better and saner and wiser— Oh, I couldn't argue with him, John. He is so much wiser and stronger than I. And he is so sincere. I had to help him—when he promised me he'd only give the Professor a mild injection which wouldn't last more than a few hours. I gave in. I know I shouldn't have, but I did."

"Well, it's done now, Phyl. No use crying over spilled medicine. What's the rest of it?"

She told him the rest—how Professor Pratte had come out of his coma before they had expected it. How he had disappeared from his rooms early that morning before the household was astir.

She said earnestly:

"And he just went off into space. Nobody knows where nor how. All they know is that he walked out about the time he usually does, and went up Adam Bede Street toward the Avenue. A newsboy or a storekeeper or somebody saw him walking but thought nothing of it. And now—he could be dead—anything. And if he is, if anything is really wrong—well, you can see what it will be for Dr. Medlow."

"I have a pretty fair idea," admitted John. "But just what is this Pratte Theory? Things like that are a little out of my line. Must be something to it, though, if Medlow thought it worth taking a chance over. Can you explain it?"

She did, more or less. She made it clear that Pratte had written a book, and that the document pointed out how the so-called *instincts* possessed by humans of today are far in advance of the instincts possessed by humans of centuries ago.

"And so, as I understand it," she said, "He claimed that by education and familiarity people could acquire a *mathematical* instinct which would instinctively calculate all the common everyday things like risk and probability which are now left mostly to chance or done by heavy long-winded formulas. That seems to be the general idea. And Dr. Medlow thought that by accelerating the body functions he might speed up the Professor to where he would have some such faculty."

John considered the proposition. Then:

"New twist in the brain, eh? Well, it's not so crazy, at that. Some people are calculation-wizards—one look at a column of figures and they've got a total. This would be like that, only more—metaphysical. Well, I can't see much harm in it. Personally, I could use a little of it myself. It would help my bridge game a lot, I'd say. Then I might pick out a few sweepstakes winners before I took a crack at the bank in Monte Carlo—"

He stopped short there. Such fancies had brought a recollection of something into his mind.

"Say—that's funny. Didn't I see something like that in the papers the other day. . . . Just yesterday, wasn't it? *'Man Outsmarts Wheel'*—something about a bird who walked into one of those joints on the Avenue and—"

He recalled for her the headline and the little human-interest story concerning the man and the lottery-wheel.

"That was about the time Pratte must have gone off into space, too. You don't suppose—"

It was not a hunch; it was only a groping, a curious mental association: *If* such a thing could have happened to the brain of a man like Pratte, then he might have behaved in just such a manner at his first contact with some mechanical device governed by the mysterious laws of chance. And *if* he had, for instance, been the man who outguessed the dolly wheel—it brought a new angle to the story. For who owned practically all such devices in Firmingham? Mr. Adelbert (Silk) Nielen. And where was Silk Nielen right now? In the hospital, wounded—perhaps dying—as the result of a shooting which was thus far unexplained.

"I tell you what, Nightingale," he said. "When we finish this dinner, you and I are going to take a little walk down to see your Doctor Medlow. I'd like to ask him a few questions about this business."

AS though this wealth which lay so mysteriously within reach of his hand were haunting him with menace, Professor Pratte, awaking from the sleep of exhaustion later that day, hastened away from it, lest temptation overcome his resistance. But this time in the household on Adam Bede Street, the situation was changed. When he had left his rooms in the early morning the previous day, there had been none astir to see him. Now there were many.

As he slammed his door against the stalking ghost of temptation, he all but crashed bodily into a strange little gnome-like figure with a triangular beard who at that moment had stepped from a room down the hall. The manikin recoiled and exclaimed:

"*Ach,* Professor, you are again awake? And so now you will tell me—"

But the words fell upon ears unhearing. Professor Pratte hurried downstairs. He collided with Mrs. Gath, housekeeper, whose broom of perpetual motion was busy at the lower landing. She glared up at him; and then, as recognition came, she gasped:

"Why, Professor Pratte! For Heavens' sake, whatever—"

But he neither saw nor heard her. He dashed through the hall to the outer door. A group of men were smoking and talking as they awaited dinner. These were medical men from out of town who, having come to inspect Dr. Putley's phenomenal patient, had been disappointed at the news of his disappearance. And when this runner broke through them like a football player, they glared and growled in resentment. But one of them had overheard Mrs. Gath, and he cried:

"It's Pratte! It's the missing patient. Don't let him get away—"

But the escaping man was already in the street and lost in the dark.

Desperately, unheedingly, Professor Pratte ran—full of grim forebodings, full of awe and terror inspired by the sudden discovery of a vast fortune scattered about his room. He ran with confused purpose, with a frantic and vague idea of finding a policeman, of doing his civil

duty, of reporting this discovery which had shocked and upset him. He ran clutching a single bill in his fingers as though its contact with his hand were burning him.

But in the long block between Vreeman and Willow, darkened by a great scaffolding on the face of a building under repair, he had to pause for breath; his frail physique was not equal to such sustained exertion.

It was under the scaffolding that the thing happened:

In his frenzy and haste the Professor had not seen a figure which lurked in front of his rooming-house door and which followed him quickly and quietly up the street, keeping close to the coverage of the houses. He had not heard the soft tapping of feet behind him. He was not aware of any danger nor menace other than the unknown and unfathomable menace lurking in the possession of money which was not his own. And when, just behind him in the inky blackness, a voice spoke sharply, hoarsely, commandingly, he froze.

"Don't move, Doe," said the voice. "This is the works."

Something hard was shoved into the Professor's ribs. He was prodded in the back. He was forced into the deepest shadow of the scaffolding. He was driven relentlessly ahead, tripping awkwardly over a débris of lumber and stones. He was thrust into an unfinished doorway, that hard thing still prodding.

"Okay," said the voice, and then a light glared into his eyes and a hand flicked over him, expertly searching his pockets.

"What," said the voice, "did you do with all that dough, Doc?"

"Dough?" The vernacular was not a part of the Professor's vocabulary.

"You heard me. The dough—the coin, the jack, the money you got off with over at Pellucci's place. You aint got it on you? Where is it?"

Money! He knew that money would bring trouble, and now trouble had come.

"Why—gracious, I—" He trembled; his hand relaxed. That crumpled bill fell from his fingers to the ground and lay like a green wad in the glare of the flashlight. It made no sound, actually; but the faint click of it as the crisp paper struck a hard surface amplified itself to untold decibels of magnitude in his consciousness. The light wavered and shone on the bill. A hand reached out of the blackness and snatched it.

"Oh—yeah!" said a voice. And then something struck the Professor a violent blow on the back of his head. As he lost consciousness, his ears heard, distantly, the wailing of a siren.

DINNER finished, John Garland and Phyllis Gainsway left the restaurant and began to stroll in a downtown direction along Willow Avenue.

John Garland did not escape a certain twinge of conscience which kept him silent for a time. No acrobatics of reasoning would justify what he was doing —abandoning an important story in order to help a young woman. Nor would it do to say that after all Pratte was a story too, and a good one. Mr. Hurd was not interested in Pratte. What the *Record* wanted was the facts behind the shooting of the gambler.

But his silence was broken before they had got to the corner of Adam Bede Street, by the distant wailing of sirens—not one, but many. The city night was torn by their noise. They seemed to be coming from many directions at once.

"Now, I wonder what goes on," John said to his companion. "I haven't heard such a din in this burg since the Harlan fire. Hey, here comes a squad car hellbent!"

And indeed a patrol coupé roared past them and skidded on two wheels to make the corner at Adam Bede Street.

It was no fire; that was clear. The street was totally dark—a darkness that was further intensified by the wood scaffolding forming a tunnel-like walk over the side of the street, in front of the old Produce Building, which was undergoing a face-lifting.

Another patrol car was approaching from downtown, and a third from Vreeman Avenue, all of them seemingly converging upon the blacked-out block.

"Well," said John, "it's right on our way, anyhow. Stick around, Nightingale, and you might see how our bluecoat heroes behave when they've got a motor crash on their hands. Likely that's what it is, in that black hole of a street."

But it was no motor accident, as the next few seconds revealed.

A heavy car without lights suddenly shot from under the scaffolding and roared in second gear toward the Willow Avenue end. The first police car swerved sharply to avoid a crash, and as it did so streaks of flame shot from the darkened car like tiny tongues. There was a chattering noise. John knew that sound!

On impulse, he encircled the girl with his arm, dragged her to the sidewalk and flung himself beside her.

The police coupé skidded and went out of control, crashing violently into a workman's toolbox which had been set up just before the beginning of the Produce Building scaffolding.

The second police car, some fifty feet behind its companion, did not sheer off from the plunge of the other car, but its driver hurled it headlong into the dark car's path, twisting the wheel just in time to cause the coupé to meet the other car at an angle. The crash was terrific. Flung apart, both cars spun end for end. The police-car driver managed somehow to bring his machine under control and come to a stop before harm was done, but the unlighted car broadsided the sidewalk not twenty feet from Garland and the young woman. The wheels struck the curb and the momentum of the massive machine was so great that it sheered off, sending the car over onto its side, where it crashed into the glass front of a vegetable store with an indescribable sound of breakage.

Garland ran for the wrecked car. Behind him Miss Gainsway screamed. Heavy footsteps sounded almost beside him; a powerful hand seized his shoulder and flung him back reeling. A voice cried:

"Get back there, if you want to live."

And John found himself shouldered out into the street by a burly police officer.

Then he saw why.

Other patrol cars had joined the party. Men in uniform were running from them toward the wrecked machine, carrying ugly submachine-guns. One of them let go a burst of fire that spattered against the building stone just above the wreck. The men approached more carefully now, covering every approach to the car.

To the policeman who held him, John Garland said:

"What the hell goes on? I'm from the press. Want to see my card?"

But the officer gave no sign of listening. John felt the tense nervous hand of the girl on his arm. She whispered something, but he could not hear. Headlights from five police cars played on the wreck. The armed men stalked closer and closer. In a moment of comparative silence there came a tapping sound from the overturned car. Every gun was trained on the side, now uppermost, where a door was slowly lifting and a man's hand protruded.

When the head appeared, it had the effect of an eerie Jack-in-the-box, gargoylesque, gruesome, hideous. It was lean and harsh. Grime and dirt sharpened the contours of the face as the lights played on it. Then a voice croaked:

"Don't shoot—don't shoot, coppers. I aint Pellucci—I'm Abe Guzeman. I got Pellucci here inside. He's finished. Gimme a hand—gimme a hand outa here."

Two of the more advanced men ran to the car, and one of them wrenched the heavy door to relieve the pressure on the injured man. But hardly had one of the policemen laid a hand on Guzeman to drag him from his trap, when there came a muffled explosion from inside the car. The gargoyle face went white; the eyes bulged and stared. And then slowly, like a crumbling rock, the figure of Abe Guzeman collapsed inward and vanished.

Someone cursed. Someone said:

"Gee! He figured that one wrong. Pellucci wasn't finished yet."

And they swarmed over the car.

It took nearly thirty minutes before a dozen husky policemen were able, by prying and lifting in unison, to move the shattered car. They found Guzeman's body, shot through the back and shoulders from underneath, sprawling limp on top of the man whose chest had been crushed by the wheel when the crash came. But this man, still warm, gripped an automatic pistol in his hand. It was Joe Pellucci.

ONE of the policemen who had been probing the interior of the sedan cried out, suddenly:

"Hey, there's another man in this bus. Looks like he's alive. Give us a hand here!"

It took an acetylene torch to cut the car body away. They lifted out a human bundle, rolled in a blanket. When laid out upon the sidewalk, this proved to be a frail little man whose hands and arms had been bound behind him. There was a gag in his mouth. And when they had loosened his bonds and wiped the blood from his face, he managed to sit up, helped by one of the policemen.

A pathetic sight, and an odd one, he blinked at the light. He gaped and he gasped, and he wore an expression of utter terror. The bright searchlights made his face appear chalk-white, save for the blood which trickled down from a bad bruise in his head. He stared at the uniformed men with a strange fascination and in total confusion. He sat there,

running his slender fingers through his gray hair and shaking his head a little, as though it hurt and he would shake out the pain.

Phyllis Gainsway tightened her clasp of John Garland's arm.

"John," she whispered, "John—I know him. It's Professor Pratte! Good heavens! How could he—"

But the frail little man was trying to talk. His mouth worked, but no sound came. And then abruptly he collapsed into a policeman's arms.

"SO that's the way it is, chief," Garland was saying. "It's a story, and it isn't. I've spent two hours with the D. A., and what's more, I *saw* the thing happen. But beyond what I've given you, I don't get much, frankly."

"Obviously," said Mr. Hurd. His expression was mixed—partly quizzical, partly troubled, a little displeased. "And Miss Gainsway? You were Professor Pratte's nurse, were you not? Can you account for this apparent amnesia?"

"The doctor says it could easily follow shock. He must have been hurt in that car crash, and he had been hit on the head too."

"But the fact remains that a considerable fortune in stolen money was found in his rooms."

"That's true, sir. But he told the police about that himself. He seemed to remember that clearly enough. He said he was on his way to report finding it when something happened—he seems not to know just what."

"But he had been missing from his rooms for nearly two days, had he not?"

"So far as I know, yes. When he was found to be gone, I went back to the hospital. Nobody saw him come into the house, but several persons saw him run out—and that was just before the police raided Pellucci's car."

The editor frowned, then turned to Garland again:

"You say the D. A. had been told where to get Pellucci, John? Why couldn't he have arrested Pellucci at the Golden Door any time if he suspected him?"

"He might have, but he didn't suspect him. Matter of fact, he had Nielen in mind ever since he was informed from New York that somebody was slipping out hot money in this region. It was this Guzeman who tipped the D. A. off yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes. He offered to trade with him. Guzeman has been on parole for some time. He said he would not only turn Pellucci in, but he'd fix it so as the cops could take the wop when he had some of the money on him, if the D. A. would take him off parole. Apparently there was something to it, but it didn't work out quite that way."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that Guzeman is such a rat and a double-crosser that the D. A. didn't trust him. Looks as though Pellucci didn't, either, because Guzeman had been shot *twice*. He had been shot in the leg before the cops took Pellucci's car. That's a way of keeping somebody from getting away—a pretty little way some of these rough babies have. My guess is that Guzeman was playing both ends against the middle. He would turn Pellucci in only if he didn't see a way to grab something for himself. Joe caught him at it, but didn't understand it altogether until Guzeman stood up on one leg in that wrecked car and yelled for the cops. Then he shot him."

"And Pratte? I still don't see where Pratte comes in. Call him an amnesia victim if you want. It would be a queer kind of amnesia that would let a man forget taking close to a hundred thousand dollars and not know how nor where."

"It would. It is."

"And you have no idea what the explanation might be?"

John Garland looked at Phyllis Gainsway. Their eyes met.

"Not me, boss," he said.

"And the D. A.?"

"None. He seems to hold nothing against the Professor, though. I asked him if he didn't think it better not to go into all that, seeing how there isn't any likely explanation, and that it would be bad for the Professor when he gets well enough to teach again. He agreed."

"Mm-m-m. Any further ideas?"

"Just one."

"Which is?"

"I had an idea that you might consent to run a special little item in tomorrow's editions, chief."

"Yes? What?"

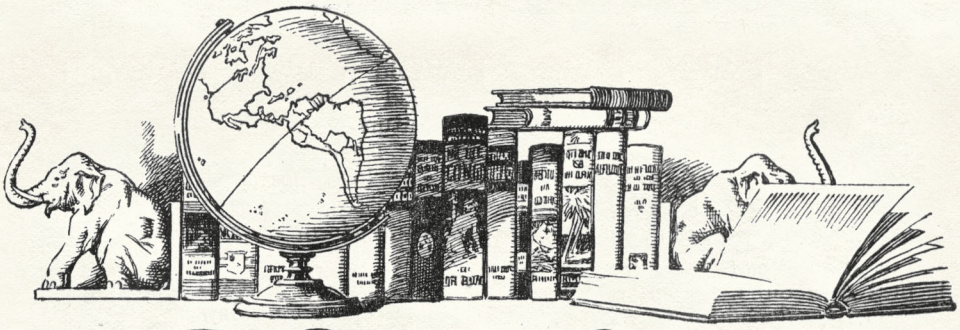
"The announcement of an engagement."

"Yours?" Mr. Hurd frowned at the two young people.

John's fingers touched Phyllis' hand. She did not remove it.

"That's right," he said.

Another story by Fulton Grant is scheduled for our forthcoming June issue.



High Lights Of the New Books

II—"Sons of Sinbad"

By ALAN VILLIERS

Heroic, villainous, and fantastic characters crowd the pages of this book. (Excerpts reprinted by permission of the publisher, Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y.)

THE ship was The Triumph of Righteousness, *a big deep-sea dhow from Kuwait, an almost pure survival from the Phœnician days, from the most ancient sailing known to man. She was bound on a trading voyage down the east coast of Africa to Zanzibar and back to the city-state from which she came. Her* nakhoda *was the youthful, hawk-nosed, keen-eyed son of the Eastern seas, Nejdi—whose full name was the Sheik Abdul-Krim bin Mishari al-Abdul-razzaq el-Nejdi—pilot of great dhows, pearl-master of the Persian Gulf. . . . His ship had put in at Aden on the age-old round of the argosies of Araby, and there Alan Villiers joined her.*

COLLECTION of the material for this book was not always easy. One cannot just go to Arabia, and expect to discover much about the Arabs and their dhows. Sailing in their ships is a hard life, and often a difficult one. The Arabs treated me well, and I owe them a debt of gratitude. I found myself wondering, sometimes, what it might be like for an Arab to ship out with us, in our ships, in order to gather material for a book about them. We should look on him rather dubiously, I fear; but I hope we should treat him well.

I wish I could have sailed three years with the Arabs, for it was all very interesting—three years with the Arabs, followed by two years on the book. But I sailed one year (and fortunate to have that) and the book, such as it is, has been done hurriedly in time out from war.

Ismael Saves a Child

ON the morning of the fifth day after leaving Shihr, the ship coasted close in by the base of the precipitous promontory of Ras Haifun. Nejdi was cutting the corner and we were very close indeed, for the conditions were excellent. The breeze was fresh and fair, from the northeast, and there was little sea. The current here sets toward the land and it is not a place to fool with, but Nejdi knew what he was doing. The promontory's eastern end is without dangers. We were cutting the corner not to save time, which never mattered in Nejdi's existence, but in order to be able to lie up for the anchorage at the town of Haifun immediately the ship drew off the southern tip of the promontory. It was a picturesque place with great yellow cliffs towering above the ship, which slipped along quiet-

ly in the blue sea. If we did not hug it closely, we should have to beat to reach the anchorage tucked behind it.

On board everything was much as usual except that it was a little quieter, and for the moment there was no serious row in progress. The half-Somali, the father of the shrew-faced bint and the little brat Abdulla, was asleep, and this automatically reduced the noise on board by half. Our group of half-Malays, or whatever they were, lay in the shadow of the mizzen taking their ease, in spite of the noise of forty-seven Beduin sitting round them, singing. Each Bedu had a hand over one ear as he sang, and I wondered why he did not have his hands over both ears, as I had, and wads of cotton wool thrust deep in them besides. Kaleel the carpenter banged and drilled at his new dhow, now and again calmly turning over a sleeping Beduin so that he might get at a fresh plank. Little Jassim the cook was drowning the livestock in a basket of rice with a bucket of water hauled up from the sea, while his assistants Abdul-wahhab and Mishari pounded corn for the unleavened bread. Other sailors, with Abdulla the nakhoda's brother, crouched like apes over a large basket of Iraqi dates. The dates were a congested sticky mess and looked as if they had been trodden into that basket by a camel some years before.

On the poop the Suri were seated in a group and Said was going through some haberdashery which he appeared to be making ready to land. Said was a smuggler, and he would soon be busy. Majid the big villain, in a long brown shirt, examined the haberdashery with interest and offered suggestions, in a very loud voice, as to the best manner of smuggling it, while Abdulla read to himself quietly from the Quran. Nejdi, who had been discussing subjects as diverse as the growth of Islam in Japan, the great days of science in Arabia, the property laws of the Hadhramaut, and the best way to make a passage in a dhow from Mandalay to Cutch in June, now was quiet, for the moment, puffing at his hookah. Ismael the musician, that ballad-whining reprobate with the guitar, had stowed away his music and was going through the contents of his chest, round which a group of Hadhramaut half-castes had gathered. He was trying to sell them some inferior ready-made Japanese coats, which they were scrutinizing but not buying. Yusuf Shirazi, his eyes, which had been paining him for a long time, half-covered in a visorfold of his white headcloth, was engaged in some mysterious occupation the nature of which I could not understand. I watched him with interest dimly conscious of the scene all around. Children scampered along the bulwarks, the little son of Aura leading them.

SUDDENLY I heard a splash. Nejdi started. . . . There was a child's scream. Some of the Beduin rushed to the side. "Child overboard!" they shouted, pointing. I leaped up. The child, a bawling bundle with his white gown streaming in the sea round him, was rapidly being left astern. Instantly, before I had time to collect my thoughts, there was another flash of white and one of brown. Two rescuers had leaped across the poop and were over the side before I could recognize them. In a few moments I saw that they were the musician Ismael, who went first, and Abdulla the Mysterious.

It was a brave deed. We were making about five knots, and there were sharks. The boy fell rapidly astern. We were perilously close in under the cliffs, and the wind, filling the huge lateen sail, was right behind us. The ship was not equipped for such an emergency. There were no lifebelts nor life-buoys, or any other kind of life-saving apparatus. The cutter was at the quarter-davits, fortunately, but it was securely lashed there. The ship herself was in a bad position. We were so near the cliffs—we could hear the breakers and watch the backwash gurgling at the cliff-base—that to throw the ship aback would be extremely dangerous, for there she would be in grave danger of driving on the rocks. To bring her up and let her shiver by the wind on the port tack, keeping the way off her, would be equally dangerous, for the set could easily put her ashore.

I wondered what Nejdi would do, for now he had to get back three people instead of one. I could not see a move open to him that would not gravely endanger the vessel. He showed himself, in those circumstances, an alert and skillful seaman. He knew what to do more quickly than I did. Without the least excitement, without as much as rising from his bench, he rapped out one curt order, so rapidly that I did not understand it. The sailors understood it. They had always worked splendidly, but in this emergency they worked like demons. In response to Nejdi's command they swung the huge mainyard midships. The quar-

termaster slammed the helm down, and Nejdi threw the ship across the wind, aback, so that her stern was seawards and her sternway carried her from the cliffs, instead of toward them. It was smartly done, though the situation of the vessel was still critical. We must have been within fifty yards of destruction. It was a question which would affect the vessel more—her sternway—which was not much, for half the sail was now useless —or the set. Her sternway took her from the cliffs. The set put her toward them. It was a fight between them, with Nejdi, compelled to wait for his sailors and somehow get them back aboard, unable to help. But he did not seem to doubt the result, nor did the sailors. They rushed immediately to the poop and began to clear the cutter. In the *Triumph,* as in all Arab vessels, nothing was ever quite ready for use. The Arab policy was to cope with emergencies when they arose, not to prepare against them beforehand. I had been inclined to scoff at this. Now I had a lesson. Those stout fellows were as splendid throughout this whole situation as any sailors on earth could have been, and they had that boat cleared and away into the water as rapidly as any smart liner might have been getting an emergency boat overboard, starting with the boat ready. They all worked: they all chanted; they all sang —even in this predicament, with the ship five minutes away from disaster, the child drowning, and their shipmates fighting for their lives in the shark-infested seas. No one was excited. No one, except the Beduin passengers, now yelled. The sailors worked magnificently, with Nejdi and Hamed bin Salim leading them. Ismael and Abdulla by this time were far astern, specks on the blue expanse of the African sea; but we could see that Ismael had the child, and Abdulla was helping him.

Now the cutter was down and away immediately it touched the water, with Abdulla Nejdi's brother at the tiller and old Yusuf Shirazi and the serang at the oars. They pulled lustily, though without excitement. The cutter was only 16 feet long. It was very small in the ocean, but there was no sea. The sharks were the danger—the sharks, and the rocks. The ship was slowly, but very obviously, being set in toward the cliffs, which now seemed to tower above her masts.

We saw the cutter reach the trio, struggling in the sea. They picked up the child. We saw them take all three aboard —the child, Ismael and Abdulla the Mysterious. Nejdi stood by the davits on the port side of the poop, watching everything, gauging the chances for his ship, cursing the Beduin child and all the Beduin, and all the other passengers; sometimes he signaled to the man at the wheel to give her a spoke this way or that. The cutter began to pull back toward the ship, coming very slowly though they were doing their best (the oars were short and bad). She seemed to come slowly because of the obvious danger in which the ship herself now lay. To make things worse, the Beduin, unable any longer to control their excitement, began to rush the poop in their anxiety to see all that went on. There was now nothing more to do than to get the cutter and its people safely aboard, but true to all the instincts of passengers the world over, the Beduin who had been helpless and useless before now clamored and scrambled and stormed and yelled.

"Get down off this infernal poop!" yelled Nejdi, in its Arabic version. (I assume that is what he yelled.) "Get down off this poop, you bunch of scum!"

ALL this time the sailors, who had been forward attending to the sail, were fighting to reach the poop again, but the intervening wedge of stampeding human beings prevented them. Abdulla bin Salim, the second serang, seeing that things might become desperate, ran hand over hand and foot after foot up the main halliards. Swarming from the masthead on to the yard, he ran out along the great

yard and swung himself by means of the long vang out and down again on to the poop, in this way coming in over the heads of the Beduin. This would have been a good piece of climbing even for a monkey, but his example was immediately followed by the others, one behind the other. Though this was a climb, and a feat excelling most of the ordinary performances offered by highly skilled acrobats, one and all accomplished it with a speed and seeming ease that was amazing. Down they swarmed on to the poop, hand over hand, forming a living wedge behind Nejdi. In a twinkling the situation was under control, and the Beduin began to retreat before the mariners down from the poop. The situation was so bizarre and events moved so rapidly that it seemed at the time like a kaleidoscopic dream. Looking at this scene with my own eyes my mind could only respond, This isn't happening: this *can't* be happening! The stampede of those Beduin made no sense, the rescue of the child made no sense, the bravery of the musician Ismael was of no apparent intelligence whatever, and (by me at any rate) utterly unexpected. I had so disliked his music that I had, I fear, also disliked him. After this piece of heroism, however, I tried to suffer his music, and I liked him a great deal. He was a good fellow, after all.

Now the cutter was alongside and the noise ceased, as suddenly and as completely as it had begun. With no excitement and no sound other than the chanting of the sailors, the boat was hauled aboard and the child taken up, and the ship fell off again, and upon her course. She had drifted within thirty yards of the backwash of the breakers at the cliff's edge. Ismael the musician and Abdulla the Mysterious were left to take care of themselves. Neither Nejdi nor Hamed nor any of the Beduin looked at them. Nejdi cuffed the child, who beyond the wetting and some fright was none the worse for the adventure, and told him that if he fell overboard again he would be left there. The child went forward, grinning, and Nedji, who was a fierce man when roused, and a hard man always, went back bright-eyed to his bench, his hawk nose high and sniffing. He did not look at the cliffs or speak to Ismael and Abdulla. He left Hamed bin Salim to superintend the resetting of the sail. The emergency was over, and that rush of the Beduin had been very undignified. Nejdi hated things to be undignified.

While we lay there [in the anchorage at Haifun] I had opportunity to visit the Persian baggala anchored near us, for the ban on my landing did not apply to visiting other vessels in the harbor. This was the same baggala which had sailed from Aden and Mukalla with us. She was called the *Hope of Compassion* (a name which, like our own, was sometimes changed), her nakhoda was a Persian named Sulieman Radhwan bin Said, exiled to Kuwait, her crew numbered thirty-three, and her capacity was 3000 packages of dates. She was a lovely vessel of about 200 tons.

THE *Hope of Compassion* had been a week at Haifun before we arrived, and Sulieman gave a feast for us the next day. I was at this feast. It consisted of the usual goat and rice, served under an awning on the poop. It was at least better than our fish, and the baggala was most interesting. She was the largest of the surviving baggalas, and in many ways the most picturesque. To sit on the bench abaft her wheel, high in the afterpart of the steeply rising poop, and to look from there along the picturesque romantic sweep of her ancient decks, from the worn planks of the poop to the curved horn at the low bow, never failed to stir me, and though we saw that baggala many times again and I was aboard her on countless occasions, I always left her with reluctance. She was beautiful from outside, and she was beautiful on board. Her windowed stern was especially lovely. Its elliptical area of ancient teak was covered with intricate patterns of excellent carving, and her curved bow swept up from the sea as gracefully as the breast of a swan. She was big, for an Arab. Her oiled teak hull sat prettily in the water with a grace and strength and sweetness of line that sang of sea-kindliness, despite all Nejdi's comments on the vulnerability of her stern. I wondered how, if her stern were so vulnerable, she had managed to survive so long, for she dated back to the slaving days. She was very old—more than half a century. Like so many Arab vessels, every line of her flowed and blended perfectly into a harmonious and lovely whole, though she had been put together on the beach at Sur by carpenters who could not understand the most elementary plan. She was built by eye, and she was built beautifully, though she was but a heap of indifferent teak poorly fastened with weak iron; and, here and there, an ill-butted

plank had warped, and all her fastenings wept with rust-stains from every pitted head, and caulking of poor cotton-stuff poked from her sides. Her quarter-galleries were latticed delicately, like the narrow windows of a harem court; her five stern windows were protected by iron bars, and a teak shutter swung from the central window richly carved in patterns of crescents and stars.

To step over her high bulwarks onto that spacious main deck was to slip back five centuries, for aboard as overside she was a craft of the Middle Ages. . . . She was much more ornate and elaborate than our new *Triumph;* and was obviously the product of a more leisured age. Wherever carving and embellishments could be added they had been, and the break of the poop was carved with a delicate tracery of patterns into which texts from the Quran had been worked. . . .

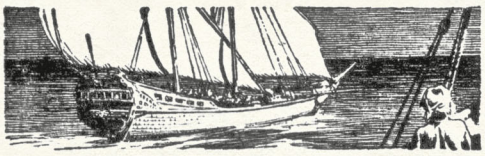
That poop and that whole ship put their arms round any sailorman who ever stepped aboard, and he had to love her, though she wept her caulking from her poor old planks and a fourth of all the sea over which she had ever sailed had leaked through her, and she reeked of fish-oil. Upon that poop I found my mind turn easily down channels that led to pirates and slaves and all those long-gone far-off things, and I could see again all the wondrous ships of my pre-maritime youth, when all the sea was wonderful and every ship an ark of grand adventure. How different had the reality been! Yet here, on board this ancient Arab dhow lying at that stifling anchorage, hundreds of miles from anywhere upon that forlorn coast, it was easy to dream again of the sea there never was, knowing so well the sea there is. Pirates and slaves, doubloons and gold, song and merriment, women and rum. The strange thing was that they had all been there—the pirates, the slaves (Swahili from Zanzibar and Mozambique), the pretty dancing girls and the traveling harem, the little slave virgins for the merchants of Sur and Oman and whoever else could buy them: and the song of Ismael and all his kind. In place of rum there was arrack from the Tigris dates, though Sulieman, a bigoted man, touched nothing of this kind. Aye, aye, pirates and slaves: both had walked here. For that matter, both walked there now. Down on the maindeck, after the meal, lately freed slaves chanted and danced merrily, and on the poop Sulieman Said was by way of being something of a pirate himself.

Mysterious things happened on board that baggala. She was half-empty when we came in and I wondered where her cargo had been landed, for it was not sold in Haifun. It was sold somewhere in Somaliland. That at least was certain. In the nights, when there was no moon, I often noticed Somali dugouts and sewn boats moving silently over the harbor, making toward the place where Sulieman's big vessel lay. They went out deep-laden and they returned empty. What were they bringing out so mysteriously? None came to us. Their paddles never chanted. They slipped by silently, unlit, furtive. After five nights of watching I began to wonder what was going on. What were they taking off so furtively to the baggala? I racked my brains and thought of many things, from skins to ivory. The ancient trade round those parts in skins of leopards and of lions is now regulated and under government control; besides, it would have taken several thousand slaughtered beasts to fill all those boats with skins. But what were their cargoes? Ivory? That was still good stuff to smuggle—dangerous, though. I would put nothing beyond any Arab or any Persian, wandering Africa way in a dhow. Whatever trade, legal or otherwise, might bring some rupees to his deep pockets he would try.

Night after night the canoes and the sewn boats continued to flit by. Yusuf said they were fishermen. The others pretended not to see them. Sulieman himself was often aboard our boom, usually coming in the mornings, very early, and going ashore with Nejdi.

One night the canoes stopped coming. The baggala was deep in the water then, and the sailors were bending her big lateen main. Yusuf said she was to sail in the morning, bound directly for Zanzibar. But in the morning something had very obviously gone wrong. The baggala did not sail. Instead, a boat full of Italian and Somali police came out and arrested Sulieman Said.

EVEN then I could learn nothing from my taciturn shipmates, who were, however, not so uninterested that they did not rush about and in five minutes effectively hide all the haberdashery and other trade goods which, after the first casual customs inspection, had been openly left in the chests and tied up in bundles all about the poop. Yusuf Shirazi disappeared hurriedly down the hatch of the great cabin. What he was doing down



there I did not know, but I heard a great deal of yelling and shoving. I found out later that he was arranging the women on their mats, very carefully, so that they hid the tiny hatch leading to the secret chamber deep below, right in the bottom of the ship. What was in the chamber I did not know, but I could guess. Part of it was probably wads of Italian paper lire.

All these efforts were, however, unnecessary, for the Italians did not bother us. We saw them pull by in their boat, with Sulieman Said looking very sorry for himself, seated in the stern sheets between two large Somalis. After the Italians had gone, Nejdi rushed ashore, taking all his henchmen with him. . . .

But what was all this about? What had Sulieman been caught doing? I took my binoculars and kept them fixed on the baggala all day, determined to solve the mystery. I could find out nothing from my shipmates. Grins, shrugs, cheerful expressions of profound belief in the mercies of the All-Highest—this was all they granted me. It was useless to ask questions. So I watched, hour after hour, and before the day was out I learned that the Italians had discovered aboard the baggala a hold full of stolen salt, taken from the beach under their very eyes—two hundred tons of it. The unromantic nature of the cargo was somewhat made up for by the audaciousness of its theft—two hundred tons. My first feeling was one of regret that Sulieman had not sailed with it, for to purloin all that salt was a fine gesture of contempt. The last canoe-load, apparently, and his own anxiety to be gone, had proved his undoing. He had gone along the beach by night to see that last boatload go, and he finished with the business. A customs officer chancing to be down upon the beach to take the air (or more probably with an eye upon some shapely Somali wench) saw the nakhoda, and followed him. After that, discovery was simple. The Somali were caught redhanded, and Sulieman with them. He blustered, but it was no use. Worse still, he was caught with the lire on him with which he was to pay for his cargo, and he had not got those lire from an Italian bank, as the regulations require. They were smuggled lire, bought illegally in the "black" market at Aden. It looked as though Sulieman would come badly out of this business, for the Italians are even stricter about currency smuggling than the stealing of salt. The situation was rather bad.

We were not left very long in doubt about Sulieman's sad fate. I thought it might have been sadder. His lire were confiscated, the salt was taken back to the beach (this took three days of hard work, in five or six boats) and the baggala was fined one thousand rupees. This was stiff, for a thousand rupees is a large sum in the East. Sulieman had borrowed most of the lire from our ship, from whom I did not know. These were gone, and he had not a thousand rupees. In this emergency, an emissary was sent from the shore to appeal for our help. I was interested to see the instant response of all on board. Nejdi himself, Hamed bin Salim, Abdulla Nejdi's brother, Said, Majid, and the others, the quartermasters, the serang, Kaleel the carpenter, even Jassim the cook, all went at once to their chests on the poop and, diving into their inmost recesses, brought forth all the rupees they had. Some had only two, others four or five. Hamed bin Salim had about 400, but these included some belonging to the ship. All were made available, and within twenty minutes we had over 600 rupees collected, thrown carelessly on to a headcloth by the capstan. I made up the balance, for they appealed to me as one of their shipmates. Then off went the emissary, looking relieved but still worried to get Sulieman out of the jail. It was a bad jail, he said, and I can well believe it. I never saw it. Sulieman was freed that night and he sailed next morning. He went out from Haifun a sadder but no wiser man. What he proposed to do next to recoup his fortunes I did not know, but there would be something.

On to Zanzibar

THE supervision of Arab dhows was far-reaching and at least nominally effective. No one bothered the dhows much, so long as they stayed in their own anchorage and did not smuggle too flagrantly. As for the certificates of competency, though these were undoubtedly a step in the right direction, and the Arabs were proud of them when gained—they were accustomed to frame them and

stow them carefully away in their chests —passing the examination was not unduly difficult.

One day I was with the port officer, a pleasant young Scot who had been a ship's officer in steam, when one of the Arab nakhodas presented himself for examination.

The examination of Abdul-razzaq was perfunctory and very soon over. If masters' licenses could be handed out like that in Zanzibar I felt inclined to sit for one myself, for it was about time I had one. So I sat, and passed too, and was duly certified by the Sultan's government as fit to act as nakhoda of deep-sea dhows. The fee for this service was fifteen shillings.

In celebration of this event I decided to take Nejdi to the cinema.

In the early evening I met Nejdi and we went to the cinema, an Indian establishment not far from the *sug*. We took a rickshaw which hurried precariously through the narrow streets, with a Negro panting in the shafts and another pushing behind. Nejdi was in a pessimistic mood, and confided to me that things were not good in Zanzibar. Soon, he said, he would be pulling a rickshaw himself. There was no price for the salt, and the merchants had no money. The Suri would not pay for services performed, and he could not sell the small dhow. Nejdi was full of woes.

It was an unfortunate mood in which to take Nejdi to the cinema. It was also an unfortunate film. It was an American production, typical of Hollywood—a competent piece of showmanship, so far as it went, but uninspired. Usually I should have attached no importance to it, and indeed I should have found it dull, but, seen through Nejdi's clear eyes, it assumed a significance that was almost frightening. Before we got out of that cinema I began to wonder very seriously whether, after all, a great many of my Arab friend's views were not nearer right than some of my own. The film dealt with a New York stenographer and her efforts to escape, at least temporarily, from the monotony of her life and her work by spending a holiday in a vacation camp — a noisy, commercialized, completely vulgar and largely insane place which, apparently, was patronized mainly by large numbers of oversexed and repressed young women, and a few inane men.

If the film was intended to be a satire on these places it was without mercy upon them; but I do not think it was meant as a satire. . . . It was intended to make profits, and nothing else. Nejdi read into it a very great deal indeed, and insisted on regarding it as a damning indictment of the white race. He thought it incredibly foolish. If he had had his way, the heroine would have been covered in black and kept within the four walls of a harem. She did not conform to any Arab standards of beauty in women, for she had neither breasts nor buttocks worth mentioning, and her bearing was deplorable. She was like a limp rod. She had moreover a very large mouth, somewhat loose, and this was woman's greatest sin in Nejdi's eyes. With a large mouth no woman could be good, according to him. Why the amorous adventures of this uninspiring young woman, tame and commonplace as they were, should have been made into a motion picture he could not understand. Not that he looked upon it as a motion picture: to him it was a piece of European life. The crazinesses, the hollow shams, the inane futilities that paraded through that Hollywood production jarred upon him and disgusted him, until he got up, at the fourth clinch, and we went out.

I was glad, for the evening was not successful.

HE asked me again and again when we were outside, what did it all mean? The behavior of the curious persons who thronged that American vacation camp was utterly beyond his comprehension, and my description of them as New York Beduin failed to satisfy him, though he thought very little of Bedu. The standard of intelligence of those persons ought to have caused their confinement. How, he asked, could sane people live that way? At the first opportunity the heroine was in the hero's arms. There was nothing wrong in that, at any rate from the man's point of view, according to Nejdi. . . . But why film it? Why picture such things as part of our lives? As for the girl, well at her age perhaps poor Miss Stenographer had to offer herself rather freely, as she obviously did. But why had she not been married? asked Nejdi. She had been tolerably pretty, once. Properly fed, she might have developed a normal appearance, though her mouth would always be against her. But had she no father? What about her family? She should have been taken care of, and married when young.

The picture of life which was given in that film was both sick and sickening. With Nejdi beside me making caustic comments and asking awkward questions, the real significance came home to me. It was more than a poor show: it was a damaging mirror held up to us all. And it was a very poor commentary to be shown there to an audience of Indians and Arabs, most of them were as bewildered as Nejdi.

Our visit to the cinema was not a success. Nejdi never forgot it, and its destructive picture of ourselves. Throughout the rest of the voyage, and months afterwards when we were in Kuwait, he kept referring to it and preaching to me on the iniquitous stupidity of European life, which he saw in that film.

I left Nejdi at the gateway of the house where he was staying, and went back on board. The anchorage was quiet and the stars were mirrored in the black water: there was no moon. Ashore in the distance somewhere I could hear the Swahili singing, and once there came a low sound of song from a Persian longboat pulling back to a Kungk boom. When that died away I heard the ring of laughter from a house ashore. I came on board to find all quiet, and peaceful, and the ghostlike apparition of Yusuf Shirazi rose to meet me at the gangway head. I looked about me at the silent anchorage and above at the raked masts of the boom, silhouetted softly against the stars, and I thought how satisfying it was to be there, a wanderer with those vagrants of the sea—satisfying, vaguely adventurous, pleasingly picturesque, a man's life in a man's world, which is hard to find anywhere in these days.

WAS it not possible that these seafarers from Araby knew more of living than we did, for all our boasted superiority? Certainly they seemed to know a great deal more about contentment, and the acceptance of each day for its own worth and the pleasure of its own living. They were not forever wanting to be somewhere else, doing something else. They had no desire to be much wealthier than they were, to acquire vast possessions. They had not to be forever turning on radios lest their minds should think, to accept the thoughts handed out to them ready made by the morning's press, to fight and to crowd and to carry on the heartless, meaningless, pitiless enmity of city life. No! They lived, and were sufficient unto themselves.

Killing

The author of "Mississippi Magic" here gives us a quaint picture of the West that was sort of wild.

THE gentle quiet of a Tuesday evening in Dryhide was broken by an unusually prolonged howling of coyotes away out yonder. Hoback Yancey, playing poker with Jum Scuney and three riders who hadn't asked any questions nor talked personalities, looked up from a nice hand that included three queens, cocking his ears, listening. Then one of the strangers demanded tartly:

"You hear something?"

"Coyotes!" answered Hoback,—a trapper going to the railroad to ship his winter take of pelts,—looking toward the door.

"Huh!" The questioner pushed down his black hat with the flat of his palm, disgusted: *"Coyotes!"*

Hoback started to say something, but decided to play out his three queens instead of interrupting the proceedings with fruitless conversation. He pulled down a nice jackpot he had opened, con-

to Music

By RAYMOND SPEARS

sequently; and this $109 and some odd cents indicated one of the reasons why, long ago, a bright man said speech is silver, silence is golden.

Chips and cash were coming Hoback's way. He knew both sides of a card as well as plenty more about coyotes than he ever told strangers who thought coyotes were low-down, mean and ornery.

Several hands later the stranger whose curiosity Hoback had satisfied with a word, tipped up his ear, listening. He glanced at the two men who had ridden into Dryhide with him at sunset.

They were casual-looking men. The one with a black hat was a lean-faced man, tall and slender and wore two dark mahogany holsters on his two-row cartridge belt. One pal was burly, stocky, rounded, a man with a chubby chin and reddish bristle whiskers. The other was a skinny little fellow, no heavier than a jockey, with snarly red hair and a rasping voice.

The two watched their companion obviously. They wore one gun each, and the jockey had a lump at the back of his neck —a knife-handle, the sheath making a ridge down his backbone.

Bad *hombres!* They had money, though; and Jum Scuney, who ran the Dry Whistle saloon with gambling-game accommodations, was helping them pass the time. Hoback, the trapper, was doing better than Scuney in getting good hands and playing them scrumptious.

Hoback heard what the three were cocking their ears to identify, but he would be damned if he would show it.

Music! The tune was "Listen to the Mockingbird." Somebody with good lungs and a good French blow-harp was riding, coming, coming right along, and of course the coyotes were moving too, keeping the melody company.

COYOTES and blow-harp music! In the valley with its wide bottom and plenty of knolls for coyotes to climb up and howl from, Deep Pass was a great natural auditorium with fine acoustics.

Coyotes and blow-harp music! Vocal and instrumental orchestral chorus in a vast opera house in the high country came ballyhooing in the starlit dark, welkin-ringing in the wind.

The cedars and quite a patch of lodgepole pines had been cut out both ways and up from Dryhide for firewood and some building. The site of the settlement was a big, bubbling outpouring of blue-water from under the foot of precipices of colorful stone. Deep Pass was the valley's name, and plenty of cows and horses were herded back and forth along the trail. A weekly stage, prospectors driving burros, cowboys looking for new places to hang their hats, and men like these three strangers who rode like cowmen but were plenty different from honest working-men, used the thoroughfare.

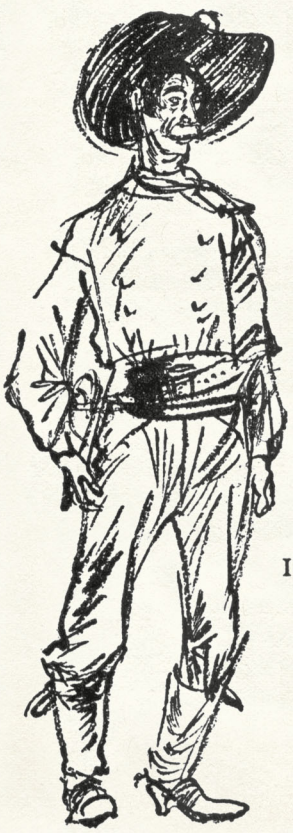
Every once in a while small bands of angry, hard-faced men raced up to Dryhide on business, ranch outfits just naturally looking for livestock illegally possessed, or posses looking for outlaws. Dryhide never knew what to expect.

Hearing that music, changing now to "The Blue Danube," the three strangers lost track of the game, in a way, which is never a good practice in playing poker. They glanced quickly and covertly from one to another, the whites of their eyes glistening; and the leader flashed a smile that showed his white teeth glistening— a grin without mirth.

For a minute the game lapsed in the strange atmosphere of gripping dance melody, while the blow-harping David jogged shacking by, his horse's hoofs plumping in the sandy dust of mid-roadway, the steel shoes clinking now and then against a pebble as the rider went on along the Dryhide street, not stopping —going out of hearing. The stable was over on yon side, too far away to tell whether the rider stopped or kept right on going over the range and into the broken-mountain wilds beyond.

The three strangers were playing abstracted poker now. Unable to concentrate, they missed the fine points. Hoback and Jum worked without any extraneous ideas or compunctions bothering them. The result was they whipsawed those men something merciless.

Naturally, coyotes are pretty low down in human estimation unless a man is modest, intellectual and appreciative, having a background of unbiased experience. Also French-harp music is away down toward the bottom of music, even according to country fiddling, banjo-picking, ornery tintinnabulations. Jum and Hoback saw that the three strangers were plumb disgusted, first by the coyotes and then by the French harp. The combination was so deep in their contempt that they were exasperated, disconcerted and fairly overlooked the usual relationship between or among two or three aces.



Illustrated by Lyle Justis

The coyotes were filling the valley narrows with their ululating emotions, curiosity and jeers. Blow-harp music does that to coyotes, wolves and dogs. Possibly the tunes got on their nerves, but more likely they loved the thrills the vibrant poetics of sound sent along their backbones, as indicated by the guard hair on neck and back standing straight up, mouths open and jaws pointed straight up in echoing sorry minstrelsy.

Hoback had to laugh behind his poker-mask. . . .

The coyotes of course took chances coming that close in on the boundaries of Dryhide, risking bullets for whatever they were getting out of those familiar old-time tunes, dancing, marching, singing, mourning, rejoicing, or whatsoever the moods. Coyotes usually keep their distance except in the small hours of night when they snuffle doubtfully around the boarding-house middens out on the wood-and-tote roads.

Suddenly the blue-shirted fellow jumped to his feet impatiently, throwing down his cards, growling to his pals.

"Damn those coyotes!" he snarled. "They'd drive a feller loco!"

"Sure smart!" Hoback grinned, pulling his cash into his pockets and shoving his chips over to Jum Scuney to cash in his several high stacks in assorted colors. The trapper looked at the yellow and paper money that the colorful wafers brought him, surprised. Really he hadn't been able to keep track, adding up and subtracting down, anywhere near accurately. He'd plenty more than doubled his estimate of his winter's take in fur and hide, and that meant a nice wad in his raw horsehide envelope belt. Scuney hadn't won a quarter as much, but he was smiling complacently, without envy, for he'd taken his share of whack from the three strangers.

Now the strangers slammed over to the bar unsociably, where Winks hesitated before setting up for them. These strangers are often notional in their tastes, pretending to know one liquor from another. Sure 'nough, they wanted brandy, applejack preferred, and the jockey demanding Louisiana blackstrap rum. Hastily the three gulped their stuff, threw down ivory to pay for it, cashed in their scant leavings over the bar and moved out the

barroom toward the back door into the alley instead of going into the street at the front.

Jum and Winks looked at Hoback, who being a trapper was an authority on coyotes and other varmints.

"A coyote has his own howling-knob or ridge," Hoback answered the voiceless inquiry. "He trades the day's news with a Miss or Mrs. Coyote, jeering his rival dogs, likely, soon's he's fed his supper. I don't get this French-harper drawin' 'em up here into the Pass. Seems like he mout 'a' stopped long enough for a drink some'res; he went right on through, instead!"

Now a combination of Little David blowing, and coyotes moving and ganged up around Dryhide howling their fool heads off, had stopped Dryhide, poker, pool, drinking, dancing—everybody dead anxious, poised, interrupted, bothered, wondering and feeling silly, paying so much attention to what didn't amount to a cowboy's whoop or a bronco's snort!

Hoback, bounding up the street, wearing moccasins and making no sound, seen out of the corner of an eye, was like a queer opaque ghost.

MAYBE two minutes, maybe thirty seconds, maybe five minutes of intense doubts and expectancies passed—nobody noticed just how long the time! Men stood, ears cocked, eyes flitting, those outside goose-pimpling in that high altitude, bothered and vacillating.

Then battering through the quieting of the confusion and wind hummings came the slam-banging of shots, 45's, 38-40's, revolvers with long barrels exploding. And every listener jumped.

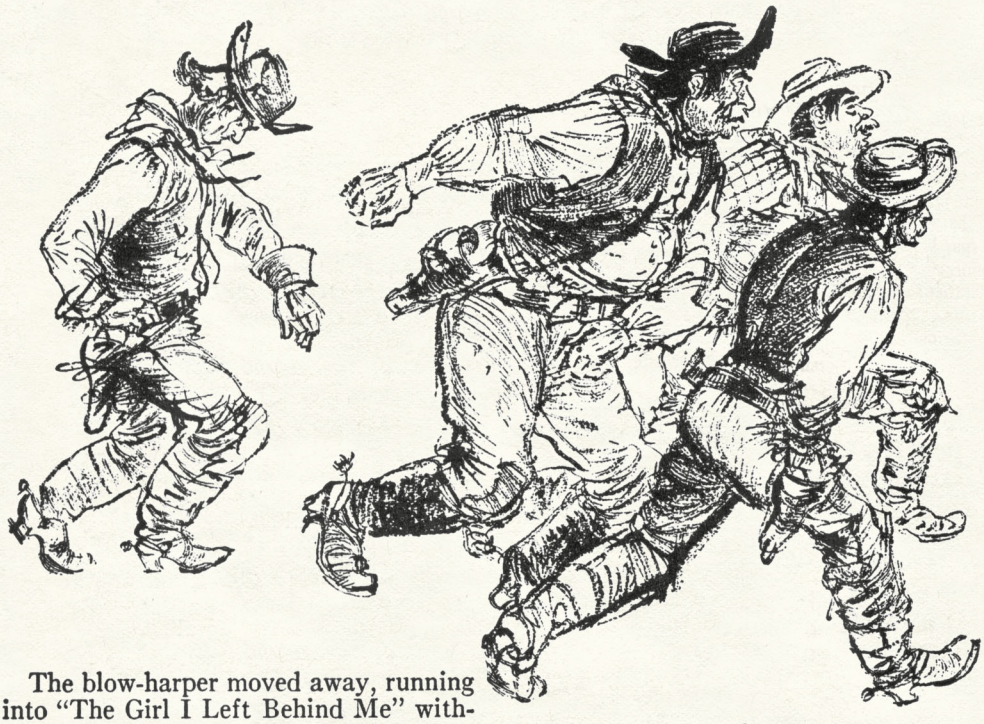
The impacts of sound smacked along the alley from over toward the stable corral, whanged reverberating from the flat back walls of the low buildings out against the stone precipices, flung across to the opposite cliffs on the yon side, and then rolled and echoed from face to face, multiplying into booming thunders.

The shooting lasted till the distant echoes returned in the wind, two or three dozen shots. Twice in the uproar a man's scream pierced the powder blasting.

Then as suddenly as the shooting began, all the interrupting sounds ceased as the coyote howling and yapping had done at the first shot. And the listeners, nevertheless, were aware that before, during and after, the French-harp music had continued, clarion-clear, never missing a note, a measure, losing the beat. In fact, listeners whispered in their breathless excitement that the shooting had been to the rhythm of the old jig-time tune "The Irishman's Shanty!"

The music blew loud and long in the wind. It just fairly held the listeners struck numb, wondering. Generally when shooting dies down and quiet ensues, following one of these way-town skirmishes, everybody runs to the scene, anxious to get there first and see who got what, how come and where. But not this time.

None moved. The old shanty folk-tune ran into "Round Town Gals," holding them all, springing as it did with the driving wind through the Pass and whimpering among the buildings, along the alleys, rasping on tingling nerves.



The blow-harper moved away, running into "The Girl I Left Behind Me" without a break, hoofs of horses clattering, steel shoes hitting stones, picking up speed, running away music and departure waning. The coyotes perked up, annoyed and vexed, giving a yip here and a whimper there, dubiously, just as though their sorry griefs and harmonizing had been interrupted impolitely by the shooting.

A shot in the night silences the coyotes for miles around, perhaps for all the rest of the dark; but a fusillade stirs their pack mockery and indignation. Moreover the music of the Blow-harp David made them cast yips of inquiry into the driving gale, working by the town, slithering shadows with now and then a blinking gleam of eyes out in the dark, following on beyond, far away down the slope and into the north, like changeling were-wolves foregathering about their furious scandalizing and black magic.

City Marshal Fonda of Dryhide recovered first. When he started on a stiff-legged, hoppety-jump, others began to limber up and run too, and cutting between the buildings into the alley, they found the three strangers who had played poker with Scuney and Hoback sprawled behind the corral on the gravel. They were as dead as horse-heads in a boneyard.

"Well, by Gawd!" a voice rose in baffled curiosity. "Who'n hell killed them fellers?"

The coroner settled the question of what killed them. He found that each victim had been shot plumb center and killed by one bullet. The heavy fabrics of high-grade, long-staple woolen of their shirts had stopped the lead slugs after they went in the front and out the back. The bullet that went through the little fellow like a jockey, had nicked his spine as well as his breastbone. Everyone recognized the bullets. All three were 38-40's, soft lead and mushroomed, upset by bones on their way through.

The holsters of the victims were empty. All four of their revolvers had been shot, but there were five loaded shells in the weapons whose owners had failed to let those bullets go.

The spectators spread out and looked around, lanterns being brought from the stable and some of the Dryhide establishments, looking at the wash gravel and corral poles and surrounding scattering of boulders and stumps. Sure enough, they found places where bullets had made fresh splinterings in wood, splashed against stone and lifted gouges in the gravel. Two 45's were found, one dropped down at a boulder and the other dug out of a lodgepole paling with a knife. It seemed to all the experts that three men shooting eighteen shots ought to have done at least some damage; but except right where the strangers were lying, obviously shedding their own blood, they couldn't find a drop anywhere.

"They must of been terribly excited!" Scuney shook his head.

"They sure wa'n't aiming right when they pulled!" Hoback added.

"I kinda figure we'd better get that Little David blow-harper!" the coroner declared, standing up and jerking his head officially.

"Mebby he was witnessing." City Marshal Fonda added: "He couldn't been in on the shoot. You gotta have one hand a-holt a blow-harp. I heard that shooting—two 38-40's went off to onct. I know that!"

"Me too!" voices chimed in. "After them twin whacks," a lone voice added, "the ruckus shootin' sure died down, quick. He started slow, but he didn't waste no shells!"

Thus Dryhide unanimously agreed that the French blow-harper, owing to the exigencies of his instrumentalization, couldn't have had any personal infliction as regards the difficulty. All with good hearing had noticed in particular that there wasn't a break in the jigging music. Of course, the shooting had banged to the beat and measure of the tune. It stood to reason the passer-by was innocent. Musicians are queer dicks. Whole orchestras have been known to keep right on with a piece even when a dance breaks up with the men whaling or shooting away while the women shriek and yell their heads off.

Accordingly the Dryhiders began to glance around suspiciously at one another, and come to think, anyhow, whoever heard of a French blow-harp musician being any good shooting, fighting, or anything much else, for that matter?

Somebody handling 38-40's there on the outskirt of Dryhide had knocked down three men, first one and then two at a whack. The killer had taken advantage of the musical and coyote serenade confusions, getting away with it!

A SEARCH of the three bodies showed they'd had some money left after their poker session with Scuney and Hoback. They hadn't been robbed, all having paper and metal money in their pockets. Two had rawhide envelope belts, with a few miscellaneous pieces of paper money in them. The killing looked like a grudge massacre rather than professional mix-up. The livery-stable hostler added right smart to the available information.

According to Buckles, the three men had tied their horses on rope lines in the grass below the springs on the beaver dam flat, where they could graze. They paid Buckles for carrying out six quarts of grain for each mount. Then they had sauntered back along the street to Woe Sing's restaurant, where they ate. Then Scuney added that they had returned to the Whistle, where they had drinks and inquired their ways into the poker game with Hoback and himself.

"If you follow an old coyote's track when he's looking for a place to lie down, snoozing in the daytime," Hoback Yancey remarked thoughtfully, "he generally goes around a knoll or maybe circles back among the trees in a patch of wood so't he can watch his backtrack two or three hundred yards out around behind where he makes his bed."

"Shu-u—doggone!" City Marshal Fonda exploded. "I've noticed some fellers always goes back to the first place they come to in town. Why, Hoback, that's an idee!"

"These three fellers come in an' went out the alley doorway, too!" Scuney perked up, surprised. "You know, Hoback, that's a reg'lar fur-trapper trick!"

"You get trick idees, tracking coyotes," Hoback gave a slight shrug.

"Where's them horses?" somebody demanded, waking up.

"That's so!" other voices chimed in. "They're gone—I heard them rattlin' their hocks right afteh the shootin'!"

Hardly anyone slept that night in Dryhide, they were so busy licking the calf over and over again. Toward morning Hoback Yancey went to the stable

where he and Buckles packed three bales of pelts and hides on each of two mountain pack-ponies, and Hoback saddled his half-breed Kentuck-Texas Arabian and shacked on southward on his way to ship.

He was gone more than a week. Going, selling and coming, his luck stayed with him. Not only did his high-line fur-trapping return good winter money, but his long nights shuffling, dealing, riffling, working cards in the solitude of his main and outlying cabins paid good wages, counting the hours. Whiskers wasn't all the trimming he did, by any means.

Dryhide had laid the three strangers up on the cedar grove where their other dead were buried. The coroner kept the records and what little property each man had left. At the head of each neat mound of shingle and small cobbles was placed a boulder with the date of the demise deeply chiseled by a hard-rock miner. Belts, revolvers, watches, gauntlets, all the things that might serve for identification sometime or other were bundled up, numbered, all according to the sympathy, hospitality and integrity of Dryhide. It was surprising how often some passer-by, hearing about the Unknown Dead up there in the mountain cedar grove, would catch a significant remark, arousing his memories, and—and come to find out, right there he'd find some pal, relative, bad friend he was wondering about. So over or under dates on the headstones, names and details would be chiseled in. And like enough, away yonder presently tears would fill some woman's eyes—deeply moved, mourning, yet the way women are, grateful, too, knowing just where their dead lie. Dryhide didn't say much about it, but they had the feeling that there were lots worse places to come to the end of a man's trail than there in Deep Pass, between the high walls.

City Marshal Fonda, who was also a deputy sheriff, rode out with three men, adding up a little mileage, trying to track the horses. The bottom of the Pass was all pocked up, and when they rode along the Little Hogback fifteen miles north, they couldn't be sure whether the horses of the dead men or that of the French-harper had come that way. Gravel tracking is hard to do. Anyhow, they had a nice ride and thirty miles at five cents per paid for the wear and tear.

When Hoback Yancey stopped overnight, excepting for the inquest and obsequies there was nothing new to add to what he already knew. No passer-by brought word of meeting either the mouth-harpist or the three horses. Perhaps this was significant, perhaps not. Side trails forked into back country where prospectors sought mines, hunters meat and outlaws for rendezvous.

"I expect mebby yo'd better keep your eyes peeled, Hoback!" said Fonda.

"Oh, I'll keep a-looking!" the trapper assured him.

"Knockin' down three thataway is sure spooky!" Fonda shook his head. "Not many pass up a chance to get a reputation that warranted. We got good ones, but none that modest!"

"The 38-40's aint common belt-guns!" Hoback remarked.

"Another point is we had only one that size in town that night!" Fonda shook his head. "Dan Dustin's. We was eatin' pie together in the Chinaman's when the rumpus begun. He had his'n on—a seven-inch barrel!"

All Dryhide fumed and fussed, trying to eliminate somebody among themselves who had busted down three men, and not bragged nor explained it. That way it looked as if it was inhospitality, malice aforethought and criminality. Confidential killings black-eye the law, give a town a bad name, and are liable to hurt business. Murder, whether even break, meanness or self-defense, is something the public has a right to know about. The odds in this fracas had been three to one, apparently, or anyhow three to two.

Hoback Yancey, loading up his packs with his summer supplies, headed for his home county, starting out before dawn.

He kept off the Hogback, and clear of the trail, and in the Spread he angled into his own fur-pocket, opening out his horses so they wouldn't make a worn-trail Indian-filing into his own country.

His landmarks were long backs, high peaks and a jagged cluster that gave his bearings to the main cabin in stubby timber by a rock-bound lake where trout in schools opened and shut their gills, watching flies disturbing the surface between the fish and the sparkling crystal sky.

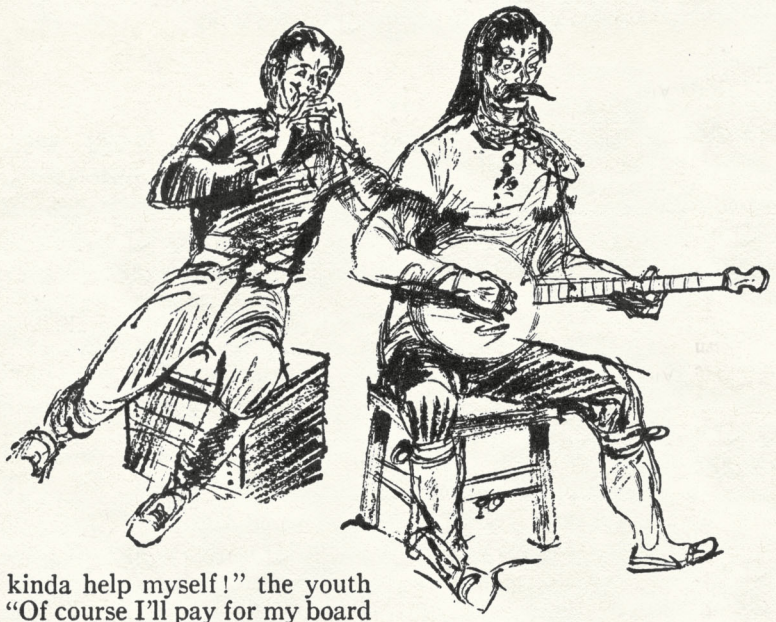
Looking across the beaver meadow, Hoback wasn't surprised when he saw faint blue smoke coiling up from the stone chimney above his hearth. The ears of his two packers and saddle-horse poked forward, and to his own ears came the thin, far quaver of a rollicking tune from the yon side of that grazing ground left when a beaver dam filled up with silt, long ago.

HOBACK circled around the grass instead of going across, and came near his cabin under the bull-pines and cedars on his flat. As he drew near, the music grew louder, and when he could peer ahead into his outfit, he saw a visitor, a clean-looking, trimly clad and solemn-faced youth covering a blow-harp with both hands, making tunes. Up around where the boy sat on a stump, bluejays were flashing and squawking through the gnarly tops of the cedars and bull-pines, darting like living turquoise on the wing, yelling their heads off.

On the saddle-rack pole sheltered with a bark-shed roof was a saddle and blanket, and Hoback could see a horse below the camp spring in a spread of grass, tethered out on a long rope. The trapper stopped to take a proper look around. Only the youthful musician was in sight, and the cabin door was wide open so that Hoback could see his split plank table along the wall, lighted by weather-proof transparency windows that wouldn't break and could be carried rolled up. On the table was a plate, a cup upside down, a knife, fork and spoon neatly placed, after washing, ready for the next meal—a set-up for just one. In the wire-screen cooler were hindquarters of a two-year-old deer.

Hoback walked his horses along the old elk runway, their hoofs making scant noise on the litter of pine needles. The trapper was all in the clear open at the edge of the chipyard before the visitor discovered him. He jumped to his feet, his countenance lighting up, and he put his French harp into a leather case that held two others.

"Howdy!" Hoback greeted. "I saw the smoke—knew I had company!"



"I did kinda help myself!" the youth nodded. "Of course I'll pay for my board —I've been here a week! I killed a venison and caught trout with your tackle. I know it's a long lug to get corn, sugar, buckwheat, all these staples in; I didn't waste any!"

A nice, thoughtful youngster! Man-grown, lithe and active, he'd chunked off and split up twelve or fifteen cords of stove wood, plenty for all summer. The camp was neat and clean as a pin. His duffel was in saddlebags, and no guns were in sight. He'd taken Hoback's 25-35 carbine to get the deer, and had used two cartridges.

"My name is Clarence Wilting," the visitor said, not waiting for any questions. He helped ease down the six bags in Hoback's two loads, uncinched the sawbuck saddles and took off the blankets. Then he took the curry and brush that hung by the corral gate, brushing and combing the sweat-patches, and rubbing the animals all down by the time the trapper had distributed his supplies and equipment. Wilting's horse was in fine, clean condition too.

OF course, Hoback wasn't asking any questions. Those three horses hadn't showed up.

He mentioned Dryhide, casually, but the youth didn't say anything. He knew Hoback Yancey's name. "I heard you had a fur-pocket back in here!" Wilting remarked, adding; "I thought I'd find you here, but nobody was around. They say you got a rich fur country!"

"Sure is good!" Hoback admitted. "High-lines are on wide backs, and all these creeks are good too. Otter, mink, fine big muskrats. Red foxes and lynx are plenty. Marten and some fisher. The coyotes average big, too—some of the dogs'll run more'n forty pounds."

"They've been around nights!" Wilting chuckled. "They sure moan in the wind, no matter how fast the tunes a man plays for them! You play too, Mr. Yancey? I see you've a sure ringing banjo!"

"Call me Hoback," the trapper said. "I pick a bit."

Hoback took down his banjo and led off. The boy seconded with his French harp. It wasn't ten minutes before two coyotes were yipping, and it wasn't sunset yet. Hoback laughed.

"That bellyacher's got a stub tail," Hoback said. "The other one's Fish-eater. I set traps for them, and they turn 'em upside down. Sometimes I shoot around them—but can't seem to hit them."

"I noticed they were impudent!" the youth chuckled. "Hides shedding now, so I didn't bother them—except with music."

Clarence Wilting was tight-tongued, modest and his eyes were crystalline blue, sparkling and twinkling—nothing soft in them, excepting when he played and Hoback picked. His clothing was high-grade, rodeo cowboy, but he wore moccasin laced boots. The nap on his trousers was flattened on his hips, and a wide belt had been worn around his waist, but the holsters and leather weren't in sight. He borrowed the trapper's 22-caliber meat pistol and played around with it—he killed sagehens and

squirrels, shooting their heads through. He dressed the game with a small pocket knife he kept as sharp as a razor.

Hoback told about carrying out his winter catch, going through Dryhide, by Broken Ax to ship at Rocky Slope.

"I must have missed you coming in!" the youth said, and Hoback wondered about this remark. Some ways his visitor was just a boy, and then in others he knew plenty. The trapper couldn't just make up his mind.

Then another visitor showed up: Puck Jason rode in. Puck was the son of Burr Jason, who ran the general store at Dryhide. He found Hoback and Wilting playing, and about forty bluejays, some Clark crows and a few squirrels sure nervous and excited out around the cabin.

The musicians and Jason all grinned.

"I could hear you clear yonder beyond the beaver meadow!" Jason said. "We're going to celebrate the Fourth! You fellers open to orchestra playing?"

"Oh, hell—I aint good enough!" Hoback shook his head.

"Well—that's how I make my living," the youth said. "I'd like to!"

"Well, we'd kinda like a banjo too. Got a fiddle—and Jew's-harp—" Jason squinted, thoughtfully.

"Why, I can pick and blow too!" the youth exclaimed, and going into the cabin, he brought out a stiff wire contraption that rested over his shoulders and put the French blow-harp against his lips. Then with both hands picking, he played "Round Town Gals" as the listeners had seldom heard it played.

"Well, now—doggone!" And Jason grinned. "I reckon you could blow your harp, rope a cow, ride a rough horse, shoot up a town, couldn't you?"

"That's right!" the youngster laughed, and going into the cabin, he returned with a belt and two holsters buckled on.

He stepped out to the edge of the chip-yard, blowing softly and looking around. Hoback grew tense. Puck Jason started —and then Wilting began to play "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Suddenly he pulled both the revolvers and began to shoot, right and left, the bullets thudding into a boulder, a pine tree, lifting a tin can off a stump—eight shots and each one marking the beat of the music. Then he pulled both triggers at once, turning and knocking two bottles off two stumps down toward the cabin spring.

Then, swiftly, he reloaded the cylinders, tucked the weapons back into his holsters—turning to look at the two spectators. Hoback Yancey looked gray and sick. Jason was grinning. Coming out of the thickety timber was City Marshal Fonda from Dryhide, also grinning. To Hoback, Fonda's smile was about the ugliest he'd ever seen.

CLARENCE WILTING stood in sudden realization. His smile of expert satisfaction remained on his face, but now it was ghastly.

"You sure proved it, boy!" Fonda said. "We knowed somebody was good, but we had to prove it up, an' you did!"

The youth stood fumbling with the buckles of his belt, looking around like a trapped bear and seeing no escape.

"How come, boy?" Fonda asked.

"Why, I heard three bad actors planning to come back here to get Hoback—Mr. Yancey, taking his winter take of fur and making him pony up his hidden stake." Wilting looked away, uneasily. "When they pulled out, I got to thinking. Then I rode in, day and night. Then there in Dryhide I met them; they knew my music and came looking. They started it. I finished it. That's all."

"Not quite all." Fonda shook his head. "An Association detective came riding in. He identified that blue-shirt feller with white pearl buttons as Little Rocky Spogane. Two-Pint Cazey was the li'l' feller. The big beef was Nick-ear Mindling. Theh's $7,600 rewards on 'em. In order to c'lect, we gotta have the gunman who done the job sign up the affidavits an' vouchers. So—well, we took the chance you'd be a feller, Jason and me did—and looked you up on the divvy."

"Why—gosh!" Wilting grabbed a lungful of breath. "Sure—we'll call it fifty-fifty. And I got their horses, saddles, outfits hid out back in the high beaver flat grass. I don't need them—"

A wispy, chilling zephyr circled down upon the little group of men who stood there, hardly knowing what to say, embarrassed and wondering. Then up from the lake on a knoll a yipping ran on into a drifting howl.

"Coyotes!" Fonda and Jason exclaimed.

Wilting's face beamed in its cold sweat; and smiling, he began to play clarion-loud and clear—not anything the listeners recognized—just one of his own made-up pieces. Right away, far and wide, the chorus of the mountain wolves came echoing their answers.

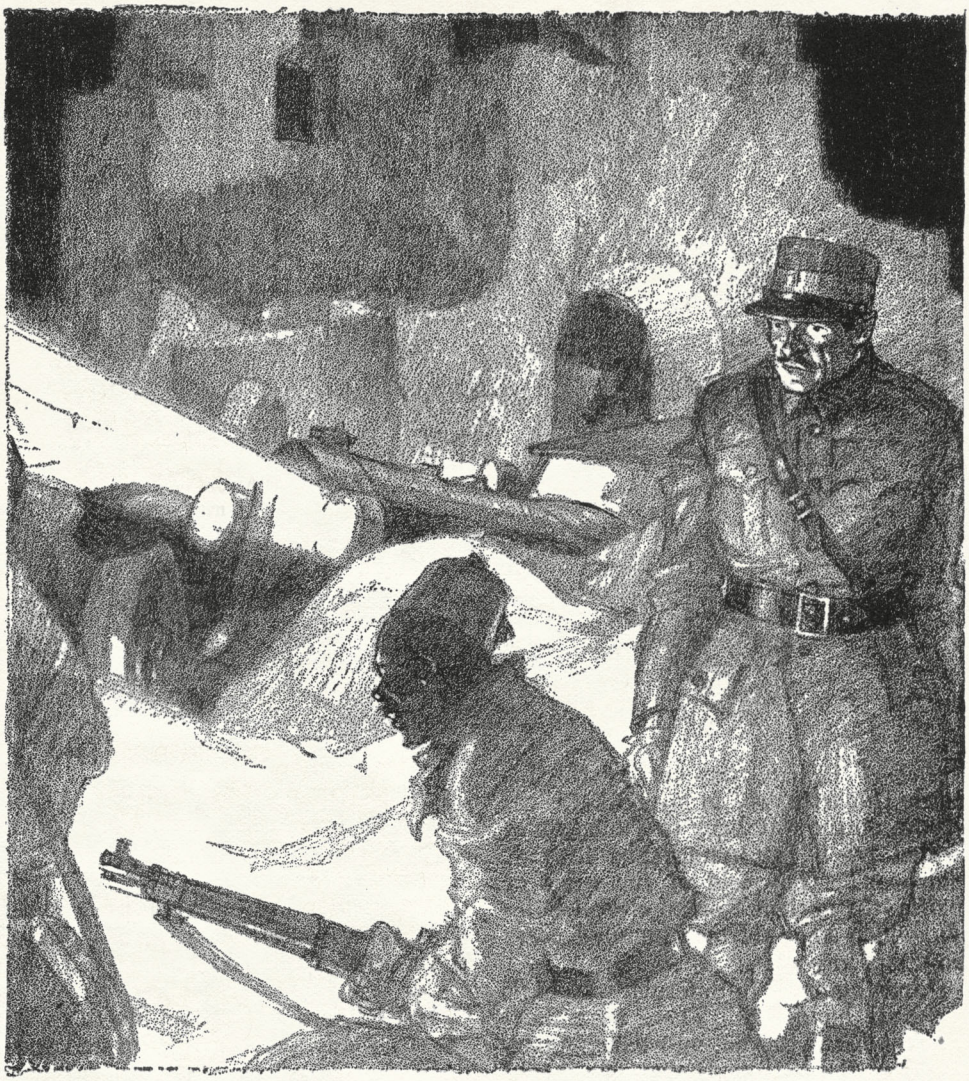
"Shu-u!" Fonda shivered, glancing around. "Coyotes!"

HAG GOLD

THIS morning, reading the latest official statement concerning the enormous amount of gold that the United States is guarding for the terrified governments of Europe, I thought of Macklin, and his fear lest America might incur certain spiritual dangers through acting as keeper for this vast and ever-increasing mass of bullion. He thought that a large percentage of it carried the anathemas of the centuries.

Sitting in the soft Tunisian sunshine, he explained the difference between virgin gold and the metal which he and other seekers sought in the ruined cities of Africa. He termed the latter "hag gold."

"I know that there is a lot of virgin gold pouring into the United States," he said. "Clean, newfound metal from the goldfields of Australia and South Africa, brought to London and sold; but there's also a hell of a lot of stuff that is old. We call it 'hag gold.' It has been possessed by men for hundreds of years. It has brought about murders, piracies, rebellions, acts of torture, and deviltry of



The gifted author of "Caravan Treasure" here gives us another colorful tale of weird adventure in Africa.

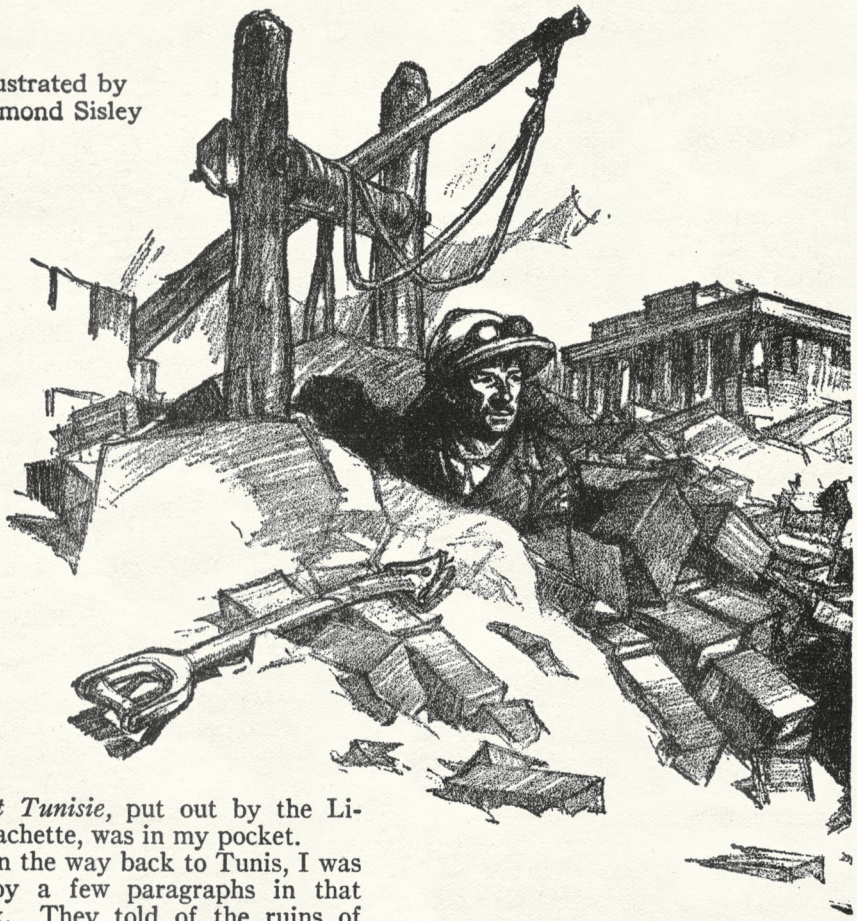
By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

every description. It's accursed. It's blood-splashed and evil. Mostly European and—well, yes, there's some, as I said, found in the dead cities of Africa. Now all that stuff, carrying the curses of centuries, rides off to find a nice, peaceful resting-place in the United States. Sometimes I'm scared of the evil it might bring to my country. Hellish scared. . . . Hag gold. Well, it's dangerous."

My introduction to Macklin came about in a curious manner. I am really a tramp. Not of the mendicant type that begs food and steals transportation, but a respectable tramp with a wanderlust that I feed by personal thrift and an active typewriter. I travel third- or fourth-class, and I shun grand hotels as I would the plague.

At the end of 1937 I was filled with the desire to visit the oases of southern Tunisia. It was the time of the date harvest at Tozeur. Calculating transportation, lodging and food on the lowest basis, and hoping that I might pare them still lower, I set out. The *Guide Bleu* of

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley



Algérie et Tunisie, put out by the Librairie Hachette, was in my pocket.

Now, on the way back to Tunis, I was thrilled by a few paragraphs in that guidebook. They told of the ruins of Sbeïtla, the ancient Roman city of Sufetula, which some thirteen hundred years ago was a gay spot.

Things hummed in Sufetula 'way back in the six hundreds! There were theaters, hot baths, stadia, and dancing-parlors; and the betting is that one would have to engage one's table on a night when a theatrical company or a mob of gladiators from Rome had ventured into the African "sticks."

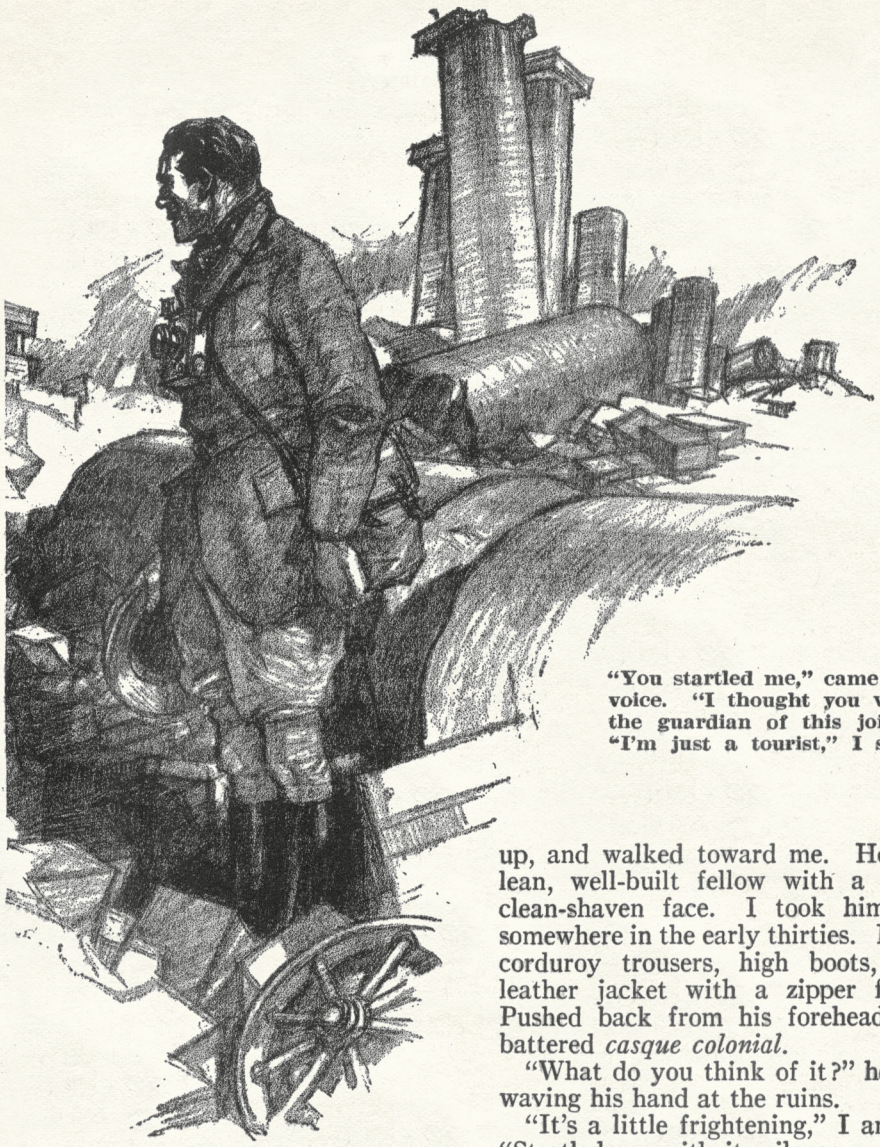
I decided to get off the train and take a snapshot of the ruins, which lie some three-quarters of a mile from the modern Sbeïtla, a small village of a few hundred French and a scattering of natives. There is hardly a building above one story in the village, so that a visitor approaching the ruins is astonished at the contrast between the ancient and the modern. The huge crumbling temples have a dignity and beauty that is breath-taking.

I was alone. There was no one in sight. It was a still, warm day. The silence was intense. In a sort of tiptoeing manner I moved through the temples of Juno, Minerva, and Jupiter, circled the *arc de triomphe,* erected by the orders of Diocletian, crossed to the *thermes;* then, a bit fatigued, I sat myself down on an overthrown column to rest. It was then I saw Macklin.

THERE are throughout northern Africa many ancient underground aqueducts that date from the days of Roman occupation. The underground method was made compulsory by sandstorms and the necessity of keeping the precious water away from the murderous rays of the African sun.

These aqueducts were constructed with immense effort. Water was brought from sources thirty and forty miles distant, to desert cities. Today a large percentage of these canals are not in use. The towns they served are deserted, and sand has filtered in through the vents that were placed at regular distances.

Now as I sat on the fallen column, I saw the head of a man appear at one of these vents in the ancient aqueduct that once served Sufetula. He was about a quarter of a mile away. In the thin sunlight I could see his face clearly. For a few minutes he stared in my direction; then he disappeared, coney-fashion, into the ground.



"You startled me," came the voice. "I thought you were the guardian of this joint." "I'm just a tourist," I said.

I waited. There were several manholes in the aqueduct between me and the spot where the fellow had disappeared. I had an idea that his curiosity would prompt him to crawl along the tunnel and make a closer inspection.

My surmise was correct. From the nearest manhole the head appeared again; then a strong voice with a distinct American intonation hailed me.

"You startled me," came the voice. "I thought you were the damned guardian of this joint."

"I'm a simple tourist," I said. "Got off the train to look at the ruins."

The man took a grip on the crumbling cement around the vent, dragged himself up, and walked toward me. He was a lean, well-built fellow with a smiling, clean-shaven face. I took him to be somewhere in the early thirties. He wore corduroy trousers, high boots, and a leather jacket with a zipper fastener. Pushed back from his forehead was a battered *casque colonial.*

"What do you think of it?" he asked, waving his hand at the ruins.

"It's a little frightening," I answered. "Startled me with its silence and air of absolute desertion."

He smiled and sat himself down. "Sometimes there's a mob around here," he said slowly. "Not tourists. Oh, no. Natives."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, they buzz around all the old ruins of North Africa," he replied. "Hunting. Like me."

"Game?" I queried.

He laughed. "No. Gold. Hunting hag gold."

Now I heard later that there is another reason for that name "hag gold" outside that which the antiquity of the treasure might have conferred on it. In the *souks* of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers, where treasure found in dead cities is

sold to dealers, the natives giving a reason for the possession of antique jewelry, lie by saying it belonged to their grandmothers! *"C'est l'or de ma vieille grand-'mère,"* they mutter; and possibly whites, wishing to make the lie humorous, might have called it "hag gold."

BUT to get back to John Macklin. He was, I discovered, a gold-seeker born. His great-grandfather was one of the original founders of Yerba Buena, the baby town that grew up into San Francisco. This ancestor served on the first Committee of Vigilance when the gold boom started. His son made a fortune and lost it. John's father was a fossicker—a gold-seeker—from the time he could walk till the day when he and his burro were found dead in an arroyo in the San Bernardino mountains.

"He left me his taste for gold, several picks, and a baby donkey," said Macklin. "Couldn't have a better legacy."

Along the top of Africa is a string of dead cities that mark the high tide of the Roman flood. Here the Romans ruled and rioted, then departed, leaving the temples, open-air theaters, *thermes,* and triumphal arches to decay slowly in the African sunshine: Carthage, Timgad, Tipasa, Lambessa, and five-score others.

Macklin had visited them all. Even the remote and off-the-trail places like Baal Regia,—City of the Royal Baal,—which at one time was the capital of Numidia and is now the haunt of miserable nomads who camp in its enormous cisterns. He had fossicked in ruined temples, palaces and sand-filled aqueducts for treasure that might have been overlooked in the hurried departure of the long-dead inhabitants. For there is much evidence of swift evacuation in these ruins. Take Timgad, the Roman *Thamugas,* constructed in the First Century. Timgad had a fine prosperous time for four centuries; then the Berbers swept down from the Aures Mountains and pillaged the city. The Timgadians cried for help to Rome; but Rome was busy with pressing affairs at its own gates. The people fled northward, and Timgad slid into the has-been class. . . .

The green lizards ran up and down the fallen columns of the once gay Sufetula as Macklin talked. His was a colorful tale of wandering. It evoked dreams.

"Have you dropped on anything big?" I asked.

He laughed softly. "Well, yes," he said; then, after a pause, he continued: "I get tips where to search. Of course one doesn't scream one's findings to the stars in North Africa. There are laws concerning treasure-trove. It must be reported at once; and the finder, if he is lucky, will get a percentage that might be half and might not be. If he makes the find in any of these old cities, the chances are that he'd get nothing. They are all under the control of the *Direction des Antiquités,* and a fossicker has no right to search. When I saw you, I was startled. Thought for a moment you were the watchman.

"But you asked about finds. I've found a few things that I wish I could have kept in their original state. Couldn't, you know. Had to drop them into the pot."

He stretched himself on the warm column and stared upward. After a long silence he spoke. "I doubt if any man alive, outside myself, has handled a double fistful of gold *octadrachms* with the heads of Ptolemy I and Berenice I. I didn't know at the time that they were so rare, but I kept a rubbing of one, obverse and reverse, and showed it to a big French numismatist. He nearly went crazy when I told him that I had handled some twenty of them."

"And did you drop them all into a crucible?" I cried.

"Sure," he answered. "Couldn't get rid of them otherwise. The dealer wouldn't buy them. I sold the chunk of gold in the *Souk des Orfèvres* at Tunis. Hell of a pity. Who knows whether that chunk is not in the United States now? I mean part of a gold-brick that Uncle Sam is minding for France."

I gulped at the thought of those coins of Ptolemy the First being dropped one by one into a crucible. It seemed a sacrilege.

"Funny about the natives," went on Macklin. "You know, you must have a heat of a thousand centigrade to melt gold. That's difficult to get in desert places, so they hammer gold coins and bits of jewelry into lumps without heating. They caught a few natives the other day in Algiers. Had a beaten-up hunk of gold that showed part of a necklace of Roman filigrane work that brought yelps of delight from the experts. They've sent it to Paris. Yes, it's dirty business to destroy stuff like that, but if you're an unlicensed *chercheur d'or,* what are you to do?"

I had no answer. In silence we sat and stared out across the tumbling ruins.

Suddenly Macklin startled me with a question.

"Staying in Sbeïtla tonight? If you are, you might see something. It's a feast night with a full moon, and there's going to be a sacrificial search."

I was intrigued. "Why a night search?" I asked.

"Well, Africa breeds a desire to do most things at night," he answered. "Possibly the sun is too damn' watchful. Dances, witch-hunting, sacrifices, smellings-out, and all the hocus-pocus of the continent is carried on at night. Queer. You never see anything out of the way during the daytime, but when the night comes down, all the deviltry of the world starts. If you're staying on, you can have a glimpse of a moonlight search after a sacrifice."

"Of what?" I questioned.

"Black goat or something," he said, laughing. "They sprinkle the blood, and if the blood strikes a spot where gold is buried, it sort of glows like fire. Where are you sleeping? Café de la Gare? I'll call for you about nine."

MOONS are no bigger in Africa than in the other continents, but one thinks so. African moons have so much desert space to shine on that they look bigger. And whiter. It was under a moon of this kind that John Macklin led me back to the ruins. With him was a Negro from the south, a Buzu. A queer, laughing type—a sort of black Pan who leaped from one fallen stone to another, making grimaces and gestures at his shadow, as black as himself on the barren ground.

We reached a point above the main aqueduct, and there we crouched behind a mass of fallen pillars. Macklin whispered to me. The natives would come from a gorge to the north of the ruins and move down to the arches of the aqueduct.

Presently the Negro touched my arm with a finger and pointed. For a moment I saw only the inky shadow made by the party; their white garments blending with the sky and landscape. The compact mass of moving figures was hardly visible, but the pool of intense black that moved around them as they surged forward was plain to the eye.

They moved silently. Not a sound. A queer hurrying stride, the leaders straining toward the entrance to the aqueduct. There were two score, at least.

Macklin whispered to me. "We mustn't move till they go underground," he said. "They'd bolt if they saw us."

The line had lengthened when the leaders reached the stone arches. Eager were the leaders. They dived into the vault, and the swirling human tail slid in, serpentlike, behind them. The landscape was empty.

Macklin pulled me to my feet. The Buzu was scampering toward the dark opening that had swallowed the searchers. Now from the vault came a sort of nasal chant, thin and piercing. It went out over the deserted landscape, a queer probing stiletto of sound, unnerving and disagreeable.

My courage failed me at the black entrance of the aqueduct. Way back in the thick, century-old darkness were pinpoints of yellow light. The nasal chant was louder now.

"Come on!" cried Macklin. "They'll make the sacrifice soon."

"I'm stopping here," I muttered.

"But you won't see anything!" he protested.

"I'll see enough," I said.

Macklin laughed softly and ran ahead on the tracks of the Buzu. I was left alone at the opening. I was, I must confess, too scared to follow him. The whole business seemed evil. There was something foul, something satanic about the affair; I had seen nothing to make me afraid, but I sensed something diabolic.

Head thrust forward, I saw the lights flare up so that the fallen masses of stone and the arched roof were visible at odd moments. Skinny arms were thrust upward. Tattered garments were tossed to and fro in the torchlight. The nasal, wasplike chant became unbearable.

It ceased at the moment when I turned with the notion of running out; ceased with a frightening suddenness. It was then I heard the sound which I have never been able to classify.

It stays with me. Puzzling, mystifying, disturbing. Cry, scream, screech, bleat? I cannot say. Human or animal? I don't know. But it has made a record of its own upon the complicated cells of my brain. At any moment I can start that disk. I hear it distinctly, and with the resurrected cry comes the memory picture of the uplifted arms, the sputtering torches, the wild scurrying of treasure-hunters who followed the sound.

It was an hour before Macklin returned, the Buzu running on his heels. Together we hurried up the slope and hid behind the fallen columns till the outpouring natives moved back across the sand to disappear in the gorge.

"Nothing doing," said Macklin. "The thing was a failure. The blood didn't glow."

"Whose blood?" I questioned.

"Why, the blood of the black goat."

The Buzu chuckled and started to leap from stone to stone as we made our way back to the village.

Well, whether it was a goat or not that helped out that performance in the aqueduct, I was the "goat," the following day.

MACKLIN came to the little railway station to say good-by to me. He chatted quietly during the short halt of the train from Tozeur; then, as it was pulling out, he thrust a small package into my hands. "Deliver that at Sousse!" he cried. "Don't fail me! Please!"

I shouted protests. I tried to push the little packet back into his hands. He refused to accept it. The train gathered speed. He stood on the platform making motions to me, imploring motions.

He had tricked me. I dropped back on the seat. Macklin had picked me as a simple fool he could use to transport something he was afraid to send by post!

I guessed, of course, that the packet contained a lump of gold that might be seized as contraband by the authorities. They might pounce on me if they had reason to suspect Macklin and had glimpsed him pushing the packet into my hands! Possibly they had noted the clumsy transfer!

Sweating profusely, I read the address. *"Madame Macklin, Rue El Kehaoui, next door to the Café Maure, El Koubba, Sousse."*

Softly I cursed Macklin. I am careful when wandering to observe closely the laws of the country in which I am voyaging. Now, I'd become an accomplice of a man who was breaking the law by searching clandestinely in the Roman ruins, and furthermore, refusing to report to the authorities the treasure that he had found!

I realized then that Macklin had nursed me along so that he might use me as a messenger. He had found out my name, my usual address, the magazines I contributed to, everything that had a bearing on my honesty, and he had taken a chance. Angrily I told myself that he had summed me up as a milksop who, lacking the courage to keep the packet, would, on the contrary, rush hotfoot to deliver it the moment I reached Sousse.

"I hope he breaks his neck!" I growled, as the train rushed north toward Sousse.

The Rue El Kehaoui is not an elegant street. It adjoins the *souks,* and it is the meeting-place of a thousand objectionable odors. I wondered if Madame Macklin had chosen the address so that she might be close to the sly dealers who would purchase anything her husband sent her through the medium of fools like myself. I was still angry with Macklin, but frightfully desirous of getting rid of the packet.

I found El Koubba, made inquiries at the shuttered house next door. I was told that Madame Macklin occupied an apartment in the rear. I went through a dark passage and knocked at the door.

For some reason or other I had, when reading the address on the packet, pictured an American woman. Macklin had not spoken of his wife during the hours I spent with him at Sbeïtla, and I had no knowledge that he was married till the packet was thrust into my hands. Now the lady who opened the door to my knock startled me.

She was tall and slight, with a figure whose suppleness was strangely evident in repose. Her body in its slightest movement showed a serpentlike pliancy. It was a little startling. The face was remarkable too. It was foxlike, framed in close-pressing plaits of blue-black hair. Nose and mouth were well shaped, the latter resembling a red butterfly at rest on the extremely pale skin; but it was the enormous eyes that startled me.

Eyes of a pythoness. Eyes that looked through one, peering at a spiritual shadow, so that they gave to the person they looked at the belief that he was transparent. To me, standing at the door, the feeling that those eyes were regarding something or someone beyond me was so strong that I swung on my heel, expecting to find another person in the passageway. Of course I was nervous with the damn' packet in my pocket.

I muttered an introduction. Said I had met her husband at Sbeïtla, and he had given me a commission. I put the packet into her hand, a slim, graceful hand.

In a husky voice she bade me enter. I obeyed. Now that I had got rid of the packet, curiosity returned to me. This Madame Macklin was something out of the way. Extremely so.

The shutters were closed to keep out the glaring sun; so for a moment my eyes found it difficult to take in the furnishings. I stumbled over the inevitable tambour-cushions upon the floor, clutched the side of a chair and seated myself.

There was something satanic about the affair; the nasal chant became unbearable.

Gradually things took shape. A low divan, native rugs, a few chairs. Then I saw the tanned bull's hide.

It was tacked to the wall, stretched horizontally; and as I gazed at it in wonder, it sort of revealed itself. Quietly, like a slow-born revelation, I realized what it was. Upon the tanned inner side was a map! A fascinating map of North Africa!

The map brought me to my feet. Mouth open, I stared at it. I heard my own croaking demand to look at it closer. She must have made a reply in the affirmative, but I didn't hear it. I couldn't hear it. The power of all my senses had gone to my eyes.

The background of that map was rose-madder. The routes were purple—a glowing Tyrian purple; surely, judging from its intensity, made from the shellfish, *purpura murex*, which yielded in ancient days the priceless dye. The cities were tinted green, prophet's green, and the wastes between were made wonderful with drawings of animals no one had ever seen. And it was centuries old. It was Arabic work. Crouched before it, devouring the indications of age, I came to the conclusion that it was drawn in Bagdad sometime in the Fourteenth Century!

That it was not earlier was proved in a way by the broad purple line that marked the route of that great Arab wanderer Ibn Batuta, who had traveled as far as Timbuctoo in 1352-1353. And the manner in which that line had been put in, blotting out several imaginary animals, proved that the news of Batuta's trip had come to the map-maker while he was at work on the magic hide. For the line was his line, purple and finely drawn.

Wow, what a map! There was the Mediterranean under its Arabic name,

I played the hypocrite, whispering sympathetic words, while my eyes were upon the hide.

Bahr er Rûm, the country of the Mamelukes, of the Barbarians, of the Caliphs! The Isle of Djerba, the land of the Lotus-eaters! The *pays des Lotophages* of Flaubert!

Purple routes to dead cities! Routes beaten by the sandals of Romans, Arabs, Berbers, Moors, Garamantes, Phoenicians and scores of other tribes that had braved the unknown!

The unknown and the dangers. The desert, the thirst, the animals that the imaginative map-maker had tried to show! In those empty places he had cleverly drawn heraldic beasts that brought to my mind Swift's satiric verse:

Geographers, in Afric's maps,
With savage pictures filled their gaps,
And o'er unhabitable downs
Placed elephants for want of towns.

The husky voice of the woman brought me back from the dreamland into which the hide of the bull had taken me. She was telling me it had been in the possession of her family for countless years.

The father, with the wonder hide as his guide, had explored many ruins, dying

finally at Tébessa-Khalia—old Tébessa—from the *paludienne* fever which he had contracted in the ruins. Later I found that the father was a Frenchman, the mother a Greek.

"The skin of the ox drove my father," she said softly.

"It would drive an army!" I cried. "It is a dream map."

She told me then that the thing had been the means of bringing Macklin and herself together. Someone had told Macklin about the pelt of fantasy. He had begged to see it. He and its owner were drawn together.

Then I knew what Macklin had meant when he said: "I get tips." The woman explained. "Sometimes I stare at the map for hours," she whispered, "and I find that my thoughts are drawn to one particular spot. I tell all this to John, and he visits the place. Often he has found valuable things at those spots which have attracted me. Coins and jewelry."

I was a little beside myself as I stood staring at the Hide of Bagdad. Some wise writer has written that life's best gift is the ability to dream of a better life. That may be so; but to me, at that moment, life's best gift would be the possession of that hide.

I had seen a hundred ancient maps. A thousand. The study of cartography has been a passion. But there was no papyrus in any museum of the world that had the power to stir me like this bull's hide. It had the quality of the magic carpet of Prince Housain. On it one floated over the world.

Reverently I touched it. I peered at the network of finely-drawn lines intersecting each other at right angles. The *isbas,* and *zams* that told of the altitude of the Pole Star, of the height of the Calves of the Little Bear and the Barrow of the Great Bear above the horizon. Ah, me! How slowly we have crept toward knowledge!

THERE are times when physical movements are not recorded. I have an impression that the woman pushed me away from the map. I don't know. I think she put my hat into my hand and gently directed me to the door. Hours later when I really came to my proper senses, I found that I had taken a room in the Hôtel du Sahel on the Place Colonel Vincent.

I couldn't leave Sousse. Not without the hide. Would Madame Macklin sell it? Imagination pictured it, a bulky roll beneath my arm. I would, I told myself, carry it with me wherever I went. On days when I was sad and depressed, I would unroll it on the floors of cheap hotel rooms, and sprawling beside it, follow with my finger those lines of Tyrian purple that led to the cities cunningly tinted with prophet's green.

I had dreams of exhibiting it on Fifth Avenue. I shut my eyes and saw it stretched in a large window somewhere close to Forty-second Street, with a milling crowd on the sidewalk "oh-ing" and "ah-ing" as they got glimpses of it. Forgetting everything as they stared! For there was, I knew, no talisman, charm, or potion that possessed the magic of the hide. Not one.

I counted my scanty funds. I would make the woman an offer. Who could tell? She might part with it.

HOTFOOT, I went the following morning to the Rue El Kehaoui. Excitedly I rapped at the door. More like a pythoness than ever was the woman. She was wrapped in a *pagne* of orange-colored silk; her blue-black hair was unplaited, falling on her shoulders.

I begged another glance at the map. A little startled, so I thought, she admitted me. With the stiff gait of a sleepwalker I stepped across the room.

Now a shutter was open, and the hide exulted in the light. The beasts that surely were seen in visions by the cartographer became alive. The green-tinted cities beckoned to me, and the routes glowed, so I thought, with the blood from the sandaled feet of warriors who had tramped them. . . .

I heard myself making an offer. A ridiculous offer. The woman received it with a smile. "I couldn't sell it," she murmured.

I doubled the sum. She shook her head. Then, seeing that I was unduly excited, she became slightly confidential, in the manner that women have of ridding themselves of unwelcome male visitors.

At the moment, so she said, she was in one of those staring moods that she had spoken of at my first visit. It would last for hours, perhaps days. It concerned a spot where great treasure might be found. When the location became plain to her, she would telegraph Macklin. Of course she could not be disturbed at the moment with offers for the hide. That was unthinkable. Once again she eased me out of the apartment.

A frightful thing is covetousness. It is the one great and deadly sin because it embodies all the other sins. It is their origin. . . .

I walked around Sousse, seeing nothing but the Hide of Bagdad. I wondered why a pelt had been chosen for the map. Was there a queer magic in the bull's hide before the cartographer commenced his design? Possibly my mind was a little unhinged. Sousse itself, being the ancient Carthaginian town of Hadrumetum, has an atmosphere conducive to mental dislocation.

It might, I thought, have been the pelt of a bull that was not of this world! There are a thousand legends regarding bulls. I recalled them: Zeus as a white bull taking Europa! The Minotaur; the bull-cult of Minos!

Sitting in the shade of the grand mosque of Ksar Er Ribat, I remembered the epic of Gilgamesh and the divine bull who was sent to wage a contest on behalf of the goddess. That bull was slain in Babylon. He must have had a magic hide! And there was the sacred bull of Memphis, the most important of all the sacred animals of Egypt. The Memphis bull had a palace of his own and was buried in state when he died. Perhaps the hide of the original Apis, the black bull of Memphis, or his successor bull, had been stripped and taken to Bagdad!

Who could say? Yes, looking back now on those hot hours in Sousse, I think I was a long way off my mental base. But then I couldn't believe that an artist could make such a map without a magic canvas. And even now, I am not convinced. If it pleases you who read this story to think I am mad, your thoughts are excused by the fact that you did not see that hide. . . . And you never will.

That evening I thought of ways and means of raising money so that I could make a better offer to the woman. I would borrow small sums from friends; I would pledge my work for a year ahead. Into my mind came a startling thought, possibly thrust forward by an Irish *rapparee* ancestor. "If she won't sell the hide," whispered the spirit of the long-dead kinsman, "why not steal it? In the days of 'Cairbre of the Cat's Head,' the Dwyers took what they wanted."

AT eight next morning, I was back in the Rue El Kehaoui. I knocked, and Madame Macklin opened the door. She was in a state of great excitement. The big eyes were filled with fear; her cheeks showed marks of tears; her husky voice was broken with sobs.

Hurriedly she told of her trouble. From the hide, on the day previous, she had received one of her unexplainable "tips." She had telegraphed Macklin immediately, urging him to visit Kasserine, a small village thirty kilometers south of Sbeïtla. Near this village are the ruins of old Cillium, a flourishing spot in the days of Constantine.

"Well?" I said, not understanding the cause of her emotion.

"But now the skin of the ox warns me!" she sobbed. "John is in danger! I must go to him!"

I played a Judas to that woman. I sympathized with her. Near-thief that I was, I offered to guard her apartment while she was away. I would watch over the hide.

"No, no!" she cried. "The skin goes with me!"

Two hundred kilometers southward was Kasserine, on the road by which I had come up to Sousse. But I did not falter. "I will accompany you!" I cried. "If there is anything wrong with Macklin, I might be useful."

She didn't make any objections. She was whispering what I thought were prayers as she rushed her preparations. The fear had her in its clutch.

I helped her to take the hide from the wall. Dear Lord, how I thrilled! I put it on the floor and rolled it carefully, the *rapparee* ancestor whispering to me as I did so. "Stick it under your arm and run," said he, and the brogue in his voice was thick and harsh. "She's upset, an' she'll never chase you! Devil a chase!"

I combated him. "These are modern days," I said aloud. "That cannot be done."

The woman thought I was speaking to her. "It can! It can!" she cried. "The train is at nine-fifteen. Get a carriage!"

At a wild gallop we drove to the station. I bought two *billets, troisième classe,* to Kasserine. That, in the state of my finances, showed courage. We clambered aboard, and between us on the cushionless seat rode the bull's hide. The Bull's Hide of Bagdad!

Madame Macklin was silent. Vaguely she answered questions that I put to her. What was the actual danger the hide had hinted at? She couldn't say. But it was a great danger. Even then, as we rode through the dreary country with its great stretches of alfalfa, its dry river-

beds and its stony deserts, the hide, so she asserted, was whispering to her.

Once again I saw the ruins of old Sufetula as we slipped by Sbeïtla. I pondered over my meeting with John Macklin. I was a little afraid of the results of that meeting; yet when I touched the hide with eager groping fingers, the fear left me.

IN the early afternoon we reached Kasserine. Madame Macklin addressed the small stationmaster, a Corsican, like most of the railway officials in Tunisia. Had he noticed an American descending from the train the day previous?

I thought that a queer look of horror came into the eyes of the *chef de gare* when he heard the question. He swallowed like a pelican. He looked this way and that; then he clutched the lapel of my coat and dragged me into his little den, leaving Madame Macklin standing on the platform.

His words came spattering like machine-gun fire. I had difficulty in getting their meaning. They tore through the receiving-net of my brain in the manner of sharks ripping through the flimsy mesh of a herring fisherman.

There had been a disaster. *"Un épouvantable désastre, monsieur! Dix personnes mortes! Beaucoup blessés! Les soldats sont sur la place!"*

Stupidly I grasped the meaning of his words. Five kilometers from the *gare,* on the site of ancient ruins, a huge underground cistern of Roman workmanship had collapsed when a number of treasure-seekers were in the reservoir. Five thousand tons of stone had fallen in on them!

"L'Américain?" I cried. "Monsieur Macklin?"

"Mort!" cried the station-master.

I was stunned by the news. Glancing through the window of the little office, I could see Madame Macklin standing on the platform. How the devil could I break the news to her? As I debated, a captain of infantry, back from the place of the accident, cried out the latest news. *"Pas d'éspoir!"* he cried. *"Vingt morts! Dix-neuf indigènes et l'Américain!"*

Madame Macklin heard. She screamed and stumbled toward a bench. The station-master, the captain and I rushed toward her. Of course she knew that the only American in the neighborhood of Kasserine was John Macklin, *chercheur d'or* from California. . . .

When Madame Macklin came out of the faint, she insisted on visiting the spot where Macklin had met his death. The polite officer drew me aside and hurriedly put forward objections. The recovery of the bodies was out of the question. A fleet-footed native, who had escaped death by a miracle, had described the situation immediately before the collapse of the cistern. A sacrifice had been made—the officer thought it might have been a human sacrifice; then the tremendous clamor of the gold searchers within the huge underground reservoir had acted like an explosive on the masonry that had held itself upright for fifteen hundred years!

The escapee had seen the huge walls quiver. Slowly they folded inward upon the treasure-seekers blinded by their greed. Then with a frightful crash the immense mass had buried the clawing, screaming mob. Buried them under the thousand blocks of stone chiseled by masons in the days of Constantine!

"It would take an army of workmen a year to reach the bodies," whispered the officer.

I imparted a little of this information to Madame Macklin, but she was obdurate. She wished to see the spot, and so the captain offered to take us in his automobile.

We drove through a dreary countryside with the African night creeping down upon it. For a part of the way we followed the *piste* to Tebessa; then we swung westward over a flat plain till we came to the fatal spot.

There were a hundred bonfires around the enormous depression that marked the spot where the cistern had collapsed. The walls, as the officer explained, had folded in from all sides; and now, in the center of this depression, there was a four-sided pyramid of piled blocks beneath which rested the dead: Nineteen colored and one white.

A company of native soldiers kept order. They beat back the hundreds of *indigènes* who had come from far-off places to the scene.

I thought that there was a defiant look about the great stones as they sprawled one upon the other. A menacing look. I think the soldiers and the screaming natives saw it. The blocks put out a threat to those who would meddle with them. Perhaps there *was* treasure there. Great treasure, which they were guarding.

Gently the officer and I led Madame Macklin back to the automobile. We returned to Kasserine. A few minutes before midnight, a train came through

from Tozeur and we boarded it. We reached Sousse seven hours later. I took Madame Macklin to her apartment. I carried the hide from the carriage to her sitting-room. I placed it on the divan and left her. It was not the moment to talk of what was uppermost in my mind.

FOR six successive days I visited that apartment in the Rue El Kehaoui. A super-Judas was I in those days. I played the hypocrite, whispering sympathetic words with my tongue while my eyes were upon the rolled hide.

That woman would not permit me to unroll it after our return from Kasserine. There it lay where I had placed it on the divan, and my eyes lusted for a glimpse of it. At times my groping fingers touched it furtively.

I pawned a few bits of jewelry to pay my board. The future was a little frightening. Again the *rapparee* ancestor whispered of theft. He thought me a fool because I hesitated.

Nervously I questioned the woman as to what she intended to do. She spoke of her mother's relatives in Greece. They lived at Phaleron, a few miles out of Athens. She thought she would go to them. She showed me letters that were very affectionate.

I touched the hide with my hand, hungrily; then I looked at her. The big eyes were upon my face. They were looking into my brain. They were reading my thoughts.

Those enormous eyes were startled with what they discovered. They knew me as a hypocrite because of my ride with her to Kasserine. A wordy deceiver because of my feigned sympathy for Macklin. They knew me a possible thief, a near-thief. Ay, the spirit of theft showed in my eyes! She pushed me gently to the door.

The following morning I went back to the apartment, and the spirit of that *rapparee* ancestor walked with me. Boldly he walked. Now and then he whispered in Gaelic, words that I did not understand; but they were fine, strong words. Strong and urgent. When we speak of the devil as a tempter, we mean, of course, our unmoral ancestors who knew nothing of our silly modern codes.

I knocked at the door. There was no answer. I knocked louder. I beat it with my fist. I thought the spirit of my ancestor kicked it, but that couldn't be. It must have been my shoe that crashed against it.

An Arab woman thrust a nervous face out of a door and spoke to me in French. *"Madame est parti,"* she said.

"Où?" I shrieked.

"Pour Tunis," she replied. *"Elle rentre dans le pays de sa mère."*

She had fled me! She had taken the early train for Tunis, where she would take a boat for the Piræus!

"La peau?" I gasped. *"La peau du taureau?"*

She made a gesture with her hand northward. She laughed gayly. I could have killed her. At least my spectral ancestor could. . . .

There are but three trains a day from Sousse to Tunis. I had a wait of seven hours. It was not till after midnight that I reached Tunis. Too late to make inquiries.

I was at the doors of the *Società di Navigazione* before the place was open. A sleepy clerk looked over the list of passengers that had departed on the *Chalkotheka,* a small boat which had sailed the previous evening.

"Oui, oui," he muttered. *"Madame Macklin est parti."*

I staggered out onto the Avenue Jules-Ferry. I was a little deranged. I bumped into pedestrians on the sidewalk and did not apologize when they damned my clumsiness.

THAT evening news of the *Chalkotheka* was posted in the bureau of the local news-sheet. The steamer had struck what was supposed to be a derelict some hundred and fifty miles off the coast. The passengers and crew had barely time to leap into the boats before the vessel sank. Every scrap of luggage that they possessed went down with the vessel. The passengers were picked up by an Italian steamer bound for Sicily.

I wrote Madame Macklin in care of her parents at Phaleron. I wished to be certain as to the fate of the hide. Her tardy and ungrammatical reply was, I thought, fearfully ungracious. It ran:

> *You might makes false words with one mermaidens and get it from her. Or you mights steal it from Mister Neptune. There are your chances. I think you bad mans.*

As I said before, if it pleases you who peruse this story to think I am mad, your thoughts are excused by the fact that you did not see that hide. And you never will. But to me it is visible in my dreams. In my glorious dreams.

British Agent

England has done it before — as witness this spirited story of another day when she was at war with the whole continent of Europe.

By **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

Pen drawings by
John Richard Flanagan

THE man with the gray eyes made a covert warning gesture. His companion fell silent, as the waitress approached with the meal they had ordered.

The little tavern, in a side street of war-ravaged Danzig, was blue with tobacco-smoke and buzzing with tongues. Burghers, merchants, soldiers, crowded the place; half the languages of Europe were in the air. When the waitress was gone, the man with the gray eyes relaxed and attacked his soup, with a quiet word in English.

"You were saying, Beauchamp—"

"That the world has turned over, is flying apart," said the other gloomily. "This upstart dictator has become, before we realized it, the greatest figure on earth. He has either conquered, or subdued into alliance, the whole of Europe. All laws, human and divine, have been abrogated. We're seeing civilization itself perish, Courtney."

"Your words are careless, my dear Beauchamp," said Courtney. "The conqueror does not destroy civilization; he makes use of it. What he does destroy are the ideals and culture of the world. And don't talk too loudly. I think those fellows at the next table are secret police. They're everywhere, these days."

"What does it matter?" Beauchamp spoke wearily, with the air of one who

This was an adventure—a fabulous dream made real; when he bowed to Elaine de Courland, he was certain of it.

has lost hope. "England is stagnant, in ruins, blockaded, her commerce gone, her influence lost—a little island fighting against the whole world! The dictator is swollen with the loot of Europe. His alliance with Russia has made him supreme. Italy is in his grip; he has literally enslaved entire nations. Freedom of speech and press is wiped out—"

"You forget one thing," said Courtney cheerfully, his gray eyes flickering about the tavern vigilantly, as he spoke. "His boasted invasion of England has failed, and must fail; we hold the seas."

"What good will that do us, in the end?" The gloomy Beauchamp fell upon his soup and gulped ravenously, after the manner of a peasant; he played his part well. "His armies seem inexhaustible. All the powers of hell are behind him. Massacres, shootings, executions, rapine, follow his flag. Universities and centers of learning are demolished, ancient systems of culture have perished. New order, forsooth! He's establishing what he calls a new order for the whole world, and has begun with Europe, his slave."

"Attend to the soup; it may hearten you a bit," said Courtney. "You know, it's getting damned hard to find decent food anywhere! Europe's in for starvation and frightful epidemics this winter and next spring. But, Beauchamp, your entire argument is wrong. Our dictator friend has done quite well for himself, I admit; he's gradually coming face to face, however, with his destiny—with the force he cannot destroy or even face."

"You mean England?" grunted the other.

"I do not mean England, unless you consider England as a mere agent. Time and time again, such waves of destruction have overflowed the world, when everything fine and noble and divine seems to have perished utterly; yet it has survived. Do you know why? I'll tell you. Think a moment; you remember Jeanne d'Arc?"

"Eh?" Beauchamp scowled. He was not good at history. "French girl—yes."

"Well, the secret lies in her story. She revealed it to the whole world, had the world only been able to—" Courtney broke off abruptly. His voice changed. He leaned over the table, stuffing bread and sausages into his pockets. Deadly alarm was in his eyes; but it was quiet, controlled, unpanicked.

"Quick, Beauchamp! I'm done for if that chap sees me. I must run. To business! When will you be back with the reports we need?"

"Soon as I can get to Warsaw and meet the Vienna chap who's to meet me there."

"Warsaw's your territory. Keep it. I've come from London for those reports; must take 'em back. Must stay here in Danzig till I get 'em. The devil! I never dreamed that Steinbach was in this part of Europe . . . he knows me too well. Can you be back here in five days?"

"Yes." Beauchamp had lost his gloomy aspect. He, too, was on the alert. "Five days, yes. I have good horses. But where to contact you?"

"Here in this tavern, the Rothenstern. Friday night. I'll be here or have word for you. Kill your horses if you must, but make it! Every day's of vital importance. Good luck, and God keep you!"

As he spoke, Courtney rose. His square shoulders slumped, his lean figure drooped. The worn old peasant's coat enveloped him, the hat-brim was pulled over his face. Staggering a little, as a countryman who had drunk too much, he weaved across the tavern floor and was gone.

Beauchamp grunted admiringly, yet scornfully. God! He had ceased to believe in God, though he was himself one of the cleverest British agents in Europe. He was not alone in this. Many people had ceased to believe in anything, these days of horror.

It was the autumn of 1809. The dictator whom they had been discussing was Napoleon, the upstart who had made himself from a peasant into the master of Europe, and who aimed at mastery of the world. This had happened before, and would happen again; but to such minds as that of Beauchamp, it was something new and horrible and meant the end of the world.

TO such minds as that of Courtney, however, it meant something very different. . . .

He reached the doorway of the tavern in security. There, just as the dark safety of the street outside was within reach, disaster almost caught up with him. A French officer, entering, shoved him aside with arrogant hand. He fell back against the wall, his wide-brimmed hat was knocked aside. The officer glimpsed his face and was shocked into a momentary paralysis of recognition. Then Courtney dived into the street and was lost in the darkness.

He cursed his luck as he sped away. Bad enough to find Steinbach, the deadliest secret agent of Napoleon, here; worse, to have been seen and recognized by Villestreux. What horrible chance had brought them to Danzig, to the Rothenstern tavern, this night of all nights? They were the two men in France who knew him, who had best reason to know him. Steinbach, the right arm, and Villestreux, the left arm, of the French secret service, that terrible organization which reached out to the ends of Europe, striking down with pitiless efficiency the enemies of the dictator.

"NOW they'll know I'm in Danzig; now there's no safety anywhere," thought Courtney as he strode through the narrow streets of the old city, recently reduced by the French after a bloody siege. "And I can't leave till my work's done."

No, he could not leave. He had come from England for the reports from Vienna, Warsaw and St. Petersburg, from the agents like Beauchamp who risked their lives daily to keep the British service afloat amid these deathly waters.

Courtney was the peer of them all. In Spain, in France itself, he had fought them tooth and nail, until a bullet through the body laid him out for six months; he was, reportedly, dead. With this advantage he was now back in the game, only to be recognized tonight, at the very start. It was cruel luck.

Leave? It was out of the question, until he got Beauchamp's reports on Friday. Even more important was to meet Dawson, who was coming from St. Petersburg. He would be here on Thursday at the latest. London was hanging desperately upon Dawson's report. If Russia could be detached from her alliance with the dictator, then there was great hope for England; otherwise the outlook was gloomy.

Never, indeed, had it been gloomier. The Flanders expedition had been a ghastly failure. There were revolts in India. The Spanish expeditionary force had ended in defeat and embarkation. Scandinavia had been forced into alliance with the dictator, and one of his marshals, Bernadotte, would be Sweden's next king. The two-year blockade had brought starvation close to home. Only

STEINBACH

at sea had England managed to remain supreme.

And now, midway of the war, the entire cabinet had changed in London—whether for good or ill, no one knew as yet. As a crowning blow, the United States had passed the Non-intercourse Act; and once more England's commerce, which was barely keeping her alive, received a body-blow.

Courtney hurried along. His avenue of retreat was secure; a bluff-bowed fishing lugger, a tiny craft lurking among the islands and sending into Danzig twice a week for word from him.

In one of the waterfront streets, where the French siege guns had wrought havoc, he came to the dimly lit basement shop of a cobbler, and paused. The street was empty; all was clear. The cobbler was at his bench, hammering away. Courtney stooped and entered; as the door swung, a bell jangled in the depths of the house. The cobbler looked up, grunted recognition, and pulled another bell-cord beside his bench; this was to tell those upstairs that all was well and the new arrival was a friend.

"All clear," said the cobbler, an old one-legged man. "But he has a caller, a lady."

"Who is she?" demanded Courtney.

The cobbler shrugged. "How should I know? French, I think. Here he is now."

A rear curtain was brushed aside. Into the shop stepped the old, bent, white-haired man whose establishment here and whose sharp wits made this the focal point of northern Europe for the secret service. Leaning on his stick, his bright eyes peering at Courtney, old Dominie Claverhouse spoke under his breath.

"What's wrong, man? Where's Beauchamp?"

"Skipped," said Courtney. "And I must find other lodgings. Can't risk drawing the hounds on you. Steinbach is here; so is Villestreux. I saw them both. By the devil's luck, Villestreux saw and recognized me."

"Get back to England," said the Dominie curtly.

"Impossible. Beauchamp returns with his reports on Friday night. And Dawson will be here from St. Petersburg not later than Thursday."

"Very well," rejoined the Dominie. "Come upstairs. Peter, draw the shutters and keep watch on the street from above. Come along, Courtney. Elaine de Courland is here—the very person to solve your riddle."

COURTNEY followed him to a back passage, which opened upon a steep stairway.

"Never heard of her," he said. "If you say so, of course she's safe."

Claverhouse cackled a laugh. "As the dead! The Cossacks have killed most of her family, the French have looted her estates. She has money enough and lives here quietly. She'll take care of you, and I can reach you at any time if you're with her."

Courtney made no response, but trailed him up the stairs. A woman refugee, eh? Young, no doubt beautiful; addlepated and languishing, with hysterics in the offing, and ready to betray anyone if their vanity were injured, these women! The lean, hatchet-faced Englishman with the gray eyes did not like to trust any woman; but women unfortunately seemed to like to trust him. They could, more's the pity.

In the bare, sparsely furnished upstairs room, he bowed to the Dominie's introduction. The candlelight did not reveal but softly cloaked details. Courtney perceived that she was not tall, that she had a sweet, mobile face, that she was enveloped head and shoulders in a woolen peasant shawl.

"Mademoiselle," said the Dominie in French, "permit me to introduce my friend Allan Courtney. He must remain in Danzig until Friday night. Two French secret agents have recognized him tonight. If taken, he will be shot at once. Anyone who shelters him will be shot. He refuses to allow me to run this risk—not that he loves me, but because my work would be jeopardized."

THE little laugh that bubbled from her was delicious to hear, but it held a steely trenchant note that warned Courtney he was dealing with no ordinary woman.

"I see," she rejoined. "So you have in mind to ask that I take the risk, eh? Very well; I agree. Please come at once, M. Courtney, for there is no time to waste. *Au revoir,* my friend; you know how to reach me."

She extended her hand; the Dominie kissed it gallantly, and Courtney, who had not so far uttered a word, offered her his arm. She accepted. The Dominie brought Courtney's small satchel, containing his few personal effects, and himself let them out by the street door.

"Do you live far from here?" asked Courtney.

"In the next street. As far as heaven is from hell, when the French bombs and shot were falling; they reached here, but not to my street." Her voice quickened. "Careful, at the corner! If there's a patrol, we must get out of sight."

There was no patrol. The streets here were empty. They came to a high, narrow old house that was quite dark. She dropped his arm and hastened up the steps; when he followed, she was holding open a door. All dark inside; he stepped in. The door closed. An inner curtain was drawn aside and an old manservant appeared, holding a silver candlestick.

"A guest, Hans," she said in French, so Courtney might understand. "He will occupy my brother's room; the clothes-closet is at his service. Show him the way. —Have you dined, M. Courtney?"

"I've some bread and sausages in my pocket," he rejoined.

VILLESTREUX

She laughed softly. "Good! We dine in half an hour. We're alone in the house with Hans, who has served me for thirty years; you are safe with him."

Courtney bowed and departed up a stairway with the old servant. The candle was the only light in the house, apparently. The flickering gleam struck upon huge portraits, thick carpets, a glow of silver, but Courtney could see almost nothing.

The old servant lighted candles in a room of exquisite appointments, a man's room. The wardrobe was filled with garments of finest texture and cut, linen of the best.

"Where is your master, Hans?" Courtney asked.

"He is not here, monsieur," replied the old servant, and departed. Cautious, eh? Allan Courtney laughed, and hastily stripped off his peasant garments.

He bathed, shaved, dressed. The clothes fitted him fairly; the change was striking. He emerged a different man, gravely handsome, his nervous

wariness gone; only the hard glitter behind his gray eyes betrayed that he was no dawdling fop. When he opened his door and blew out his candles, he found the hall lighted, the stairs and the rooms below in a glow of candelabra. Tapestries and portraits and clusters of arms adorned the walls; he was in an atmosphere richly subdued, luxurious in the extreme.

He realized, now, that this was an adventure, a fabulous dream made real. When he bowed to Elaine de Courland, he was certain of it.

She, too, was transformed. Not a girl, but not over thirty, he judged. Her damask gown, her jewels, her high proud head, the regal loveliness of her features, astonished him; she was a woman of superb poise, of perfect control, and her outward loveliness was but the reflection of her real self.

Dinner was served in a dining-room paneled with old black oak; the silver, the china, the linens and viands were not only fine but remarkable. An ancient house filled with ancient treasures, Courtney comprehended. Across the table they spoke of art and music, of books, of travel; not stiffly and formally, but with a delightful intimacy. And as they talked, his wonder at this woman, and his admiration of her, grew each moment. Yet, in their conversation, no personal note intruded. She would not ask questions of a guest.

DINNER over, she led the way into a drawing-room and seated herself at a harpsichord, tinkling away idly, smiling at him.

"You do not use snuff?" she said. "Then smoke, by all means; I smelled tobacco on your clothes as we came."

Courtney obeyed, with a sigh of comfort. He had not eaten such a meal since he left London, and admitted as much.

"May I be permitted a question?" he went on. "I did not recognize the crest on your silver, but then I don't know much about German heraldry."

She ceased to smile. "The house of Courland was broken up and scattered long ago. This it all that remains of it. The estates are gone. The family is gone."

He started. Courland—the Dukes of Courland! Of course; long ago scattered and gone.

"But your brother?" he asked quietly.

"He is dead," she said. A sudden flash came into her face and was lost again. "He was murdered by French agents; rather, by an Alsatian in the French service."

"Forgive me," he said gently, but she smiled again.

"Why? One must always learn; the desire to learn betokens interest. There are many things I would like to ask you. I have heard your name. I know that you are one man whom the tyrants hate and fear—" She paused. "And then, monsieur, consider how similar are the names we bear: Courland, Courtney! That is destiny at work, doubtless."

HE forgot that he wore the clothes of a dead man; not that it mattered in the least to him. For, as he discussed his work, his adventures, the world around and the incredible things happening to it, he discovered in this woman a deep and sympathetic comprehension very like his own. She was not baffled by the mad events of today.

And yet they had closed in terribly upon her life. She was a refugee; French and Russians alike hated her whole family, and the dictator's secret police did not disdain to oppress or kill women.

"The future? I have none," she said simply. "If I could reach England, yes; but it is impossible. I have ceased to think about it. I must hide away here, and trust that no one will learn of me, or remember me. Presently, when the French find that this house belongs to me, they will come and loot it, and seize me. That will be the end."

"You shall have a better fate; I shall see to it!" he exclaimed, then relaxed and smiled. "Not that, at the moment, I'm able to change destiny; Steinbach has seen to that."

Her brows lifted. "Who?"

"Steinbach—the devil in person, who serves France. He's here; I saw him tonight, he knows that I'm alive and within his power. By this time, the city is probably being searched for me. That's why I'm in danger."

"Oh! Like all the world; will Europe ever be itself again?"

"Certainly," he rejoined, puffing at his pipe.

She abandoned the harpsichord and looked at him for a long moment.

"You seem quite sure. You have strength and poise and knowledge. . . . I think you must be a good swordsman?"

"Oh, fair enough." He laughed a little. He was the best rapier in London. "Quite sure? Of course. All this is

nothing new, this destruction of the moral law, of spiritual and intellectual truth, by brute force. Every so often it happens, and the brute force meets the same eternal obstacle, and perishes. Just so will Bonaparte perish, and all his boasted new order."

"What is this eternal obstacle you mention?" she demanded quickly. "Are you one of those silly people who believe Right must conquer Wrong—when we see it denied all around us every day? That God must always conquer Satan—when we feel the devil's whip on our backs?"

"No." His face, his eyes, became gravely earnest. "I was trying to explain it tonight to my friend Beauchamp; rather useless, I fear. It's not merely man's will to survive; it's something more startling, more direct. It's an unseen force which has never permitted, and never will permit, the Beast to conquer and flourish. He may conquer, yes; then it destroys him. He disintegrates, before its unseen power."

Her eyes dilated. "Either you are quite mad, or you have perceived a great truth! What is this force?"

He was silent for a space. "You may understand it; most people would not. You recall the story of Jeanne d'Arc?"

She gestured impatiently, alight with eager interest.

"Of course. What about it?"

"She appeared in times not unlike these, and saved her country. She brought it erect again. At such a crisis, this unseen force works in queer ways, and through queer agents—but always, invariably, it so works! Jeanne was in intimate contact with it. She heard it speak to her, she obeyed it. Remember the 'voice' which she heard? This unseen force, I tell you, is the same eternal verity behind all the worlds: Divinity. Things divine. Man struggles and builds

"Come upstairs, Courtney," said the Dominie. "Peter, draw the shutters and keep a watch. Come along, Courtney."

to reach the divine, and ever reaches a little farther. Some Napoleon, some Attila, some Genghis Khan, ravens and destroys him and his works, yet he and they persist, because divine things are at work—"

Awkwardly, he ceased to speak; he could not put the thought further into words. No need. She sat rapt, staring at nothing; she had comprehended, and it made her slim bosom rise and fall, her thin delicate nostrils dilate, her whole face become radiant. At length, with a catch of her breath, she wakened from her reverie and turned to him.

"I see, I see; you are treading upon dangerous ground, my friend! You dare to affirm the existence of a God, when the dictator of the whole of Europe denies the fact?"

"Nonsense! I'm not talking religion at all," exclaimed Courtney half angrily. "I'm talking about natural forces, eternal verities which we cannot understand, whose very existence is revealed only to certain chosen persons.... Say no more of it, I beg you."

"Not so; it is an idea, and ideas are precious things," she rejoined, and with a smile came to her feet. "I know you must be weary; we shall have time enough to talk, these next few days, so good night."

He went to his own room; and yet, oddly, he knew that she had dismissed him abruptly because she wanted to be alone with this idea of his. She grasped it. She knew it true.

And it remained between them, as a bond. They did not speak of it again, for morning brought new outlooks, yet it was there. It was at least a hope, given to a woman who had been empty of hope.

NEWS came with day: news of activity throughout the city, of all exits barricaded, of all boats and ships in the harbor searched. The waterfront was gone over with a fine-toothed comb; once satisfied that the man they wanted was not in this quarter, the French clapped a rigorous blockade on every road and exit, then set about a house-to-house inspection of the city.

So Courtney learned on Monday evening, having seen his hostess only briefly, at meal hours. She went out on Tuesday morning, muffled in the peasant clothes and shawl that she invariably wore on the street, carrying a market-basket. Courtney, who had discovered a small, gloomy but well-stocked library adjoining the drawing-room, was busy there when the servant Hans appeared in great agitation.

"Monsieur!" he exclaimed, for he also spoke French fluently. "They are here; they are in the street! The soldiers!"

"Where is your mistress?" asked Courtney, not turning around. "Has she come back?"

"No, she is at market—"

"Admit the soldiers when they come," he rejoined, and lifted his head from the pile of books on the table before him. A thunderous banging came from the door. "Quickly! Admit them, I say! I am your master, tell them!"

Hans fled. Courtney tumbled open some more volumes, seized quill and inkstand and paper, and fell to work.

He heard them coming, pounding on the stairs, clattering on the polished floors. Two officers strode in and halted at sight of him. One extended a paper.

"A search-warrant, monsieur. We are seeking a notorious criminal."

Courtney looked up, with an air of irritation. Spectacles were on his nose; his hair was disordered and well grayed with powder; a gray mustache clung to his lip; his face was yellowed and darkened and streaked with lines of age.

"What is it, what is it?" he said in German. "I do not understand."

The officer explained in German. Courtney waved his quill.

"Search, then! It is nothing to me. The house is at your disposal. Do not bother me."

The two officers grinned at each other and departed. Presently the house was cleared. Barely were the soldiers out, when Elaine de Courland came hurrying in, and with a quick word to Hans, rushed to the library. She stopped short in the doorway, at sight of the transformed Courtney, and an exclamation of relief broke from her.

"You! It is a miracle—"

"Careful," he broke in. "Get to the kitchen, quickly! They'll be back. It's an old trick; search a house, depart, and then come back again in a few moments. Hurry!"

She was off on the instant. Sure enough, ten minutes later one of the two officers came striding in without ceremony and came straight to the library. He tossed down a paper before Courtney.

"*Mein Herr,* I forgot to give you this certificate. It shows that your house has been searched, in case others come."

"Yes, yes; why do you disturb my work?" growled Courtney, and the officer departed.

Tuesday passed. Wednesday dragged out its slow hours. Hans went to the cobbler's shop and came back with word that all was safe there; the Dominie had survived the search-ordeal. On this night, Elaine showed herself charming, radiant, filled with life and gayety. What a woman she would be, thought Courtney, once away from this world of terror and constant fear!

ON Thursday morning came a caller, from the Dominie. It was the bluff, hard-jawed Hamburg man who captained the lugger that hung among the islands; he had come into the city by boat.

"I'm hoping to leave tomorrow night," said Courtney. Elaine was with them; he made no secret of the matter before her. In his heart he had determined not to go alone. "If not, then the next night."

"The harbor is closed an hour after sunset," said the shipman, worried.

"An excellent time to get away," Courtney declared. "I'll be waiting at the first boat-stairs this side the customs-house, the same place you set me ashore. If not tomorrow night, then Saturday night. I think, however, it will be tomorrow."

"The boat will come," said the shipman, and took his departure.

This day, Thursday, Courtney noted an abrupt change in his hostess. Finding that he played chess, she produced a board and they whiled away the hours at the game; yet she was not herself. She seemed on a nervous tension. She was distraught, regarded him queerly. He wondered whether the risk was getting on her nerves.

At dinner, she spoke of her brother. He had been the idol of her life, it appeared; she had loved him devotedly, passionately. It was only six months since his execution; he had been working against France, serving the German revolutionary party. They had shot him.

"I would do anything on this earth, anything," she said with deliberate emphasis, "to avenge his death, to strike down his murderer!"

Courtney thought for a moment that she was talking at him, seeking to enlist him. This was very far from her intent, as he later knew, but the notion irked him.

"It is the risk we all run, mademoiselle," he said. "We are lucky if we get shot, indeed—that is, if we're caught or betrayed."

Her gaze chilled upon him. "So? You English have no heart."

"On the contrary, we have so much that we fear to let it appear on the surface." He smiled. "You catch my meaning, I trust, even if the figure of speech is faulty."

She changed the subject, as though offended, and that evening he saw nothing of her. But Dawson came; Dawson, from St. Petersburg—at sunset the Dominie brought him, so well disguised that Courtney scarcely knew him.

His reports were definitely a blow. At the moment there was no chance whatever to entice Russia away from alliance with the dictator of Europe; every means had been tried and had failed. For London, it would be sad news. To Courtney, it was only another setback in a world filled with setbacks. He took the dispatches that Dawson entrusted to him, shook hands, and was left alone again.

Friday came, a chill, cloudy day pregnant with rain or with snow—for winter was close at hand in these northern regions.

Courtney passed the morning in the library, reading, forcing his mind to calmness. His reward came toward noon, when Hans said that a Polish fish-peddler was asking for him. It was Beauchamp, gloomier than ever and highly nervous.

"With Steinbach and Villestreux both here, Danzig is the devil's own pitch-pot!" he said, refusing even to sit down. "Here are the messages from Prague and from Vienna, and my own reports to boot. Suppose anything happens to you?"

"Then you're out of luck too," said Courtney lightly. "What news?"

"The worst. The Austrian alliance with Bonaparte has been confirmed; huge slices of territory are being handed over, huge monetary payments made. There's some talk that he's to marry Marie Louise, the emperor's daughter. From Warsaw, I've only the same bad news. He's creating an entirely new Polish state; at least, that's what I've picked up. From Prague—well, this report will speak for itself. Kendricks was betrayed and was shot for espionage; we'll have to appoint a new man there. Poor chap! He was at Harrow with me."

Beauchamp departed.

Courtney made his dispatches into a compact bundle. Too bad about Ken-

dricks; this hit him hard, for Kendricks had been an old friend and comrade. He looked up, at a step, to see Elaine de Courland. She was going out; to his astonishment, she had eschewed the peasant garb and was really lovely with her furs and a glint of jewels.

"Are you leaving tonight?" she asked.

"Yes. All finished. But you—"

"I'm tired of smelly clothes and of hiding," she cut in, checking him. He had been on the point of telling her that she, too, was leaving this night. Her cold manner stopped the impulse. "I'll be back in time for dinner. An early dinner, since you'll be leaving as soon as darkness falls. Here! I wish you to wear this, if you please. It belonged to my brother. I'd like to know that you're wearing it."

She handed him a sheathed sword, a beautiful blade with jeweled handle, and then left him. Courtney was perplexed by her air, by her words; but when he looked at the naked blade, he was delighted. It was a rapier in a thousand, of finest steel, and a most princely gift.

"Queer!" he thought. "What the devil's in her mind, I wonder?"

THE afternoon dragged. He made ready, picking out a heavy fur-lined coat of the dead man's, and giving his old peasant costume to Hans for burning.

"And," he told the old servant, "get your things ready, and the pick of what your mistress will want—of jewels and money, no more than can be carried lightly. I may take you both with me to England tonight, but I'm not sure. I haven't asked her yet. I'm leaving that until the last moment."

Hans, confused and overjoyed, bustled off.

Sunset approached, but there was no sun to set this night. A thin drizzle of rain was beginning to fall, to the great delight of Courtney. Darkness would come early. In fact, the gloomy house grew dark long ahead of its usual time, and Hans lit candles in the drawing-room where Courtney sat pondering moves on the chessboard, to kill time. The sword lay on the table beside him; he had no intention of cumbering his movements with the weapon before he left the house.

A rattle at the front door. It opened and closed again with a slam. She was back, then! Suddenly Courtney, hand extended to one of the pieces on the board, froze. He heard voices from the entry hall, her voice—and another's. A

man's voice—a voice he knew, and it sent an incredulous, gasping chill through him.

He looked up, his face white and shocked, as Steinbach came striding into the room. Behind him was Elaine, closing the door and standing against it.

"So!" On the word, Steinbach halted. "A trap, baited upon a pretty hook! So this is the gentle love-nest she promised me! I might have known it!"

He was as though carved of ivory—a pallid man with cold eyes and expressionless but striking features. He was garbed in the height of fashion, a fine gentleman; but he was no gentleman.

"Quick!" From the woman burst a wild gasp. "The sword—this is the reason I gave it to you! This is the man who murdered my brother! Kill him, kill him! I have brought him here—"

"Yes, she brought me here." Steinbach was smiling. A laugh, a rare thing with him, came to his lips. "Good evening, M. Courtney. We meet once more."

All this brief while, Courtney had not moved. His hand was still extended to the chessman. Now of a sudden, his palsied brain calmed. He saw the whole thing, and could have groaned aloud. In her blind and furious desire for vengeance, a wholly natural but frightfully dangerous desire, Elaine had lured Steinbach here to his death—or so she fondly expected.

The Frenchman toppled forward. The candles were blown out. The voice of Hans, the voice of Elaine, pierced the darkness.

But Steinbach was laughing with grim, confident amusement.

"What, my honest Englishman, no move to kill me?" he said lightly, tauntingly. "You seem astonished. Is it possible you did not send her, after all, to bring me?"

"No, upon my word," faltered Courtney. The young woman stared at him in wild and incredulous horror. Steinbach turned, still laughing, and surveyed her.

"Your brother? What's all this talk? You lied to me about your name?"

"Yes, you devil!" She flashed into abrupt movement. A little brass pistol came into her hand. "I'm Elaine de Courland.... Ah, you know me now, do you!"

Steinbach looked startled. "So that is it!"

"Yes, that's it," she cried, her voice shrill. "I shall kill you myself.... What are you laughing about, monster?"

Courtney, not rising, not moving, spoke up with sharp vehemence.

"Elaine! Put down that pistol—down with it!"

As he very well knew, Steinbach could have wrested it from her with little danger; she held it far out from her body, at arm's-length. But Steinbach was smiling, keenly amused.

"Our friend gives you good advice," he said. "What am I laughing at, pretty one? Why, I've treated with lovely ladies long before now, let me tell you. And if you kill me, it'll do you no good. My comrade Villestreux followed us. He's out in the street now, with a dozen men, waiting to hear my whistle. Yes, put down the pistol."

Her eyes distended, her arm slowly, slowly fell. She stared at Steinbach, then darted a frightful look at Courtney.

"A lie!" rang out her voice. "A trick, a lie—"

"Not in the least," spoke up Courtney with calm assurance. "If you had broached your plan to me, I would have told you it was useless; you cannot catch Steinbach with so simple a lure."

Steinbach bowed his head slightly. "Thank you, M. Courtney. Will you have the goodness to surrender quietly? I don't like your motionless attitude, upon my word."

"There's reason enough," said Courtney, relaxing a little in his chair. "I've

a badly twisted ankle, thanks to a fall down the steps this afternoon, and can't stand on my left foot at all. Otherwise, I assure you, it would have given me great pleasure to kill you. I'm afraid the game's up. You've got me where I can't run. Would you do me one favor?"

"Possibly," said Steinbach, eying him narrowly.

"Then let's not have any scene. I've no concealed weapons, upon my honor; not so much as a pistol. I didn't expect this call, you see. However, I have a good deal of information in regard to certain large sums of money. So call in Villestreux by himself, leaving his men outside, and we may do a bit of bargaining. I'm done for, but this young lady should not be molested. And you can't find the money unless I tell where it is."

Desperate—a desperate gamble, his voice and face under desperate control. He had no choice now. She had brought about this horrible crisis, and he had to get out of it if he could; it was a long chance. Still, he knew how venal Steinbach was, how the man was avid after gold; it was the ruling passion of his life.

"Hand over the pistol, mademoiselle," he went on quietly. Now, at every cost, he must make the man believe in him. "Perhaps, Steinbach, you'd prefer that she call Villestreux?"

Steinbach relaxed a little.

"Yes. If you think I'm fool enough to take my eyes off you. . . . Ah, thank you!" He took the pistol that she extended. "Yes. Call M. Villestreux. I'll speak to him when he comes to the front door. A little talk will harm no one."

ELAINE DE COURLAND was stricken to the very soul; Courtney almost pitied her in this moment. She had all but collapsed. Her flaring, flaming spirit had been struck down. Courtney's words had horrified her; realization of her folly, of Steinbach's cunning, had absolutely demolished her. As she turned to the door, she staggered, then recovered.

"Sit down, Steinbach. Sorry I can't do the honors, but my whole leg is in spasms of pain." Courtney picked up his pipe and stuffed it. His air was casual. "Bad luck, eh? Otherwise, I'd have got away. Well, I can offer you a bit of gold if it'll do me any good: a thousand guineas in English gold. Securely hidden, too."

He leaned over, grimaced with imaginary pain, and lit his pipe at the nearest candle. Through the smoke, his gray eyes leaped and drove. The pistol that Steinbach held loosely. . . . Alas, the silly woman! One might have known. The priming was all fallen out. It was at cock, and he could see the empty pan. He could see the glint in Steinbach's eyes, too, at his mention of the guineas. Gold was rare in Europe, these days.

"That, plus the reward for your capture, will not be bad," said Steinbach.

FROM the hall, they could hear Elaine calling. Her voice was choked with emotion as she called the name of Villestreux. After a moment they heard his response, and Steinbach let out a bellow.

"Pierre! Come in, come in. Leave the men outside. Come in! A surprise for you!"

Through his pipe-smoke, Courtney's eyes were flickering about. He was planning every word now, every movement. His life depended on how well he timed what must be done; he could not afford to miss by an inch. Even so, he might possibly be killed—but that was always the risk. How lucky, now, that he had laid the naked sword on the table, unsheathed! This was the only break of luck in the whole affair.

And he knew he dared waste no time on Villestreux. There was a man who would not be tricked; he was all for action, impetuous and determined. Luckily, Villestreux was no mere police agent but a soldier. He did not depend upon whistles, as Steinbach did. God, what luck where most needed!

And here came Villestreux into the room, a smallish, agile man in uniform. He halted at sight of Courtney. He was thunderstruck. . . . And this was the instant on which Courtney must gamble.

Steinbach was laughing a little for sheer enjoyment of his comrade's stupefaction, as Courtney rose. He stepped on his left foot, winced sharply, staggered, threw out his hands—then, swift as light itself, he had the rapier and was whirling about. And even as he swung around, he was lunging, with every movement calculated.

Steinbach came half out of his chair. The pistol flashed in the pan. The point of the rapier drove through his throat; even his rise had been anticipated. But Courtney had overlooked one thing; the high wooden chair-back. The rapier-point, driven through and through Steinbach's throat, plunged into the wood and stuck.

True, Courtney freed it almost at once, but this brief instant had given Villestreux time to act. A shout burst from him; his sword slithered free, was thrusting forward. Barely did Courtney catch it on his own steel and parry the thrust.

A raving, furious passion seized Villestreux. He hurled himself at Courtney, cutting and slashing. Evading, stepping backward, parrying, Courtney almost went down under that mad rush. Yet his voice came with insistent energy.

"Elaine! The door—bar the front door! Call Hans. Out the back way!"

Villestreux had him cornered. He slipped away, caught a slash across his left arm, but the steel did not cut through the cloth by luck. Stay here fencing all night? Devil take it, no! Courtney backed to a chair, hooked his left arm about it, and sent it scurrying at the Frenchman. It caught Villestreux about the knees and staggered him. As he came to balance again, Courtney was in and at him, thrust and lunge, rapier driving and slithering past his steel.

Villestreux was struck, was struck again. A desperate cry broke from him as the blood spurted; that was his last effort, for the rapier crossed his guard and plunged into his chest, and Courtney sprang backward.

"You—you devil!" gasped out the Frenchman. His sword fell; he clutched at his breast and toppled forward.

The candles were blown out. The voice of Hans, the voice of Elaine, pierced the darkness. Courtney, sheathing the rapier and fastening the belt, was guided to them; Hans held the fur coat for him.

"Out the back way," he panted. "Lead. Chance it. . . . If they're not there, we can make the boat-stairs. You're going to England, Elaine, you and Hans. . . . No talk! Lead."

Her hand found his, and led him.

LUCKILY—luck again, he thought—there was a back way; not every house had one.

They came out into a silent street, muffled by the slight rain, Hans bearing the burden of what he had packed. Courtney felt Elaine's hand slide through his arm. Bewildered, swept away by her emotion, she scarce knew what she said. He silenced her abruptly.

"Never mind, never mind. Calm down. I don't blame you a bit; it came out right enough after all. Now forget it."

She calmed; the chill rain, the night air, aided. To distract her thoughts, Courtney spoke of the news brought by Dawson and by Beauchamp—none of it was good news.

SHE made an effort to discuss these things, about which she cared so little. Then they were at the dark stretch of wharves. Here Courtney knew his way, and presently came to the deserted boat-stairs by the customs-house. All three of them descended to the landing at the edge of the dark water.

"All right," said Courtney with assurance. "We're safe. The boat will come; after that the lugger and England. Feeling all right now, Elaine?"

"I don't know. Everything's gone—" She paused. "So there's nothing but bad news! I'm sorry. The world has turned upside down for us, for everyone."

"It'll come right, never fear," Courtney rejoined.

Her fingers tightened on his arm.

"Do you still believe in your theory?" she breathed. "You have seen how hopeless everything is; no help anywhere, only the worst of news from all quarters! Your England has no statesmen, no soldiers, no generals of any fame. The dictator has the finest on earth. Oh, it is so hopeless, so dark!"

Courtney sighed. "True, I suppose; yet my conviction endures. The men who attempt to obliterate all divine things are, eventually, destroyed by those same unseen forces. They work slowly, through agents who gradually come to the front. We had hoped that Sir John Moore was such a person; he was our best soldier. But now he is dead, his army in Spain has been destroyed and driven out."

"Then England has given up fighting the dictator in Spain?"

"No," he rejoined. "No. They've sent another man, I hear, one who has gained some success already. He's not too well known. I'm afraid he can do nothing there."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, a chap who had most of his fighting experience in India. His name is Wellington. . . . Ah!" He broke off suddenly, leaning forward, searching the dark water. "There's the boat! All's safe, my dear!"

A chap named Wellington. . . . All was indeed safe; the world was safer than Courtney could know or dream.

"Not Upon the Sleeve," an offstage drama during the British occupation of Boston, will be Mr. Bedford-Jones' contribution to our forthcoming June issue.

What Price Freedom?

By CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

WITH tent pegs and flaps fastened securely, an American army officer sat alone in a baking oven of heat. Sweeping across the Libyan desert from far south of Jerabub and the Kufra oases, the dreaded Saharan hurricane tore its blighting course toward the Mediterranean. The heat was so intense it not only warped the covers of some books that lay on his folding table, but the boards of the table itself. Even within the tent, sand penetrated his garments and literally seemed to choke the pores of his skin. Sand settled in the glass of water beside him, and the glass itself became too hot to lift. Worst of all, was the effect of these conditions on a gunshot wound in his left wrist, an excruciating torture, as though his entire arm was on fire.

The man was General William Eaton, commanding the American Saharan Expeditionary Force. The place was just outside Derna, Libya. The time, five P.M., May 23, 1805. The occasion: holding the besieged Derna against the forces of Yusuf Karamauli, Bashaw of Tripolitania (Libya).

A little over three weeks before, after a six-hundred-mile desert march of untold suffering and difficulties, from Alexandria, William Eaton with Lieut. O'Bannon, Midshipman Mann and six American marines, the Englishman, Richard Farquhar, a few other Christians, a company of Janissary cannoneers and about twelve hundred Arabs supported by three ships of our Mediterranean squadron, had attacked and captured Derna. Eaton's trump card was Hamet Bashaw, deposed and exiled by his brother Yusuf, who had usurped and now occupied the throne of Tripoli. Thus, as they marched westward, Arabs loyal to Hamet joined this unique expeditionary force under the American flag.

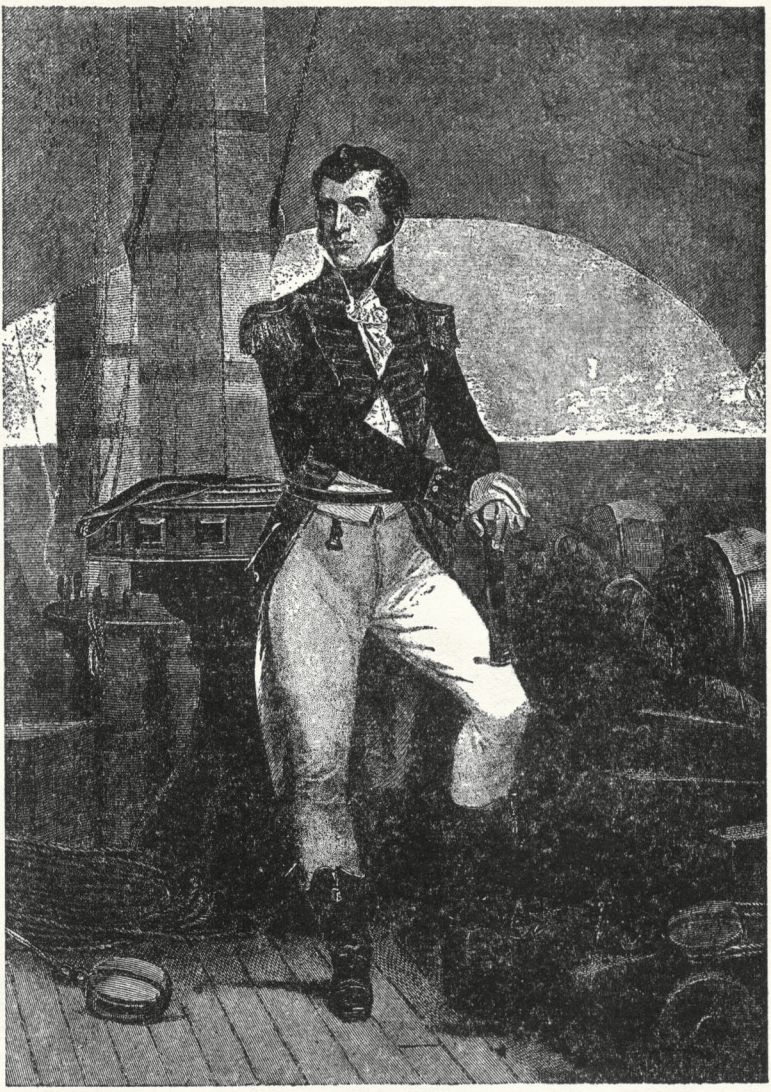
Eaton had obtained his first two objectives: his rendezvous with the fleet at Bomba and his capture of Derna. But the third and most important, the capture of Tripoli, which was to depose Yusuf Bashaw, free the American prisoners, establish Hamet on the throne and effect an honorable treaty of peace, still lay ahead. Despite the extraordinary effort Yusuf Bashaw had used to defend Derna, both diplomatically in Egypt, and with arms, Eaton was now in possession of the most valuable province in Tripoli. He at once set about consolidating his position. All that was now required was reasonable and efficient coöperation by our Government through the navy. . . .

Mustapha Bey, the Governor of Derna, had fled to the sanctuary of a neutral sheik, whom Eaton tried in vain to induce to give up the refugee. From there Mustapha directed his plans and carried on propaganda against Hamet Bashaw and Eaton—who dared not violate the Moslem law of sanctuary, but tried to induce the Sheik to turn the Bey over to him, to use in an exchange for the imprisoned Captain Bainbridge.

Several hundred of Yusuf Bashaw's Tripolitans, most of them well mounted, had reached Derna and joined the Governor's forces, which now numbered 3,045, and under Hassein Bey, commander in chief, surrounded the town. They had fortified their main camps, established just over the first low mountain range, from where Hassein had offered thirty dollars for every Christian head, and had set a price of six thousand dollars for Eaton's, and double that sum for him as a prisoner. Hassein Bey's men had been making depredations on the horses and flocks of Eaton's loyal Bedouin Arabs camped in the vicinity of the town. Eaton with his officers and thirty soldiers, made up of Americans and Greeks, had moved out of town against them. During this movement, Eaton's forces came off best in a number of engagements in which both the Americans and Greeks not only succeeded in causing considerable losses to the enemy with little injury to themselves, but succeeded, with the help of Hamet Bashaw's Arabs, in recovering the stolen cattle.

Eaton's consideration and protection of these people made him many friends, but Hassein Bey's harshness in holding

Here ends the dramatic story of an American army in the Sahara, and the final naval actions by our Mediterranean squadron. Today there is being reenacted—but with a different cast—a war drama similar to that of 136 years ago.



STEPHEN DECATUR—from an old print.

some of the Arabs' prominent men, as hostages in chains, resulted in some of them, including their women, acting as spies. These voluntarily brought valuable information to Eaton as to the enemy's position, numbers, and plans.

The day after the sandstorm ended, as supper was about to be served to Eaton in his tent, an unkempt, wild-looking fellow, with a big mop of hair, without fez or turban, but dressed in the Arab *baracan* and carrying a staff, appeared at his tent. This fellow was a *marabout* or Mohammedan holy man, who wandered from place to place, living on goat's milk and wild honey—when he could get it.

"Arfi" (master), he warned, "there are two women, one in Hassein Bey's camp, the other in town, *who have been hired to kill you by poison.* Hassein Bey has already made them large presents, among them a diamond ring, a brilliant solitaire, in anticipation of this service. Accept no presents of pastry cooking, preserves or fruit from anybody in the town. May Allah protect thee. Allah! Allahu!"

Eaton thanked him; whereupon he lightly touched the fingers of his left hand to his heart, his lips and his forehead, meaning, "Thou art ever in my heart, on my lips and in my thoughts," and went out.

FOR seven weeks Eaton held Derna, during which he fortified the town against the approaching Tripolitan army, which arrived in about eleven days and occupied Eaton's old camp site at the rear of the town.

There were later a number of skirmishes, and on June 10 the enemy, reinforced by Arabs, made another attack, in

which Hamet's cavalry offered a firm resistance. One of Eaton's field-pieces and the long twelve-pounders of the *Argus* were very useful, whenever the enemy showed himself from the hills and ridges. The Tripolitans were finally repulsed with a loss of fifty killed and seventy wounded, while Hamet lost between fifty and sixty killed and wounded.

During that winter and early spring, while Eaton was conducting his campaign, Col. Tobias Lear had been a great deal with Commodore Barron at Leghorn, who spent much of his time there because of ill health. Now that Hamet was hammering at Yusuf's gates, Lear, who appears to have had considerable influence with Commodore Barron, persuaded him to consider favorably a treaty of peace with Yusuf Bashaw and withhold help to Eaton.

In a letter to Commodore Barron, Eaton advised him that when Yusuf Bashaw was apprised of the capture of Derna, the success of the expedition and the rallying of the Cyrene Arabs to Hamet's cause, the wily Yusuf, appreciating the seriousness of his danger, would make overtures of peace to the United States. The success of this would not only rid him of his rival by thus depriving him of further help from that country, and block the further march of Eaton's expedition, but would prevent the placing of Hamet Bashaw on the throne, compromise Hamet's future existence and well-being, and force Eaton to betray a trust as a representative of the United States. Eaton warned Barron of such a contingency.

Consequently, when Eaton learned on June 1, in a letter from Commodore Barron, that Yusuf Bashaw had actually made overtures of peace, he was greatly perturbed, but even more so when he was advised that Consul-General Lear was determined to meet these overtures.

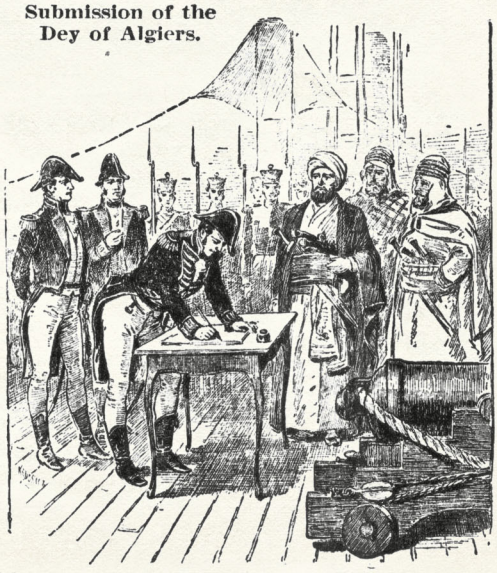
Eaton at once dispatched a letter to Commodore Barron, reviewing the situation, emphasizing both his and the United States' honorable responsibility in it. He strongly deprecated making temporary use of Hamet Bashaw and then abandoning him, as well as violating the principles of honor and justice involved:

You would weep, sir, were you on the spot, to witness the unbounded confidence placed in the American character here. . . . You would feel that this confidence, at any price, should be carried through the Barbary regencies, at least to Tripoli, by the same means that it has been inspired here (Derna). But if no further aids come to our assistance, and we are compelled to leave the place under its actual circumstances, Humanity itself must weep; the whole city of Derna, together with numerous families of Arabs, who attached themselves to Hamet Bashaw, and resisted Yusuf's troops in expectation of succor from us, must be abandoned to their fate: havoc and slaughter will be the inevitable consequence: not a soul of them can escape the savage vengeance of the enemy.

Could I have apprehended this result of my exertions, certainly no consideration would have prevailed on me to have taken an agency in a tragedy so manifestly fraught with intrigue: so wounding to feelings; and I must view it, so degrading to our national honor.

Meantime let us leave Derna for the moment and focus our eyes on Tripoli. Nineteen months had passed since the U. S. Frigate *Philadelphia* ran afoul the Kaliusa Reef off Tripoli Harbor, and her surrender to Yusuf Bashaw on October 31, 1803. Nineteen dreary months of confinement and apprehension for Captain Bainbridge and his officers, and of slavery and torture for the 307 members of the crew: forced labor, semi-nakedness, beds on a pebbled floor, insults, beatings, bastinadoings and starvation! Except for six who died and five who turned Mohammedan, nearly three hundred of these courageous, hardy American sailors kept their faith and honor and survived the ordeal, though some bore the physical effects to their graves.

Submission of the Dey of Algiers.



But it was the "turning Turk" by Wilson, West, Hixmer, Smith and Prince and the treachery of Wilson which galled them most. They took a little consolation from the fact that only Smith and Prince were Americans.

During this time three men in Tripoli had consistently befriended the American prisoners: Mr. Nicholas Nissen, the Danish Consul; Sidi Mohammed d'Ghiers, Yusuf's Minister of State; and a Neapolitan slave. Through Mr. Nissen, word was brought that General Eaton had joined forces with those of the deposed Bashaw and was successfully marching across the Libyan deserts, that he had already captured Derna, and would soon have Bengasi, with a view eventually to taking Tripoli from the rear while the American squadron bombarded it from the sea. This information put Yusuf in a dither, and he redoubled his efforts to increase fortifications in and about Tripoli.

IN the midst of all this, on the morning of May 26, 1805, Tripoli awoke to see morning sunshine gleaming from the white sails and glistening masts of the *Constitution, Essex* and other ships of the American squadron, as they came up into the wind and dropped anchor just outside Tripoli Harbor's reefs. Aboard were Commodore Barron, Rodgers and Colonel Tobias Lear. The white flag run up on the *Essex* was acknowledged by one from the Bashaw's Castle, and Yusuf sent the Spanish Consul aboard as his emissary.

But days of bad weather prevented further communication until May 29, when negotiations were renewed in the captain's cabin on the *Constitution.* While Colonel Tobias Lear listened to Yusuf's proposals in the comfortable cabin, the wounded William Eaton, in his heat-soaked tent at Derna, listened to the warnings of the marabout.

Yusuf's Spanish emissary stated that the Bashaw waved aside all Lear's terms, but demanded $130,000 for the ransom of the Americans, and delivery of Tripolitan prisoners gratis. Lear objected strongly and countered with the following proposition: an exchange of prisoners, man for man, as far as they would go. As the Bashaw had three hundred Americans, more or less, and Barron one hundred Tripolitans, more or less, sixty thousand dollars should be paid the Bashaw for the balance in his favor; that the American captives should be sent aboard the squadron now off Tripoli, and the Tripolitan prisoners brought from Syracuse and delivered to him as soon as possible.

In addition to this, "a treaty of peace should be made on reasonable and mutually beneficial terms." Lear presented this as an ultimatum and stated he would submit it in writing. Two days later Yusuf replied that "he agreed to the terms of the exchange of prisoners, but could not deliver the Americans until his subjects were ready to be delivered to him." Lear's reply to Yusuf was that he had twenty-five hours to take it or leave it. Neither Nissen, d'Ghiers, Bainbridge nor Lear trusted the Spanish Consul, and Lear finally refused to deal with him.

The wise and far-seeing Sidi d'Ghiers wished for a settlement, so a conference held in prison, resulted in a plan that Bainbridge himself should be the intermediary and should go aboard the *Constitution* under his parole of honor to return, his companions to pledge their lives for its fulfillment. D'Ghiers was in full accord, but when he presented the paper drawn up and signed by the officers to His High Mightiness, the Bashaw simply shrugged. "I don't trust these Americans," said he; "besides, I value Captain Bainbridge as a prisoner more than all of his officers put together."

Thus, Yusuf remained adamant, and only granted Bainbridge's request when d'Ghiers offered to leave his only son in the Castle, *whose head was to be lopped off if Bainbridge failed to return.* So Bainbridge was rowed out and spent the entire day in consultation aboard the *Constitution;* and three days later, through the able efforts of Sidi Mohammed d'Ghiers, a decision was arrived at.

CAPTAIN BAINBRIDGE and Mr. Nissen were invited to the Bashaw's council-chamber. Members of the Cabinet, guests and representatives were seated in the form of a great crescent; the appointments of the place were more magnificent, said Lear, than anything he had ever seen in any of the other regencies.

Yusuf was on his divan in the center, and after Bainbridge was seated, Yusuf turned to him and remarked: "In thus admitting you to my private divan, you have received an honor never before conferred on a prisoner of Barbary." Then, with dignity, he submitted to his council the question of peace or war with the United States. The ballots were cast. It was a tie. Yusuf himself must decide.

Then Yusuf Karamauli surveyed the gathering, leaned forward, thrust his

right hand into the bosom of his rich silken gown and drew forth a signet.

"It is peace!" With the signet ring, he stamped its impress upon the treaty.

With Mr. Nissen acting as liaison officer, the treaty was signed aboard the *Constitution* June 3, Article III reading: "The United States forces in Derna to be withdrawn, and no supplies given Tripolitan subjects in rebellion. Americans will endeavor to persuade Hamet to withdraw but will not use force; and his family will be restored to him."

Bainbridge at once sent a letter to William Ray informing him that peace terms had been agreed upon. When Ray read this to the crew, tears which brutal flogging had failed to wring from these hardy tars, coursed down many a sun-tanned cheek. The night of June 3, the day before the men were to be released, the brutal jailers and overseers were suddenly missing, and a new guard put over the men, who were locked in their prison. The former keepers were taking no chance of vengeance by the freed men.

On the morning of June 4 the men received an issue of new uniforms, and the entire contingent rendezvoused at the main landing-place—all but the six who had died during the nineteen months of slavery, and the five renegades. They were called before the divan of the Bashaw, who graciously told them that peace was concluded, and as the Americans were about to leave Tripoli, they were given the choice of continuing as his subjects or leaving with the rest of their comrades. "Unaware of the artifice," wrote Ray, "all except Wilson expressed their wish and anxiety to relinquish the turban and accompany us to America."

Wilson, the arch-traitor of the five, recalling Bainbridge's threat that if they both were ever released from captivity, he would have him hanged for a traitor, chose the lesser of two evils, thanked His Majesty for his generous offer, said he preferred Tripoli to America, Mohammedanism to Christianity, and wished to remain with him as a loyal subject.

"Wilson," Ray continued, "was honored and caressed by the Bashaw and his divan (court) for his singular fidelity, while the other four were sent into the country with a formidable guard. We had a glance at them as they passed our prison, and could see horror and despair depicted on their countenances."

The following day, June 4, the flagstaff Yusuf had cut down four years before was replaced on the American consulate, and the flag of the United States run up. Immediately a salute of twenty-one guns from the Castle and forts boomed out, which was returned by the *Constitution*.

All but eleven of the original crew of the *Philadelphia* tramped from the Castle for the last time through a vast concourse of people which lined the streets and the shore, many of whom had spat upon them on their arrival. But now, happy over the peace, they shouted "lu! lu! lu!" to the departing tars as they clambered into the ship's boats. In one of them went the Neapolitan slave who had befriended them—but as a free man. Seven hundred dollars was the price of his liberty, made up by the *Philadelphia's* men with the advance money of the wages due them. The free sailors were soon distributed amongst the different vessels of the squadron.

"Anchors aweigh!" The white-walled, minareted city, the grim ramparts of the Castle of the Bashaws dwindled and disappeared below the horizon.

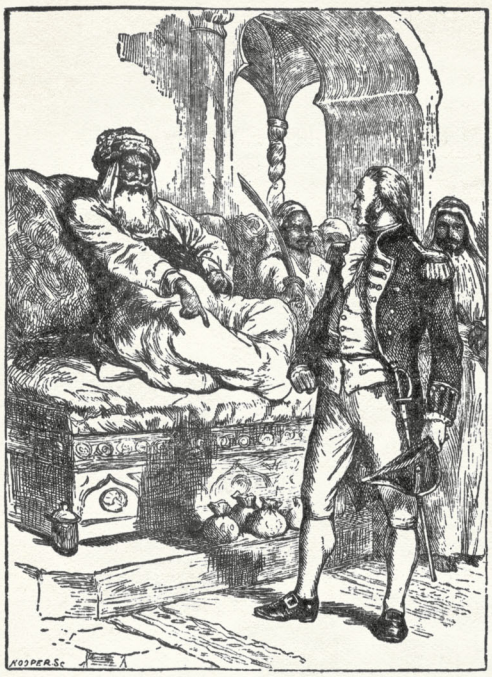
ALL this took place, not only without consulting Eaton or Hamet Bashaw, but without even officially informing them. On June 3, the very day the preliminary articles of the treaty were signed aboard the *Constitution,* Eaton was standing on the defensive at Derna and protecting the inhabitants of that city from attack. Through an Arab spy he had employed, he learned that on June 4 a courier had arrived from Tripoli with dispatches from Yusuf Bashaw to his commander-in-chief in that vicinity, "stating his intentions of concluding a peace with the United States . . . . *after which he should know of how to dispose of his internal enemies.*" Referring, of course, to Hamet and his followers.

As Eaton's marines passed to and fro through the town, old and young, even the women from behind their jalousied windows, shouted:

"Live the Americans! Long live our friends and protectors!"

"*Hapless beings,*" wrote Eaton in his journal. "*If they could descry the reverse that probably awaits them, how justly would their acclamations of confidence be turned to execrations.*"

On June 4 Capt. Hull staggered Eaton with the news that the *Argus* and the *Hornet* were to leave the coast for Syracuse, that they were ready for sea, and would receive Eaton and the men under



Captain Bainbridge and the Dey of Algiers.

his command on board any moment he was ready to abandon his position, and a favorable opportunity offered to take them off.

"I think the tenure of this position so important to the issue of the negotiation now pending between the United States and the reigning Bashaw of Tripoli," Eaton replied, "that I cannot reconcile it to a sense of duty to evacuate it . . . . except compelled by . . . . further advices received from the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Squadron in the Mediterranean."

Eaton did not have to wait long for advices. On June 11 the *Constellation,* Capt. Campbell commanding, dropped anchor off Derna and brought orders to Eaton apprising him that *peace had been concluded between the United States and Yusuf Bashaw of Tripoli June 3, and that Eaton was to evacuate and withdraw his forces from Derna.* The latter also enclosed the articles of the treaty, which Eaton observed was drawn up between Yusuf and Tobias Lear, Esq., Consul General for Algiers and Commissioner of Peace on the part of the United States.

This was a bitter pill for Eaton to swallow. He must have felt, like Lawrence of Arabia, that he had been allowed by his country to become the unwitting agent in the betrayal of the confidence of an Arab sovereign. However, he proceeded at once to make the best of a bad matter, and to protect his protégé Hamet to the best of his ability.

The problem was not only to withdraw his Christian soldiery, but also Hamet and his suite, without arousing the suspicions of the loyal Arab populace that they were being deserted, and thus avoid a general massacre of revenge. So the following day he feigned preparations for an attack on the enemy to divert the attention of the townspeople. He also spread the report that reinforcements had arrived in the *Constellation* for this purpose, and would send ammunition and supplies ashore. Early that evening two of the *Constellation's* boats were laid alongside their wharf, and marine patrols were placed as usual to prevent communication between town and batteries. Under Eaton's eye, and cover of darkness, the evacuation quietly took place.

When the boats were seen returning, Eaton sent a messenger to the Bashaw, requesting an interview. Understanding its significance, Hamet immediately repaired to the fort with his retinue, dismounted and embarked. The marines followed, with the American officers. When all were well under way, Eaton, the last to leave, stepped into a small-boat which he had retained, and had barely shoved off when suddenly the battery, camp and shore were alive with distracted soldiery and populace. Some called on Eaton and the Bashaw; others were shrieking and calling execrations on their heads. Then they fell upon the horses and the tents which had been left standing, and prepared to flee. . . .

According to the terms of the treaty, Hamet was reunited with his family, returning as Bey of Derna, but later he fled again into Egypt, where he died.

EIGHT bells clanked the time for the midday watch of the U.S.S. Frigate *Constellation,* June 13, 1805, as she prepared to weigh anchor. Eaton sat alone in his cabin, gazing at the picture framed by his porthole: white-walled Derna, shimmering under a desert sun, the azure Mediterranean lapping in lazy ripples the foot of her picturesque bastioned walls.

Eaton wrote: *"In a few minutes more we shall lose sight of this devoted city, which has experienced a stranger reverse in so short a time as ever was recorded in the disasters of war; six hours ago the enemy was seeking safety from them by flight. This moment we drop them into the hand of our enemy, for no other crime but too much confidence in us."*

As the picture passed from view, Eaton raised his eyes to the battery flagstaff, where for the first and only time in all African history the American flag had been loosed from the ramparts of a conquered city—conquered in the interests of justice, freedom and peace.

UPON Eaton's return to America, he was received with marked distinction, but was financially embarrassed by the long delays of the Government in settling his claims for money expended on the expedition. No laurel wreath was placed on his brow. Even the meager reward of a medal was defeated by a small majority in Congress, although perhaps he would have refused it.

Though his was not the glory, yet through his undaunted courage and brilliant services he really did achieve his greatest objective, the release of the officers and crew of the *Philadelphia* from slavery in Tripoli, and the forcing of Yusuf Karamauli to a treaty of peace. In recognition of this, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts made him a grant of ten thousand acres of land in what is now Maine, and honored him as a Legislator and back of the golden-domed State House in Boston a short street slopes down the back of Beacon Hill, which the city fathers have named Derna. . . .

Our treaty with Tripoli was the second ratified with us by that power. We had also consummated treaties of peace and friendship with the Sultan of Morocco, the Dey of Algiers and the Bey of Tunis; but apparently the Barbary rulers looked upon these treaties as binding only in so far as our naval strength in the Mediterranean insured their enforcement.

Consequently a strong squadron and the presence of our vessels at the Barbary ports was essential, and played a part in a number of deciding episodes:

One of the first occurred with Tunis. Commodore Rodgers, aboard the flagship *Constitution,* had captured a Tunisian *zebec* and two prizes she was convoying, in their attempt to run the blockade of Tripoli in the spring of 1805. The law of blockades meant nothing to the Bey of Tunis, who demanded the return of the vessels. This was refused. The affronted Bey menaced our Consul Dr. George Davis in Tunis and threatened war against the United States; whereupon the *Constitution,* nine other ships of the squadron and several gunboats promptly appeared in Tunis Bay and anchored on August 1, 1805.

"Are your intentions peaceful or otherwise?" Rodgers wrote the Bey, stating if he did not receive a reply within thirty-six hours, he would begin hostilities. The reply was delayed; whereupon Captain Decatur was sent ashore to demand a reply. Refused an audience, Decatur returned at once to the squadron.

Appreciating matters had come to a showdown, the Bey had a sudden change of heart. When Decatur arrived aboard the flagship, he was surprised to find the Bey's messenger already ahead of him. This courier brought a conciliatory letter, in which the Bey complained that the anchoring of the whole squadron before the city was an act of hostility. However, the letter invited the Commodore and Consul-General Lear ashore to a friendly conference.

"You are mistaken," Rodgers told the Bey, "about all of our *whole squadron* being present. There is still a frigate, a brig, two bomb vessels and eight gunboats which have not yet arrived."

Rodgers' decisive action resulted in a satisfactory solution, to the astonishment of the European consuls in Tunis, who said that "no other nation has ever negotiated with the present Bey on such honorable terms."

The increasingly strained relations between the United States and Great Britain made it advisable to keep our navy about its home ports; by fall of 1807 our entire fleet was out of the Mediterranean. Consequently, save for an occasional "look-in" by vessels visiting Europe, our interests in that great sea were left unguarded for several years, a situation promptly taken advantage of by the Barbary pirates.

Mohammed, the Dey of Algiers, whom Eaton had described as a "shaggy beast," had been assassinated, after the manner of the final departure of Deys, and his throne usurped by Sidi Achmet, who was in turn assassinated. The present Dey of Algiers was Hadji Ali, a ferocious old fellow, "shaggier" even than Mohammed. And out went his biggest frigate to prey on American merchantmen. Among her prizes were the ship *Eagle* and the schooner *Mary Ann,* both of New York, and the brig *Violet of Boston,* all captured in the Straits of Gibraltar and sent to Algiers with prize crews.

The prize crew of the *Mary Ann* comprised eight men and a boy. On the third day a plan by Capt. Ichabod Sheffield and her crew to recapture her was successful. After a fierce struggle to the

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An armistice was requested by the Dey's commissioners. "Not a minute," was Decatur's reply.

death, four Algerines were thrown bodily overboard and the other four set adrift in a boat; but the boy was kept aboard and taken with them to Naples, which port they succeeded in reaching safely.

Old Hadji Ali, the Dey, had the habit of demanding, on one pretext or another, large sums from consuls, and menaced and even imprisoned some if his demands were refused. Three months after the affair of the *Mary Ann,* the Dey without warning demanded of Col. Tobias Lear, United States Consul to Algiers, eighteen thousand dollars in compensation for his nine subjects lost on the *Mary Ann.*

The very same day Hadji Ali had seized the Danish Consul, loaded him with chains and put him to work with his slaves, because the Danish government didn't come to scratch with its tribute.

Although Lear fully expected similar treatment, he declined to pay without government authority. The Dey then formally notified him that two frigates, which had been refitting, were ordered to sea to cruise against American merchantmen. To prevent further piratical raids on his countrymen's ships, Lear paid the eighteen thousand dollars under protest.

Encouraged by his neighbor, the Bey of Tunis now tried his hand at this chicanery against us, and the French annoyed us with their buccaneering. But of all the Barbary rulers, old Hadji Ali, Dey of Algiers, was the hardest nut to crack.

The United States was still bound to a treaty with Algiers, ratified in 1796, the last article of which stated that the Dey will observe the treaty on consideration of the United States paying annually the value of twelve thousand Algerine sequins ($21,600) in maritime stores, a shipload of which had just arrived and was being unshipped from the American merchantman *Allegheny.*

IT was then July. Suddenly the Dey charged that the cargo was unsatisfactory and ordered the entire load reshipped aboard the *Allegheny.* At the same time he demanded of Lear the instant payment of $27,000 in liquidation of all tribute he charged was in arrears at that time.

"You," he informed Lear, "are to pay this money at once and be ready with all other Americans in Algiers, to leave my dominions on the *Allegheny* within three days. Otherwise," he threatened, "the ship will be seized, her officers and crew, *you and the twenty Americans will become my slaves and I shall declare war against the United States.*"

Protests availed nothing except to extend the time limit two days. "With difficulty the broker Bacri was persuaded

to advance the money, charging a commission of 25%.... The money was paid, and Lear embarked with his wife and son and three other American citizens."

For seven years potential trouble between Great Britain and the United States simmered under increasing heat, until June 18, 1812, when the United States declared war against Great Britain, and the lid blew off. Our consuls and merchantmen in the Mediterranean now not only had the Barbary States and the French, but the British to contend with.

The *Allegheny* sailed from Algiers on July 25, 1812. On her way to Gibraltar she fell in with a British brig-of-war which offered no interference. The war had been declared by the United States against England seven weeks before, but this fact was not yet known in the Mediterranean. The Dey of Algiers had five heavily manned and gunned frigates and several smaller vessels foraging for American ships.

But Hadji Ali chose a poor time for his kill. Because of the state of war between the United States and Great Britain, American merchantmen fought shy of the Mediterranean for three years, and the Dey's only American prize was the brig *Edwin* of Salem, Captain George C. Smith and a crew of ten, including the mate. These unfortunates were "subjected to the well-known horrors of Algerine slavery." When Mr. Noah, our Consul in Tunis, attempted to release the American captives in Algiers for a ransom of three thousand dollars apiece, old Hadji Ali replied: "My policy and my views are to increase not to diminish the number of my American slaves; and not for a million dollars would I release them."

No sooner was the war with Britain off our hands than President Madison turned his attention to Algiers. On March 2, 1815, the United States declared war on the Dey of Algiers, and two and a half months later two squadrons under Commodores Bainbridge and Decatur, were organized.

Decatur was ready first and sailed from New York May 20, 1815. His command comprised nine vessels beside his forty-four-gun flagship, the frigate *Guerrière*. His first fight was with the forty-six-gun frigate *Mashuda*, the flagship of Rais Hammida, Hadji Ali's leading admiral.

While the odds were all in favor of the Americans, Hammida courageously engaged four of our vessels, including the *Guerrière*. This vessel sailed close enough to receive musketry fire from Arabs in the *Mashuda's* foretops, which wounded a number of her crew. Withholding his fire, Decatur, after his habit of earlier days, ranged close alongside the enemy and let go a broadside.

Hammida, wounded, was courageously directing the working of his ship from an exposed position on the quarterdeck, when "he was . . . cut in two by a 42-pound shot from one of the *Guerrière's* carronnades. The second broadside drove all the Algerines below." Still a few musketeers, with cool courage, kept up the fight. Decatur, wishing to avoid unnecessary loss of life, drew away and left the finish to the little sloop-of-war *Epervier*. Finally, after a gallant fight the Algerines surrendered. Decatur's next haul was the *Estedio*, an Algerine brig of twenty-two guns.

DECATUR now decided to head for Algiers and cut off any of the enemy heading for that port and to attack the town and shipping, if the Dey refused to come to terms. On June 28 he dropped anchors off that port, and learned that since Lear had left, the Dey, Hadji Ali, had been murdered by the soldiery.

He had been succeeded by Sidi Omar, a Lesbian by birth, who had character, courage and determination. The very next morning Decatur presented a letter, informing the Dey that the United States had declared war against Algiers and laid down terms for a durable peace.

This treaty provided that tribute in any form should be abolished forever; release of all Americans without ransom; ten thousand dollars compensation; indemnity for property seized by the Dey's predecessor; restoration of certain seized American property; freedom of any Christian slaves in Algiers who might escape to a United States warship; all prisoners of war to be treated as such, not enslaved, and subject to exchange.

Omar demurred at these conditions. Then a truce or armistice was requested by the Dey's commissioners until peace should be finally concluded.

"Not a minute," was Decatur's reply. "If your squadron appears in sight before the treaty is actually signed by the Dey, and the American prisoners sent off, ours will capture them."

Though it was five miles between ship and landing, within three hours Omar's representatives returned with a white flag, the captives, and the signed treaty.

"You told us," the Dey's Minister ruefully and resentfully charged the British Consul, "that the Americans would be swept from the seas in six months by your navy, and now they make war upon us with some of your own vessels which they have taken."

This treaty, "dictated at the mouths of our cannon," as Decatur said, undoubtedly hastened the action taken the following year by Great Britain and "contributed more than had anything else up to that time to the breakdown of the system of piracy and white slavery in the Barbary States."

The fast-sailing, American privateer *Abaellino* of Boston had captured a number of British vessels in the Mediterranean. Two of these prizes had been taken into Tunis, and two into Tripoli. Here the Bey of Tunis and Yusuf Bashaw of Tripoli, both violating their treaties with the United States, had in each case allowed these prizes to be taken over by British men-of-war under the protests of our consuls. Decatur did not learn about this until after his arrival in the Mediterranean.

He made a call on the Bey of Tunis, promptly collected forty-six thousand dollars from him in compensation for the two prizes he had turned over to the British. Three days later, August 5, 1815, he also dropped into Tripoli to see his old friend Yusuf, who was still Bashaw there.

The little *billet-doux* he demanded from Yusuf, in lieu of the two prizes he had turned over to the British, was a mere thirty thousand dollars. Yusuf's first impulse was to reject the demand and again declare war against the United States, but being advised of what had just happened at Algiers and Tunis, and reflecting on his previous acquaintance with Decatur, he decided to yield.

Our Consul in Tripoli considered the two vessels in question were not worth over twenty-five thousand dollars, so Decatur agreed to that sum on condition that the Bashaw liberate ten Christian captives, among whom were two young Danes "released in remembrance of the kindness of their countrymen, Consul Nissen, to the *Philadelphia's* crew. The other eight captives were a Sicilian family . . . liberated by Decatur, in consideration of the aid given to Commodore Preble by the King of the Two Sicilies."

Four days later Decatur sailed away from Tripoli with the money and the freed Christians, touching at Syracuse, where he put the Sicilians ashore, then to Naples, where the young Danes were turned over to their Consul-General.

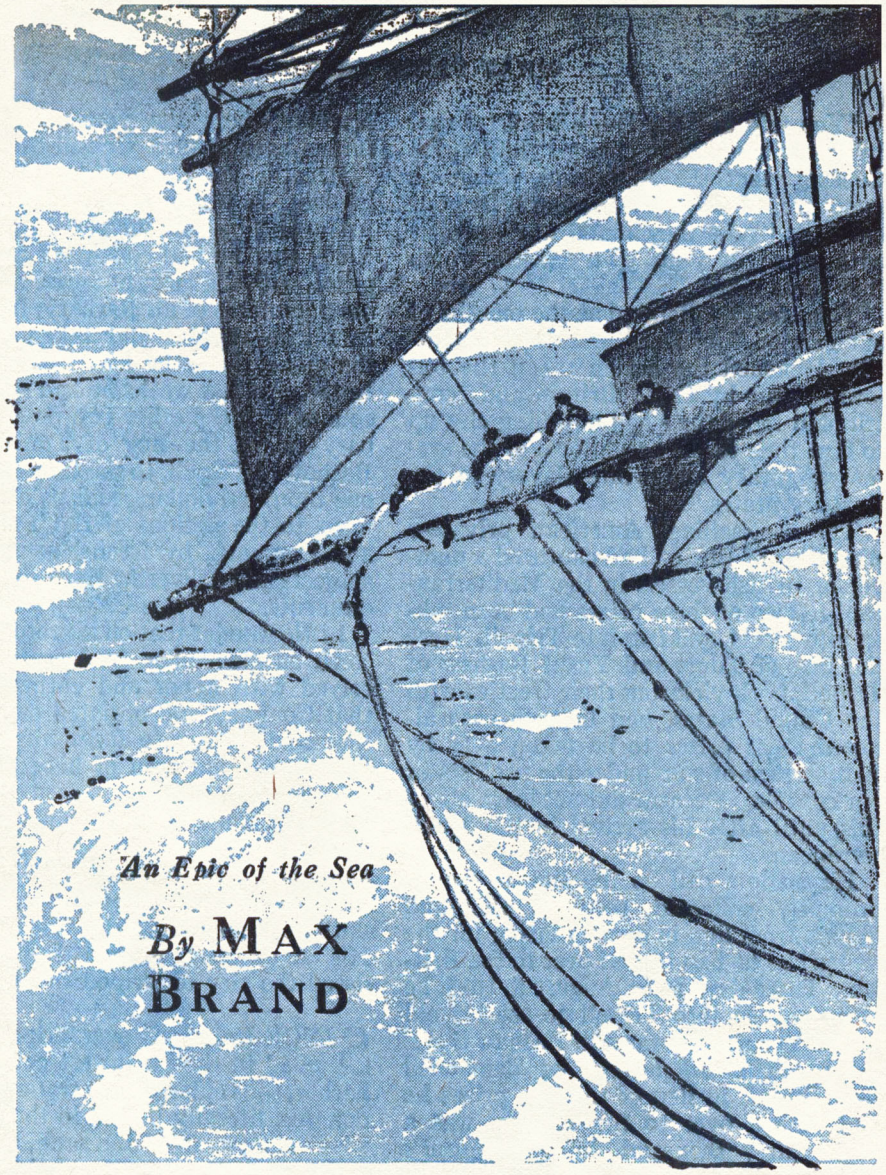
Decatur had accomplished an astounding feat. In just one day under six weeks, from the time he had sailed out of New York, that he had concluded a treaty of peace, with the most powerful and obdurate potentates of all Barbary, freed every American captive and taken with him the money indemnity he had demanded. In the next few weeks he had squared accounts with the other two powerful Barbary rulers, the Bey of Tunis and the Bashaw of Tripoli, to the tune of seventy-one thousand dollars, and paid a compliment to the nations of the Two Sicilies and Denmark, by freeing some of their subjects and delivering them to their governments.

Little wonder that on his return to New York on November 12, Decatur was received with honor and enthusiasm and that Congress appropriated one hundred thousand dollars to indemnify him and the officers and men of his squadron in prize-money. . . .

Yusuf Karamauli continued to reign until the 1830's, since when Tripoli was administered by a Turkish Military Governor, serving as Viceroy for the Sultan until September 10, 1911, when my friend His Excellency Redjed Pasha surrendered the city of Tripoli to the Italians.

SINCE Italy took over Tripoli, she has filled in the northwest corner of the harbor, thus enlarging its waterfront. Under this, literally buried in the very spot where she grounded and sank, lies all that remains of the once proud sister ship of the *Constitution* — the United States frigate *Philadelphia.*

It has long been my hope that over this spot there might be erected a well-designed, square pedestal, surmounted by a beautiful Roman column capped by a ball, surmounted by an American eagle. That on each of the four sides of the pedestal might be four bas-reliefs commemorating and depicting those four dramatic episodes in the military history of our three military services—the capture and surrender of the *Philadelphia;* her recapture and burning by Decatur; the ill-fated Somers expedition in the *Intrepid;* and the storming of Derna by Eaton. But in any event, this or a similar memorial should be erected in Washington, New England or both for the signal achievement of that national hero William Eaton, in his patriotic fight for justice and freedom.



The Luck of

The Story Thus Far:

CULVER, an athletic bookworm, supported himself by a job with a San Francisco express company, and spent his other waking hours in study in search of a key to the lost Etruscan language.

But one day Culver lost his job—by taking another man's mistake on his own broad shoulders. And that night, tramping the foggy streets, he came upon a huge dog determinedly pursuing a car. Even as he watched, the dog leaped for its running-board, slipped, was knocked into the gutter by another car.

Culver took the big dog home, revived it, dressed its wound. And next day, thinking it might lead the way to its home, he took it out on a leash. For miles he followed the questing beast. Then it stopped at a rooming-house, led him upstairs to the room of a sailor, nosed under the edge of the rug and disclosed a little ebony cross. The sailor knew nothing of the dog or the cross;

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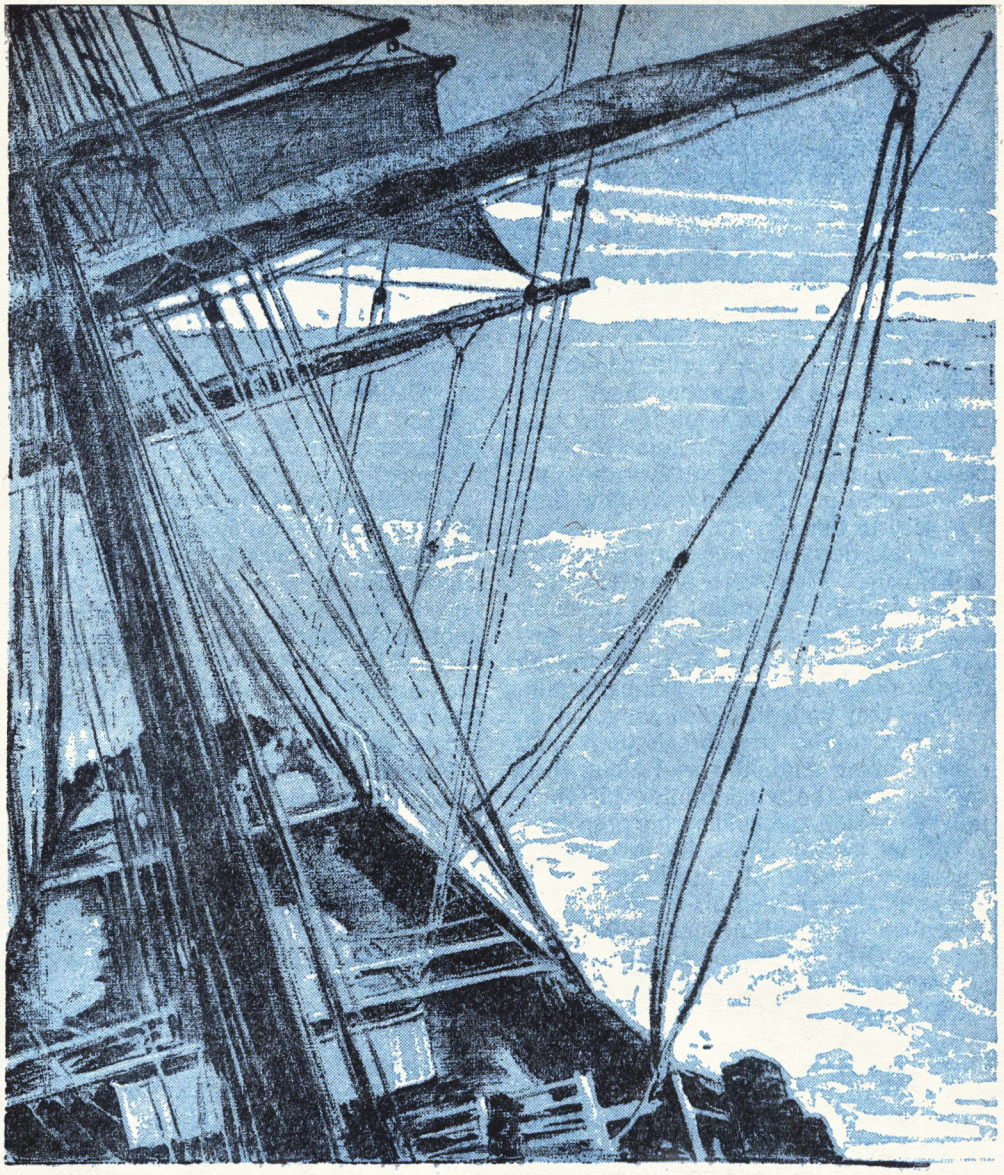


the Spindrift

but as Culver led the beast away, it kept nosing at the cross in his pocket.

The next lead was a stocky man with red hair whom the dog tried to follow; he took a cab and was lost; but it was while inquiring for him that Culver met pretty Sally Franklin, and that was all to the good. . . . And then—pursuing the dog and its quest to the waterfront, Culver was blackjacked and woke up to find himself shanghaied along with the dog aboard the sailing-ship *Spindrift*.

Next day, at sea, the mate Burke made a speech to the crew: They were going out to the South Seas to find one Walter Toth, who was dying and had a great store of pearls. "It's no easy job," he concluded, "because everybody that's up against Chinee Valdez is up against something hard." *(The story continues:)*

SOMEONE else appeared on the poop —a girl with golden-brown skin, her black hair done in a knot at the back of

her neck. She wore a dress of faded blue stripes with a red cord knotted around her waist. The wind leaned against her, and she did not have on many clothes. But she stood with her fists on her hips and her legs spread to the pitching of the deck and her head raised to look at the sails. It was plain that she did not care what eyes looked at her. She was free as a boy; she had a boy's pride about her.

Burke passed into another theme. He said: "Chinee Valdez is on the sea now, or he'll soon be, and we're going to try to be on his heels. And if we ever cross his wake, we've got his dog to follow 'im! I've seen to that!"

A quick, deep murmur came from Alec and others. They were pleased by this news. And Culver, at last, had the name of the dog's master: Chinee Valdez, former skipper of the *Spindrift*. As though to give point to the new skipper's talk, the dog they called Napico came out on the poop to the very break of it, and stood looking straight ahead along their course, with the wind pulling his thick tail to one side and ruffling his deep hair. When he looked down, he favored the crew in the waist with a silent grimace of hatred that showed his fangs.

Against this background Burke was saying: "But we've got to cut corners and we've got to save time. The *Spindrift* is an old one. She leaks. She groans and she whispers, but she's a lady. No faster set of lines were ever drawn to carry sails. Sails aint steam, but we're going to make them come damn' close. I'm going to sail her. I'm going to crack on if I have to blow the damned tophamper out of her rotten keelson. I'm telling you, the men that help, get double pay; but if you soldier, by God, I'll eat your hearts. . . . Lay forward, men!"

THE wind held for them as they went south. It held day after day. Culver grew a set of blisters, broke them, hardened his hands anew. Twice he nearly fell to his death from aloft when his dim eyes made him miss a grip; but he was beginning now to get the feel of things aloft.

He had expected, after the new skipper's talk, that he would hear a great buzz of conversation, but Burke worked them so hard, constantly trimming sail, constantly adding and shortening it as the wind permitted, that the men were too tired for talk until the last whisky dregs had worked out of their bodies. He himself, in spite of his good trim, had every labor doubled by the dimness of his eyes, so that as a rule he had to fumble twice before he was sure of any handhold. But he was almost glad of the fatigue, because it gave him no opportunity to think about the books which he had left to the tender mercies of Mrs. Lindley. Perhaps—and the thought froze his brain—perhaps she would sell them at once, and they would be scattered over the whole wide face of the world!

That was why he dared not think back, but tried to house himself closely in every moment of his work.

He talked very little to anyone; for the rest of the crew, except Alec, despised him. It was because he had accepted the blow and the kick of the bosun, Jemmison, without an effort to fight back, that they looked down upon him. They sent him to run errands; they ordered him to bring the bucket of tea from the galley. And after that, they turned their backs upon him.

Respect from such a collection of gutter-rats was hardly to be desired, perhaps; yet this constant contempt bit into the very marrow of his bones. Even Alec, who looked upon him with a sort of fondness as an adopted pupil, observed once just within earshot of Culver: "A guy that has bad eyes, it takes the guts out of him!"

"It seems a hard ship," Culver said to Alec. "The crew is hard, and the officers are hard on *them*."

"I'll tell you something, and you button your lip down close on top of it," said Alec: "This aint America; this aint England; this aint Finland, or Greenland, or Iceland, either. This is Valdez-land. This here is his house—and there's his pasture-lands, kind of bluer than grass, and there's white sheep winkin' in and out."

He indicated the wide ocean, and the frothing crests of the waves.

"This is Valdez-land," he repeated. "And don't you forget it. Some of these dummies think that Burke is only a shadow of the Old Man, but they'll find out different. Burke has swiped the Valdez ship. To follow Valdez, he swipes Valdez' ship, and that's piracy or something. Burke knows it. The rest of us are in the soup with Burke; some of us old hands are, anyway; but Burke would have to take the main rap. And he knows *that*. One of these mugs is goin' to speak out of turn, one day, and Burke'll turn him inside out by way of an object-lesson."

"Who is the girl?" asked Culver.

"Koba? She's none of my damned business," answered Alec; "nor yours, neither. She's something that Valdez picked up down south of nowhere, and thought she'd make cabin furniture. But she fooled him. And if she fooled Valdez, I guess she could fool anybody else. You keep your eyes off of her. She's poison."

"Have you sailed much with Valdez, Alec?" asked Culver.

"Yeah. I put in some time with him."

"Where did you sail?"

"Aw, in the China Seas, and south of that, and south of that, and south to sugar palms and hell, if you want to know. Chinee Valdez is his parlor name. Old South is what we call him, me and Sibu and all the rest that stick with him: Elia, and all the old hands."

"What's the story about Walter Toth and the pearls?" asked Culver.

"Toth? Pearls?" answered Alec. "I wouldn't know anything about that!" And he broke off the talk.

BY this time they had the ship in good trim. All on deck was shipshape; all aloft was in good order. On a fair wind they blew southward and westward. Culver lay in his bunk one afternoon when his watch was below and listened to the slop of water at the bows and felt her lift and fly. When he thought of the *Spindrift* by herself, it seemed as though she could overtake any other man-made invention, but then he had to remember that she was living now in a different age, for which she was not meant. But he had an odd feeling that she was carrying him to his destiny. Napico, the dog, had led him to her, and now she was taking him south toward Valdez. In his soul, Culver had not the slightest doubt that eventually he would see the dog's master face to face. And then something would happen. Something strange—though he could not put tongue nor mind to it. . . .

He saw the dog only now and again on the quarter-deck, where he roamed, and paid no heed to the crew. People who walked the quarter-deck were safe from his teeth, the sailors said, so long as they did not blunder into him. *Napico*, meant, they said. "Does not bite." ("Not much he don't bite!" said Alec.)

The seasick days were gone behind Culver, now. His belly was as gaunt and hard as iron. The blisters on his hands had changed to calluses, and there was another change which he hardly dared admit to himself. Either he had become so familiar with the rigging that he knew his way about, or else his eyes actually were better, so much better that sometimes a queer hope rose up in him that they might return entirely to normal. That, after all, was what the oculist had promised him, if ever he gave them a complete rest.

He was in his bunk now, because the other men did not like to have him with them. They sprawled in various attitudes; Alec, squat as an ape, with red freckles showing through the brown of his face, said: "Give us a song, Constantine, you little damn' Caruso—give us a song, will you?"

Then Constantine the Greek sat up and looked around him with glimmering eyes. He was American by force of trade, having grown from a bootblack to a thief, and from a thief to a sailor.

"Give me a tune," he said. "Elia—hey, Francolini! Give me a tune, and I'll put words to it."

Francolini was an Italian with a face as sour as sour wine. He was of the "old crew," who had something more than wages to hope for out of this cruise. He drew a harmonica from his pocket, and without a word, as though he preferred giving in, to arguing with a detested Greek, he blew a few notes to find himself, and then struck up an old air.

Constantine, the beautiful young Greek, sang in a husky tenor:

"Come all you young sailormen, listen to me;
I'll sing you a song of the fish in the sea.
Then blow the winds westerly, westerly blow;
We're bound to the southward, so steady she goes.

Oh, first come the whale, the biggest of all.
He climbed up aloft and let every sail fall.
And next come the mackerel with his striped back.
He hauled aft the sheets and boarded each tack.

And next come a Dyak from Borneo
By name of Sibu, and he said: 'Let her go!'"

There was a chuckle among the men at this mention of one of the watch. Sibu was one of Valdez' old crew. He looked up and favored them all with a grin. But the grin had no meaning, and while his lips were twitched back, his eyes ran like cats from face to face to study the expressions. They were careful how they looked, when Sibu was watching them like that.

Constantine, having started the theme, went on with swift improvisation to develop it, striking in at will into the sing-song music of Francolini.

"There was gold in his teeth and gold in his grin;
The smile that was in him, he couldn't keep in.
He wore a bandana instead of a hat
And he liked to go bare. What's the matter with that?

He wore a brass ring; he talked Yankee slang;
He swore like a Christian; he prayed to Sang Sang.
He prayed to Sang Sang but he worshiped a skull,
And he kept his knife sharp and he kept his eyes dull.
He liked his meat high and he liked his winds low,
But a thirst in his throat made him yell: 'Let her go!'"

The watch laughed a little at the description, and Sibu laughed with them, but his eyes were always veiled, and waiting to find trouble and ready for it. Culver realized with a slight shudder that he had just heard the description of a head-hunting native. Perhaps Sibu had eaten some strange kinds of meat, in his time, thought Culver.

CONSTANTINE was now in the full flair of improvisation, and he continued with his singing: Alec, the Frenchman Latour, the Italian Francolini, the Southerner George Green, the smugly smiling Englishman Will Carman—one by one the improviser impaled them, lampooned them with a crude and bitter humor.

The savage Irishman, O'Doul, was the next victim. The sound of his name roused him the way a whip-stroke might rouse an Irish horse. He was swearing slowly through scarcely moving lips as he listened.

"Then come the O'Doul with his Irish lies,
A terrier's jaws and a terrier's eyes.
He had hunted the lowland and hunted the hill;
He had ridden the silk and looked at the kill.
He talked of the green but he thought of the red,
And he took to ships to keep from his dead."

Here Constantine, out of breath or out of ideas, made a longer pause than before, and Culver felt the rising anger at work in his victims. He expected at any moment to hear a voice raised, cursing.

It was perfectly plain that Constantine understood the danger, and yet he seemed to enjoy the taste of fear that it put in his threat. He had grown a little pale, but his eyes burned with a savage delight as he scanned his victims.

Then the danger came to a sudden head in the slow, steady rising of Latour, the Frenchman; and Sibu was stealing up to his knees also, his smile never stopping.

Constantine suddenly struck into a verse that brought his chant to an end. As he began, Latour and Sibu slipped back into position, their eyes still hungrily fixed upon the singer. Gradually their expressions changed as they listened. For the singer had lifted his voice to a louder tone as he began:

"Then Constantine came, and he sung a gay note
With the tar on his hands and the fog in his throat.
He waited for others, before he talked;
He went behind, when the lions walked.
His ways they were gentle; his manner was meek;
And he kissed the fist like a God-damned Greek!"

Constantine, as he reached the definite ending of the song and himself, lay back on his elbows and breathed deeply, his lips sneering, and his eyes on the alert; but his last lines had pleased his audience so entirely that they guffawed happily and loudly. Only Alec, the best-natured of them all, said when he had finished laughing: "But some day I'm gonna poke you on your dago chin, you Constantine!"

Rogers, the cabin steward, came down into the forecastle just then. He was a long and lean pink-jowled Englishman who walked around with his eyes closed and a partial smile on his lips as though he were meditating a secret with a jest in it.

He said: "I been hearing something. I been hearing plenty!"

They forgot Constantine and stared at Rogers. He liked to come down among the men, and they liked to have him, because he brought them news of what was happening among the afterguard.

"What do you think of the mate?" said Rogers. "What d'you think?"

He could not continue his story. He had to taste his own news again and swallow on it, smiling again in inward enjoyment.

"How the hell should we know what to think? What's up now?" asked Alec.

It was not Koba that he paid attention to, however, when he stood at the wheel.

"He wants Koba!" said Rogers. "He's after Koba!"

Nobody spoke, but several of the old crew grinned. They liked this tidbit.

"Valdez couldn't get that she-devil, but Burke is trying his hand. I heard him."

"What did he say?" someone asked. "How the hell did he go about it?"

"What he said don't matter so much. It's what *she* said that counts," answered Rogers. "She said: 'Go and grow—grow as big as Jemmison! He's the most man on this ship. I wouldn't have anybody but the most man!'"

"Jemmison—the bosun! She wants Jemmison!" shouted Latour, the Frenchman. "She wants Jemmison. The good God! *That's* why she wouldn't have Valdez himself. She aint got brain enough. She thinks Jemmison is the most man because there's more of him. Because he has the strongest back!"

Then Alec said: "Jemmison—that hog-face! *He* could have her."

He said it softly and sadly, with something of a childish wonder in his voice.

"Jemmison!" repeated two or three of the others, looking at each other with blankly speculative eyes.

Chapter Ten

THEY logged on south and south. One evening Culver was summoned aft to Burke, walking the poop. They had electric lights in the cabin, served by a small dynamo. The steady radiance in the companionway was pleasant. It was the first time Culver had been aft, for Burke would not have a green hand at the wheel while the wind served and the *Spindrift* was logging like a lady.

Burke said: "You got it rather rough, Culver. It was a kind of a dirty trick I played on you in Frisco."

Culver listened in a faint surprise. It was apparent that the captain wished to

be conciliatory. Far more important to Culver was the fact that even through the dimness of the twilight he could read the features of the skipper and see his half-sneering, half-amiable smile. He had not dreamed that his eyes had improved as much as this!

When he made no remark except, "Yes, sir," Burke went on: "You got a kind of a brain in your head."

"I hope so, sir," said Culver, mildly.

"You got a brain you could think something through with," said the complimentary skipper. "Now I wanta know, did you ever know anything about wireless?"

Culver remembered that he had seen the layout of Tommy Wiley. It would be incorrect to say that he was absolutely ignorant.

"I can't say that I know nothing at all," he answered.

"Good!" exclaimed Burke heartily. "That's talking up like a man. Damned good! I'll tell you what: I'm going to give you a chance at an easy job. The only hand on board that ever knew anything about the radio was Valdez. Damn him, he was too smart to have any other operator. He didn't want any pair of ears on the ship listening in on him when he talked over the air. He wanted the key all to himself. Now, I want you to go down there and take a look at that radio and see can you do something with it. This way, Culver."

THE radio-room was no larger than a good-sized closet. It had been sealed up all through the voyage, and the air was dead in it, and full of the sweat of iron, and the odor of decaying grease. The radio itself presented a confused tangle to Culver.

He said: "I don't know enough to—"

"Sure you don't know enough to sit right down to it," said Burke. "But you get it all together and figure it out. . . . Look out! There comes Napico."

The big dog was slinking toward Culver through the dusk.

"Jump for the break of the poop!" shouted Burke. "Jump, or he'll tear your throat out. It's better to break a leg than have your throat cut open!"

Culver stood still.

"Jump, you damn' fool!" roared Burke. "He won't stand a sailor aft, except at the wheel or on the way to it! Jump!"

Culver stood still. The dog came up and sniffed at the trouser pocket in which the ebony cross was carried. Culver laid a hand on his head and felt the huge body grow stiff with resentment; he felt the tremor rather than heard the sound of the snarl that bubbled in that throat. Then the snarling died out; he stroked the head of Napico, and the dog continued to sniff at the pocket.

"That's funny!" said Burke. "Bar Valdez, I never seen him go that far with anybody. What did you ever do to that crazy hellion, anyway? What did you feed him?"

Culver was silent, petting the dog. He felt that he should explain that in the cross he carried a charm which the big brute hardly could withstand, and yet he felt the explanation would be too long.

"All right. Go forward," said Burke. "But when tomorrow gets the sun up, you come back here and start rigging up that radio, will you? And cheer up, Culver."

Culver went forward.

"What kind of hell did the old man give you?" asked Alec. "I never heard him talk so soft to anybody. What kind of hell did he give you?"

"Not very much," answered Culver. For again it would have been too hard to explain.

And afterward he heard Francolini saying to George Green in a hush between gusts of wind: "I was up in the foreshrouds, and I seen it. The dog come snooping. 'Jump!' says Mister. He just stood; he didn't jump. And Pico come up and stood like a lamb and gave his head to Culver's hand. Gave his head to that yellow-bellied rat!"

George Green said: "Nobody can understand dogs. Nobody can understand women. So why try?"

"But it took guts, just to stand there, didn't it?" asked Francolini.

Then the wind came, rubbing the rest of that talk out of Culver's ears. . . .

Every day he worked on the radio now, except when all hands were called in a squall, now and then. There was a chart and a code-book. Since nobody else on board had the slightest idea of what electricty meant, it was as well to apply his mind to the subject as to confess his real ignorance. By degrees he built up his understanding, photographing the details, recombining them in his brain, until the subject began to take clear form. But it was slow work, and he was in a fog all the time, a fog that gradually thinned. Burke let him alone, content to see him bending over the instrument for hours each day; and every day his eyes were clearer; every day he fumbled less among the wires and the small in-

struments. In off moments he practiced with the buzzer, sending to nothingness.

They were far out now. The *Spindrift* was not a summer hotel, and the food was bad. The salt beef was hard; the lumps of pork turned green in the steep-tank water; the weevils already had honeycombed the ancient biscuit; it was necessary to give the hardtack a few taps to clear each piece before it was put into the mouth.

They had to man the pumps in every watch, working the bilges dry through a long, long damnation of labor. Some of the crew said that she had sprung a leak and that the first storm would send her down. The winds were very light now. They were rigging studdingsails constantly, or taking them in when the gusts blew. Reefing and bracing, setting and striking canvas, they nursed her tenderly along every wind, with Burke growing thin on the poop, and cursing every move that was made, no matter how expertly the crew responded to orders.

BUT they forgave him for his brutal treatment, because they knew that he was matching the days of the *Spindrift* against the days of some unseen steamer, hull-down on the horizon, that carried Valdez toward the undoing of their hopes.

Exactly what it was that Valdez had in hand, Culver could not gather, except from the first speech that Burke had made to his crew. But there were pearls —pearls that a Walter Toth had found; and Toth was the wandering relative of Sally Franklin; and the crew had a certain right to them; and Valdez was bent on taking them all for himself; and the *Spindrift* was to fumble among the South Sea Islands in order to cross the trail of Valdez, which might lead them to their goal; and the dog Napico might help them if ever they found the fresh trail of the dog's master.

This story, after all, was reasonably clear. Only the details were lacking from it. It carried an immense irony, in that Valdez' own ship was being used to run him down, and the dog of Valdez was their ace in the hole. And sometimes it seemed to Culver that there was something fated and predestined for him in this whole structure of events, with his discharge at the express office as the opening moment, and the dog as the leading dramatic impulse which wove together the girl, the wireless, the ebony cross, the *Spindrift*, and worked him into the pattern of a strange new existence.

He had time to ponder these things as he worked in the radio-room. The rest of the crew, during the doldrums which came, were kept at work aloft, tarring down the rigging spunyarn, serving, parceling, reeving off new gear.

Culver learned much about everyone, as time went on. For his memory, like the shutter of a fast camera, clicked on every word, every expression, filing the crowds of images away in his mind; and on that material his brain could not help working, like the scholarly instrument that it was, filling in gaps, deducing, constructing, fitting the whole characters together out of small parts, in large acts of synthesis. He was without his books, but he remained a student, with men instead of pages to pore over when he was away from the radio-room. Then one day he hooked up the instrument in his mind, not in fact, and knew that he had it right. The next morning he switched on the current, and the receiver began to jerk out messages. It was a moment of strange importance. The world which had been taken from him was now restored, dimly and far away, like something seen through a telescope of high power. The face of things was gone, but a strange voice could reach him.

Then they struck a calm. They drifted. And as they hung there with the sails slatting against the masts, something,— a ghost, a whisper,—seemed to be overtaking them; something was moving toward them over the curving cheek of the ocean.

It was fiercely hot; sun poured on the ship, flaking the paint away as though with a blowpipe. The tar boiled in the seams. Within the tanks the water slowly reddened; blood seemed to be dripping into it day by day. And the masts were nailed solidly against the sky. The sails no longer stirred. They hung down with ever-deepening lines, like human faces growing old. The helmsman leaned on the useless wheel.

Culver endured it very well. Thin fare for many years made it easy for him to accept the positively bad fare of the *Spindrift;* and in the doldrums he was allowed for the first time to take the wheel and con the ship through the rising and dying winds, always studying the tremor in the leeches as he held her close up to each breath.

It was the most exciting physical event of his life. Before that, he simply was on the ship. But at the wheel, he held her in his hand. She belonged to him.

For him she luffed her head around. For him the very wind sang in the cordage. She was his. He could not help an amazing sense of gratitude to the *Spindrift* because she obeyed him so implicitly. And then, as he stood there, he had a pleasant sense that many eyes were watching. They were not on him, though the second mate had told him, with a few blunt oaths, that he had a knack for steering, but they were observing because when he went aft, the big dog came out and sat down beside him, turning his head with apparent companionable friendliness to him again and again. But Culver knew it was because of the scent of the ebony cross which was always in his pocket. Sometimes, toward the end of his trick at the wheel, Napico would lie down at his feet and remain there, motionless but apparently happy.

And now, when he went forward, the dog formed the habit of following him all the way to the break of the poop and staring after him until he had disappeared from the deck.

"He's got something on the dog," said Francolini. "He *knows* something about Napico, and the dog hopes that he won't tell the rest of us!"

THEN came utter calm, the windless hours, the windless days, the windless nights, and a tension began to build up in the whole crew, and in the whole ship, so it seemed to Culver, as though the *Spindrift* lived with a set of nerves which could feel human suspense, and the need to get places on time.

Sometimes Koba came out and looked at him for a brief moment, and then forgot his presence. She would look at him from head to foot, and then at the dog, and then turn away. It was plain to Culver that she wanted to understand what it was in him that attracted the great dog; and not understanding, she returned again and again to the problem.

He enjoyed having her on the deck because she was like a pretty picture. The golden brown of her skin made the sea bluer and the canvas whiter. And when she moved, she made motion beautiful and effortless, and there was a sort of rhythm about everything she did, as though she were doing it to music. She was very young. In time maternity and too-early maturity would sweep over her in a tide of flesh. He had seen pictures of South Sea Island girls and matrons many a time, and he knew what the future held for her. But at the moment she was as trim as a yearling filly, which is one of the most beautiful of the works of God. Her face lacked that finish and delicate modeling which only comes to an intellectual race, as though the mind worked to refine the features, but she had the loveliness of a beautiful animal.

It was not Koba that he paid most attention to, however, when he stood at the wheel. The handling of the ship gave him quite another companion, and that sense of spiritual possession which he felt when the *Spindrift* changed her course, obedient to the spokes he turned on the wheel, led him somehow to another visualization: He kept seeing Sally Franklin just beyond the corner of his eye. Sometimes he asked himself if this were the beginning of an absurd infatuation—a man of thirty-five losing his head about a young girl; but as a matter of fact, it was rather, he thought, an association of ideas. Sally Franklin was almost never in his mind except when he stood at the helm of the *Spindrift*, and then something about the thoroughbred, slender grace of the ship reminded him of the girl. At any rate, those hours at the helm were by far his happiest hours on the ship, and he left the wheel unhappily when he returned to the radio-room.

He heard a strange tale one evening during the calms. He was through his watch in the radio-room. The sun lay on his belly in the west, puffing his cheeks and blowing flames and purple smoke across the sea. The crew gathered on the forecastle head for a yarn.

A school of flying-fish on twittering wings flew past the sun in streaks of rose and amber, and after them the dolphins came leaping, as azure as the sea, but dripping with crimson and gold and green. Their beauty like a wind freshened the eyes of Culver.

"She's got her chin in the mud," said Dutchy, who was the ship's Sails.

"She's old!" answered George Green.

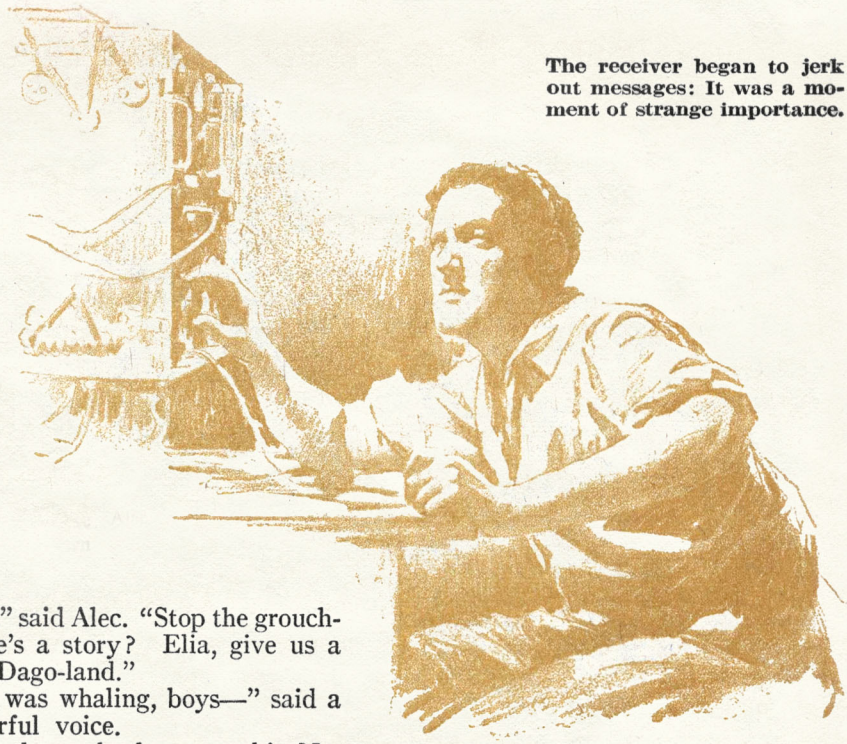
"Her heart is young enough," said Rory O'Doul, "but too much asking has tired her."

The sailors nodded, listening to the rasping parrals, the clanking of the pump and the gush of water as the other watch labored.

"But whether she runs or rests, she's always drinking," said Constantine.

"Oh, God, blast her bloody heart, how she will sop it up if a storm hits her!" commented the Englishman.

"It's lying still and looking at the sun that makes her thirsty," said Latour.



The receiver began to jerk out messages: It was a moment of strange importance.

"Shut up," said Alec. "Stop the grouching. Where's a story? Elia, give us a yarn from Dago-land."

"When I was whaling, boys—" said a deep, powerful voice.

That was the cook; he was a big Negro. Some people said that he was almost stronger than Jemmison, the bosun.

"When I was whaling—" he said, and waited a little to have permission from his white crew-mates before he went on.

"Oh, God," said George Green, "he's gonna tell his tale again—how he met Chinee Valdez. He's like a fly stuck in one drop of glue on one spider-thread, that'll buzz and buzz the same damn' story till the spider eats him. That's what I'll do, some hungry day. Doctor, go on. But if you change one word of the yarn, if you start anything new in it and wake me up, I'll throw you overboard."

He stretched himself out on a coil of rope, a coil of big line that cradled him from neck to knees.

"Go on with the yarn," he said. "Start with the *Murmurer*."

Chapter Eleven

WHAT Culver heard was a strange production of the sea and a negroid brain, with fact and legend and emotion so oddly blended that it was difficult to tell where one began and another took on; it was a colored mist, in short.

"The *Murmurer!*" said Peterson. "There was a ship! A clipper is a lady, but a whaler is a man with double timbers that never hog or sag. Ice couldn't bust the *Murmurer*. It never whimpered because of the sea or him that drove the ship. That was Parrish, boys. Red Parrish was getting old. Mostly his hair was gone, except a fringe. But all of him was red and yellow-freckled, blistered and peeling. Parrish—he was a cat, and the fat mice he hunted around the world was sperm whales. He ran them in the attic to Baffin Bay. He ran them in the basement to South Shetlands and the Weddell Sea. He could have found them in the dark, smelling them out. His eyes were always bloodshot, and he sniffed like he was smelling blood always, too. Though the hold was full, Parrish was never full. He damned and slammed us. Half of every crew signed for the hope of seeing Parrish die. The carpenter, he waited out seven cruises. This was an easy passage, the one I'm talking about: the Bermudas, the two Thirty-sixes. Then we swung around the world from Madagascar east to Fiji and the Friendly Isles. We looked in sunshine at the Horn. The dirty devil showed us his bald head and the teeth he eats with. There was a cold wind out of the south, darkening and wrinkling the sea, and putting beards on the big rollers, and we climbed up the hills and slid down the valleys; and a lookout yells out of the fore rigging—"

"Damn you, Doctor," said George Green, "you know you left out something

back there—about the waves you were climbing."

"So I did, Master George," said Peterson. "I guess I sure did leave something out. I should have said those hills and valleys in the sea were as sleek as gray iron. Then a lookout yells out of the fore rigging: 'A sail! A small boat on the weather bow! Ahoy the deck! A small sail on the weather bow!'

"We thought he'd mistook the white chin-whiskers of an old roller for the shine of canvas. Those waves were heavier than melted iron. They kept four hundred tons of us a-bobbing, so what could small boats do, how could they live in such a seaway? But then we saw, out of the southward, like something that had crept up from the Pole, something that was running like a deer across the hills and valleys of the water. It was a dory. Just a dory, mind you! A damned little bob-nosed dory and a snatch of sail with only one man showing in the sternsheets. We all stood by to shorten sail. Says Chips: 'It's Davy Jones, coming to get his pay from Parrish; and that cash is a long time overdue.' And by God, that devil Parrish, instead of bringing the ship to, he hollers to lay her off a point or two; and then he sings out to get the topgallants on her."

"Was he scared, Doctor?" asked Alec.

"Well," said the cook, "I'll admit that it had a lonely look, that one man and the dory jumping in the wind. We got the lashings off the main topgallant, but as the ship started running, the little dory ran up the weather side of the wave we were riding and threw its man aboard. Then it fell flat and went drifting away on its side, as though it was tired of living, and ready to go back home after doing this job for Davy Jones. Right there among us stands the castaway.

"Parrish, like the old devil that he was, shows his teeth as he looks on. But this castaway, this young devil—because that's what he looked like with his big beak of a nose and his chin sticking out, and his eyes and his hair as black as the pit of the night—he stood there and only laughed. All we got out of him was that his name was Valdez."

PETERSON made a pause, when he reached this point in his story. As though he knew that he had touched on a charm which would hold his audience as long as he chose, he deliberately prolonged the silence while he filled a pipe and lighted it. He smacked his lips, getting up a head of fire in the bowl of the pipe. When he had it drawing well, he said: "He bunked with us forward and turned to in the starboard watch like any common sailor. He never talked. What ship that dory was from, he never would say. All we got out of him was his name. He was three men on a rope; and he was as good as four standing on a bucking footrope and furling frozen canvas. No, he never told us how he came adrift, but he talked now and then of China and the South Seas; and he called himself Valdez. And his hair was black and his eyes were as black as his hair."

"What did you think of him?" ventured Culver.

"We knew that we'd picked some trouble off the sea," said the cook. "But we were happy, rounding on the Falklands, because we were full, and thought we'd done with gurry, and all that. Our harness was put away and we were fixed to settle. We'd started tons and tons of water over the side and filled with oil, and nothing remained where we could stow oil except a little corner that would fill out of the melons of a pod of blackfish. We'd finished singing: 'Five and forty more!' We'd found our luck and boiled it. Five had laid beside us in a single cut. We'd trailed the stink of burning scrap around the world since we first got off soundings. Now it was a frolic on a tow-line to Callao Grounds without a lookout.

"But one day it was me that seen right from the deck, and I sung out by habit: '*Blows! There she white-waters! Gai!*' And the rest of the crew mumbled, because they didn't have any more belly for fishing: 'Ay, blows!' They mumbled it, and they watched the spouting, fifteen to the minute. You know you tell the length of a whale by the number of times that he spouts. About fifteen to a minute is the way they breathe. And the length is one foot to each breath. We were counting the spouts to ourselves until they got up to seventy. What was a big whale to us? It would have been a waste. We only had a spare corner that needed filling; we were full enough already. We should have left something for Davy Jones, they say. Anyway, when the count got up to seventy, everybody started shouting out: 'And one, and two, and three and four, and five makes seventy-five!'"

"That's a hell of a big whale, aint it?" someone asked.

"What you think we were using our mouths for bellowing out the count, if it

wasn't a big whale?" demanded the cook. "Sure it was a big whale. I've heard talk about hundred-footers, but I guess they never came that big in sperm. Not in cachalots. Anyway, we had to keep right on singing out the count, because the spouting didn't stop. And pretty soon we were yelling at the top of our lungs: 'Eighty-five and eighty-six, eighty-seven, eighty-eight—make it ninety, brother!—eighty-nine, and ninety! *Ninety!* It was a ninety-footer. Just even. He stopped spouting, that old bull, right at ninety, even. God, a ninety-footer! I remember looking around, and the crew was all gaping and grinning with their scurvy-yellow teeth.

"Parrish, he looked to windward—to leeward was the whale—pondering on his short lay, smelling the cocks, I guess, like a horse turning homeward that has the sweet and the comfort of the manger in his nostrils. But out there the whale, like he was playing with us and waving good-by—like he knew that we were a full ship and that he was safe from us, he started lobtailing now. With a thirty-foot tail he started the thunder cracking, slamming the sea right and left. Parrish couldn't stand it. *'Clear away!'* he yells.

"WE rubbed our chins and stared, I'll tell you. What'd he mean, we wondered—for we was full; the boiling of his tail would of overflowed us. But it wasn't oil Parrish wanted; it was a fight to warm his hands and his damned heart inside him, if he had a heart. We all were groaning, but that other devil, that black young one, Valdez, he started laughing. He was still laughing while he helped us clear the laundry from the davits and tapped home the boat-plugs, and cast off the gripes, and loaded the line-tubs in, and cleared the falls. Three boats of us hit the water. Valdez pulled an oar in mine; and in the bows of that same boat was Parrish standing. So I had the two of them right under my eyes, and that's why I know what I'm talking about when I tell you this yarn.

"I remember that Parrish was standing in an undershirt of blue, and the blue was washed out of it in streaks because he wouldn't buy a thing for himself except old clothes, the mean old devil! And his bald head shone, and the last of his red hair, it was blowing out like a ship's flag. Then he turned around and seen Valdez, and he yelled out: 'Who in hell let that black devil into my boat!'

"He said just that, and no more. But when one devil calls another by name, you sort of know that there *is* a hell, and fire in it too. The look of Parrish, too, was like he had seen a devil. But now we were getting close up, and all at once Parrish gives the word. We sprang on the oars, and pretty soon we were in the slick of the oily, quiet water near the whale. He wasn't like a beast with life in it. He was like a big ship turned keel up. Then he sounded, and threw his tail half a block in the sky, and was gone.

"Parrish held us on our oars with the way on the boat stopped.

"*'Sub silentio!'* Parrish says. It shows how good I remember, that I remember those words. Somebody tells me that they're Latin and means keep your goddam mouth shut. Latin! That Parrish—that pig had Latin in his belly! It shows he'd gone away back in his mind. Back to his school-days, eh? The biggest whale he'd ever seen in a life of whaling. And he was there to gaff the life out of it! And everything stopped for him; and the Latin, it comes dripping out of his mouth without knowing why.

"*'Sub silentio!'* Parrish says. Then I seen a shadow rise. A mountain, not a fish. He broached so close to us that I seen the crust of barnacles along his jaw. He went on up like an elevator was hoisting him. He come down *crash.* The splash of him went up so high I seen the sun through it, and the sun looked silver, like a moon; and then we started on into the leaping of the white water, and finished off nose to blackskin while the first spout was snoring up. Old Parrish hitched his body back, and he bent over double, and he fleshed his iron up to the hitches. And he grabbed the second iron on the short warp and sank that one too, before he gave us the sign and we backed; we'd held on so long near that mass of black that when the signal came, we leaped the boat astern. And he cut fluke. The misery was so deep in him, it pinched him so, that he skipped our bows with half a ton of tail; and then he sounded fast. The rope flew out of the Flemish coils; and every coil jumped up by itself and sang with its own voice. We had that rope good and free, but the bows of the boat sank to the water's edge with the friction. The chocks were groaning and smoking.

"'Is he lead?' said Parrish. 'Is he never going to stop sounding?'

"Well, there was hardly twenty fathoms in the last tub when he stopped

sounding and the bows staggered up. We were gathering in armfuls of the line when that old bull came butting up into the air once more. He was vomiting out tentacles of squid, a boatload to a bite. Then he ran. He done twenty knots if I ever watched a wake. That was a real Nantucket sleigh-ride, boys. Like tipping over the rim and sliding down the shoulders of the sea, until we were hollow inside from the speed of it, d'you see? We were flying in a fog. The water from the piggins drove to rain. And then we stopped to a wallow.

"All the while I'd been feeling that the danger was not so much from the whale as it was from Parrish in front of me, and Valdez behind. I didn't know what that danger would be, but I damned well wished that I was back on the *Murmurer.*"

IT came to Culver that the cook was old. He had seemed, until this moment, not more than fifty. But now even in the dim streaking of the lantern-light he looked gray on the cheeks as well as gray on the head; time had tarnished more than the mere surface of him. Perhaps he was seventy. And to get back to such whale-fishing as this, Valdez must be well on in years too. Could such things have been very much nearer than thirty years away?

The cook went on: "The bull, off there, was pitch-poling in the water with smoke around his head like a volcano just rising. Parrish turns around and points a finger over my head at Valdez.

" 'You—you blackhead—you, Valdez,' says Parrish. 'It's you he's smelling.'

" 'Not me,' says Valdez. 'You're hung a little higher than I am. You're riper meat.'

"I could of laughed at that, but Parrish was black and mad. 'I'll trice you up, for that,' he says. 'I'll give you sixty lashes!'"

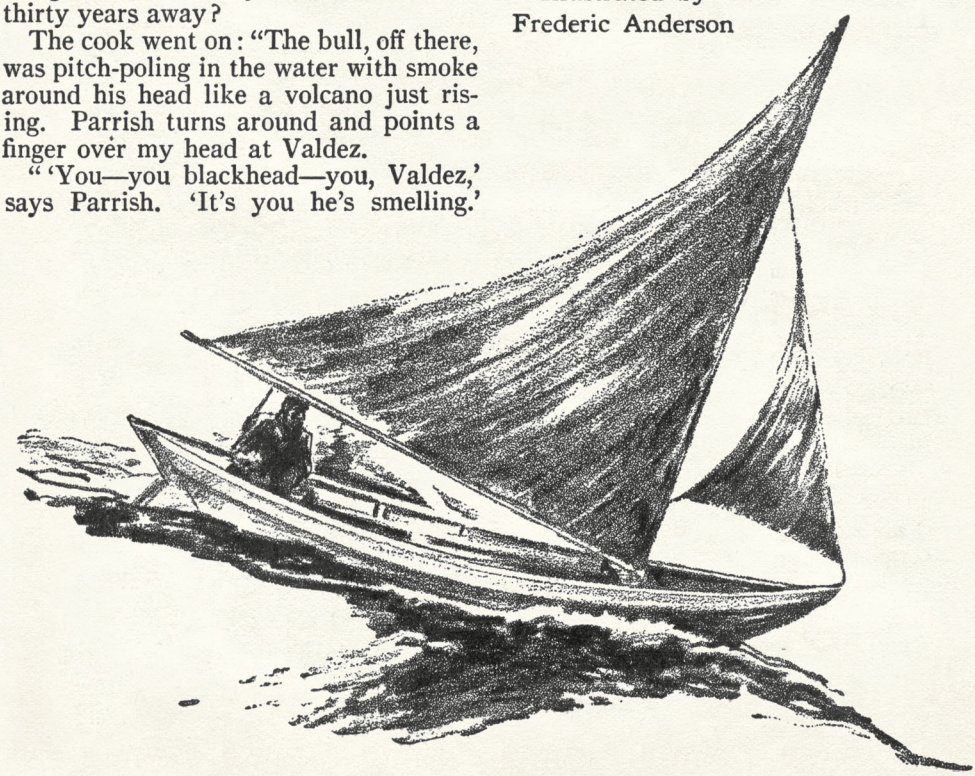
"And then Valdez half rose and pointed. 'There he comes. He heard you talk, and he's coming for you. He's the grandfather of all the little whales you've ever killed, Captain, and he's going to take it out of your hide!' says Valdez.

"Well, it looked that way, to see the whale come smashing along, and the big bow-wave that was throwing up in front of him. Like he was lifting his head as he ran, and making sure where he was going.

"Parrish, he got into a regular crazy fit. He started to shake his fist at the whale. 'Come on, baby,' he sings out. 'I'll have another dance with you, and then I'll take you home with me and put you to bed. I'll put you to bed, and I'll put you to sleep!'

"That whale, he had his head right up, and he came humping along the water, let me tell you, boys! And the pair of waves was galloping at his bows. I've been in Cadiz and seen the bullfighter

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson



waiting for the bull with a sword. That's how we waited, and Parrish up there in the bows with the lance in his hand. Like the matador, was the way we sidestepped, too. The steering oar squealed on the steering brace, and that long wall of black went by us like the side of a train, a regular express. Parrish boned that lance and sank another. 'The flag!' said Parrish, screeching it. 'I've put a waif on him!' The bull was on his side, like a ship heeling. He was in his flurry. That last lance had touched the inside of him right in the center of where he lived. He circled as he flurried, with his mouth open. You think about twenty foot of jaw, and you can think what his mouth was like when it was open. A couple of barn doors. And his lower jaw was set with teeth like the spikes they use to hold down iron rails.

"He was blind and crazy. And yet he seemed to be seeing us out of his little eyes. He leaped his tail out of the water away off there. He swung it. The flukes came shining and big as the side of a house. He was taking a fair crack at us, but he was too anxious to smack us flat, and he missed. Those flukes went by in a blur of speed and a roar like a train passing. The wind of them pretty near knocked me down. But we weren't touched. The flukes went by, and we were all sitting there safe, and nobody touched at all. And then I saw that the bows of the boat were empty. Parrish was gone. That whale had come for him, like Valdez said, and the whale had took him, too. Pinched him out of the boat with thumb and forefinger, like you might say. And somehow it seemed like it was the doing of that black devil Valdez, who'd picked out the old red devil Parrish, and chucked him away to hell and gone.

"We never saw Parrish no more. The fish never saw him no more, either, except maybe them that crawl on the bottom of the sea."

Peterson stopped. The engine of his brain was laboring up a grade of thought that was difficult for him.

"Blood is one color, fish or man," said Peterson. "It boils, and no fire needed. But—I dunno. The heat that starts you fighting, it makes you lose the fight. There's Parrish and Valdez, smelling trouble, licking their chops and ready for it, thinking about each other, sitting like two cats beside a rathole. And one day along comes a snake and swallows one of those cats."

"What you mean by that?" asked Alec.

"Aw, nothing, maybe," said the cook.

"He don't mean nothing," said Latour. "He's only a half-tide rock awash. But where's the Finn? Ukko, why don't you give us a wind?"

Birger Ukko grunted, lighting his pipe.

In Culver's mind was still the story of Valdez coming out of the sea; and the death of Parrish. He had a feeling there was something of immense power about Valdez. That was why the men never had talked about him.

The O'Doul said: "Ukko! Hey, Ukko! Give us a wind, will you? We're falling behind. Valdez is getting the lead of us. He's walking away from us."

A new light began to stream across the ship, painting the idle sails white and black in long streaks. Culver, turning, saw a golden moon rising out of the horizon mist. It was the only element of motion in the scene—the moon and the trembling of the stars.

Birger Ukko was saying: "How I give? My hand is empty. There's no weather in it."

"But what's the matter, Ukko? Why are we stuck here?" asked George Green.

"Maybe the *Spindrift*, she smell trouble," said Ukko. "Like a horse that won't cross bridge."

"What kind of trouble would she be smelling, Ukko?"

"Something dead, you think? Maybe?" said Birger Ukko.

Alec broke out: "Stop asking Birger. You oughta know that a Finn can't think of nothing but bad luck lying ahead. Now he's promised us a dead man before we sight land. Shut up and stop asking him, or he'll tell us something more."

They had been overheard by authority, as they talked. The voice of Burke came bawling forward from the poop: "Masthead Birger Ukko to look us up a wind!"

Chapter Twelve

THAT knocked the legend of the Nantucket sleigh-ride and the death of Captain Parrish on the head and brought the idle talking to a stop. In the moonlight the men looked at one another with strange faces. Mastheading a man was, Culver understood, some sort of punishment; but he could not conceive of such a grotesquerie as putting the Finn up there at a masthead, that spear-point trembling in the sky, for the sake of whistling up a wind.

A faint murmur passed among the others as Birger Ukko went aft. He stood under the break of the poop, saying: "Ay-ay, sir. But what's the use? I aint a signal flag to raise the wind!"

"Bosun!" thundered Burke from the poop. "Masthead Ukko to look us up a breeze!"

"He's drunk," whispered Alec.

Big Jemmison began to laugh. He liked trouble in any form, particularly when it meant the infliction of pain.

"Up there with you, Ukko!" he commanded. "Lay aloft and freeze yourself onto the main masthead."

"What's the use, sir?" said Ukko.

A faint chill of excitement struck through Culver as he realized that the impossible was happening: a sailor before the mast was questioning an order. And the quiet, drawling, foreign voice of Ukko had a suggestion of patient resistance in it that would endure a deal of stress and storm.

"You heard me, Ukko. *Jump!*" roared the bosun. He picked up a rope's-end.

Birger Ukko still was facing the poop where Burke stood, and where the slender silhouette of the girl passed back and forth against the stars.

Ukko said, in the same patient voice: "I'm forty year at sea. Ukko never call up a wind."

"Will you jump, you lousy son of torment?" shouted Jemmison.

"By God, I'll find out if I have to give orders twice on this ship!" cried Burke. "Catching hell from the weather aint enough—I gotta catch hell from my own crew, too! I gotta take lip and back-talk from 'em, do I? . . . Now, trice him up and give him two dozen lashes. . . . I'm gonna give you something to think about. I'm gonna make you think you're back in the old days of sail, when there wasn't any sea-lawyers! Trice him up, Jemmison! Two dozen, and then we'll see how he talks!"

Jemmison with his big hands stripped Ukko to the waist with a gesture. . . . The Finn submitted dully, clinging to his one phrase: "Ukko can't raise wind."

Jemmison secured him to the rigging by the wrists. He got out a cat-o'-nine-tails. No ship but the *Spindrift*, surely, would have had such a weapon in her list of equipment and stores. Someone had brought a flaring lantern. It did not help the moonlight, but threw a stain of red over the scene, like a thin wash of blood.

"Give him a last chance!" called Burke.

The sailors had followed aft. Some of them were enjoying this prospect with smirking faces. Some were agape.

Culver looked away, sick at heart, as he saw Jemmison draw the lashes through his left hand tenderly, as though he loved them. And he saw above the break of the poop the noble figure of Napico at watch, as though he would see with pleasure this degeneration of humans.

Jemmison responded to the last proffer of Burke by bawling at Ukko's ear: "You gonna lay aloft to the masthead, you?"

Ukko droned: "Ukko can't raise wind!"

"All right. He's had his chance," said Jemmison. He stood back, and Culver saw him ready for the stroke, passing the tip of his tongue over his lips, gathering himself to make the first blow a telling effort. A soft, husky, musical voice sounded on the poop. That was Koba, laughing with pleasure, showing her fine teeth to the moon. Her hero, Jemmison, was about to get into action, and she liked the prospect and the picture. Someone else came out on the poop, in time for the flogging. That was the plump figure of Jimmy Jones, that nondescript companion of Valdez who, so men said, never had left the deck of the *Spindrift* for ten years or more. It was whispered also that he rarely went ashore, because he was afraid of what the law might do to him, having broken most of the laws of most of the nations in the world, at one time or other. It was said that his unsavory intelligence formed one half of the mind of Valdez, the slimier half. He went through the world—or rather sailed through it now—with a perpetual smile of good nature. The reason for his kind expression was that he bore no malice toward his victims. A saying attributed to him was: "What dish is more succulent than a well-trimmed and cleaned sucker, nicely browned in oil? Or what is more delicious to think of afterward?" He now joined the group on the poop.

THE bosun, after taking a step back, started to swing the cat-o'-nine-tails, but did not finish the stroke. A voice shouted at him: "Stop it, Jemmison! You can't do that! Good God, how can Ukko raise a wind for this ship?"

The throat of Culver ached. He realized that the voice had come shouting from his own lips. And he was out there half a dozen steps beyond the others. Somehow Burke was only a black figure to him. It was Koba's face that he saw, her mouth agape in bewilderment.

"What the hell is this?" called Burke. "A half-baked mutiny, or what? Knock that damned fool down and throw him on his head in the forecastle, bosun!"

Big Jemmison turned; and seeing Culver, he laughed a little with happy surprise. In all his brutalities he had a faculty of maintaining a childish expression of innocent merriment. The business of the whip undoubtedly had appealed to him, but physical contact was still more to his taste. He stuck out his chin and rushed for Culver. A babbling of voices began among the sailors. A fight was a fight, for them. Will Carman's voice sounded off above the rest, as he called: "Kick the yella so-and-so into the sea, bosun!"

Culver heard that. What he saw was the row of black silhouettes above the break of the poop, with only Koba's face white, because in her happy excitement she had tilted up her chin toward the moon. Then he got his hands up and pitched his weight a bit forward in the boxing stance. That was automatic, with the years of shadow-boxing behind it. The bosun came in with his right poised and raised like a javelin-thrower about to make his cast; and when he threw his fist, Culver reached out and caught the blow in the palm of his hand while it was still two feet away.

The bosun tried to check his rush, with the result that he floundered sidewise like a crab. He was open to the head. He was open to the heart and wind. But Culver did not strike. If he hit the bosun, he was afraid that there would be malice in the blow, and he could not think of himself giving pain and taking pleasure in it; that was for the dumb beasts, not for the thinking men.

The bosun whirled around. "Missed!" yelled the penetrating voice of Will Carman. "Now smash him down, Jemmison! Smash him!"

"Smash him!" echoed Koba's voice.

The bosun smashed with a hearty good will. He smashed with the good right hand so hard that the lurching force of the punch pulled his body around, and then he smashed with the left to straighten himself, and he waded straight in with lefts and rights alternately until Culver ducked in under a swinging arm and came up behind Jemmison, while the bosun was punching furiously at the rim of the moon.

The crew of the *Spindrift* had walked for a long time in terror of Jemmison. It had taken them some time to make sure that the bosun was only murdering the air, but now they began to laugh. They were laughing, but Koba was not. She was dancing in a fury on the poop, and shaking both her fists and shouting advice; but in her excitement she forgot to speak English.

CULVER was breathing easily. He was hardly thinking about the bosun, but was lost in gratitude and wonder because he was seeing every movement of Jemmison's hands as though they were caught by a slow moving-picture camera. There was little or no blur. Those overstrained eyes had been rested at last, and were taking in every detail without effort.

The bosun, turning about again, yelled out: "What in hell is this? A game of tag?" And he flung himself spread-eagle at Culver, to clutch him and bring him down by sheer weight. Culver took an inside hold. It was a heaving panting barrel that he grasped. It might have been stoutest oak at one time, that huge keg of a torso, but now it was overladen with fat. Culver did not go down. He stood against the impact with ease, and heard the bosun gasp: "But—by God—"

Then a blow struck Culver under the groin. The bosun had used his knee.

Out of the yelling voices, that of Will Carman still sang above the rest: "Dirty! *Hai,* damn' dirty! Fight fair, Jemmison!"

The thing to do, Culver knew, was to relax, let all his body go and crumple on the deck, surrendering to that electric agony. But when he looked down, he saw the big boots of Jemmison and thought of them bashing into his face if he dropped; for the bosun was beyond himself with astonished rage; and anger, in that strange face, looked like frantic fear. Culver held himself upright. The big belly muscles were pulling like ropes to bring him down. His knees bent. He wanted to wind his arms around his body, but he had to lift them and hold them high on guard.

Jemmison twisted up his face in a final effort. He showed his teeth to the molars, and then launched another blow like an avalanche, as easy to see in its start, as easy to watch on its way. Culver ducked back. The breast of Jemmison, lunging on after the punch, struck him and knocked him to a stagger.

"Hit him, you fool!" yelled Will Carman, over the shouting. "Hit him, Culver! Tear his rotten head off, will you?"

Culver swayed over to one side. Somehow the pain seemed to warp his body in

that way. He bent over crookedly and kept lifting one knee; but he managed to get one good breath down deep into his lungs.

Jemmison came in once more, like a javelin-thrower again. Culver used the weight of that rush to help his own striking arm. He took a good aim. There was plenty of time. There was half a second for drawing the bead, so he picked out the point of Jemmison's chin and banged home his fist. Jemmison's head disappeared. It came up again wabbling. All of Jemmison was wabbling, down to his knees and his shambling feet. He retreated, gasping: "My God, what's happened? My God, how'd he hit me?"

Culver followed with limping, shortened steps. The pain still was twisting him. It had hold of all his nerves and wrung them in one burning handful. Jemmison struck out, but he struck short because he was afraid. He did not know what had happened to him before; and he certainly did not know what followed, as Culver hit again inside that reaching arm, and again his counter thudded against the jaw—solidly, with a jarring force that Culver felt up to his shoulder. Jemmison hit the rail with a crash. He had both arms stretched out against it to support his weight. There was no more fight in him, and Culver did not follow in for a flooring blow. He said: "I'm sorry, bosun!"

"Damn you!" breathed out Jemmison, and struck him down with a marlin-spike which he had plucked out from the rail.

He would have brained Culver with the stroke, except for a quickly upflung arm.

Chapter Thirteen

CULVER was not completely unconscious. The sense which remained most alive was that of hearing, so that he made out the voice of Burke yelling: "Put down Birger Ukko and seize up Culver. Seize him up. I'll 'tend to him myself. Get his shirt off!"

And then Culver came back to his full wits with his wrists lashed into the shrouds well above his head, and the sound of the nine-tails whishing in the air, and the drawing stroke of them across his naked back.

Someone began to scream. That would be Koba. Maybe she wanted to do the flogging with her own hands. Burke panted and cursed at his labor, wielding the lash. Culver looked up at the stars that gaze on this little world and never change their faces, as though they stared but did not see us. Like a club and a cutting blade at once, the whip fell again. Culver locked his jaws together; he was silent. But the strokes of agony knocked at his throat like hands against a door that must be opened, and let the screaming out.

He tried to keep his head straightforward, but the muscles of their own volition took hold on his head and turned it so that he seemed to be looking over his shoulder to watch Burke at work. In that way, also, he was forced to see the crew in the moonlight.

He was amazed as he looked at them, for they were not watching his shame. They had turned their backs and were trooping gradually forward. Only Birger Ukko remained over there by the rail, painted black and white by moon and shadow. Birger, naked to the waist, calmly watched. It was less strange that the rest of the crew should turn their backs, thought Culver, than that Birger Ukko, for whom in a sense he was undergoing this torment, should be standing there to watch.

He began to count the lashes. He counted twenty. There had been many before. He forgot all about books and the lessons of the great. All he could do was to pray that he might faint before he screamed for mercy. He prayed that he might faint. He was willing to die rather than scream out. Unconsciousness was promised to him by waves of black numbness that rushed up from the base of his neck and entered his brain; but the next whip-stroke brought him back to burning life. He could feel something running, not on his excoriated back, but down his trouser-legs. That would be his own blood.

He was thinking of that when the voice in his throat escaped from him unaware.

"Oh—Christ!" his voice sobbed.

Burke shouted, completely out of breath: "Christ never went to sea. Don't call on Him. Don't pray to Christ. . . . Pray to Burke!"

The knees of Culver surprised him by giving way. He was quite in his senses, but his knees suddenly gave way and left him hanging by his arms. Perhaps Burke thought he had fainted, for the skipper panted, addressing the whole crew:

"Take this thing forward. Masthead Birger Ukko. I've been the baby of the house, on this ship. I've been a woolly little mascot for the *Spindrift*. I've been

Culver did not follow in for a flooring blow. He said: "I'm sorry, bosun!"

the errand-boy and the playmate, is what I've been. I've been a lamb. But that's not good enough for you. Salt meat is what you want; and by God, you're going to get it. You're going to get more salt than meat. More salt than meat from now on, d'you hear? I'll teach you to like it! I'll make you like it! In the *Spindrift,* you'll know that there's either hell on board or else a wind. . . . Masthead Ukko!" He threw down the lash.

The big bosun cut down Culver.

"I can walk. I'm all right," Culver protested.

But he wasn't all right. His knees wouldn't work, and his feet dragged. The bosun took him under the armpits and helped him strongly forward toward the forecastle.

"Hell, I'm gonna get blood all over me," said the bosun, in disgust.

He got Culver forward. Other hands, a forest of them, reached up and got Culver and put him in his bunk, face-down.

The bosun, panting from this work, paused to break into a strange vein of humor. "Look at what he done to me!" he said. "Where'd he get the hammer that he had up his sleeve? Look at how he raised lumps on my chin! Whoever thought that he'd turn out to be such a ringtailed hellion as all this?"

The voice of Constantine, the Greek, said softly: "Perhaps you better go on deck, bosun."

"For why should I go on deck, you dago louse?" asked the bosun cheerfully.

"Go on deck," said Constantine, "before I cut the guts out of you. Look—with this knife!"

The bosun cursed, gasped and fled.

The forecastle was airless, thick with heat. The lantern flame was a sickening blue; there was a highlight on the sweating windlass.

"Would you like I should rub some grease on you?" asked Constantine.

Culver could not answer. There was a whisper on his lips and words coming in the hushing of that sound; he did not know what the words were, but they kept coming. He was afraid, if he unlocked

his jaws, that he would begin sobbing aloud. He wanted a drink, but he dared not speak to ask for it.

He recognized the words that were whispering from his lips:

"Amphi dè 'údor psuchron keládei dí' úsdon malínon, aithussoménon dè phúllon koma katarrei."

(Around about the cool water gurgles through apple boughs, and slumber streams from trembling leaves.)

The words became clear. The meaning became clear. The subconscious mind in him had been asking for sleep, or death like sleep. He had cried out in the agony; he had not been man enough to endure. And he wished for death as for something cool and endlessly delightful.

"Udor" could not be the missing word, he was sure. *"Air"* would be nearer than water; air, passing through the apple boughs like gurgling water, and slumber streaming down from trembling leaves.

He made these mental annotations as he lay there on his stomach with his face turned to the side and agony turning dim the picture of the forecastle. And then he wondered at himself and at the ways of the mind, that it could take up such considerations in the midst of torment.

He thought of other things also. He thought of Burke and that murdering passion, grunting with effort as he grew tired of arm and yet continued to swing the humming cat-o'-nine-tails. One thing turned Culver sick with a sensation like that of fear; it was the memory of the *weight* of the whip-strokes. Such power had gone into the lash that it had kept knocking the breath out of his body, and it had been always impossible to breathe deeply.

If it had been possible to breathe deeply, his strength of will would have remained in him, and he would not have had to groan aloud. Or if it had been day instead of night, all would have been well, he thought. He could have endured with the kind, friendly warmth of the sun looking down on him; but the cold moonlight stole away the heat of his blood and made everything mysterious. That was why the men in the forecastle were surely despising him. Constantine the Greek had made a kind of offer to rub the raw fire of his back with grease; but the rest certainly were despising him. Little Sibu, from Borneo, came and leaned above him, and made a rapid clucking sound. He knew that the clucking sound was the laughter of Sibu.

He wondered why his throat ached and burned as though he had been talking to a great throng for many hours. He wanted to take a good deep breath, but he knew that if he unlocked his teeth, he would groan loudly. That hardly mattered, because they had heard him cry out under the lash. He was straight-jacketed in fire and torment. Now the locking of his jaws was stifling him. His heart swelled and raced, and he thought it would burst. It was not blood that lay on his back, but a rank acid that was eating through his flesh into the vitals.

The harsh voice of Latour, who had no kindness for God nor man, snarled: "Sibu, what are you laughing at? What are you laughing at, you yellow dog?"

"At us," said Sibu. "I laugh at us. Pretty soon *we* have the whip on our backs, and not for beating that bosun."

"Stop laughing anyway, you swine," said Alec. "My God, when he was dancing around, I thought Jemmison never would lay a hand on him; and after Jemmison fouled him, I thought he'd die on his feet; and then when he started hitting out, it was gun-shots through Jemmison's brain. Them hands of his went right straight through."

It came vaguely home to big Culver that they were not despising him. In fact, this seemed to be the tune of admiration. He could not believe it. He closed his eyes hard and tried to think the thing out. They had heard him cry out, surely; and yet they seemed now to have forgiven the shame he put upon all humanity. They seemed to forgive and love him for the things he had done. He felt the vast unreality of this. He had been laughed at and despised all his life.

"Ah hai!" said Francolini. "Look, look! Here it comes! Look at it!"

SOMEONE else came into the forecastle. The tepid air seemed to grow cooler, and a fragrance mingled with the acrid scent of the rusting iron. Then he saw the gesture of a hand beside him. He could not see more than the hand, because most of his vision was obscured by the edge of the bunk and the position of his head. It was a slim brown hand.

"Get out!" exclaimed the voice of Koba. "Get out and leave him alone. In a whole ship—one man! And you make the air stinking so he can't breathe. Get out!"

Francolini said: "The bosun aint the biggest now. The bosun's down, and there's another up."

"Damn you, dago stinkfish!" cried Koba, and jerked up her hand as though there were a knife in it. That gesture sent them spilling through the doorway. She went over and propped the door wide. It let in the air. It let in the sound of voices on the deck and trampling of feet.

Koba came back beside him. She pulled out a sea-chest and sat on it.

"Now you see me better, eh?" asked Koba. "It'll make you feel better, seeing me. It is good for eyes to look at me, no?"

He tried to speak. But all he did was get a big breath high up in his chest. The air stayed there, puffing out his breast, half-choking him.

"So, so, so!" said Koba.

She opened a can of stuff that let an oily perfume pass into the air, and this she commenced to rub on his back. Her touch was lighter than air. Whole sections and acreages of pain disappeared as she worked.

She paused for a moment, and leaning, took him by the short of his hair and shook his head a little.

"Make a good big noise and then you can breathe easier," she said. "Being so much man is what kills white people. It chokes them. Make a noise like a sick baby, and then you'll be stronger."

She shook him by the short of the hair; and Culver, parting his set teeth for a breath, groaned long and deeply.

"Ah! Ah-ha!" said Koba. "How does that taste? Pretty good in the throat, maybe? Now try again. Make more noise and get more air. So—so—so!"

Dazedly he obeyed her, and as the air breathed out from his lungs, he groaned deeply again.

"Much better," commented Koba.

"Better. Thank you, Koba; you are—"

"Shut up, fool," said Koba cheerfully. "I could make even sick fish well, very quick. Don't talk. *I* talk."

Her hand continued rubbing in the ointment, steadily, lightly. There still was incredible pain, but it lessened mightily from moment to moment. He tried to think of gentleness in her face; but all he could see, while his eyes were closed, was that picture of her showing her teeth to the moon.

She began a small monologue.

"I take away the pain quick. I do everything quick. I learn him English one month, and ever after speak him fine. Like you hear me."

It was impossible to repeat all the mispronunciations of Koba in the mind. The *th* for her was *s*, and all the *i's* were *e's*, all the short ones, at least.

"You speak beautifully, Koba," said Culver.

"Shut up," said Koba. "You keep your wind in your own sail, or Koba give you one hell of a whack. *I* talk."

She made a pause, still rubbing gently, steadily.

"How you like to see me?" she asked. "Close or far away? Close, I smell very good. Far away, you see me better. I stay far away. But I smell terrible good. My mother's-mother's-mother's grandmother make this good smell, and every morning I rub some on my forehead. Smell and see!"

She leaned her brow close to his face. The queer perfume which he had noticed before became stronger. It was almost offensive when it was so near.

"Tonight I rub on before Koba comes to you. Everybody loves Koba when he smells her like this—no?" She went on. "Now I sing. I sing best in the whole island. Everybody loves Koba when she sings. All the old men wake up at night when they hear Koba sing, and they stay awake till the morning comes."

She laughed and laughed again, and once more broke out laughing as the pleasant thought kept returning.

THEN she sang, her voice breaking into a whining wail, dying to a rhythmical murmur, whining and wailing again.

When she was silent, still rubbing the sleek of the ointment over his back, she said: "You know what he means? It goes like this:

'The breast of a bird, how soft;
Breast of a cloud, softer and softer;
But softest is the breast of night.

Long night, soft night, long, long night;
And two breathing together;
In the breast of night two breathing.

Now the morning stands on the hill;
Now the morning lies on the water.
It is still. It is waiting. It is still.'"

Singing the song in the translation, she softened her voice until there was nothing but husky music in it.

"Pretty fine, eh?" said Koba.

"Very fine," murmured Culver.

"Shut up, Culver!" she commanded. "When Koba sings, the whole island loves her. Brown love. Not white love. Bah! White love is a pig. It gets fat. It lies in the sun on its back and snores. But brown love—brown love—"

Burke panted: "I'll teach you to like it! I'll make you like it!"

She sang again, in that softened voice:

Like the sunlight under the water,
Like the sunlight through the wave-shadows,
Sunlight through the blue ocean,
Sunlight on the warm ocean sands,
So is he at the door of his house,
So is he in the darkening hut,
My love, my love, my love.

"You hear me, Culver? That is brown love. Not white. Faugh! Not white love, but brown love. . . . Now go to sleep!"

His pain was so slight, now, that he almost smiled at the thought of sleep. She began to run her fingers through his hair. With the flat of two knuckles, she kneaded the base of his skull gently.

"So sleepy—so sleep!" said Koba. "Sleepy white pig, so sleep, sleep. I take all the sorrow. All the sorrow out of your body. My hands are hot with him. My arms ache with his sorrow. All his sorrow is gone away. All his sorrow is gone away into my heart. All his sorrow gone. White sleepy pig, sleep, sleep—"

Culver slept. He dropped into it as though from wave to wave, softly, deeply into unconsciousness. . . . A sudden thundering of feet over his head wakened him. He heard voices shouting. The ship beneath him had a careening motion. The waves, roused out of that long silent sea, were beating rapidly against the bows.

Someone came rushing in.

"Wind?" asked Culver.

Koba was gone. There was only the highlight on the rusting iron and the smoking flare of the lantern in the forecastle. He could not make out the identity of the bent figure which was rooting around among some dunnage.

"Wind! Ay, wind! Birger Ukko has looked us up a wind!"

Chapter Fourteen

WHEN Culver's watch was called, he was soundly asleep again. He got up and turned out with the others. There was a good wind over the weather quarter, and the *Spindrift* was logging along merrily with every sail set up to the royals. He listened to the symphony of

sounds. He could recognize the deep, bass-viol, soft humming of the larger rigging and the thinner violin-strains of the smaller ropes; there was the rush of the sea over the side, and the rush of the wind past his ears; there was the pounding of the waves, the odd swishing noise as the ship lifted and the water seemed to be left behind; and there were dripping noises; and from the braced yards, creakings, and from the bending masts, groans, and out of the body of the ship itself indescribable deep murmurings which ran fore and aft as the living body of the old *Spindrift* gave to the force of wind and sea. He listened and he rejoiced in the noises as he identified them.

He took his place at the pump. The movement split apart the healing, crusting flesh of his back and gave him fiercer strokes of pain than the whip in the hands of Burke.

"Lay below," said Alec. "Go on and lay below, big boy. You been big enough for one day. We're all thinkin' about you. You go and lay below and don't be a damn' fool."

Culver did not lay below. He remained there at the work, swaying the weight of his body generously into it. The pain did not endure. The full bite and burn of it diminished suddenly as he looked aft and saw the skipper at his conning station on the poop. He could see the helmsman, too—and sometimes, against the stars, he could observe the man braced and striving to hold the wheel steady, as it tried to kick a spoke this way or that, obedient to the waves. But it was Burke whom he watched so intently that he was forgetting his pain.

For a new emotion had been born in him. He considered it curiously, student that he was. It gave him a cold, bright feeling inside. He felt strong with it, and his body seemed light, and yet it was a new sort of torment, too spiritual to permit his body to have much sensation either good or bad. In his hands there was a desire to close on something yielding, and he knew in spite of himself that what he wanted inside the clutch of his fingers was the throat of Burke.

He was deeply shocked. Such an emotion never had entered him before. The presence of it forced him to reconsider himself from the first to last, for he had thought that he knew Samuel Pennington Culver, and now he realized that there was in him an undiscovered country as wide and as dark as this ocean over which the ship sailed.

A seaway was kicking up. The *Spindrift* did not float over it but clove through the lifting waters. They took on some good seas. The channel ports kept clanking this side and that as she rolled. The rush of the water down the bulwarks sometimes made it seem that the lip of the ocean was hooked over the side of the old ship and that they were being buried in a weight of speeding water. It was the strongest wind that they could use royals with, he knew.

And again his mind went back to Burke. The man was big, strong, brave. He cracked on sail fearlessly and held onto it in spite of the devil and the age of his craft. The very fact that he was taking the out-trail of Valdez was probably the finest tribute to his courage, judging by the weighty silence with which the crew treated the owner of the ship. A man they would not even curse was too dark a danger to be played with, but Burke was running out across the Pacific in the hope of finding his traces.

Big, brave, patient—that was Burke; but cruel, cunning with the craft of an animal, not the wisdom of a man. With his whip he had made a dog out of Culver, and Culver felt that he never would be himself, never his own man again, until he had exacted some just and equal payment from the body of the skipper.

HE was standing by the weather rail, braced to the heel of the deck, when he heard Burke's voice bawling: "Come back here, Koba, you devil!"

Then Culver saw her coming right on down the deck. The moon showed her bare feet. They left narrow tracks on the wet deck. When she reached Culver, she stood quietly beside him holding to a rope. Burke's voice followed her, then broke off into curses. She began to laugh. Holding to the rope, she swung in close to Culver so that he was looking forward and she aft.

"How is your back?" she called. "Does he hurt?"

She had her voice pitched up the scale so that the sound came small and shrill but clear to him. Evidently she was accustomed to talking through the wind.

"The back is all right," said Culver.

Francolini went by grinning to himself; and yet Culver knew that the smile was for him and for the girl, standing there together. Koba looked after him, and laughed, and nodded.

"*He* knows," she said, and looked up to Culver for confirmation. Culver

stared helplessly forward. The moon was halfway down the eastern arc of the sky with huge, shattered clouds washing across it. The girl glanced over her shoulder and then nodded at Culver again in agreement.

"I see," she said. "Koba is like the moon, eh?"

He said nothing. She went on developing her own thought.

"Koba is shining in your mind, eh? Like the moon? The moon is pretty good; Koba is pretty good, eh?"

She laughed, overcome by the joy of the idea.

"You think like that, eh? Oh, but you don't know. You don't know Koba. Some day he'll shine out for you. Sometime Koba, he'll make a hell of a big light for you."

She began to study his face and kept on reading it like the page of a book, from the top down. Then she turned the page, as it were, and began at the top.

"You talk pretty good. Not much. But big."

She put her hand on his arm high up, just under the point of the shoulder where the muscles are always firm.

"You are much man," she said. "You are the most man. You are for brown love; white love is for pigs. You bet the damn' life."

"Don't swear, Koba," said Culver.

"God is much word. You are much man," said Koba.

"I'm old," said Culver.

She took hold of him and drew herself closer, turning her ear. The wind whipped the hair away from the nape of her neck and bared her shoulder. Something went through Culver like sweet lightning through the sky.

"I'm old!" he shouted again. "Koba's young; I'm old."

She let the rope swing away and held onto Culver with both hands, laughing.

"Brown love is old, too," she said.

Suddenly he felt that he was being held by more than her hands. That single mind of his had divided into two portions. One part was holding out arms to her; the other fought against a strange sense of disaster and loss. One part of his mind saw her as she would be half a dozen years hence, her body softened with loose flesh and her face swollen; the other part of him saw her only as she was and made an eternity out of the moment.

The *Spindrift* met a rising sea, a sea that ranged aft in bright hills, polished by the moon, clipped into shining facets and fingermarked with white. And as it thumped the forefoot the bell clanged, forward, clearly, with the proper touch of sharpness. Yet the hour was far from one bell.

"What's that?" shouted Burke. "What woolen head is fooling with the forward bell?"

"Him that struck that bell is lonely and wants company," yelled Peterson.

"What's that?" challenged Burke. "Who's forward that wants company?"

"Not forward," said the cook. "He's as deep as hell and aches for company. Ukko Birger said it. Somebody on board us is dying; and there's the bell calling for him."

"Hark to that bally talk!" bawled Burke. "There's more talking woman in all of you than good sailoring. You'd like to have a shark's tail on the bowsprit. You'd like to keep a damn' dove in the rigging. You're the kind that sees lousy mermaids in the white of the seafoam. There's no bad luck aboard the *Spindrift*, I'm telling you, except spitting to windward or slanging your skipper."

"On deck there!" shouted the lookout.

"*Hai, hai!* Trouble!" said Koba, and forgot Culver in a newer excitement.

"On deck there!" yelled the lookout. "A cloud is making out of the west, a cloud or a flying devil; no squall ever come so fast."

IT came pouring out of the west, a cloud that exploded outward across the sky. Leaden-colored, curling upward in greasy smoke and its forehead overhung with knots like clustering grapes, the great bank of darkness rolled at them. The wind failed at the same moment. The *Spindrift*, which had been so full of voices, was now a silent chorus. But there was other sound, overtaking them across the sea. For now the storm-head flew its tangled hair in the zenith, its forehead checked and patterned by working veins of lightning.

Culver was in the rigging now, driven with all the crew by shouts of the skipper. They worked with desperate hands to furl and get the gaskets on the upper canvas, and chain it down, and marl it to the yards. They worked to lash and to double-lash the maindeck boats and those amidships. And the wind began to breathe on them as it came, swaying the ship to starboard as the frightened sailors yelled and slipped upon the footropes. The darkness came. It was built high

in the upper heavens; now it toppled in walls and pinnacles that burst in falling and overlaid the sky with smoky twilight. The lightning stepped between the two horizons and under it, like an outstretched shadow of the brighter flares, a phosphorescent light more softly fingered the sea. Electric fluid ran on the spars and rope-work, as the light of dawn pours a delicate fire along the dewy cables, the woven sails and infinite rigging of spiderwebs that bind together three tall blades of grass in a meadow; so the watery lightning glowed on the cordage of the *Spindrift*.

It seemed to Culver, even as he worked in touching distance of the subtle fire, that the whole image of the ship was removed and set off from him so that he saw it from a distance, like a fragile mist on a mirror's face, extenuate as thought and thought's creation—so that the *Spindrift* and all her cargo of tinned goods and cloth and all her freighting of human lives, and all her history of many ports and many storms, her narrow pinches in the Sunda Straits, her glimpses of Cape Stiff, the Southern ice, the Northern twilight, and all the love and labor of hands that made her, might be rubbed away, might perish like words from paper, or paper touched by flame. On the yardarms and high on the trucks the corposants were flaming, and the *Spindrift* seemed to burn on the sea like a great candelabrum.

It was not a squall the eye could look through. It was as thick and solid as a city of blackness, blocks and towers and ruined upheapings of blackness. It was nothing they could luff to and spill the wind out of the sails, while a wise skipper conned her through the pinch.

They strangled in a sudden rain that closed their nostrils like submersion under water; the skipper was a ragged outline through the dimness. Hands were better than eyes for seeing, then, except when the lightning winked. But now and then Culver could see the spars quite clearly, dimly whitened by the dashing of the rain. Then the wind came in its force and blew those heavy pencil-strokes of rain to gossamer mist. The *Spindrift* lay down and on her bottom the waves went *thump* and *crash* as though she were banging on a reef. Wildly the gale, with all its violins and horns was singing, high and near.

What was the matter with Burke? He was out of his head to carry all the sail that still remained on the ship. She'd smother and go down, she'd die with it, thought Culver. And all at once he wanted life as he never had wanted it before. He thought of the ship darkly wavering down through the ocean, of flat-bodied fish swimming in and out of the ports and nosing dead bodies—and he wanted life.

THE ill-stowed clew of the mainsail blew out, then, and the whole course exploded into tatters which leaped and thundered on the yard.

The *Spindrift* righted a little. She split the wave-tops and leaped across the hollows; and in the westerly the storm came rushing like a herd of charging elephants, tusked with lightning. They had overwhelmed the world; they had trampled flat the continents and left them awash; there remained only this last little bubble of life to stamp out—the *Spindrift*.

Still, through that uproar, Burke's voice could be distinguished, shouting: "Get off the canvas! Fore uppertopsail first. Tail all the hands along the spilling lines."

The swarming crew, how small they seemed along the deck! A sea flung a black arm over and tossed them like corks. Culver felt not even the strength of a child in his big hands.

They scrambled back to the line, patient as ants after a disaster to the column of workers. They shouted, their voices broken by the wind: "Ho! Yo ho! Oh, oh! She goes!" With heads fallen back they tugged against the wind. The sail was like a hollow carved in crystal stone, unyielding.

"Now heave! Oh, bust her; break it! Make it run!"

They moved it. They pulled it up. They inched it along. They belayed it.

"Now up, starbowlines! Now up and furl her. Show your guts and give her hell!"

They climbed. The wind pried open lips, filled mouths with driven rain-dust. Then on the footrope, as though upon a shuddering quicksand, they fought the white bird. But still the devil was treading on the heels of the *Spindrift*, and she fled wildly.

"Get the foresail off her!" shouted Burke. "Lay down from aloft. Lay down on the run. Port buntline and clew garnets."

The big new foresail, like a wall of stone, was rigid with wind. The blocks were jammed. The lines were twisted,

and the waves like molten lead slapped the poor sailors into tumbled heaps along the lee rail; but they came again, spilling the wind out, taking hold on the weather braces, gathering the slack by inches, hitching lines and holding on for life in the blind smother when they saw the heaping shadow of another sea.

At last, now, they could furl it, with two men working to pass a gasket on the massive yard.

Culver worked there with the old cook, and he heard Peterson whining: "Let her have some clothes on! She knows how to live in a wind like this. She loves it. Does Burke think that she's a stinking barge from a French canal? It's the *Spindrift* he's muzzling, the poor fool!"

Overhead came a gun-crack and a tremor: They were wounded. It was like his own flesh tearing, the way Culver felt it. The topsail tye had parted and the yard fell with a roar of breaking canvas and flogging rope. It split the topmast cap and broke the parral, dropping like a vast javelin with a ten-inch haft, iron-bound, massive, forty feet in length. It crashed on deck. The wide topgallant, that passage-maker, bellied far out, bent the mast, and parting at the head, flew down the wind.

There was that voice from Burke again: "Put up the helm! Up! Up!"

"Down!" snarled Peterson. Only Culver could hear him complain. "Down, keep it down. She'll never fall away, now. You beetle-headed driveler, you marine, you dundering, lubberly coal-barge skipper!"

The *Spindrift* raced with the wind, far over. The starboard fairleads washed in a race of foam.

"Now up, girl! Up, up!" shouted the cook. "Up, my sweet beauty!" But the *Spindrift* would not right herself.

"Helm up!" screamed Burke. "Oh, damn you, up, up!"

The two men at the wheel, half in the rushing ocean and half out of it, fought to obey the order. They did not need damning to make them fight for their lives; but the ship would not answer. Like a flat disk she blew.

They loosed the topsail halyards, but the yards clung to the bending mastheads.

Culver, always close to that wise-handed sailor, the Negro cook, heard Peterson say: "Now they've frightened her; now she's galloping all out. She's bolting out of hand. She'll jump a cliff and smash herself and all of us at the bottom. She wants her master's hand. She wants Chinee Valdez. She knows a fool is in the saddle!"

Then, in the deadly blackness to the windward, Culver saw it lift, gathering as though it dragged the bottom of the ocean, a mighty sea that rose with streaming flags and walls that tumbled down in thunder and in smoke while it still lifted like a hill. The sailors saw that black hand lifting. A yell went out of them like the cry of the rabbit when it feels the breath of the hound on its back.

The sea rose loftier than the mainyard.

Then, from his place in the rigging, holding hard, Culver looked down at one speck of human life which was left sprawling on the great slant of the deck. He had a treble flash of lightning to show him who it was. It was Koba, down there. She had been hauling on the lines with the rest of the crew, making a man of herself. Now, as she tried to get into the rigging, she fell on that slippery deck as on a hill of ice. Culver went down to her, handing himself along like a monkey among the ropes. And the black hand of the rising wave he could feel behind him; the light he saw it by was the scream of the crew, piercing his brain. He got Koba. She had hurt herself in the fall. She had banged her head on the deck or something.

He had to pick her up like a half-filled sack of grain that kept trying to spill out of his arm. There was plenty of Koba; there was a hundred and thirty pounds of her and a dozen arms and legs hanging to get in his way. He had to hold her with one arm and climb with the other. Perhaps his heart should have swelled and grown great with the thought that he was saving a life. Instead, it was pinched small by the thought that she was only an islander; to the brain and life of the world she was nothing, a name, a gesture in the dark, and yet he was risking his life for her.

HE got her into the mizzen shrouds a way; then the sea struck them. It struck so hard that when it hit his feet it almost knocked them off the ratline. He put his arms right around the ropes and crushed Koba against the shrouds. That sea, at full swing and gallop, covered him knees and hips and shoulders and head at one stroke. He was holding his breath in blackness. His brain, spinning, told him that the ship was upside down. Invisible hands got

hold of him and pulled. In the tension, he hardly was sure whether Koba was there or gone from him.

The wave passed, and there was the head of Koba held erect, and the eyes of Koba looking into his face as though the storm did not matter! She was silent, for once. Somehow she was able to say everything without words. The wave had gone on, but he could feel the ship settling under them, beneath the thousands of tons of water; yet in spite of that Koba laid hold on his brain and made him think of her.

Then abruptly all his consciousness returned to the *Spindrift*.

She had lain right down. Her speed was quenched. She lay flat as a stone. The waves breached over her in thunder. The moon came out; it showed spray hanging in the air like shining sails, as though the ghost of the *Spindrift* already had left her and was voyaging on.

She was hurt. The poop was stripped of weathercloth, of covering-board, and gratings. Tons of water, iron-hard with speed, had burst the cabin skylight, smashed the lazarette. The long-boat on the forehouse, once like a graceful yacht, was now a raffle, a double armful of loose boards held by the lashings; where the wheelhouse had stood, Culver saw the naked steering gear and well-oiled couplings open to the sea. There was no crew, but rags and dripping peltries caught among the rigging, and voices like the salty cry of sea-birds dissolved in wind but settling to a scream: "Cut the masts!" He could hear that voice settling into a sound from a single throat over the clanging of swing-ports and the salvos of wet ropes, straining, cracking.

"Axes!" shouted Burke from the main-shrouds. "Axes! Axes!"

Then old Peterson lifted his grizzled head and yelled: "No axes! Don't chop her down. Wear ship! Wear ship! The main yard, square it! Haul on the main brace. Hold by your teeth, and haul!"

The crowding thunder closed over his shout like water over the lips, but already the crew was answering, and Culver with them. He was first to reach the line and cat-footed Koba with him. Sliding and scrambling on the tilted deck they grappled with the main-brace, half in air and half in sea. They hauled, and sounded a broken chanty. The yard moved. They squared it. A sailor—it was Birger Ukko—manned the wheel.

She did not spring up suddenly. She went off little by little, still dragging her lee rail under—heavy, lifeless, stupid, the *Spindrift* that once had had the body and the feathers of a gull!

"Cut! The axes! She'll never rise!" yelled Burke.

Somehow the crew in that moment listened more to old Peterson as he shouted in answer: "Give her her chance. She's given us ours. Cut her throat and she'll die and bury you all, damn you!"

A mighty sea, a father of waves, arose beside them. Instead of beating them down into the ocean, it chose to lift them on its knees.

"God stiffen you!" shouted Peterson. "If you use the axes, God stiffen you! You half-tide barnacles, you lousy scum, it's flesh and bone you'd be cutting."

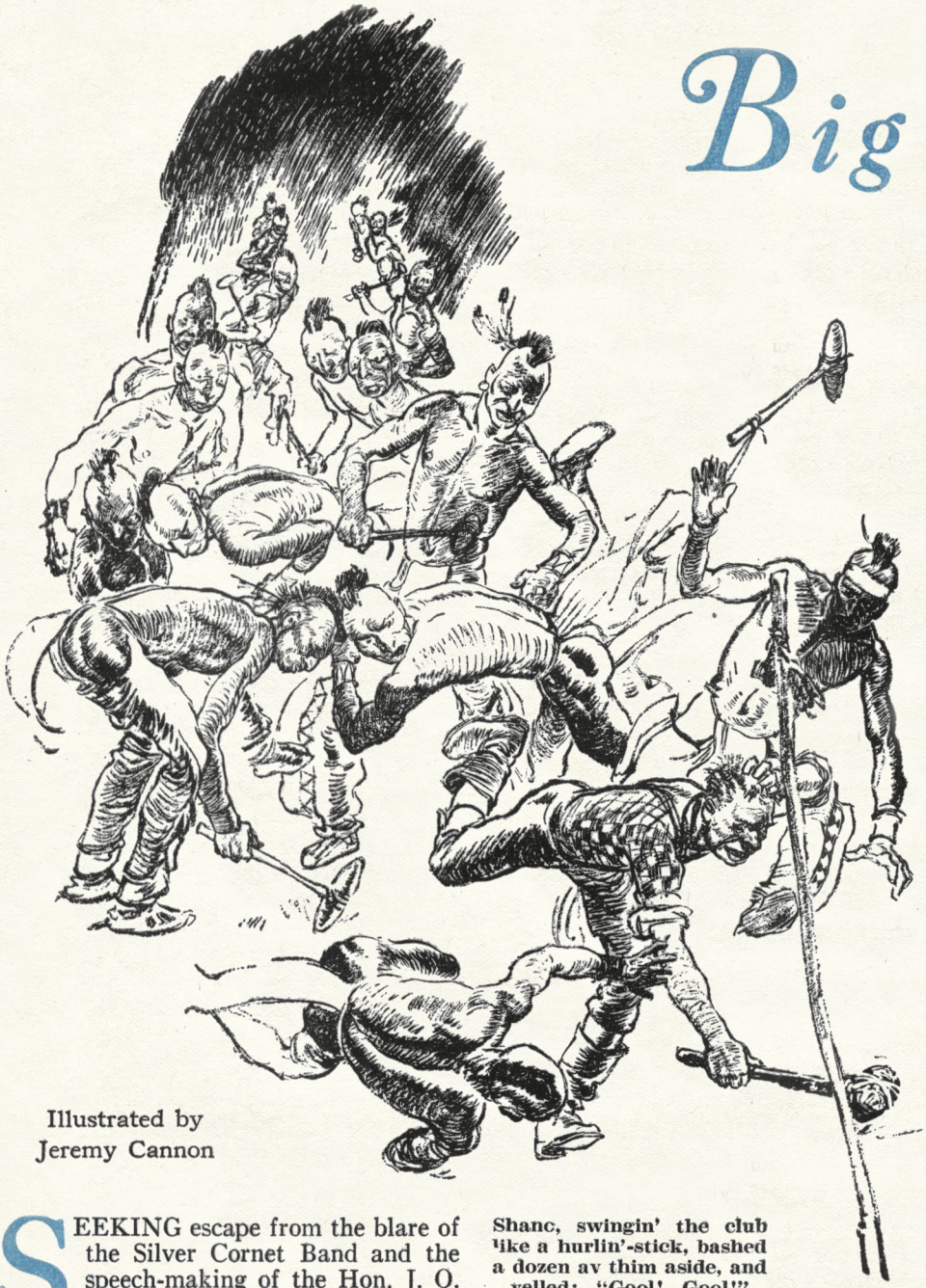
THE *Spindrift* staggered, heavily beaten. But in her quarters there was strength. She had the bows for speed, with plenty of rake and a narrow entrance that let her slice to windward like a knife, trailing her wake to leeward. In spite of those fine bows, she came about as sweetly as a bird on the wind. And she had, as Peterson put it, a tail to sit on when she was lifted by the head. That is to say, she was built for safety in her rump—as safe, said Peterson, as though she were at anchor. She was no damned two-year-old, Peterson would say, no lousy sprinter, all neck and middle, but cut away behind to nothing. She was a stake-horse, and the distances would never kill her, not the rough going. It was those strong quarters which served her now, together with the bracing of the mainsheet, and the lifting of that sea.

It happened all in a moment as the wind shifted a little. Suddenly she rose. She flung her masts upright while from the taut ropes the dust of the ocean was shaken. The keeling deck, glassed over with yards of ocean that was green in the light of the dawn, flung its burden into the wind, and the wind struck the sheets of water into spume. On the hard knees and belly of that lucky wave they pitched erect.

That was all. They were wet as a tide-water rock and still dripping. But presently the pumps were gushing; the storm sails were pulling them on their course. Lightning speared the morning sky from side to side, and the old *Spindrift* rose, and rose, and flew.

The third installment of this four-part serial appears in the forthcoming June issue.

Big



Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

Shanc, swingin' the club like a hurlin'-stick, bashed a dozen av thim aside, and yelled: "Gool! Gool!"

SEEKING escape from the blare of the Silver Cornet Band and the speech-making of the Hon. J. Q. A. Frump, I retreated from the Square to the rear of the Courthouse. There was Timmy Costigan, impervious to political sound and fury, sitting with his chair tipped back against a shady wall, sucking his gurgling pipe and watching the pigeons in the street.

"Oh-ho! 'Tis the mon of few words!" I said. "And why aren't ye around in the square, greeting the next Congressman?"

"Congressman, is it?" Timmy snorted indignantly. "'Tis well said thot whin a mon hasn't sinse enough to farm, we make a school-teacher av him; and whin he lacks aven the sinse to teach school, we sind him to Congress to keep him off the county poor-lists."

"Ye're a Dimicrat, and prejudiced," I taunted, mimicking his brogue. "Many in the district think John Quincy a great man. Will ye be after listenin' to the band playin' 'Hail to the Chief'?"

"Chief, is it? Him a chief?" Timmy almost choked in indignation. "A foine chief the loikes av him would be after

Chief Banshee

The wild Irish pioneer who starred in "The Banshee Comes to America" and "The Great Knockin'-Down" pursues his surprising adventures here.

By HUGH FULLERTON

makin'! Me gran'ther Shano Boards would take shame of bein' a chief, to hear such a mon called chief."

Timmy's gentle brogue thickened with anger, and broadened as it always did when he spoke of his ancestor Shano Boards, who according to his tales was driven from Ireland for playing banshee, and became a great figure in pioneer history of southern Ohio.

"So the great Shano ye are always after tellin' lies about," I taunted, "was an Indian chief?"

"He wor thot," Timmy insisted. "And 'tis no lie I'm tellin' ye. I'm a mon av few words, and all av thim thrue. The Injuns elected Shano chief, and 'twor him thot put a stop to wan Injun war, and mayhap saved Giniral Harrison, auld Tippecanoe—him and his friend Giniral Massie."

Surprised, I forgot to imitate Timmy's brogue, for he was serious.

"You mean to tell me that your grandfather Shano Boards, who was a banshee and was chased out from Ireland, and who killed five Indians, was a chief of the Indians?"

"He wor," Timmy averred solemnly. "And if the throat-latch av me wor not all dhry from wastin' words on ye, I'd be after tellin' ye—"

"I have the cure for what ails you, Timmy Costigan," I promised, tapping my pocket.

Presently we were in the sheriff's office, into which the noise of the band and the impassioned voice of the Hon. J. Q. A. Frump penetrated but faintly.

IT wor the year after the great muster for the War of 1812 in Captain Billy Hill's meadow (so Timmy said when his pipe was refilled and a tin cup of what he always called "usquebaugh" was in his hand). Me gran'ther Shano Boards was livin' in the cabin Giniral Massie gave him. He wor still a bit disappointed thot the new county town, Hillsboro, wor not built on his land, but comforted at the thought thot he could raise the great voice of him and not be scarin' neighbors. He wor happy in the forest with the still dhrippin' in the cave by the spring, and the pigs gruntin' content with fattenin' on the mast, and the mash from the still, and Maureen and the childer healthy. With six children in six years, and a herd of pigs, it seemed his days of adventure were inded; seldom did he wander, ixcept wanst a year when Maureen's time came, or whin he felt the homesickness for the auld sod, the peat-smoke and the bogs of Ballyhaunus. Thim times he would take the foot av him in his hand and go down to the Rocky Fork to dhrink a crock av poteen with his friends Burke and Fullerton and Dunn, and sing the auld songs. At such times he would lift the great voice av him and give the banshee yell and scare settlers four miles away.

Thim wor quiet times in spite of the war with the English, for the Mad Giniral Wayne had put the comehither on the Injuns at Fallen Timbers, and set the treaty lands to kape the Injuns penned in their reservation, and Giniral Harrison had hammered thim at Tippecanoe whin they were stirred up by the English, who as always was makin' trouble, sittin' behind the Treaty Lands at Detroit and in Canada, stirrin' the Injuns to raid, and supplyin' thim with guns. Only Tecumseh and his ugly wan-eyed twin brother thot called himself the Prophet was makin' and threatenin' trouble; and Giniral Harrison was watchin' thim in the Maumee country, where the big Shawnee towns wor.

Me gran'ther Shano held no fear of the Injuns, rememberin' how he had scared thim with his banshee yell, and kilt five. Many the time his cabin was full of thim, and him learnin' thim to sing "Nell Flannigan's Drake" and "Rory Come Aisy,"

and dancin' jigs till Maureen would take the broom and swape the whole b'ilin' of thim into the clearin'. He always contended thot Injuns were but sunburnt Irish, and he learned some av their talk. The great friend av him amongst thim was a young chief called Wannecongo, the "Friendly Wan," who was a Mingo, livin' with the Shawnees.

But to the north there always was the fear of the Injuns, for the English held on to Detroit and the Straits, and claimed that the Americans were breakin' the treaty—and thim forcin' us to break it by stirrin' up the savages.

Sometimes whin the wander-foot tickled him, me gran'ther Shano would take a jug of usquebaugh and walk down to the falls of Paint to have talk with his friend Giniral Massie about politics, so thot Shano might know who to vote against, come election-time.

A great friend av me gran'ther wor Giniral Massie and a great mon, and he nivir tired tellin' how Shano Boards had kilt the Injuns. Five hundred thousand acres av land he owned, and he had built himself a castle on the hillside overlookin' the valley of the Paint; and 'twor James Hoban, of Dublin, him thot built the White House in Washington, thot built it for the Giniral, whin he came to the wilderness to build the great house for Governor Worthington on the hill at Chillicothe. Manny the time I heard me gran'ther Shano Boards tell how he and the Giniral and Mr. Hoban sat with a crock of usquebaugh and how Mr. Hoban fell off the chair av him with laughin', whin the Giniral tauld him how Shano Boards played banshee and was druv out of Ireland by His Lordship.

Giniral Massie's great friend wor Giniral Harrison, him thot broke the Injuns at Tippecanoe, and who came to be President. They had fought togither, and marched togither; but Giniral Massie thought thim days were over, and thot he would live in peace in his castle on the Paint, with the bride he brought from Virginia—and thin one marnin' whilst he wor ridin' down the valley to the sawmill he wor buildin' at the Falls, a messenger came ridin' hard and bringin' bad news.

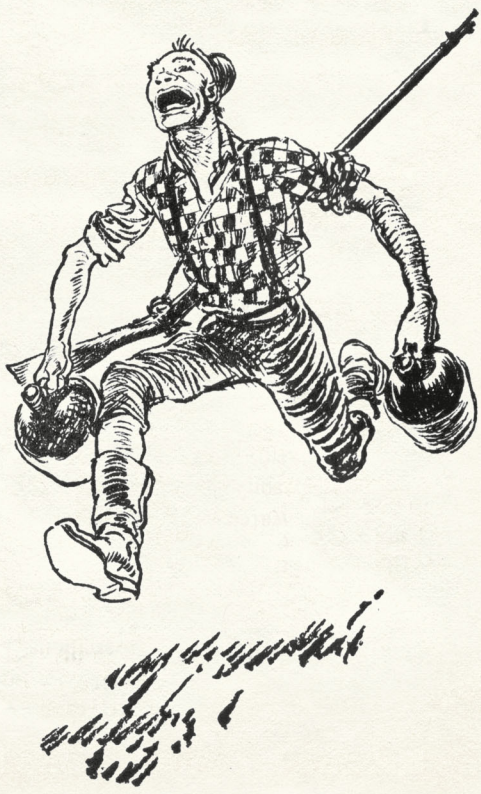
The word wor that Tenskawatawa, the ugly baste av an Injun with but wan eye, who was Tecumseh's brother, and who called himself the Prophet, had joined with the Redcoats from Canada, and wor marchin' with a great army of Injuns and 'breeds and British to surround Giniral Harrison and his little army in Fort Meigs, up in the North at the Maumee, and thot all the hell's spawn wor gatherin' to massacree the sodgers.

Giniral Massie nivir lost wan minute. He rode to his house, grabbed his sword and pistol, kissed his bride and was buttonin' his old uniform coat whilst his horse galloped to the new town he had built and called Bainbridge—wavin' and callin' to aich mon he saw in cabin or field to jine him.

Nivir wor there such a march as thot! The Giniral reached Bainbridge with two min, callin' to all to catch horse and follow him to bate the Injuns. He rode into Chillicothe with thirty min, and he bate the drum in the Square, and in an hour he marched wanst more with sixty min, aich with his rifle and blanket. Thim thot had no horses, grabbed the stirrup-straps and ran beside the horses, and they came to the Round Town, which the white min call Circleville, with more than two hundred min, and at nightfall he reached Franklintown, where the capital now stands, with more than five hunderd, and more pourin' in to jine him.

In Franklintown wor a store av arms and ammunition, and the Giniral passed thim out, and thin stood up and said:

"Min, I'm no longer in the army, and am supposed to be too old to fight. I'll



l'ave it to you to elect your giniral, but me auld frind Giniral Harrison is in trouble, and I'll be goin' along."

The drummer, a mon named Stuart, shouted: "Giniral, ye're the only giniral we'll be after wantin'!" And iviry wan shouted his name.

At daybreak Giniral Massie led more than a thousand min out to save his friend, with more comin'. They rode hard the day, gatherin' min with aich hour—and whin they came nigh Lower Sandusky, they met a messenger from Giniral Harrison sayin' the Injuns had heard that Giniral Massie wor comin', and had turned back, and the English had fled back to Canada. The min cheered, and Giniral Massie ordered thim to ate a great feast from the provisions, and turned back toward home.

"AND what did all this have to do with the wild Irisher you call your gran-'ther, Timmy Costigan?" I demanded. "And where was Shano Boards the banshee whilst Massie was marchin'?"

"I wor tryin' to tell ye," Timmy replied with injured dignity as he relighted his dudeen and refilled the tin cup.

I might be after tellin' ye the Injuns ran because me gran'ther was on his way, (said Timmy); but he wor sittin' at home mindin' the still and the pigs, and hoein' the praties, thinkin' nawthin of war and fightin'. And 'twor not until the Giniral wor far upstate thot a hunter brought him the word of the big foregatherin' and of Giniral Massie's call fur fightin' min.

Shano lepped into the air and cracked his heels togither, and let out wan of his best banshee yells. Thin he grabbed his rifle, powder-horn and a blanket, kissed Maureen and started to jine up. Thinkin' he might be needin' strength, he slung a jug av usquebaugh over wan shoulder; but before he had reached the woods, he discovered thot the jug made him run lopsided, so he came back and hung a second jug over the other shoulder to balance. And at thot time he thought mayhap there would be snakes in the swamps, so he put on the great pair of brogans he had cobbled for himself winter evenin's, with soles an inch thick and the leather half to his knees. Like all Irishmin, me gran'ther hated snakes, and they wor the only things he feared. 'Twor a lucky thing for him he wore the brogans thot trip, else he nivir would hov become a chief, and like enough would have lost more hair than Maureen ivir pulled from the head av him.

Passin' Amos Evans' cabin on Clear Creek, Shano raised the voice av him to cry the news, and urge Amos to jine, but Amos yelled back thot he wor too old.

"The Giniral must be far ahead av ye," Amos said. "Ye'd best ride my horse if ye are to overtake him."

"'Tis in a hurry I am," said Shano, "and no time to waste with a horse."

All thot day he ran, and into the night, stoppin' but to rest wanst an hour. Aich time he stopped, he drank from the jug, and thot made him run lopsided till he had to drink from the other ju to balance his keel. In the marnin' he wor far across the Big Tree prairie, and thinkin' he might be sightin' the army anny minute, he put on more speed, and iviry mile or two he lifted his yell to warn the Giniral he wor comin'. At the nightfall he wor beyant the Olentangy, and runnin' the old Warrior Trail to the north. Whin it got too dark for him to see the trail, me gran'ther stopped for another sip from the jug, and seein' no sign av the army, he decided he must hov passed it whilst takin' a short cut. So he drank from wan jug and leveled the ither to the same shakin', rolled himself in his blanket and wint to slape in the brush, peaceful as an infant.

With the first light av marnin' Shano waked suddint-loike, thinkin' some sound had roused him.

"Ho-ho!" he said to himself. "Thot must be the Giniral and the army coming. I'll be after givin' a wee whisper av a yell to let thim know I'm waiting."

So he stood beside the trail and gave his softest banshee yell, and in the wil-

"Ho-ho, ye red divils!" said Shano. "What are ye after m'anin'?"

derness it wor hardly louder than a squall of a catamount. He stepped out into the trail, thinkin' he heard a rustlin', and found himself surrounded by forty av the ugliest Injuns he'd ivir seen, all smeared with war-paint, carryin' their guns and tomahawks. Half av thim had fresh scalps, and with thim wor three or four prisoners, scairt and silent, ixpectin' to be kilt intirely anny minute. Wan av thim Injuns had seen me gran'ther slapin' peaceful in the brush, and 'twor his call of alarm thot had wakened Shano.

"Ho-ho, ye red divils!" said Shano. "And what are ye after m'anin' by disturbin' me sleep?"

And with thot he let out a yell thot made thim lep backward the lingth av a sawlog. Shano wor hopin' the Giniral might hear his shout, and mayhap the Injuns feared thot too, for wan big, ugly varmint let out a yell av anger and rushed at me gran'ther with his tomahawk raised to split his skull. Shano scarce made a move till the buck wor near him; thin he stuck out wan av his great brogans between the Injun's legs, kickin' wan av his shins hard, and sint him sprawlin' into the bushes. With thot the rist of the Injuns laughed and shouted; and Shano, laughin' hearty himself, made the sign av peace. The big Injun wor half crazed with the kick and with bein' laughed at, and he came lep-pin' at me gran'ther again; and this time Shano caught his arm as the tomahawk wor swingin', and givin' him the cross-buttock holt, sint him flyin' twinty feet into the forest, where he landed against a tree, upside down. 'Twor the holt that me gran'ther's gran'ther, auld Shepelaun Boards, who in his youth had been champion av all Ireland, taught Shano as a bhoy. And all the Injun bucks made a great miration over Shano, who, seein' they did not like the big Injun much more than he did, lepped into the air, cracked his heels togither three times and crowed like a rooster, whilst they all grinned.

The chief, a fine-lookin' old buck named Ok-wil-wan-nay, spoke an order, forbiddin' the angry Injun from harmin' any av the prisoners, and told thim to hasten the march. The warriors surrounded me gran'ther and pointed up the trail. Shano knew he wor a prisoner, and he wor too smart to try to fight or escape, but wint along peaceable, listenin' to the talk av thim. He knew enough av their lingo to understand thot they wor a war-party av Shawnees, comin' back from the siege of Fort Meigs; and glory be, he knew that the Injuns had heard Giniral Massie wor comin' and had feared to fight him. He learnt, too, thot the Injuns wor all divided, with the old wans wantin' to return to the villages and be in peace, whilst Tenskwatawa, the Prophet, wor urgin' thim to fight, and thot the ugly baste av a buck he had thrown into the woods wor wan av the Prophet's min, and wantin' bloody massacree.

Aich av the other prisoners was forced to carry a load, but whin wan buck tried to make me gran'ther carry a big load av loot from a burned cabin, Shano thrun the load to the ground and tauld thim all he wor a great warrior and no squaw, to be carryin' packs. The ugly big warrior wor so angered he lepped toward Shano to bash out his brains, but me gran'ther fetched him so great a kick on the shins av him with his big boots, thot the Injun dropped his hatchet and yelled in pain, whilst the other bucks laughed at him.

"Ho-ho and ho-ho!" said Shano to himself. "'Tis the weakness av him thot I hov learnt. His shins are his weakness."

The auld chief spoke harshly to the big buck, claiming Shano as his own prisoner, and forbiddin' annywan to touch him. Some av the warriors grinned at Shano and called him Brave Warrior,

and Shano learnt enough to know thot the big ugly buck wor no more popular in thot tribe than the windbag spachifyin' out there in the coortyard will be with the voters, come election.

TIMMY puffed his pipe contemplatively and held out the tin cup to be replenished, while the sound of the voice of the Hon. J. Q. A. Frump came faintly through the windows.

Come night (Timmy resumed his tale after a deep drink) the war party came to wan av the big towns of the Shawnees on the Maumee River. The bitterness av comin' home beaten, and the scoldin's av the squaws, made thim ugly. Shano, peekin' out av the tepee into which they put him, and listenin' to the talk and the mutterin', knew he wor in for trouble. He could see the warriors gatherin' around the big fire, gettin' ready for a council, and sittin' at wan side av the fire he saw the big wan-eyed buck, dressed and painted like a medicine-mon, and he knew it wor the brother av the great Tecumseh, him they called the Prophet. Half a dozen 'breeds and renegades wor with him, and Shano saw the big buck he had kicked on the shins, wavin' his arms and talkin' with Tenskawatawa. Some av the bucks wor wearin' the red coats av the British, but they kept by thimselves and would not jine the council around the fire.

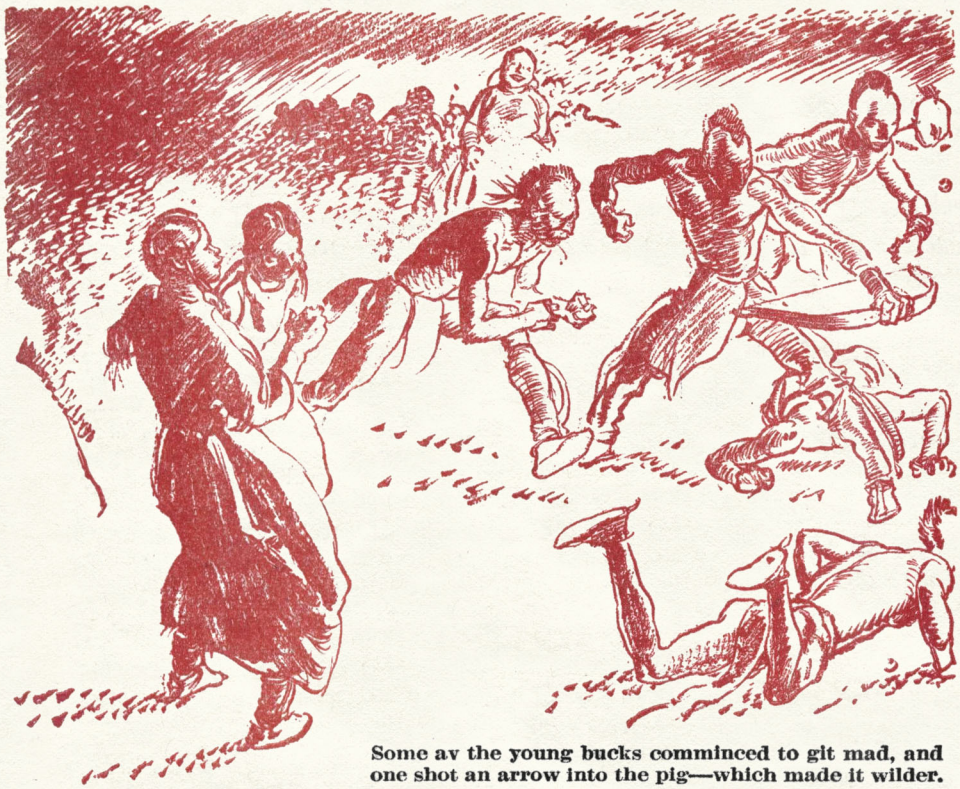
The young braves backin' the Prophet wor howling to go back to Fort Meigs and massacree all the whites, and manny av thim wor demandin' thot the prisoners be brought to the fire to be tortured and burned at the stake.

"Ho-ho," said Shano. "I'm wishin' meself back in Ballyhaunus! Not aven His Lordship would be as bad as these bucks."

Ok-wil-wan-nay, whose name manes Tongue-that-spakes-wisdom, spoke counseling peace, sayin' there wor no chance of beatin' the whites, and thot Giniral Harrison wor a better friend av thim than the English. He called thim fools and hot-heads, and said thot instid av killin' the prisoners, they should sell thim to the British at Detroit for guns and powder. The argumint grew hot and hotter; and wanst it looked to Shano as if the auld chief and young ugly-face would come to fightin', for he knew enough of the talk to know thot the young buck wanted revenge, and thot he was appealin' to the Prophet to back him up.

The Injun buck guardin' the prisoners seemed to be sidin' with the ugly-faced wan, and Shano could make no ground thryin' to draw him into talk, hopin' mayhap to put the blarney on him, but after a time, whin dark wor comin' on, he called anither buck to stand the guard, and Shano felt better with gladness whin he saw it wor Latwalawawa, wan av the

Shano stuck out wan av his great brogans, and sint the buck sprawlin'.



Some av the young bucks comminced to git mad, and one shot an arrow into the pig—which made it wilder.

Injuns thot had come twice to his cabin and had a few sips of usquebaugh, and seemed friendly. So Shano called him a greetin', and held up wan av the jugs so after a time Latwalawawa came into the tepee, and pretendin' he wor mad, winked at Shano and injoyed himself a dhrink. Thin he squatted just outside the tepee, an' all the time actin' mad, he spoke with Shano in English an' was tellin' him the m'anin' av the talk by the fire, gettin' more friendly with aich dhrink.

The council was gittin' wilder and more divided, and the two factions seemed ready to battle aich other. It grew noisier ontil after a time the Prophet walked into the circle av light by the fire and held up a hand, commandin' silence. Shano could see that the huge ugly baste with the wan eye and the medicine-mon's clothes wor a powerful leader of min, red or white. All the noise stopped, and the braves thot had been yellin' and threatenin' quieted and sat silent, to listen as Tenskawatawa spoke. A queer figure av a mon he wor, accordin' to Shano, taller than anny other Injun in the tribe, the right eye av him only a hole in his long face, his left eye glarin' like the light av Kinsale. He wore the medicine-mon's feather headdress, and his long face was striped up and down with paint.

His voice wor strong and rose higher and high as he spoke, and wor deeper than thot av anny Injun me gran'ther iver heard, savin' whin it broke almost to a scream, in his anger. The others listened and nodded agreement.

Thin the Deer, which wor Shano's friend's ither name, shook his head sadly and tipped the jug wanst more.

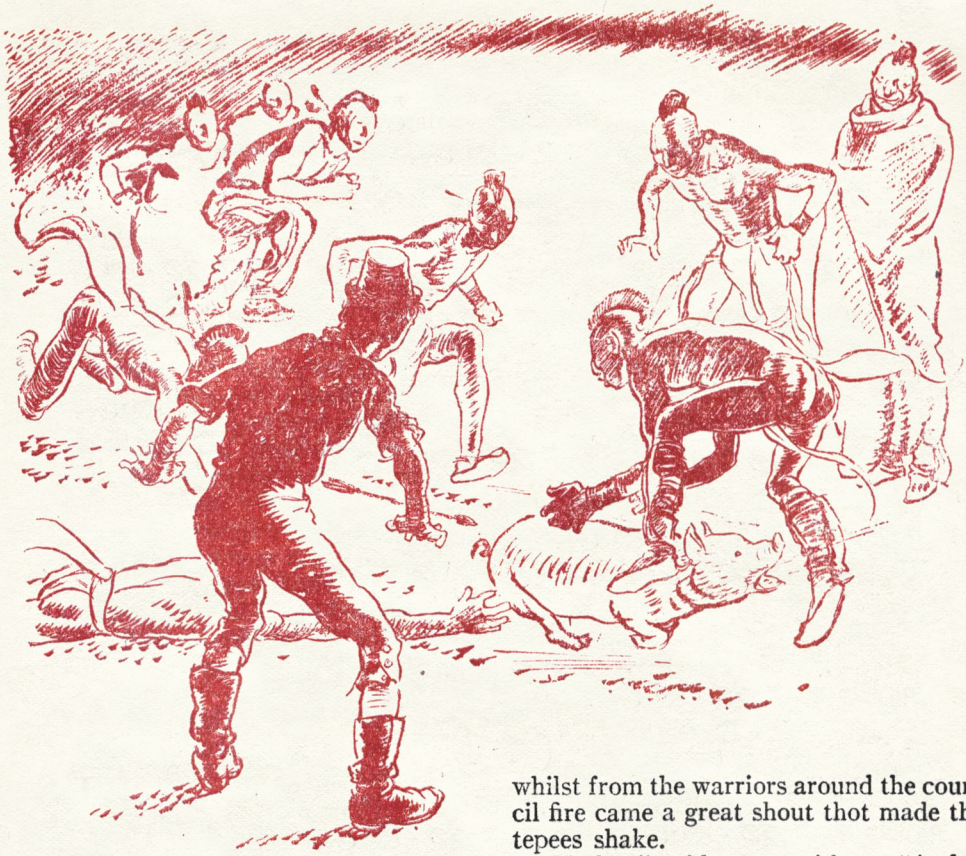
"'Tis bad for ye," he said. "'Tis makin' ye run the gantlet they'll be after doin'."

"Ho-ho!" said Shano, boldly, and laughin'. "Runnin' the gantlet? Thot'd be play for the loikes av me. Manny the time I had to run the gantlet back home in Ireland, whin His Lordship and the keepers came lookin' for me snares. I'm p'raps the best gantlet-runner thot ivir came out av Ireland."

Me gran'ther tauld me many times thot he wor not feelin' as brave as he spoke, but he wor not the mon to let anny Injun see thot he was afraid.

"'Tis not like they'll kill ye, unless ye show fear," the Deer tauld him. "Ye must run fast, and nivir stop."

"'Tis the fastest runner in the woods I am," Shano tauld him, takin' a big dhrink. "Thot time His Lordship chased me for st'alin his piggie, I ran from Ballyhaunus down to Galway Bay faster



thon ivir mon ran before. This gantlet-runnin'—whot for av a game is it?"

"'Tis a test av bravery," the Deer tauld him. "Ye must run bechune the lines whilst they strike at ye with clubs and firebrands, and mayhap some wan might bash yer head with a hatchet. If ye fall or aven hesitate, they'll think ye a coward, and thin the young bucks will be permitted to torture and kill ye."

"And what'll *I* be after doin', all this time they're poundin' me with the clubs and firebrands?" asked me gran'ther. "Nivir a Boards took a b'atin' and gave none."

The Prophet wor talkin' and the young bucks wor gittin' more and more excited, whilst the auld wans wor sittin' serious and sayin' but little. The Prophet wor tellin' thim thot the fight wor not inded, and thot they should bide their time whilst he roused the other villages and got more min and guns from the English in Canada. Thin they would fight ag'in and drive Giniral Harrison and all the settlers from their huntin'-grounds and back across the Ohio.

Whin he finished sp'akin', he wrapped his robes around the great body av him and walked all alone into the woods, whilst from the warriors around the council fire came a great shout thot made the tepees shake.

"Ho-ho!" said me gran'ther. "And if thot is all the better they can yell, 'tis no fear I hove av thim. Stand back whilst I show thim a mon thot can *yell!*" He took another wee sip from a jug, and gave out so great a banshee yell thot the English in Detroit might have heard, had they been listenin'.

The Injuns lepped to their feet, grabbin' guns and tomahawks, thinkin' it wor an attack, and whin they saw 'twor only wan man, and him wan av their prisoners, they yelled for him to be brought, and began formin' two lines for the gantlet-runnin', and sint sivin young chiefs to bring me gran'ther out into the clearin'.

All the tribe waited for him, yellin' and threatenin' because av the scare his yell had thrun into thim, wavin' their hatchets and clubs at him. The young bucks and the warriors formed two lines, tin feet apart, with the small boys sharpenin' sticks and wavin' firebrands. The old squaws sat injoyin' the fun, and the chiefs sat smokin', takin' no part in the play, but actin' as judges.

Near the middle av the line Shano saw the big ugly-faced buck, holding a big club, with nails in the head av it, spittin' on the hands av him, and gittin' ready to bash the brains av him out if so happen

he got thot far. Beyant the lines the lingth av four surveyor's chains was a post set in the ground, near the fire where the old chiefs sat.

"Is thot the gool?" Shano asked the Deer.

"It is thot," said the Deer. "Ye're to run bechune the lines and touch the post, if ye can. Thin ye are safe, for a time."

Shano lepped into the air and cracked his heels togither three times to limber the muscles av him, and looked down bechune the lines av howlin' savages.

"Do ye be after guardin' thim jugs av mine," he said to the Deer. "'Tis like I'll be wantin' a dhrink whin I finish runnin'."

The Injuns holdin' him let loose, and wan hit him acrost the shoulders av him with a club, and Shano lepped tin feet straight down the line, and thin started weavin' first wan way, thin the other, the way he had learned to run in the football in Mayo. And most av the Injuns missed him with their clubs, until wan buck jabbed him in the ribs with a sharp stick thot was afire at the ind. With thot Shano lepped straight into the air six feet, and let out so great a yell thot half the Injuns lepped backward from the fear av him; and Shano, lightin' runnin', made a dash toward the pole. He saw the big ugly-faced buck thot had been clamorin' for his life, waitin', houldin' his club ready to swing, but instead av passin' him, Shano made a suddint leap sideways, dodged under the club and fetched that buck wan runnin' kick on the shins av him with his great boots.

"'Tis yer wakeness!" he yelled. "And if ye don't loike it, here's anither, to give to your frind with the wan eye."

And he fetched the ugly wan another kick on the shins thot made him howl with the pain av it; and Shano, grabbin' the ugly wan's club, lepped high again and cracked his heels, as he let out the greatest banshee yell av all his life. So great was thot yell thot the power av it came nigh upsettin' the canoe av the Prophet, and it three miles down the river; and some say thot the English in Detroit put up shutters, thinkin' the big wind was blowin' again. Before the Injuns could rally from the scare he thrun into thim, Shano, swingin' the ugly wan's club like a hurlin'-stick, had bashed a dozen av thim aside, and reachin' the big pole by the fire, struck it with the club and yelled: "Gool! Gool!"

The chiefs and warriors gathered round, callin' him brave mon and great warrior; and me gran'ther, breathin' hard and wipin' sweat and blood from the face av him, sat down right beside the auld chief Ok-wil-wan-nay, and slappin' him on the back, said:

"'Tis more spoort thon I've had since the hurlin'-match bechune Killybeg and Ballyhaunus—but 'tis dhry spoort. Will ye be after sindin' wan av the lads for the young feller thot is kapin' me jugs for me?"

The jug was brought, and Shano tilted it to his mouth and drank nigh onto a pint at wan breath, and handed the jug to the auld wan, who passed it to the next, and in less time than the tellin' takes, they wor talkin' friendly as thieves, and Shano said to thim:

"'Tis a foine game, this runnin' the gantlet. 'Tis a bit loike the hurlin' in Ireland, but not so rough, and a bit loike the Gaelic football, only 'tis too wan-sided. The nixt time ye're after wantin' a game, I'll bring me friends Burke and Fullerton and Dunn from down on the Rocky Fork, and we'll be after playin' forty or fifty av ye red savages. Thot'll make it more aven, and greater spoort."

There wor a lot of jabberin' and excitement whin he said thot, and 'twor plain thot the Injuns thought me gran'ther a mighty mon for bein' eager to run the gantlet, just for spoort, and no hard feelin's. Old Ok-wil-wan-nay took another dhrink from the jug and stood up, makin' talk in the Shawnee tongue, sayin' thot the strange white mon were brave and a mighty warrior, and thot he ought to be in the tribe, instid av a prisoner.

Shano histed the jug and dhrank twicet as much as the auld chief had done, to put him in shape for makin' a sp'ach.

'Tis a wakeness av the Boards tribe thot they're unable to talk much onless their throat-latches be oiled with usquebaugh.

THIS hint sufficed to refill the tin cup; and Timmy, after a decent pause, continued the tale:

The Injuns knew little more av what me gran'ther wor sayin' than he knew av what they had said, but he tauld me later thot the idea came into the head av him to kape thim in a good humor, so he said:

"The throuble with ye Injuns is that ye hov few spoorts, and no rules for the games. 'Tis no spoort to play games without rules to break. This runnin' the gantlet would be foine spoort, wor it not so wan-sided. I'll be after showin' ye a spoort thot is more fun. Will ye be after fetchin' me a piggie?"

The auld chief sint the squaws into the woods to bring a pig thot had been stole from the settlers, and Shano smeared it all over with bear's-grease. He tauld the auld chief to line up the whole village, min and boys, in the clearin' like they did for the gantlet, and thin he turned the piggie loose, and yelled thot annywan catchin' it could kape it.

Nivir wor there seen so much yellin', laughin' and shoutin' as whin the Injuns chased thot piggie round and round, grabbin' at it and slippin', while it squealed and the squaws shook with the laughin'. Some av the young bucks comminced to git mad, and wan av thim shot an arrow into the behind av the pig—which made it wilder.

Thin Shano, grabbin' the two hands av him full av sand, caught the piggie. 'Twor aisy for him, because av the practice he'd hod in Ireland st'alin' His Lordship's pigs, and he carried the squealin' piggie to the auld chief as a gift.

'Twor a grand feast they made from the pig, and there wor singin' and dancin' till midnight, with Shano passin' a jug around until not wan more dhrop could be squeezed from it. Whin ivirywan wor feelin' foine, the auld chief made another spa'ch, praisin' Shano as a brave warrior and a wise mon, sayin' he would be a great chief, savin' he joined the tribe.

"All me ancestors wor chiefs," Shano answered, "and manny av thim kings; and the greatest chief Ireland ivir had was wan av thim. He wor Finn MacCumhl. He'd lep through your gantlet, and nivir wanst touch the ground. He wor the greatest lepper av the world."

"Could he lep over the great waters?" asked the auld chief, m'anin' the ocean.

"I'm not sayin' he could do thot," Shano admitted, sorrowful-like. "Ye see, Ireland, it be so small he nivir could git the proper run for the take-off for such a lep."

"'Tis proud we'd be to hov ye as a brother in the tribe," said the auld chief.

"And 'tis proud I'd be to jine, and be a Shawnee," said me gran'ther. "Me name bein' Shano, 'tis small change I'd be after havin' to make. But I'm not likin' bein' a brother to thot ugly wan whose shins I kicked, nor the wan-eyed Prophet."

"'Tis thim thot would lead us to war with the settlers—and to take scalps to sell to the English at Detroit," said Okwil-wan-nay sadly.

"'Tis rather I'd be fightin' the English," said Shano. "But I'm a mon av peace, and would be yer brother."

"'Tis a wise head and a quick tongue," said the auld chief, "besides bein' a bold warrior and a cunning fighter."

"I'm obsarvin' thot there is no love lost bechune ye and the wan-eyed wan," said Shano. "With me to do yer fightin', we could kape the peace entirely, and maybe bate some sinse into the heads av thim thot hov no more brains thon to fight for the English."

The auld chief signed for the medicine-mon, and all the chiefs performed some h'athen didoes, takin' dhrops av blood from Shano and from their own arms, and tradin' blood with aich ither. They brought a foine big feathered war-bonnet, with aigle feathers, and put it on me gran'ther's head, and gave him a blanket and belts av wampum beads, and dhressed him so thot his own childer nivir would have known him, and formed a circle and danced around him—and Shano danced with thim, and thin they led him back to the tepee, and tauld him he must stay alone for twinty-four hours, with no food nor dhrink—and if 'twor not for the ither jugs, Shano nivir could hov stood it.

WITH a sly grin at thought of that vigil, Timmy resumed:

Whin his young friend the Deer had squatted at the door av the tepee, he tauld me gran'ther:

"They hov made ye a blood-brother and a mimber av the tribe. Tomorrow they will make more medicine, and thin pull out the hair av ye, savin' the scalp-lock, and ye'll be a Shawnee and a chief."

"Wurra, wurra!" said Shano. "Nivir wor there a bald-headed Boards! But mayhap 'tis thankful I should be they're not cuttin' off the scalp with the hair."

So he took another dhrink to straighten the mind av him, and sat down thinkin'. "They're divided ag'inst thimselves now," he said to himself, "and I must be thinkin' some way to kape thim thot way, or worse." And with thot, and the usquebaugh, he fell aslape.

Come marnin', the feastin' and the makin' medicine began all over ag'in', and some av the young chiefs asked Shano to be startin' anither pig-chase.

"Wurra, wurra!" he said to himself. "Pigs'll be the dith av me yit! 'Twor a pig thot chased me from Ireland, and pigs thot settled me in the cabin, and now pigs with Injuns chasin' thim."

And all av a suddint, the idea came to the mind av him:

"Ho-ho and ho-ho!" he said, liftin' the great voice av him. "I'll be after showin' ye a game only brave min and warriors can play. I'll not be playin', but will be the judge."

He called his young friend the Deer, and explained the game to him—and added: "I'll be thradin' the shoes av me for yer moccasins, and don't forget the shins av thim whin the game starts."

He took the bladder av the pig they had feasted on, and blew it full av air, and tied it tight with horsehairs. Then he put on all the finery they had given him, and stepped off a field where the gantlet had been run, with two poles for gools, and he divided thim into two teams, makin' sure thot all the Prophet's min wor on one side, and all the friends av Ok-wil-wan-nay on the ither, and he came nigh makin' a friend av young chief Ugly Face by appointin' him captain av the Prophet's team, and he named his own friend the Deer captain av the ither team, whisperin' to him:

"And don't ye be forgettin' thot the wakeness av him is his shins, and thot ye hov me boots on."

Whin he had thim all lined up, Shano put the bladder on the ground bechune them and signaled for the Deer and Ugly Face to kick it. Nivir, me gran'ther said, wor there so great a game av football. 'Twor loike Lady Day at the monument in Dublin, with the touch av the Boyne waters thrun in; in tin minutes the braves wor grabbin' their war-clubs and scalpin' knives and runnin' back into the scrimmage—and all the time the Deer, wearin' me gran'ther's big brogans, wor gainin' ground, kickin' the shins av Ugly Face and av ivirywan who got in his road.

Shano waited ontil the game wor at its best, with all the young wans kickin' and fightin' and yellin', and all the squaws and the auld chiefs yellin' encouragement; and thin, with all his feathers and beads, he made off into the forest, with no wan payin' heed. Before night he wor down at Fort Meigs, reportin' to Giniral Harrison, and tellin' him that by the time the football game wor inded, the Injuns wouldn't be able to fight annywan, and to march in and make peace with thim.

Whin he wor comin' near home, Shano felt the fear upon him. Whin he crossed the Rattlesnake Crick, he gave out wan av his banshee yells; and whin he came to Clear Crick he tauld Amos Evans av his ventures, and thot he'd rather go back and run the gantlet again than to take what Maureen had waitin' for him at the cabin. Thin he gave another banshee yell and said sivin Hail Marys and started, knowin' Maureen would be waitin' with the broom and the fire-tongs.

But whin he came into the clearin', all decked in blanket and beads and with the feather headdress on his head, he gave out wan Injun yell; and Maureen, seein' him safe and not kilt intirely, dhropped the ax and hung to him with the arms av her around his neck, and only bate him a little with the corn-pestle, after kissin' him a dozen times and cryin' a wee bit.

TIMMY stopped to strike a match and light his long-dead pipe, holding the tin cup at a suggestive position.

"Timothy Costigan," I said, imitating his brogue, " 'tis the liar av the world ye are, but 'twor a grand tale and desarvin' av anither tin av the usquebaugh."

Timmy replenished the cup and drank half of it without blinking an eye. " 'Tis a mon av few words I am, and all av thim thrue," he said. "The childer ruint the war bonnet the Shawnees gave me gran'ther, pullin' the aigle feathers from it to tickle Shano's feet whin he wor slapin', but the wampum belts Shano and Maureen kept to prove thot he wor a chief. Be ye after lookin' in the drawer av the desk."

And, as the old man puffed calmly at his pipe, I opened the drawer and lifted out a headband of the shell wampum of the Shawnees and a wide belt of wampum with the sign of the panther and the thunderbird woven into it in beads made from the blue of mussel shell.

"They named me gran'ther *'Wah-ne-hathna-willa-way,'* Timmy said reflectively. "And thot manes, *'Mon who makes thunder with his mouth.'*"

TWO SHORT NOVELS

THE BOMB AT MON RÉPOS

By ROBERT MILL

The secret service deals with a hidden hostile base in the Caribbean.

BOTTOM DEAL

By HUGH PENTECOST

A murder mystery with some novel angles by the able author of "Bang It Out of Town."

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

"Mademoiselle—messieurs: You have your papers of identification?" asked the soldier who wore the bars of a lieutenant.

THE BOMB AT MON RÉPOS

By ROBERT R. MILL

"MURDER RIVER" tells how civilization, in 1941 came to the Caribbean island of Haiminga.

To find Haiminga, you must know and love all the black countries of the Caribbean, that body of water which some day may be our Sea of Destiny.

Haiti, dark and mysterious, but completely captivating. . . . Martinique, where in happier days French joy of life blended so well with the African ability to smile easily. . . . The Dominican Republic, where the ghosts of Spanish dons walk through scenes of alternate splendor and dire poverty. . . . La Gonave, the beautiful but sinister island that lies in the Windward Passage between Haiti and Cuba. . . . All these, and others.

Even then, there is no direct approach to Haiminga. It is best to return to the United States. Once there, if the tropical sand has really entered your shoes, you will be flooded with happy memories. From them there will emerge the composite picture of the ideal tropical island, your island. That is Haiminga.

There is the same basis of fact for the legends that appear in this story. Haitian peasants, if you bother to learn their musical patois, will tell you of their legendary King Faustin, who lived many years ago. Some day—"any time now, monsieur"—Faustin will return from the skies, and deliver the blacks from the oppressions of the mulatto ruling class.

That done, Faustin will live and reign in his castle. Not Sans Souci, the luxurious abode of the fabulous but relatively colorless Christophe. Not La Ferrière, the citadel atop a mountain which still stands as a monument to Christophe. Faustin will live in the south, in his own palace, Mon Répos, which is on an island.

Scientists and explorers have searched in vain for Mon Répos. . . . It is on the Murder River, which is in Haiminga. We learned that from Mama Vaublanc, who was very old, and very wise.

THE Caribbean, usually a smiling glamour girl, was showing that on occasion she could be a bit of a vixen. Cobalt blue skies, in which white puff clouds drifted lazily, had been replaced by a lead-colored dome. Beneath it, instead of tranquil blue waters, were black oily swells which now and again broke to disclose white crests streaked with dirty yellow. There was an unnatural light that defined exact classification; not quite pink, and not quite yellow, beautiful, but at the same time fear-inspiring. The air was close and sultry.

The lieutenant-commander who was skipper of the U.S.S. *Dover,* a light cruiser which was knifing through the oily swells with barely enough speed to maintain steerageway, took a look at the barometer, and then entered the chartroom, aft of the wheelhouse.

"We wanted weather," he remarked. "Now we have it."

Stephen Blake smiled. He was tall, thin, wiry, and his rather handsome face was tanned the color of a mild cigar. A sleeveless undershirt revealed muscular shoulders and arms. The white duck trousers of a yachtsman, and sandals with rope soles, completed his costume.

"Made to order, Commander," was his comment. "When will you be kicking me off?"

The naval officer beckoned, and they passed through the wheelhouse, and out upon the starboard wing of the bridge. On the deck beneath them, and aft, a group of sailors, watched by a petty offi-

cer, removed canvas covers from a cabin cruiser, some thirty-five feet in length.

The motorboat, obviously a pleasure craft, seemed oddly out of place upon the businesslike deck of the man-of-war. The name, *Sinkorswim,* visible on her port bow in brass letters, added to the absurdity of the picture.

"Everything you need aboard her?" asked the man in uniform.

"I think so." Blake checked aloud: "Clearance papers—gasoline—oil—water—food—liquor—clothing for two; everything two amateur yachtsmen would have, even down to the passport and personal correspondence of the one washed overboard during the storm."

THE officer frowned as he watched a rigger and the petty officer, busy attaching the motorboat to the boatfalls, brace themselves as the slender bow of the cruiser jabbed a hole in a black hill that came rushing toward the bridge.

"Getting a bit dusty." His face was thoughtful. "You should make it in between two and three hours. You'll have a following wind. By the same token, you'll have a stern sea, and that tub isn't built to take too much of that. This is the tail end of the hurricane season, you know."

Stephen Blake shrugged. "They wrote a shipwreck into the scenario. Might as well make it realistic."

They reëntered the wheelhouse, where the skipper glanced at the compass and the "iron mike," or mechanical steersman. Then they were back in the chartroom, with the steel door closed.

"We are running due east, and we're almost directly off the mouth of the Murder River, so your course will be due north." The man in uniform smiled. "Can't truthfully say we will be sorry to lose you. Four days of cruising back and forth, keeping out of sight of land, and away from the steamer lanes, is just about enough for—"

He broke off as a messenger entered, saluted, and handed over a slip of paper.

"That's nice." He gave a low whistle. "The *York*—she's about three hundred miles south of us—reports heavy seas and winds of almost hurricane velocity. What's hers now, will be ours soon." He paused a moment, and then reached a decision. "If you take my advice, you'll stay on board. We'll put those engines of ours to work, and get away from here. The south coast of Haiminga isn't a nice playground in any kind of a blow."

"That's good advice," Blake admitted. "I am sorry, but I can't follow it."

"Suppose I refuse to stop." The natural resentment of a ship's master, not accustomed to opposition on his own bridge, made this a declaration, not a question. "Acting for your safety, of course," he hastened to add.

"Sorry." Blake's smile robbed the words of offense. "The letter I gave you when I came aboard covers all that. Guess I better get below to the good ship *Sinkorswim.*"

The commander gave an order, and a quartermaster set the indicator of the engine-room telegraph at *"Stop."* The barely audible purr of the engines ceased. The *Dover* rolled, then regained an even keel in the calm that followed the passing of the wave.

They shook hands. The skipper walked out on the wing of the bridge. Blake descended the spiral steel stair and came out on deck, where the tiny cabin cruiser rested near davits which had been swung out over the oily, black waters.

"All ready, sir," said the petty officer.

A machinist's mate stepped forward.

"Your engine is warmed up, sir."

"Thanks, everybody." Blake vaulted into the cockpit, and donned a life-jacket: "Good luck!"

"Good luck, sir!" came the chorus.

The *Dover* rolled, then righted herself. Up on the bridge, the skipper dropped his raised hand.

"Lower away!" ordered the petty officer.

The blocks creaked as the *Sinkorswim* went down to meet the inky water with a resounding smack. Blake cleared the ropes. The motor roared to life. The little craft came about, just in time to present her blunt bow to a wave that threatened to hurl her against the steel walls of the warship.

Now she was astern of the *Dover.* Blake, his eyes on the compass, set a course due north. The whistle of the *Dover* blew three short blasts of farewell. Blake waved, then adjusted the engine to a safe cruising speed.

The *Sinkorswim,* he noted, behaved well. There was a pattern to the seas, and once he had mastered it, he was able to relax, with only occasional demands upon his seamanship, while he reviewed the strange sequence of events responsible for his present position:

A free-lance mahogany man had returned to the principal city of Haiminga after penetrating deep into the remote,

seldom-visited and primitive south coast country. He had been playing a hunch, and that hunch was built around the Murder River.

The name "river," as he well knew, was a misnomer, for the body of water was merely an arm of the Caribbean that extended inland for a matter of about thirty miles. Yet as a river it had been known, ever since Columbus had seen in every new body of water a passageway to the real object of his search—the Orient. The same great explorer was responsible for the second half of the name, for on one of his voyages he had left a garrison there while he went on to what he hoped would be more fertile fields. Upon his return, he found his men had been murdered by the natives, who failed to enjoy working under the lash.

The mahogany man, however, had scant interest in history. All he saw in the Murder River was a navigable body of water that penetrated rich timber regions, and might serve as a highway to bring out the precious wood. Once this locality had been the richest and most populous section of Haiminga. That was in the days when sugar was white gold, and stately ships used the waters as a harbor while they loaded valuable cargoes. The storming of the Bastile, in far-off Paris, had put the first crimp in all that; for Haiminga, once the brightest island star in France's colonial empire, became a black republic. Prohibitive tariffs drove another nail in the economic coffin. The humble beet had delivered the death-blow.

IT was true there had been a brief flurry of revival in the days of "dollar diplomacy," when the United States, seeking to assure payment of a loan not yet due, had invented an excuse to occupy the country. That too had passed. It left in its wake a few questionable benefits and many scars. Cane was cultivated only for the rum needed locally. No ships visited the ports. There was no revenue to be collected, so the distant capital was not interested. There were no strangers. Residents drifted away. The stately buildings crumbled, and the magic of the tropics gave them a protective coloring that made their ruins things of beauty. The few peasants who remained were almost as primitive as their ancestors, who centuries before had been hunted down on the west coast of Africa and brought here to create what the jungle had later destroyed.

All this, too, had interested the lumberman only in that it promised a virgin field where concessions could be had almost for the asking.

He had found just that, but before he could estimate the value of the timber, something took place that drove mahogany from his mind. He had been standing on the bank of the Murder River when he saw what resembled a stick emerge from the water. The stick, as he watched, became a piece of pipe that plowed through the muddy ripples as it moved steadily toward the mouth of the river and the sea.

It was then that he lost interest in mahogany. That stick, he knew, was the periscope of a submarine. That meant there was a base near by, and it constituted an ideal hiding-place from which to sally forth and attack British and neutral shipping.

A combination of motives prompted his speedy return to the capital. . . . A hostile submarine base was nothing with which an American mahogany man should tangle. The Haimingan government might, or might not, be aware of what was taking place. Outwardly it subscribed to the "good neighbor" policy, but the scars from the Occupation might explain much. Therefore, if he poked his nose into what was not his business, he might find himself unwelcome in the country.

Patriotism also influenced his decision, but his action really was decided by a throbbing head, aching joints, chattering teeth and other signs that pointed to a return bout with malaria. He had preferred to stage that bout in the capital, where ice and other refinements of civilization were available.

Once there, after a nightmare of a journey, he had stayed on his feet long enough to visit the offices of the United States consul, and tell his story. That official had listened with no outward signs of excitement, but after the lumberman had departed for the hospital, he acted quickly.

Washington acted promptly too. A high official there sent for Stephen Blake.

Blake could speak French. Good. He could handle a small boat, and he looked the part of an amateur yachtsman. A shipwreck would explain his presence at Murder River. It was as simple as that.

Definite instructions? The high official raised polite eyebrows.

Blake would locate the submarine base. He would eliminate it. There must be

nothing to connect Blake, or the United States, with the process of elimination. The country wanted no declaration of war. Neither did it desire any unpleasantness with the Haimingan officials. In event Blake became identified with what happened—

The high official sighed with genuine regret. In that event, the United States government would announce, with some austerity, that it had no knowledge of an individual who claimed to be Stephen Blake, of Baltimore, Md., U.S.A. . . .

Blake gripped the wheel of the tiny cruiser as he snapped back to the pressing present. The tempo of the storm had increased, and the pattern of the seas had altered. The eerie light was fading, causing him to peer anxiously ahead in an effort to pick up the coastline and spot the gap that marked the mouth of Murder River.

The increasing wind had kicked up the seas still more. Astern, angry black mountains formed like magic. The howling wind sent them racing after the motorboat, transforming them into monsters of destruction which threatened to beat the life out of the little craft.

Blake warmed to the struggle, using all his seamanship to avoid the inevitable avalanche if one of the great waves should break upon the squat stern of the *Sinkorswim*. He relied upon speed to escape from one black herald of disaster. Unable to outrun another, he came about, throttled down, quartered into it, and then retraced his course.

He followed that technique steadily, but the tacking meant loss of precious time. After a bit he was able to estimate the size of the waves, ride with the least dangerous, and change his course only to avoid the most formidable. And the wind booted the cabin cruiser along the way. Even the lesser stern seas seized her, and carried her ahead at a speed beyond that furnished by her engine.

NOW came great sheets of rain; vivid lightning-flashes ripped the enveloping curtain of darkness. And one of those flashes served to give Blake his first glimpse of the shore. It was a black line, only a trifle darker than the sea. A palm tree, straining against the force of the gale, established the coastline as fact, rather than fancy. A second flash revealed the stone ruins of what in more prosperous days had been a lighthouse.

Blake checked his position. The old lighthouse, he knew, was slightly east of Murder River. It had appeared about two points off his port bow, which meant that he had veered eastward from his course. He smiled grimly, as he cautiously made the correction necessary to carry him into the river.

The *Sinkorswim* pitched, rolled, shuddered and groaned as she fought her way along. It was darker now. Blake knew that he must have entered the river, which was more than a mile wide at this point; but it was impossible to see either shore, and the fury of the waves had not abated. Instead, the going was rougher, and the cabin cruiser was buffeted by choppy waves that approached from varying points of the compass.

One of those waves, a towering black wall, struck the craft upon her unprotected starboard side. Tons of water thundered down upon the forward deck, which was also the roof of the cramped cabin, and a Niagara swept across the open cockpit, near the stern.

Blake clung frantically to the wheel, but his numbed fingers lost their grip. Swirling black water, splashed with white foam, embraced him, and carried him up, up, toward a black, starless heaven. He sputtered and fought for breath. Now he was going down, and the descent was even more rapid than the climb.

A dark object loomed up before him. He raised an arm in a futile effort to cushion the blow. There was a breath-taking impact—then Stephen Blake knew no more. . . .

The tropical storm reached its full fury, and faded away as easily and quickly as a beautiful woman changes from a frown to a smile. The wind died down. The warm sun came out to soften the scene of desolation.

The jungle rallied quickly. A toucan winged its way through the air, and came to rest upon a fallen palm tree which bobbed about in the waves, partially submerged, and held in position only by tattered shreds of its trunk which clung to the stump on the bank. Perched on a branch, the bird used its long banana-shaped bill to preen its bedraggled plumage.

The tree, rocked by a wave, sank a little deeper. The startled toucan took to flight. The palm, with an unconscious man pinioned in a crotch formed by the trunk and a frond, slipped beneath the surface of the water. Only the harsh, discordant call of the toucan marred the serenity of the scene.

THIS day had dawned much like any other on the south coast of Haiminga. There was the good sun, with the good earth beneath it, and a short distance below, the cool water of Murder River.

Only Mama Vaublanc had any knowledge of what was about to happen. She was very old, very black, and very wise. Wearing a spotless dress, which was her only garment, she stood in the doorway of her mud and palm-thatch house, listening to a sound not audible to other human ears.

"The earth grumbles." She spoke to herself in Creole patois, a combination of French, Spanish and harsh African gutturals which the peasants blend into a melodious language. "The mango crop is good. There will be a storm, a great storm."

She entered the house, and paused before a mahogany shelf, resembling an altar, which was shared by a statue of the Virgin and a crude cross about which a green snake, representing the voodoo god Damballa, was entwined.

Mama Vaublanc saw nothing strange or wrong in this combination. For years warring African tribes had imposed their religious beliefs upon their victims, and in turn had been obliged to embrace the gods of their conquerors. They accepted this with African calm, still clinging to their own faith, but also accepting the new, and accomplishing this without friction among themselves or their gods.

There was no trace of servility or fear in Mama Vaublanc's manner as she approached the altar; neither was there arrogance. Both these deities were very real to her. She did not kneel. Her friendship with them was too long, and too close, to require humility of that sort. Also she was very old; surely these superior ones were so considerate it would grieve them if she used her painful joints unnecessarily.

Then too, in her own right she was a *mamaloi,* or voodoo priestess, whose fame had spread as far as the distant capital. So she stood erect in a manner of polite attention, and as was proper, addressed the Lady first.

"Good morning, Madame." She spoke in pure French, which, as everybody knows, is the language of politeness. "I hope you are well."

One does not state a request baldly. Neither does it do any harm to remind a benefactress, quite discreetly, that past service has been a trifle below expectations.

"We are old, Madame." (That should establish a common bond.) "You have borne a man-child." (All women are proud of that.) "I too had hoped to bear a child. Many soldiers came to us then from the United States. I was young, not bad to look at, and the hill people have a saying that passion is color-blind."

The wrinkles gathered about her shrewd old eyes as she drove home her point:

"I prayed to you, Madame, and burned many candles. I promised you many more if my child was a man, and white."

One must be fair when dealing with deities.

"Madame saw to it that I had much love, but it was like a coffee tree that lacks shade, and bears no fruit."

Instinctive African kindness prompted her to soften the blow.

"Think nothing of it, Madame. I remember hearing stories that there was much famine in the world at that time. That may have kept Madame busy. It may have been that Madame had a cold, and was unable to hear my prayers for a white child."

She made an effort to speak in a casual manner.

"There will be a great storm, Madame. I am old and want nothing for myself. Guard the little one, if it please you, Madame."

A short step carried her to the green snake, and her manner changed. Here was a male, and he should be treated as such.

"Ho, Damballa!" She spoke in Creole, which lends itself readily to salty phrases and idioms. "I was walking in the garden, and saw a green one such as you. She was soft, and thin, and desirable. Oh-oh! You would have her? I would do your bidding, but it will take time to find her. She is coy, and has hidden beneath the vines. I would search for her, but I am not sure that the sun will remain in the heavens." She shivered. "I am too old to have the rain fall upon me."

She gazed intently at the snake. Now her request was something in which he would have personal interest.

"Good! I go, Damballa."

The old woman turned and came face to face with a girl leaning in the doorway. She was tall, slender, with skin the color of ivory, but there was nothing negroid in her features or figure. Her tight, single garment was stretched into a mold that might cause a woman of civilization to gnash her teeth with envy.

"Mama Vaublanc!" There was kindly reproof in her voice, and her brown eyes sparkled. "If Damballa is a god, surely he knows that you are trying to deceive him." Her manner sobered. "He is just a snake. It is wicked to worship him. The priest says—"

"Has Damballa ever attacked the priest?" There was guile in the old woman's eyes.

She gave the girl no chance to reply.

"Heed this: I once lived in a village that had two traders, both Syrians. The first trader had only good words for the second trader and his wares, while the second trader called the first a thief and declared that his wares were worthless. The village people knew the wares of the first man were good, because he was not afraid to praise the wares of the other. They traded with him; and the second man found it necessary to move to another village."

The old woman shook a thin, talon-like black finger.

"Tell that tale to the priest when next he comes here just long enough to tell you things you cannot fully understand."

"That is not just, Mama Vaublanc," the girl protested. "Father Gautier does the best he can, but he has many villages to visit. Did he not send Gaspaud to teach me to read?"

"Oh-oh!" The old woman seized the opening. "Gaspaud taught you that, yes, and he would have taught you other things had I not sent him on his way with well-boxed ears."

The girl spoke calmly:

"Gaspaud wanted love, as all men do, but I could not give it to him. The books he taught me to read had pictures of far places. There were fine houses, and people wearing rich clothes. They were whites. Gaspaud is a black, and his child will be black. My child must be able to go to those far places, and move among those whites."

MAMA VAUBLANC clucked with pretended scorn.

"So you are a white! A parrot learns to speak a few words and thinks that he is a man."

The girl glanced complacently at ivory-tinted arms, and thrust forward a dainty bare foot to call attention to a shapely leg of the same hue.

"My skin is of a shade of whiteness."

"There are many shades of black," retorted the old woman, "while white has only one."

"But my father was a white," the girl protested. "You have told me that many times." She asked the question casually: "Who was my mother?"

"That too I have told you many times." The old woman was cross. "I do not know. She had been dead many days when I first saw you. Your father was dying. It was the black-water fever. Would it have been proper of me to ask a white the name of every wench with whom he had passed a pleasant hour?"

The girl stamped her foot in vexation.

"That is not true, Mama Vaublanc! My father and mother must have loved each other very much, or the good God would not have sent me to them. Father Gautier told me that. He said—"

The old woman stalked from the house. In the garden, after an apprehensive glance at the sky, she dropped to her knees among the vines. Soon she found the object of her search, one of the small, non-poisonous green snakes so common in Haiminga. She picked it up, and climbed laboriously to her feet.

The hot sun had disappeared. The blue sky was overcast with gray. The fronds of a banana tree near by began to sway in the growing breeze.

Mama Vaublanc walked slowly toward the house. At the door she stopped for a final appraisal. The storm was gaining in violence, and promised to be more severe than she had anticipated. Deliberately she drew back her arm and hurled the squirming snake into a clump of coffee bushes. Then she smacked her lips with satisfaction. Only a fool, or a white, would bring a god gifts for a service he obviously was unable or unwilling to perform.

Inside the house, she and the girl prepared for the ordeal that was ahead. There was water to be brought from the spring. All nearly ripe fruit was hastily picked. Door and windows were barricaded.

That done, the old woman, scorning a chair, settled down upon her haunches to wait. The house, praise the gods, was sheltered by a bluff from the full force of the wind. It had been built too high up that bluff to be endangered by rising

waters. Mama Vaublanc shifted into a position she could maintain for hours without fatigue. The girl sat on a low stool beside her. Only once during the hours that the storm held sway did the old woman move. That was to turn her back upon the snake god, Damballa. At the same time she winked knowingly at the statue of the Virgin. Madame had failed too, but Mama Vaublanc had no desire to press that issue, because Madame shared a secret with her. The realization that Madame must know these things had caused Mama Vaublanc to toss restlessly upon her sleeping-mat through many a tropical night.

THE storm spent its fury. The old woman busied herself about the house, while the girl slipped out to view the damage. The garden was ruined, the fruit a total loss. But—that was to be expected. She gazed toward the river.

"Oh-oh!"

She used the stock exclamation which enables the peasants, by change in tone, to convey almost any meaning, and in this case the words clearly expressed dismay. A tall, stately royal palm which had stood on the river bank, was down. Its ragged stump, still standing erect, gave mute testimony regarding the ferocity of the wind. The once beautiful tree, under which she had drowsed away many hours, bobbed up and down in the waves, held to the stump only by frayed strips of wood and bark.

Now the girl's exclamation denoted startled surprise. Pinned in the V formed by the trunk and a frond, was a man. Only his head was above the water; and each wave, as it broke over the tree, covered him completely.

She darted down the path to the river's edge. The sodden tree disappeared into a wave. A startled toucan flew blindly by her. The last restraining strip of bark parted with a snap, and the tree failed to reappear above the water.

With seemingly one motion she pulled her single garment over her head, wriggled free of it, and entered the water. Down she went, until her outstretched hand encountered the trunk of the tree. She groped along it until her hand felt cloth. Her arm encircled a body. Her knees went up and down like pistons, but there was no forward motion. Her lungs ached, so she shot up to the surface, empty-handed.

Then she returned to the task. This time she attacked the frond, using the weight of her body to bend it back. On the second try the unconscious man floated away from the trunk. Her knee pushed him along. His cork jacket carried him up. The girl followed.

She blew river-water from her mouth and glanced about. The man floated a short distance away, face downward. She seized a strap of his jacket and started for shore. She was almost exhausted when she made it, but she did manage to get the man's head out of water, and to utter a shrill cry: *"Mama Vaublanc!"*

The old woman appeared in the door, and waddled down the path. She bent over the man.

"Oh-oh! A white!" She made an accurate, quick appraisal. "An American." Her eyes measured the distance to the house. "Assist me."

Between them, with the girl at his shoulders and the old woman at his feet, and with frequent halts, they carried him there. The black woman took the larger of two drums, made from hollowed tree-trunks, and pulled the man upon it, with his face toward the floor. Water poured from his mouth.

Mama Vaublanc grunted with satisfaction as she pushed the drum aside, and knelt astride his chest. She seized his arms, and pumped them back and forth. She shook his shoulders. She bent over and blew her own warm breath into the gaping mouth. She worked to the tempo of an African chant which had been old when the first white man had sighted the Murder River country. What she did, and the timing provided by the chant, constituted a jungle form of artificial respiration quite as effective as the modern scientific version.

She had worked for some time, pausing only to strip the clothes from the man's body, when her imperious finger indicated a bottle, which the girl placed in her hand. The old woman uncorked it, poured some of the contents upon the man's chest, and proceeded to rub it into the body.

That liquid contained rum, tobacco, pepper, blood from the heart of a white fighting cock, and other ingredients best not inquired into. It had been brewed in the full of the moon, with the proper ritual. On the theory that all faiths are good, it had been blessed by a priest, who had been hoodwinked into believing that a devout black woman's piety would be aided by holy water.

Centuries before, an identical mixture had been rubbed into the lifeless limbs

of a stricken black king in a desperate effort to get him on his feet long enough to save his tottering empire.

"He will live?" The question came from the girl, who had silently watched the struggle.

Mama Vaublanc got wearily to her feet, her work finished for the moment.

"Ask Damballa," she directed. "Or Madame." She chuckled. "There is work for both, if they would save this white."

CHAPTER THREE

STEPHEN BLAKE struggled slowly to consciousness. His eyes opened. Vaguely he realized that an old black woman was bending over him, trying to force fiery liquor between his teeth. The old woman stepped aside. His vision cleared a bit, but his mind remained shrouded in fog.

Dimly he saw a girl kneeling, her hands clasped, and her lips moving in prayer. A stray ray of late afternoon sun penetrated the room, and played over a round and youthful ivory-tinted body with high, firm breasts. Only then did Blake realize the girl was nude. . . .

Murder River soon slipped back into its leisurely scheme of existence. Those necessary things that had been damaged were repaired, after a fashion. And others? Oh-oh! That was useless work. There would be other storms. The magic of the jungle would soon take care of what otherwise would be unsightly ruins.

To be sure, this storm stood out from others because it had brought a white. He had been cast out of the waters like a dead man, but old Mama Vaublanc had restored him to life. She had great magic, that one, and it was well not to draw upon yourself her displeasure.

The gods had been good to this white, because his companion had been lost at sea, and his little ship had been pounded to bits by the angry waters. Sensible men would not have been at sea in a boat that small during the hurricane season. But all whites, as everybody knows, are a bit foolish. By the same token all whites, and particularly Americans, are rich. Murder River, even as more civilized communities, was not averse to the presence of a man of wealth.

This white, as soon as Mama Vaublanc had nursed him back to the stage where he could walk, had installed himself in a small cabin on the river-bank, which was owned by the old woman, who waited on him throughout every waking hour.

The community was divided into two schools of thought regarding his continued presence. The practical element pointed out that his injuries had left him too weakened to attempt the journey to the west coast. The sentimentalists—they were in the majority—found the explanation in the girl Mama Vaublanc had raised as her own daughter. They quoted an old Creole proverb, a cleansed version of which runs: "A village must offer more than food, drink and a bed if it hopes to make a resident of a visitor."

On this morning Blake furnished ammunition to both schools. He started out on one of the long walks, which Mama Vaublanc had recommended to restore strength. At his side, like a puppy frisking about a beloved master, was the girl.

They followed an almost obliterated trail that wound its way along the river, until they came out at what once had been used as a landing-place. Blake seated himself upon a rotted stump. The girl stretched out beside him, her elbows in the sand, her chin cradled in her hands.

"Steve—" She used the name hesitantly; she had discarded the formal "Monsieur Blake" only after much urging.

Stephen Blake came back to the present.

"Yes, Yvonne."

"Always you seek something. Is it gold?"

"What makes you think that?" His French was improving with constant use. "I take walks. Mama Vaublanc told me to do that. She said that it will make me strong."

"No, no." She shook her head. "You said that to her so that she thought the words came from her."

He covered his surprise with a laugh.

"You are very wise," he said with gentle mockery.

"Mama Vaublanc is much wiser." She refused to return his banter. "But she loves you, and that makes her blind."

He chuckled with relief. "I understand. You do not love me; that is why I am not able to deceive you."

"That is not true." She was very positive. "Mama Vaublanc loves you as an old woman loves a son. That is blind-

ness." She continued with no trace of self-consciousness: "I love you as a woman loves a man. She sees, but often she hides what she sees from others, and to herself she says that it is not true."

He sat studying her. She was a beautiful child, natural and unspoiled, and in some ways almost primitive, yet with all the earthy wisdom of the peasants. Up to this time he had accepted her on his own basis, as an amusing companion, and useful in guiding him about the countryside. He made a blundering attempt to restore their former relationship.

"You are a sweet child, Yvonne."

Her angry retort had all the directness and candor of the peasant.

"I am old enough to bear you a son."

He felt the blood stain his face as he fought back a prudish desire to read her a lecture on the outside world's standards of modesty and reticence. That would be cruel, for she was absolutely without guile. Instead, he matched her candor.

"Your child would be beautiful, Yvonne. I would love him, and you, very dearly. But there will come a time when I must leave Haiminga and go back to my own country. That would mean only sorrow for all of us."

Mollified, she nodded sagely.

"Mama Vaublanc said that you would go away."

HOPING to keep the conversation impersonal, rather than because he was interested, he asked: "Did she say anything else?"

"Oh, yes." She shrugged. "She said more whites are coming."

"More whites coming here?" He sat erect.

"'There is no such thing as one mosquito.'" She quoted the Creole proverb glibly. "Mama Vaublanc says it is the same with whites: one attracts others."

"What else did she say?" he demanded.

"Oh-oh!" The girl was growing impatient. "There was some nonsense about the whites fighting among each other, and much blood being spilled into Murder River."

"If she believes that, why does she make me welcome, and urge me to stay?"

There was a barb in the girl's answer:

"Have I not told you that she loves you, and that it is blind mother-love, which is the sort you desire? Besides, this is voodoo nonsense. It is wicked. I give service to the whites' gods. I do not believe—"

She broke off abruptly as a cloud of dust, which had been coming along the trail toward them, dissolved into a man and one of the small, patient donkeys so numerous in Haiminga, which are known to the peasants as *bourriques*. This man, however, had not reached the basis of understanding that usually prevails between a peasant and his burro: when he tried to lead the animal, it balked; urged forward from behind, the burro—though loaded down by two heavy pack-baskets—broke into a too-rapid trot. It was this struggle between man and beast that caused Blake to realize that the man was white, a fact the girl had noted in her first fleeting glance.

The man, who was tall, blond, and obviously not an American, halted before them, perspiring and angry.

"Good day." His French was labored, with an accent that Blake was unable to classify. "This cursed jackass—"

"Suppose we try English," Blake suggested, speaking in that tongue.

Relief was visible upon the man's face.

"You are an American? Goot!" He hastened to correct the mispronunciation. "That is good. I have followed the trail that leads down from the hills. Now I would continue inland, and avoid the coast."

"You are headed in the right direction," Blake assured him.

The man's thanks were cut short as three uniformed Negroes, mounted on thin, undersized horses, pulled to a halt before them. One of the soldiers, who wore the silver bars of a lieutenant, saluted them and inquired:

"Mademoiselle—messieurs: You have your papers of identification, messieurs?"

The man with the burro produced a packet, which the officer proceeded to examine.

"But yes: Monsieur William Wagner, of Georgetown, British Guiana. You seek the buried treasure." White teeth flashed amid blue-black skin. "Many men have sought Faustin's gold, but perhaps Monsieur will be more successful than they." He shrugged. "At any rate, you have the permission of the government."

Blake, watching the scene closely, and troubled by a vague suspicion that there was a secret understanding between the two men, heard a courteous: "And you, monsieur."

The American reached in his shirt, unbuttoned a belt, and pulled out his passport and other papers.

"Ah! Monsieur Stephen Blake! An American. I heard talk in the village. Monsieur Blake was shipwrecked."

"That is correct," Blake answered. "I was injured. As soon as my strength is restored, I shall travel to the west coast, and take ship for my country."

The officer nodded, and then turned to answer a question by Wagner.

"But yes. You may proceed at any time."

They stood watching the man and the reluctant donkey pass along the trail.

"Monsieur and the *bourrique* do not understand each other," said the officer. "You, monsieur, speak our language very well." He bowed to the girl. "Monsieur has a very charming tutor."

Blake smiled. "Thank you—I do not know the lieutenant's name."

"Lieutenant Mars, of the Guard of Haiminga."

"We will meet again, Lieutenant Mars?" Blake asked.

"That rests with the good God, monsieur." He gave an order to his men in Creole, and they rode off in the direction taken by Wagner. They were out of sight when Yvonne spoke:

"Those two would have you believe that they met for the first time."

He let the observation go unanswered as he asked:

"What is this talk of Faustin, and buried treasure?"

She turned to him in surprise.

"Do you not know? Faustin was king of Haiminga many years ago. The peasants made revolution and killed him, but they could not find his gold. The hill people say it is buried near here. That may be true. Mon Répos, his castle, is not far. Come!"

She led the way along the trail, taking two short, quick steps to his one. The path was crooked, but for the most part it followed the river. They swung away from the water, and passed through a vast stand of bamboo. Then they turned, and came back to the river.

Stretched out before them was a marsh studded with reeds, among which scores of long-legged salmon-colored flamingoes were feeding. In the open water beyond the reeds, standing upon an island, was a massive stone structure which, even in its ruined state, caused Blake to give a gasp of admiration.

Mon Répos had been built of great blocks of solid stone. Some forgotten genius of an architect had formed them into a haven that was both beautiful and strong. The front of the castle, which they were facing, extended beyond the island into the river, where a vertical wall of stone arose for many feet, to end in casements and turrets that had paid toll through the years to time and the tropics. The other walls were equally massive, and equally safe, for although they were surrounded by land, the island itself rose abruptly and steeply from the river, with high vertical banks of sand which were virtually impossible to climb.

Half-forgotten fragments of history and legend returned to Blake's mind as he stood gazing at the majestic ruins. This had been the last haven of a mad black king whose power over his only semi-civilized followers hung by a thread, and for whom death was always near. Here Faustin and his followers had eaten rich foods, sipped rich wines, and listened to the finest musicians Europe could provide. They had used the flat tops of the walls for pistol practice, and their targets had been the living bodies of luckless conspirators who had hoped to free Haiminga from a rule even more cruel than that it had experienced under the whites.

This front wall of solid stone, rising straight out of the water, had offered the only means of admission to the castle. To it, by boat, came all visitors. Guards upon the walls, obeying Faustin's orders, either lowered a rope ladder, or hurled down solid shot to crush heads and furnish conclusive evidence that his majesty was not receiving.

"YOU like it, Steve?"

The girl's question brought Blake back to the present.

"It is wonderful, Yvonne."

She stamped her foot upon the sand.

"It is evil. A curse follows every man who visits the place. The people here will not go near it. Come!" She indicated the trail ahead. "The day advances. I would eat. There is a trading-place very near."

The trail led away from the river. Then it veered again, and they came out upon the march to find a structure unusually large and well-built for the section.

"Gaspaud owns it," she explained. "Come."

They entered a room fitted out like a store. Blake's keen eyes noted the unusual stock of canned goods.

"Is there a village near here?" he asked.

"Only the hill people, who sometimes come down to the river."

A tall, very black Haimingan shuffled in. He greeted the girl with a smile, but her explanation of Blake's presence drew only a scowl. The girl drew close to the white man as Gaspaud placed crackers, canned meat and tinned butter before them, and then slouched out of the room.

"He wanted love," Yvonne explained. "I could not give it to him."

"That may be," Blake admitted, "but I think that he does not like Americans. I shall inquire."

He brushed aside the restraining hand of the girl. Three rapid strides carried him to a door, which he opened, and confronted the irate Haimingan.

"Monsieur, I believe that you do not like Americans."

The Haimingan averted his glance.

"American marines killed my father."

Blake hesitated. During the Occupation, marines had sometimes mistaken harmless peasants for bandits, and had been too free with their rifles. By the same token, other marines had mistaken bandits for harmless peasants, and those marines had paid with their own lives.

"That was a long time ago," the American said. "Much wrong was done by both sides. Time has altered all that."

"Time cannot alter death," retorted the Haimingan.

"Steve!" The plaintive voice of the girl carried in to him.

"I come, Yvonne." He turned to the Haimingan. "We must meet again, monsieur."

He walked back to the girl, and chatted gayly with her as they lunched. But his mind retained a picture: It was a room obviously used to store goods, but now bare of fixtures and supplies. On the floor there were dark rings which had been made by the bottoms of steel drums. The air of the unventilated room reeked with fuel oil.

They finished their luncheon, and returned to the trail, homeward bound. Being feminine, Yvonne was pleased with her triumph.

"Gaspaud is very angry," she announced complacently. "He sees me with a white. He thinks you desire me. It displeases him that a white should have what has been withheld from him."

"Gaspaud's thoughts are wrong," he retorted.

There was mischief in her giggle.

"He would not believe that." She darted gayly ahead. "How is he to know that the white—" She broke off abruptly, and drew back behind a protecting bush at a turn in the trail with a low warning "Oh-oh!"

Blake moved forward quietly, and peered down the trail. Some distance ahead a *bourrique* was standing, its feet spread apart, and completely at rest. On the ground beside the burro, with his back toward Blake, sat the man called Wagner, bending over an oblong object.

"Remain here!" Blake whispered.

HE moved forward stealthily. Wagner was speaking; now his words became audible. Blake strained his ears. It was a strange jargon, which Blake was unable to identify. Now the object before Wagner was revealed as a radio sending set, small and wonderfully compact. Blake's foot struck a pebble, which hit a leaf with an audible click.

Wagner turned. Blake, watching his every movement, was forced to admire the man's self-control.

Wagner's left hand made a rapid movement to distract attention from the right, which stealthily threw a switch. The right hand, its real work done, clumsily twirled a dial.

"We meet again," said Wagner. He glanced at a wrist-watch. "Almost time for news from the States. You may find it interesting."

Blake's reply was lost in words that poured from the radio set:

"—little activity elsewhere, and a diplomatic stalemate in the Balkans. . . . New York: Congressman Bacon Trout, assailing President Roosevelt's policy of all-out aid to England, declared citizens of the United States have become British subjects in all but name. . . . Washington: Navy Department officials announced that twelve of the thirty-five members of the crew of the British steamer Rose Castle *had been picked up by an American destroyer on neutrality patrol duty. The* Rose Castle *went down following an explosion which, survivors declared, was caused by either a torpedo or a mine. The ship was about one hundred miles northeast of Jamaica at the time of the sinking. Five other British and neutral vessels have met a like fate in this area within a week. . . . Washington: A Navy Department spokesman expressed the belief that a Nazi raider is planting magnetic mines along Caribbean trade routes."*

The station announcer cut in:

"This news report was brought to you by the makers—"

Wagner grinned as he shut off the radio.

"Thanks, awfully, but we aren't having any of that. But a spot of news is welcome, even in the jungle—eh, what?"

Warily Blake shifted to match his mood, even to the exaggerated British accent.

"Quite. But the war appears to be coming close to the jungle." He made an elaborate operation of lighting a cigarette. "By the way, what is your theory, torpedoes or mines?"

Wagner's face flushed, and for a matter of seconds Blake sensed that death was very near. Then the man regained his composure.

"I would rule out magnetic mines," he said quietly. "All British ships are equipped with protective belts. Surely your"—he repeated the pronoun, and managed to make it an insult—"your Navy chap knows that." He drew a cover over the radio set, and put it in one of the pack-baskets. "But perhaps you have more expert knowledge?"

Blake dropped his cigarette and crushed it with his foot before replying:

"I am not an expert on sinking ships." He raised his voice. "Yvonne!"

The girl rounded the turn in the trail, and walked slowly toward them, her face expressionless and her manner wary.

"The hour grows late," said Blake in French. "We have many miles to travel." He shifted to English, as he fell into step beside the girl. "Goot day, Herr Wagner."

There was no reply from the man with the donkey. It was a test of Blake's willpower, and his nerve, but he did not glance back.

They had gone some distance when Yvonne asked: "Why did you speak in that strange way?"

"I spoke English," he declared.

"No, no." She shook her head. "You used strange talk. It made that white very angry." She eyed him shrewdly. "I think he would have killed you, if I had not been with you."

"You see things that do not exist." His tone was sharp, because he was startled by her keen powers of observation, but she was quite unruffled.

"You are angry because what I say is true. There was death in his eyes."

"Nonsense!" he retorted. "Come, it is late."

CHAPTER FOUR

MAMA VAUBLANC had the cooking-pot on the fire when they returned. Blake ate hastily, and descended the cliff to his own quarters, where he stretched out on a blanket at a spot overlooking Murder River. There he reviewed the happenings of the day:

There was Gaspaud, a Haimingan, who ran an overstocked store, which had a storeroom in which considerable quantities of fuel oil had recently been stored .... There was Wagner, with a passport from British Guiana, and an exaggerated British accent, but who, in an unguarded moment, had pronounced *good* as *goot*, and who, in his unconvincing rôle of treasure-hunter, tramped about the jungles with intricate radio equipment .... There was Lieutenant Mars, of the Guard of Haiminga, who happened to be in this seldom-patrolled section just at this time, and who obviously had some secret understanding with Wagner.

Out at sea, not many miles off the mouth of Murder River, deadly submarines were lurking, and according to the news that came over Wagner's radio, operating with impunity and efficiency possible to undersea craft only when some base was available near by.

Blake gazed out over the now tranquil waters of Murder River, which were transformed into liquid gold by the full tropical moon. The "Old Man" had been right when he decided the tale told by the mahogany man was more than the delirium of a tropical tramp. There was something sinister here.

An hour later he saw it with his own eyes: a line of silver, apparently traced by some invisible finger, appeared on the golden surface of the river and moved steadily along, headed for the open sea. Blake strained forward in an effort to penetrate the half-tones of light just above the glare of the moonlit waters. His eyes became accustomed to the light, and picked out, at the far end of the silver line, a round object that protruded from the water, and ended a few feet above in something that resembled the ventilator of a ship.

Blake jumped to his feet. Unconsciously he glanced at the house on the

cliff. Then his mouth tightened. This was a game to be played alone.

The girl? She might be just what she appeared to be, a simple child of the jungle, but at times she displayed precocity that would have done credit to a girl far beyond her years. The old woman? She was as primitive as the soil of her own Haiminga, but at her fingertips was all the unholy knowledge of this island, and the age-old lore of Africa besides.

Blake stumbled through the darkness caused by dense foliage, trying to find the start of the trail. The hot tropical night was eerily still, with not a single drum-beat to disturb the calm. There was a new, strange fragrance in the air. It was heavy and languorous, like some exotic tropical flower. He made an absent-minded and unsuccessful attempt to classify it, then gave his attention to the trail to Gaspaud's store. . . .

Yvonne finished eating, watched Blake's disappearing back as he made off for his own quarters, then turned to Mama Vaublanc.

"You spoke of more whites coming." She made her voice casual. "They are here."

The old woman cackled with triumph.

"You said they would fight among themselves," Yvonne continued. "That has not yet come to pass, but there is death in the looks they give each other."

Mama Vaublanc nodded sagely. "That also was in the vision."

Yvonne allowed some minutes to pass as an indication that this was not important.

"You had something to say about the waters of Murder River running red with their blood. Did the blood from our white add to the color?"

Mama Vaublanc, caught off her guard, showed that the shot had struck home, but she rallied quickly.

"The blood of one white is much like the blood of another. Should I question Damballa about a matter of so little moment? Should you question him, you who said these things were foolishness and wicked?"

Yvonne stood up, with slow, catlike grace.

"I have said it before. I say it now. These things are wicked."

She moved off into the night, and came by a roundabout path to the river at a point some distance from where Blake was sitting. There she wriggled out of her dress and entered the water.

Feeling clean and refreshed, she climbed back to the bank, dried herself with the discarded dress, and darted back to the cabin. It took only a short search in an old chest to produce a white dress, which she pulled over her head. She used a bit of broken glass, the back of which was smoked, to survey herself.

The dress was made of heavy silk, with insertions of fine old lace. It was cut daringly low, and her full youthful figure strained the seams. She did her hair in tight braids and wound them about her head. When that was done to her satisfaction, she reached through a glassless window and plucked a spray of flaming bougainvillea, which she wove into the braids.

After a final look in the glass, she turned so that her back was toward the image of Damballa, and knelt before the statue of the Virgin. First she repeated a little prayer the priest had taught her. Then, peasantlike, she found that inadequate, and proceeded to put her supplications upon a person-to-person basis:

"It is a wicked thing I am about to do. I know that. It would give me more pleasure to have Father Gautier read from the Book. But there is no time. My white will die. I read that in Mama Vaublanc's face."

Entreaty crept into her voice:

"You, dear Lady, know that in all the world there is only one man I can love—this white. Let the sin fall upon my head, not his."

She slipped back into the orthodox prayer, and was on her feet in time to confront Mama Vaublanc, who gazed at her in astonishment.

"That is your bridal dress!"

The girl spoke calmly: "This is my bridal night."

"Oh-oh! Where is Father Gautier? The white—he waits for you?"

"That is a matter for the white and me," Yvonne retorted with youthful disregard as she fled from the hut.

SHE was some distance down the trail when she saw Blake, sitting with his back toward her, and looking out over the river. Nervousness prompted her soft giggle. She would tiptoe up behind him, and clasp her hands over his eyes.

"Oh-oh!" she breathed suddenly.

Blake had jumped to his feet, and was peering out over the river. She followed his glance, and her keen eyes soon picked up what resembled a stick plowing

through the water. Surprise and fear gave way to a pang of bitter disappointment. This was man-business, and there was no place in it for a woman. Now there was no time for love; and, her heavy heart told her, it was doubtful if there ever would be.

She saw Blake turn, and barely had time to take a quick step so that hibiscus blossoms would make a neutral background for her white dress. She watched him grope about for the start of the trail. Then, like a disobedient puppy that had been ordered to remain at home, she waited until he had a safe lead before she too took up the trail that led to Mon Répos. . . .

The hot, still Haimingan night came to life. High up in the hills, a lone drummer went to work. The drumbeats were soft, regular and almost soothing, much like the monotonous voice of an old woman retailing a not-too-spicy bit of gossip.

Along the sides of the hill, tiny flickering lights appeared at various points. The cackling voices of hill people blended harmoniously with the muffled boom of the distant drum. Soon the drumbeats became even fainter, but the voices and flickering lights drew nearer.

Blake drew back into his hiding-place, the center of a cluster of cotton bushes tall as trees. To his left was the shack of Gaspaud, the Haimingan trader, and the building was ablaze with lights. Beyond the marsh and the open water of Murder River was the massive shape of Mon Répos, now bathed in moonlight.

The lights and the voices came to the junction formed by the trail leading down from the hills and the trail Blake had followed from Mama Vaublanc's house. There they turned, and came forward, moving toward the edge of the marsh and Gaspaud's shack.

Straining forward from his shelter, Blake saw the answer to at least part of the problem confronting him. The hill men marched two abreast, in lines of three, and upon the shoulders of each six men, cradled in stout branches which acted as yokes, was a drum of fuel oil.

Rapidly Blake put his knowledge of Haimingan geography to work. Kenseauville, the nearest hill town, was connected by motor road with Jaqaret, a seaport. The fuel oil, obtained through legitimate channels, was landed in Jaqaret. That port was not sufficiently remote to be used as a base, but truck shipments bound inland would attract little or no attention. The trucks ended their journey at Kenseauville. Then human bearers took up the load; and those bearers were hill folk, naturally secretive, and with little love for the peasant dwellers in the lower country.

There was no need for speculation concerning the goal of the human bearers, for Gaspaud stood to one side of the door as the first six entered, walking sidewise in order to take their burden inside. The Haimingan followed them. More teams of six, each carrying a drum of oil, and each accompanied by flickering lights, were moving along the trail.

Blake wrestled with a mental problem. Gaspaud's shack was at the edge of the marsh. Shallow water made it impossible for a boat to get within some distance of the building. A soft, sticky and slippery bottom would discourage men who tried to wade out to a boat with a heavy drum upon their shoulders. All this seemed to indicate that Gaspaud's place was merely a relay point, and that the oil later would go forward to some more distant place along the river, where the real base was located.

ALL the while Blake's subconscious mind had been tallying the oil-drums being carried into the building. Nine. Three more moving along the trail before his eyes. More, judging by the flickering lights and the chattering voices, on their way down the hill. All bound for that lighted doorway.

Now eleven drums had entered the building, and Blake, choking back a gasp of surprise, did a simple problem in arithmetic. Eleven drums. Six men to each drum. Sixty-six men—plus fifteen or twenty others, who had carried torches, or relieved the bearers at intervals. All had passed through that door. None had returned. The very walls of that comparatively small building should have been bulging.

Blake glanced out over Murder River, and the shadow formed by Mon Répos kindled half-forgotten memories:

> Mon Répos was completed. Faustin stood upon the wall, and at his side was the mulatto architect who was responsible for this splendor.
>
> "Here, Your Majesty can defy the world," said the yellow man.
>
> Faustin frowned thoughtfully.
>
> "Ships with heavy guns could make this a hot place."
>
> The mulatto smiled complacently.

"Your Majesty is prepared against even that remote possibility. There is the secret underground passage to the mainland."

Faustin nodded with satisfaction. Only picked men had been trusted with that work. They had been told that they were digging secret vaults to hold the King's treasures. They had been divided into gangs, and kept apart, so that no group knew what the other was doing. When the work was finished, all the workers received the same reward—a push, a fall, a splash, and then sport for the sharks cruising back and forth before Mon Répos.

Faustin nodded again.

"How many living men know the secret of this passageway?" he asked, and his voice was like a purr.

"Only two, Your Majesty," said the architect. "You and the humble subject standing beside you."

"That is well," said Faustin. A black arm flashed through the air. A heavy fist struck. The body of the architect went down to the waiting sharks.

Faustin smiled.

"Now it is only one," he murmured.

History or legend? No living man knows. Just part of the compound of mystery, romance, savagery and half-truth that hangs over Haiminga like a cloud. Former visits and much reading had made Blake familiar with these tales. At home, or in a drawing-room in the Haimingan capital, it had been easy to dismiss them as colorful fantasy. On a tropical night, along the shores of Murder River, anything seemed possible.

The nineteenth drum, and its carriers, entered the building. Not a man reappeared. Legend merged with fact: the building must house one end of an underground passage. Quite aside from the legend, there was only one logical place for the other end of the passage—Mon Répos.

Blake leaned against a cotton tree, and gazed out across the moonlit waters. There was no sign of activity on the island. That, however, was easily explained. The passage undoubtedly led to some chamber deep within the castle.

But once inside the castle, the fuel oil would be no more accessible to a submarine than it was in Gaspaud's shack! The high front wall of solid stone made loading almost impossible. The steep banks on the other three sides of the castle offered even greater difficulties, for it was doubtful if a submarine could come close to those shores.

Then, before Blake's very eyes, Murder River staged a tableau that banished doubt and solved the mystery. A silver gash appeared upon the surface of the water, which the moon transformed into molten gold. A periscope and a conning tower bobbed up, to be silhouetted against the night sky. The deck of the underseas craft emerged from the water. The untroubled wake showed that the engines had been stopped, but the forward momentum carried the submarine on toward the solid stone wall of Mon Répos.

Now the hatch of the conning tower was open, and men appeared upon the deck. One of them made a megaphone of his hands, and shouted a hoarse command. There was an answer from the old castle.

Blake's expert eyes were appraising the submarine. She was short, narrow, and had a knifelike bow. He was not familiar with the type, but guessed at once that she was one of the "pocket editions," turned out on a mass-production basis, manned by a relatively small crew, and when operating close to a base, quite as deadly as the full-fledged U-boat. Probably she had not crossed the Atlantic under her own power, but had been brought to the Haimingan coast by a surface raider.

The submarine drifted on toward the high stone wall, and Blake's appraisal of her was halted by a sight that caused him to rub his eyes in an effort to convince himself that this was not a mirage:

The wall of stone parted, leaving an opening at least forty feet wide, which extended about twenty feet above the water. What had appeared to be solid stone was pushed aside as easily as a stage drop, and now was revealed as mere camouflage.

A coil of rope swished through the air and landed upon the deck of the underseas craft. Sailors seized it, and made it fast. The line grew taut. Slowly the submarine was swallowed up by the black gulf formed by the opening in the wall of Mon Répos.

BLAKE stood motionless, held by the drama of what he had witnessed. Again half-forgotten Haimingan legend came to mind as he groped for an explanation. The genius of a mulatto architect, years ahead of his times, had pioneered in air-conditioning. He had

caused the waters of Murder River to flow under the lower floors of Mon Répos, providing welcome relief from the fierce tropic heat.

That channel, obviously, had been deepened; the camouflaged entrance had been provided, and the result was a perfect base in which the submarine, once the entrance was closed, could remain indefinitely, shielded from prying eyes.

Now, however, the gap in the wall remained open; and Blake, as he peered across the water, soon saw the reason. A second underseas craft broke the golden sheen of the river and appeared on the surface. Again the same procedure was followed, but this time the disappearance of the submarine was followed by an alteration in the front wall of Mon Répos. The gap in the wall vanished. The movable part blended with the permanent structure, and to all outward appearance became a massive wall of solid stone.

BLAKE stepped away from the protecting cotton trees. The lone drum no longer sounded, and the night was unnaturally still. Off to his right, a branch snapped. He turned in that direction, and took a few steps forward.

A hard, cold object was thrust roughly against his side. Then came the voice of the man who called himself Wagner:

"Put your hands up!"

Blake obeyed.

Wagner spoke again:

"This is a hard game. Anybody who plays it knows the rules."

Bitterness gripped Blake. He had failed. He had blundered into a trap like the veriest amateur.

"I know the rules," he admitted. "Get on with it."

Wagner remained silent.

"Do you quibble over a little thing like murder?" Blake taunted the man, who any second would be his executioner.

There was a click as the hammer of a revolver went back; but the hammer did not fall. The waiting was intolerable.

"A Nazi with a conscience! Hitler wouldn't like that!"

The pressure of the muzzle relaxed a trifle, and Blake sensed a split-second of hesitation. His left hand seized the barrel of the gun, and thrust it aside. His right hand flashed upward, and his fist found its target, a chin.

Wagner went down. Blake was on him, his fists flying.

"You fool!" Wagner seemed dazed.

Blake gritted his teeth. This *was* a tough game. A moment of weakness had cost this man his chance. He, Blake, would not make the same mistake.

Wagner fought gamely, but the first blow had sapped his strength.

"Don't you see—"

Blake drove his fist home. Wagner's body sagged. Blake straightened, and now that the tension was relaxed, he realized that he was shaking.

Then he went to work. He ripped off Wagner's shirt, tore it into strips, and bound the man securely. Wagner's belt was useful in binding his legs. A crude gag completed the task.

After a short search he found the discarded revolver, and pocketed it. A bubbling noise coming from a clump of bushes attracted his attention, and he approached warily. Something caused him to stumble. He choked back an oath, and then smiled as he recognized Wagner's radio set. The bubbling noise, he found, was coming from headphones.

Blake slipped the band over his head, and heard gibberish, which obviously was code. For just a second he struggled with the temptation to press down the sending key, and speak a ribald greeting in German. That would be dangerous—for Mon Répos, and its underseas visitors, would be listening on this wave-length. Instead, he snapped off the set, and proceeded to kick it to bits.

That done, he peered about. Out in the river was Mon Répos, dark, still, and apparently deserted. Between him and that dangerous goal was shark-infested water.

Gaspaud's lighted shack drew him like a magnet. A hurried glance through the windows showed him it was deserted. He entered the storeroom. A trapdoor in the floor was open. The light of the room revealed a gradually descending passageway, the walls and roof of which were lined with masonry that would have passed inspection on almost any modern tunnel job.

Here again was proof of the genius of the mulatto architect, but Blake had no time to pay him tribute. He weighed his chances coldly and dispassionately. Gaspaud and the hill men probably would remain in Mon Répos long enough to service the submarines. It might be possible to negotiate the passageway unobserved, and find a hiding-place on the island, from which he could

observe operations, and perhaps, determine just what part, if any, the Haimingan government had in all this.

Blake shrugged. Then he bent low, and walked onward, and downward, through the dank, foul air of Faustin's secret passageway. The darkness caused him to stumble and grope about uncertainly, but he welcomed it, for a light would have made him a target for any stray man of the hills who decided to return to the mainland.

The pressure on his eardrums increased. Drops of water seeped through the stone lining of the tunnel, and fell with a sound that was magnified to alarming proportions by the narrowness of the space. Rustling sounds proved that lizards, or rats, regarded this as their domicile, and resented the presence of an intruder.

Steadily Blake groped his way forward. His breathing became more labored, which caused him to assume that the tunnel was beginning the climb necessary to reach the opening above water level in Mon Répos. But there was no welcome gleam of light to mark that opening, only inky blackness, holding giant bats, which brushed him with their wings as they flew back and forth.

Here, however, the air was becoming purer. There was less leakage, for no longer was he sloshing through pools of foul-smelling water. A gust of clear air drifted toward him, and he drank it in eagerly. The ground felt different underfoot, but it was so dark that it was not until his outstretched arms failed to touch any barrier that he knew he was out of the tunnel, and in some room in the castle.

Blake took an experimental step forward, and then peered about. He was rewarded by a tiny gleam of light. He walked toward it. Then there was a blinding flash, a deafening roar, and the whole world seemed to shake, to writhe.

CHAPTER FIVE

YVONNE flattened herself against a mangrove, and waited. The white dress was a sorry mess. She dismissed that with a fatalistic shrug of the shoulders. No bridal dress was needed; for this, truly, was man-business.

Some distance away, but within her range of vision, was her white, crouching among cotton trees. She too had watched the boat that came out of the water, and had seen the stone wall of Mon Répos fall away. Then came the second boat from out the water, and the wall fell back into place.

She had only a vague idea what it was all about; but as she had watched it she had felt less astonishment than Blake. The whites did strange things when they fought among themselves. Besides, Mon Répos was a wicked place. Any kind of evil magic could happen there.

Now her white was moving from his shelter. She allowed a little time to elapse before she followed him, and she was some distance away when she heard angry words, and quickened her pace. The struggle had started, and ended, when she reached the spot. Her white was victorious, so she faded back into the shadows. It was not well to disturb men at times like this.

She watched Blake bind Wagner. She looked on with interest as he listened to the radio, and then kicked it to bits. That was the magic box. Whites spoke words into it that were heard by whites many miles away. At least, that was what they claimed. A girl could have her own doubts, of course, but it would be just as well if she kept them to herself.

She narrowly averted discovery as Blake sought, and found, Wagner's revolver. She followed him to Gaspaud's shack, and stood outside, her face flattened against a window, when Blake entered the underground passageway. A few seconds later she was in the shack, fighting a battle with herself.

Her first impulse was to follow Blake, but fears held her back. She was afraid of the tunnel. She surmised that it led to Mon Répos, and she feared that place even more than the passageway. What really brought about her decision, however, was the fear that Blake would know that she was following him.

Once she had decided to remain where she was, she cast about for other ways in which to aid her white. Gaspaud, the men on the boats that came out of the water, and the other men on Mon Répos were his enemies. Mama Vaublanc had foretold that, and the girl had hardly needed the added proof furnished by the wary manner in which Blake went forth to met them. Blake and the white called Wagner also were enemies. Therefore,

Wagner and the men on Mon Répos were friends.

From that point on, her reasoning was divinely simple. Wagner was a white, so naturally he was the leader of the others. He was tied up, helpless, and entirely at her mercy. She would force him to insure the safety of her white. Just how this could be done was not quite clear; but the whites, although a bit foolish about most things, did have potent magic to use on their own affairs.

She picked up a stout club which had been discarded by one of the hill men. With it clutched in both hands, she retraced her steps, and stood over the luckless man who had fought with her white.

Wagner, conscious, but still confused by the beating he had received, looked up to see a girl wearing a soiled white dress. Anger and determination were in her every movement, and her rage gave her face a new *gamine* beauty. Wagner fought back a wry smile—she was so like a kid sister on the rampage.

Then the girl spoke, using the Creole of the peasants:

"You fought with my white. Now he has gone through the hole in the ground to Mon Répos. Your friends there will kill him."

Wagner sensed the deadly menace in her voice. She was a wild thing, fighting for something she loved. To save that loved one, she would beat him down as ruthlessly as she would crush a snake. That was the law of the jungle, and at this minute she was entirely a jungle creature.

He shook his head, and raised his bound hands to indicate the gag. Warily she bent over him, tugged at the fastenings, and removed it. Then she stepped back.

"Speak!" she ordered.

Wagner spat out threads and lint.

"I fought with your white, but that was a mistake."

She regarded him through narrowed, unbelieving eyes.

"Your white is an American. I am an Englishman. His country and mine are at peace. The men on Mon Répos are Germans. Your white and I are at war with them."

"Oh-oh!" She blended doubt and scorn in the exclamation. "There was war between my white and you when you first met. I am just a girl, and you did not speak in my language, but I could see that."

The man called Wagner groped for words that would make the situation plain, and satisfy the girl. He and the American were players in a desperate game. You played it alone, and everybody you encountered was suspect. Blake's obvious Americanism, and his not-too-convincing story of a shipwreck, had been more than enough to arouse suspicions that he was dealing with a clever Nazi agent. Then Blake, with death near, had cried out his hatred for Hitler and the Nazis. But that had been too late. A swinging fist had sealed the tragic misunderstanding.

ON the other hand, Blake had had every reason to suspect him. There was the assumed German accent, and the labored French. Originally he had done that with an eye upon the investigations that would follow his departure. Peasants, when questioned, would tell of a man with a German accent, and there would be nothing to connect his government with what had happened. He had derived twisted pleasure in continuing the sham before a man he believed to be a Nazi agent. Expensive pleasure! He put that bitter thought aside, and gave his entire attention to an attempt to bring all this within the understanding of a primitive girl of the jungles.

"Your white and I were not sure about each other. I thought he was a German. He had the same thought about me. It was a bad mistake, but if we work fast it is not too late to correct it."

Looking up at her, he knew that he had failed. He made a desperate effort to win her aid:

"You must help me, if you would save your white. The airplanes—" He saw that the word meant nothing to her, and quickly shifted to her vocabulary. "The ships that fly through the air will soon be here. They will drop things on Mon Répos that will destroy it. Your white will die, even if he escapes the Germans."

She held the club directly above him.

"They are your ships of the air. You must stop them. Do not lie to me. You have magic."

"Yes." He made an effort to rise. "My radio. It is somewhere near. You must find it."

"Oh-oh!" There was despair in her voice. "The radio is the magic box?"

"Yes."

"My white destroyed it!" And she fairly spat the question at him: "There is no other way?"

"No," he admitted. "There is no other way."

She gazed down at him for a period that seemed endless. Then, apparently satisfied that he was telling the truth, she straightened. The club was thrown aside. She held her bedraggled white dress high above her knees as she darted toward the marsh.

She entered the water. The sodden dress impeded her progress. She clutched at the low-cut neck, and pulled. There was the sound of tearing silk, and the man called Wagner saw her cast the garment aside as she continued her progress through the reeds, bound for the open water of Murder River.

"Come back!" he shouted. "For God's sake, come back! The sharks!"

Her laugh, eloquent as words, was a ringing declaration that ships that fly through the air, sharks and all other dangers were as nothing when she was bound for the side of her white.

The bound man twisted his body so that he could watch. She was beyond her depth, and swimming steadily. He lost sight of her.

Then his attention was caught by a faint, persistent purr, which gained in volume, and became a steady drone. He directed his glance aloft. Now the drone was a roar, and he spotted the dark shape of a medium bomber which was following the course of the river.

A parachute flare drifted lazily down, lighting up the entire countryside. The pilot spotted his target. The falling bomb was not visible to the man on the ground. He saw a vivid flash. There was a great roar. The earth shook. Shapeless black objects were momentarily visible above a huge cloud of black smoke. Then the smoke cleared, and Wagner saw Mon Répos, now a shapeless pile of stone, with a gaping hole in what had once been the front wall.

The plane circled, while the pilot inspected his handiwork. Apparently he found it good, for he pulled away toward the shore of the river. A second flare floated down. Wagner, sensing what was about to happen, tried to roll away from the hut, but it was a vain effort.

The pilot, acting upon the radio instructions Wagner had given him before the clash with Blake, did his work carefully and methodically. The first bomb struck in the river, midway on a straight line between Mon Répos and Gaspaud's shack. The second was aimed at the shack—designed, in event the first had failed, to put the tunnel out of commission by destroying the shore entrance.

It was not a direct hit. The bomb fell between the man called Wagner and the building, but it accomplished its purpose. The walls of the shack tottered and fell. Dislodged masonry and dirt poured into the tunnel. The ever-threatening water, balked for years, now gained its goal, and the work of the mulatto engineer was destroyed forever.

The man on the ground was hurled against a tree by the force of the explosion. He felt a great weight on his chest. That eased a bit, but it was followed by numbness. On the ground beside him an irregularly shaped pool was forming.

He felt surprisingly little pain. The knowledge that he was badly hurt was sidetracked by fleeting images that formed in his mind:

A brother with the R.A.F. . . . "One of our ships failed to return." . . . Poor old Geof—that was his requiem. . . .

The little native girl so like his own kid sister. . . . Food for the sharks. . . . Her white, the Yank—blown to kingdom come. . . . Plucky two-fisted beggar—

Mars, of the Guard of Haiminga. . . . Black as the ace of spades, but a gallant gentleman. . . . Braving the wrath of an anti-United States, and pro-Fascist district commander. Purposely keeping out of the way until this scorpions' nest could be eliminated. . . . Then ready to help him reach the coast, and safety. . . .

All wasted. . . . Now, in addition to Mon Répos, Mars would be saddled with the corpse of a man with a German name, who looked like an Englishman.

Perhaps, if he tried very hard, he could roll down to the bank, and into the concealing water. . . . Not pleasant to think about. . . . Neither was it pleasant to die alone in the jungle, and under a cursed German name. . . . The other way was cleaner, more decent. . . . He owed that to Mars.

CHAPTER SIX

LONG before dawn, old Mama Vaublanc awoke from a troubled sleep. Her head was spinning, and her heart was pounding in her ears. That, how-

ever, was an old trouble, and she dismissed it in favor of a more pressing problem.

First rolling up her sleeping-mat, she lighted a torch, and made her way to the cabin Blake had occupied.

"Oh-oh!" They were gone.

She had aged twenty years when, panting and reeling, she reached her own hut at the top of the bluff. All her love and all her very life had been bound up in the girl. She had felt only joy when she saw Yvonne turn to the white as a sunflower twists to meet the sun. That was inevitable. But now she was gone, gone forever, and without even a word of farewell.

She was very proud, this old black woman. She had an Oriental's regard for "face." The absence of the girl would be noted, and the peasants would ask questions. She was truthful, according to her own standards, and she would not lie to them. Soon everybody in her world would know that the girl, upon whom she had lavished so much love, had cast her aside like a worn-out drinking-cup. That loss of face added to the pain in her tired old heart.

Mama Vaublanc leaned weakly against the frame of the door. This attack was worse than the others. Her heart beat like a tom-tom, sending the blood gushing through her thin arteries. She knew, just as well as a Park Avenue specialist, what would follow. She had a better sense of timing than any specialist, and she knew that her hour was very near.

There was a low, almost inaudible rumble.

"The earth grumbles," she muttered.

That had not happened since the storm that brought the white, and now the hurricane season was over. She sniffed experimentally. This was typical earthquake weather.

Death near—the girl gone—loss of face—the probable earthquake. . . . The thoughts pounded through her mind to the rhythm of her throbbing heart. Then African guile came to her rescue, and pride helped her to find a solution.

She was Mama Vaublanc, the most famous *mamaloi* in all Haiminga. Should she, in death, be remembered as an old woman, scorned and deserted? No, by the green skin of Damballa! There was still time to give them other things to think about.

"Luke! Luke!" Her cry rang out in the still night.

A sleepy peasant appeared.

"Yes, Mama Vaublanc?"

The old woman said with great dignity: "I am possessed." (She meant that Damballa had entered her body, and she was not responsible for her actions.)

"Oh-oh!" The peasant's eyes widened. "There will be a revelation?"

"Yes," said Mama Vaublanc. "There will be a great revelation."

THE peasant darted away. Soon two drummers took their stations in an open place near the cabin. One drum, which had the deepest tone, was male; the other was female. That was proper, because all living things should be mated.

A comely black girl stood behind the drummers. In her hands was a bit of cloth, which she used to wipe the perspiration from the heads and shoulders of the drummers, who beat on without interruption.

A fire lighted up the scene as the crowd assembled. A crude altar was erected, and upon it was the image of the snake god, Damballa. The drums reached a final pitch of frenzy, and subsided. Then Mama Vaublanc stepped from the house.

She wore a red dress. Her eyes were fixed in an unseeing stare as she walked to the altar with a slow, proud gait. Various offerings of food and drink were produced, and handed forward through the crowd. A brass bowl was placed before her, and she sprinkled water over the repast spread for the green snake.

"Damballa! Damballa!" The cry of the *mamaloi* was caught up by the awed peasants. "There is no god in the jungle but Damballa!"

Mama Vaublanc began a chant, which had been old before white men knew of this new world. That chant had been brought from Africa in the fetid holds of slave ships. It had served as the battle-cry to rally the blacks when they went out to die for their freedom.

The old woman changed into one of the uncounted *chansons* recounting the bloody exploits of the liberators of Haiminga. All these songs have the same theme, hatred of the whites, and they form the basis for the debased form of voodoo that still flourishes in the Caribbean area.

The peasants took up a chorus. The drums roared the song of hate.

A young girl, with wide, startled eyes, handed the *mamaloi* a white rooster, which she held at arm's-length. The terrified bird squawked; its wings flapped wildly, and feathers flew in all directions.

The drums rolled, louder, louder and louder. Mama Vaublanc swung the cock through the air in three wide circles. The drums ceased. A gasp of expectation went up from the crowd. Then came silence, amid which the cock made a last futile try for freedom, and then crowed, loud and raucous.

That good omen was greeted by clapping of hands and stamping of feet. The noise subsided. The blade of a machete lopped off the head of the rooster. Mama Vaublanc touched the bleeding neck, and daubed blood upon her forehead and breasts. There were hysterical screams as the frenzied peasants pressed forward to be anointed in the great purification.

Only a baptism in blood will satisfy Damballa, and he is a jealous god. Three times Mama Vaublanc cried out into the night, and her words were sheer blasphemy. Rapid, excited breathing was the only sound as they waited for an answer that did not come. Mama Vaublanc laughed with triumph.

"Three times have I called upon the God of the whites! You heard no answer. There is no god but Damballa!"

"Damballa! Damballa! No god but Damballa!" The chant was on in full swing, with the drums roaring; but the upraised hand of the old woman halted the tumult.

"Hear my words, for I speak with authority!"

The peasants leaned forward, eyes wide, mouths open, and breathless.

"Across the seas, the whites fight among themselves." (There was a chorus of approval, for they had heard vaguely of those things.) "They will bring those wars to Murder River." (She drew upon her fertile imagination, using tales told by strangers, which at the time she had dismissed as falsehoods.) "There will be ships that sail under the water, and ships that fly through the air." (Harsh cries of astonishment went up.) "That is true, and the waters of Murder River will run red with the blood of these whites."

She drew herself up to her full height.

"I, Damballa, tell you this: The earth will roar and shake. These whites shall be destroyed. But have no fear. No harm will come to my people."

She eyed them craftily. This, her inborn sense of showmanship told her, was just enough. Mama Vaublanc would be remembered, and her memory would not be clouded by loss of face.

"Go!" she commanded. "Remember my words! Go!"

There was a smile of triumph on her face as she watched them fade into the night. Then the dizziness returned, and forced her to grasp the altar. This attack was worse than the last.

As she staggered back to the house, she knew that her time was very short. She went at once to a secret hiding-place, and produced some treasured, but dangerous keepsakes.

There was a yellowed photograph of a man and a woman, both Americans. Beside it was a tarnished ornament that had once been yellow as gold. There was a ring set with a diamond, and a battered book that had once been a diary.

She was reeling as she placed these things before the statue of the Virgin. High over the hut there was the drone of an airplane, and the noise caused the startled peasants to greet the first evidence of the truth of her revelations with shouts of fear. Mama Vaublanc heard that not at all. There was an old account that must be settled.

She made a polite bow, staggered, and almost fell. When she had recovered herself, she slipped into a kneeling position.

"I greet you, Madame."

Using French, the language of politeness, she began to rid herself of a burden she had carried for many years.

Outside, a black man, clad in khaki, warily approached the open door. The voice of the old woman carried to him, and he tiptoed forward. He stood just outside the door, listening intently, and as the recital continued, a look of compassion appeared upon his intelligent face.

Then the earth trembled and shook. The roar of a distant explosion swept down the river valley and echoed and reechoed as it bounded back and forth among the hills. Mama Vaublanc fell face downward before the statue of the Virgin, and made no attempt to rise.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STEPHEN BLAKE struggled painfully back to consciousness. Three impressions struggled for supremacy in his mind: Darkness had been replaced by a half-light; he was lying in water; and the air was filled with acrid fumes. That last impression brought back a mem-

ory of the explosion that had hurled him to a far corner of the room.

Muffled exclamations of pain marked the process of regaining his feet. He was in a room about twenty feet square, the walls of which were of solid stone. The light came through an opening in a door, and the opening was guarded by thick steel bars. At the far side of the room was the entrance to the tunnel, shadowy and grim, and from it came the sound of rushing water.

Blake splashed through water to the door, and peered through the opening. Spread out before him, and open to the sky, was the pool that once had formed the submarine base. Shattered fragments of stone—they came from the once solid walls of Mon Répos—protruded from the water. Twisted bits of steel were scattered about. Here and there were charred, formless things that might, or might not, at one time have been parts of a human body.

Still bewildered by what he had undergone, his mind sought an explanation for the scene of destruction. It looked like the work of a heavy aërial bomb. Mon Répos, as a submarine base, was finished forever. The two "pocket" submarines had been blown into twisted wreckage that had neither form nor shape. Their crews and the Haimingan hill men had been blown into oblivion, for not a living thing remained about what had once been the base.

That much was certain; but beyond that, Blake felt unable to cope with the problem, and he turned to the more pressing problem of his own fate. Raising the latch of the door, he pushed. The barrier failed to yield. He pulled. Still there was no response to his efforts. In an effort to apply more pressure, he seized the bars in the opening. The door held fast. Closer examination revealed a massive lock, the key of which had been inserted from the outside, and which was still in the lock.

Blake gave his attention to the door. It was a solid piece of thick mahogany. He smiled grimly. Mon Répos held him a helpless prisoner.

Then came the realization that the water in the room was steadily rising. A quick survey through the opening in the door supplied the explanation. The floor of this room, which held the entrance to the tunnel, was about at the level of the pool that had served as the submarine base. Some distance beyond the door were the ragged ruins of a wall which, before the explosion, had acted as a dam to hold back those waters.

Now, however, there was no restraining barrier. The tide, obviously, was beginning to rise, for the water had reached his knees. It came under the door in a steady stream. The fact that it was not draining off into the tunnel proved that the passageway, also, was flooded. The roof was about a foot above his head. Long before flood-tide, the room would be transformed into a watery grave.

Blake peered through the bars in the door, hoping he might be able to reach down and turn the key in the lock. Dismay caused his heart to miss a beat. The great key, as was customary in olden times, had been made of wood. The explosion had spared this, the most distant and also the most solidly constructed part of the castle; but some piece of flying débris had broken off the key, and it had been carried away by the swirling waters. Only a jagged end extended from the lock. He reached down, seized it, and attempted to release the lock. His fingers, despite their dampness, slipped on the smooth round wood, and he was unable to obtain a hold.

AGAIN and again he tried, working himself into a state of near-frenzy. It was a hopeless task. Sane reasoning demanded that he save his strength for the ordeal that was ahead. That thought prompted a loud despairing laugh, which echoed against the piles of shattered stone. He followed it with the shouted question:

"Save myself for what?"

The rocks sent back the echo, but it was drowned out by the shrill cry:

"Steve! *Steve!*"

He turned toward the sound. No, this was not delirium. There she was, at the far end of the basin, a statue in ivory, as she stood motionless, trying to locate the place from which the sound came.

"Here, Yvonne!" He waved his arm through the bars. "Here!"

"Thank the good God!"

She darted forward, leaping from stone to stone, and plowing through the water. The early morning sun penetrated among the ruined walls, and played upon her gleaming body like a spotlight, but she was conscious of only one thing: Her white was still living.

"You are unhurt?"

Her face was pressed against the bars. He could feel her warm, sweet breath upon his face.

"Yes, Yvonne. There is a broken stick in the door. You must try to turn it, so that I can get out of here."

"But yes." She bent to the task. "Oh-oh! It will not move."

"Try it again," he ordered, and leaned out to watch.

"No, no. You must not look. I have no dress."

"Here." He slipped off his shirt, and handed it out."

Deftly she wrapped the material about her slim body like a sarong, buttoning a button to hold it in place.

"Now you may look," she told him. "See!" She dropped on her knees in the water, which reached above her waist. Her strong, white teeth seized the handle of the key. Her head turned. There was the sound of cracking wood.

"Damballa!" She spat out a fragment of the key, which had broken off even with the door.

Blake fought back his disappointment. That chance was gone.

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

Her face was back at the opening in the door.

"Through the water."

"You swam?" There was disbelief in his voice.

"But yes." She laughed, in an effort to belittle what she had done. "It was very droll. First came the ship that sails in the air. I was scared, so I went to the bottom. That was well, for the ship dropped things that exploded. I was shaken some, and found it hard to breathe, but I escaped." She laughed again. "The sharks were not so lucky. I saw one dead one. I think the others were scared, just as I was, because they did not trouble me."

He pointed out into the basin and the open water beyond, where fins sliced about amid the wreckage.

"They are no longer scared, and they are eating well," he said grimly.

She shrugged. "They were your enemies, and they would have killed you."

"Why did you come here?" he demanded.

"I followed you from the house. I watched you fight with the white. That was wrong."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I saw you enter the passageway, and I was afraid to follow. I went back to the white, and took the things out of his mouth. I said that his friends here would kill you, and that he must prevent them, or I would kill him. He said that your country and his fought side by side, but that you and he had been afraid of each other until it was too late."

"He lied to you." Blake's voice was harsh. "He wanted you to set him free."

She shook her head.

"No, he spoke truly. Then he told me his ship of the air would soon be here to destroy Mon Répos. I told him he must stop it. He said he could not, because you had broken his magic box. I knew that was true, so I left him there, and came here."

"Why?" Blake demanded.

She gazed up at him, bewildered at this stupidity.

"You were here. I came to take you away. The ship that flies in the air came too soon, but I kept on. If you were dead, I could die with you."

He reached through the bars, and touched her face reverently.

"Very few people are capable of love like that, Yvonne."

The water swirled about his waist. There was not much time. It was such a small thing for him to do in return for so much. His lips were pressed against hers.

"I love you, Yvonne," he murmured. "I love you as you should be loved. You must remember that always, Yvonne."

"But yes." Her bewilderment was proof she did not sense the desperateness of his plight. Not because he had any hope, but because he wished to keep her attention occupied elsewhere, he said:

"Love must wait." He made his voice casual. "I must get out of here. You must climb as high as you can. Perhaps the white will see you, and come out in a boat."

She shook her head.

"Not the white. He was near Gaspaud's store when I left him. He could not move. The ship that flies in the air dropped things there. I think he must be dead."

BLAKE forgot his own plight, in a wave of remorse. The man called Wagner was dead! They had fought each other, when they should have been fighting side by side. The Englishman had paid with his life, but before he had died, he had accomplished his purpose. Blake smiled wryly. He too would die, but he had accomplished nothing!

But Yvonne must be spared.

"Even if the white is dead," Blake said, "Somebody else may see you, and come to us."

Again she shook her head.

"The peasants fear this place, and will not come near it. You know that." She voiced the fear that had been troubling her ever since the first flush of joy at finding him alive had subsided. "You think that I am stupid, that I do not know that the water is rising, and that you are trapped. You know there is no hope of help, but you would send me away."

He made a desperate attempt to be convincing:

"What is this talk? Stand well away from the door, Yvonne. I will shoot the lock off with this revolver I took from the white."

"That will open the door?"

"Yes," he told her. "Stand to one side."

He watched her face disappear from the opening in the door, and heard the water splash as she moved away. Then he began shooting, firing at an angle, so that the bullets would not ricochet in his direction.

The last booming echo died away. The thin white smoke vanished. Then he leaned forward to inspect his handiwork.

The bullets had struck in a perfect pattern, designed to split the lock. That steel, however, had been forged in a day of honest craftsmen. There were dents, but no breaks. The lock, which was just above the level of the rising water, still held. One look at it convinced him that it would continue to hold, no matter how much of the same treatment it received.

Yvonne fought her way back to the door.

"You have failed, and—"

"Mademoiselle!" a voice hailed.

She turned. Blake peered through the bars.

A rowboat floated on the water a short distance away. Two husky Haimingan soldiers were at the oars. Lieutenant Mars sat in the stern.

The girl's voice was shrill with excitement:

"Quick, Monsieur the Lieutenant! My white is trapped. The water is rising, and there is not much time."

The side of the boat grated against a pile of rocks, and Mars stepped out, carrying a line, with which he moored the craft.

"Come!" he told his men.

They splashed their way to the door; and Mars, ignoring the cries of the girl, quickly sized up the situation.

"We will get through from above," he decided. "Use your bayonets." He tarried to reassure the girl, and the man behind the barred door. "The walls of Mon Répos are very solid, but not so much care was given the floors." Then he joined his men, who were scaling the wall of the ruins.

Blake and Yvonne waited. From above came the sound of metal striking upon stone. Wood splintered; soon bits of lath, plaster and wood showered down into the room. They worked steadily, enlarging the opening.

"Your hands, monsieur," said Mars.

Blake raised his arms. They seized his wrists, and drew him up to them. Even in the semi-darkness of this upper room Blake could see the joy in Yvonne's eyes.

They made their way to the boat, and the Haimingan soldiers took up the oars. Blake looked back at the ruins of Mon Répos.

"They did a thorough job, Lieutenant Mars," he ventured.

Poker-faced Mars shrugged.

"It was a severe earthquake, monsieur."

Yvonne started to speak, but the Haimingan officer continued:

"The peasants talk of nothing else. Mama Vaublanc foretold it."

His manner indicated that the subject was closed.

THE boat grounded upon the flats of the marsh. Mars gave an order, and then he accompanied Blake and the girl to the shore. Blake halted in the shade furnished by a mango tree.

"We owe you a great debt, Lieutenant Mars."

"You owe me nothing, monsieur. I went to the home of Mama Vaublanc to find you, and if necessary, to kill you. Then I came here, and for the same purpose. But on the trail, near the shore, I met the man we knew as Monsieur Wagner. He was dying."

There was a moment of tense silence, and then Mars continued:

"But even in death he was gallant. He was trying to reach the water, so that his body would not remain to complicate this affair. He lived long enough to tell me that he, you and I had made a tragic mistake."

Blake spoke:

"That is true. We should have united against the common enemy. Instead, we suspected each other and fought among ourselves."

Mars nodded.

"The price we paid was high, but we succeeded. That is what counts. The

man we knew was Wagner told me that just before he died in my arms. He also told me to go to Mon Répos, on the long chance that you and mademoiselle might be alive and in need of help. I did that with bitterness. But that has passed. We share the blame."

He thrust out his hand, and Blake grasped it. "That is very generous, Lieutenant Mars."

Reserve still was evident in the manner of the Haimingan officer as he continued:

"Much remains to be done. The earthquake story will not suffice forever. It is best that you depart."

"Before noon," Blake declared, "I will be on my way to Haiminga City."

Yvonne's face clouded. There was a look of pain in her brown eyes.

"And Mademoiselle?" asked Mars.

"Mademoiselle Yvonne goes with me."

"The passport regulations will cause delays," Mars warned.

"There will be no delays," Blake said quietly. "Before we leave Haiminga City, Mademoiselle Yvonne will be my wife."

The Haimingan's manner underwent an abrupt change.

"Felicitations, monsieur." A smile appeared upon his face. "I bring you a wedding-present." His smile vanished. "Like most things of this world, it carries both joy and pain."

He addressed himself to the girl:

"Mademoiselle, I must tell you that Mama Vaublanc died this morning."

Tears filled Yvonne's eyes. She gave a low moan. Blake's arm encircled her shoulders protectingly.

"She went quickly and easily," Mars continued. "She knew that her time had arrived, and she was content. I had the honor to be with her."

He fumbled in a pocket of his khaki coat.

"She trusted me with some things to be given to you. She also sent a message to you."

He spoke slowly, choosing his words with care. He was a truthful man, and a man of education, but racial pride caused him to juggle the truth in order to present the old woman in the most favorable light possible.

"This belonged to your father." He produced a small gold globe, which bore an anchor and an eagle. "He was a captain in your marines, monsieur. . . . And here is a photograph of your father and mother. She was an American, and she was with your father when he was stationed in Cadeau, in command of Haimingan gendarmerie. Here is your mother's diary. It will explain many things. This was your mother's ring." He handed it to Blake. "Perhaps Monsieur would desire to place it upon the finger of Mademoiselle."

He stood with his face averted while Blake did that. When he turned back, their shining eyes caused him to smile.

"There is more to the story, and we have not much time. Your mother died a few hours after your birth. Mama Vaublanc cared for you, and for your father, who was very ill at the time. He died the next day. Mama Vaublanc hid you away. She said you had died at birth. Then, when it was safe, she took you back to her own village, and raised you as her own child."

HIS gestures became eloquent as he pleaded the cause of the old woman.

"Mama Vaublanc had wanted a child of her own, a white child. That was denied her. She saw you as the answer to her prayers. But she did wrong. She knew that before she died, and asked your forgiveness, so you must not condemn her."

"Condemn her?" the girl repeated. "I love her." Then the wonder of it caused Yvonne to speak her thought aloud:

"I am indeed a white!"

Mars bowed.

"You go to the whites as a white. You will be in a world unlike Murder River and the jungle, but in time you will realize it is your own, and be happy there. The whites will love you, as we have."

Blake's voice trembled as he spoke:

"And we will always love Haiminga and its people. You have done so much for us. You have done it in the gracious manner that is part of your—"

Mars, though obviously pleased, raised a restraining hand.

"Nothing I have done deserves your thanks. But the story of Mademoiselle's parentage should serve as a sound basis for your future happiness."

Blake took the Haimingan's hand.

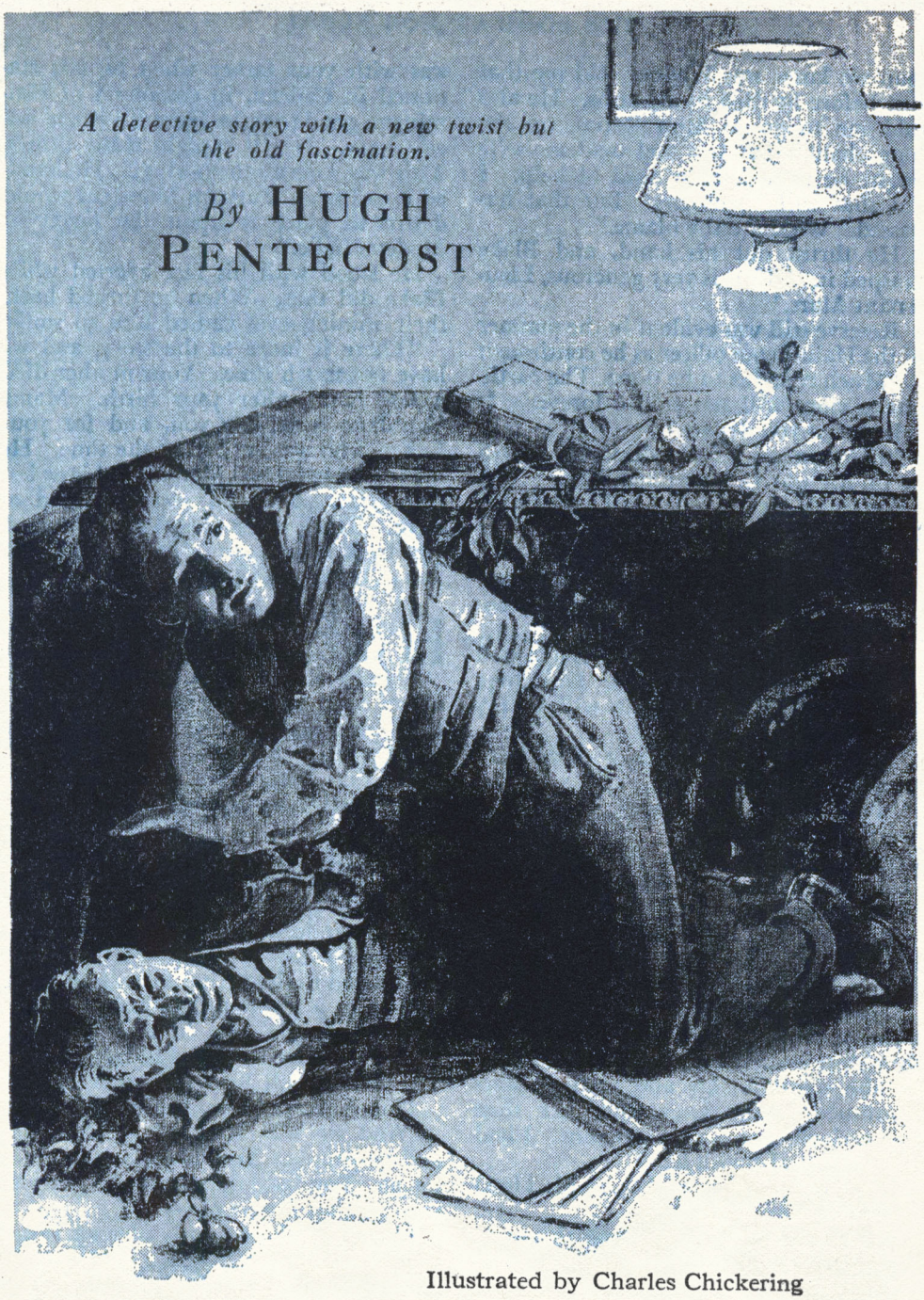
"It will," he promised. "We thank you for that—and for everything."

"Then go," said Mars. His dark eyes twinkled. "Mama Vaublanc was right. The waters of Murder River are running red. There will be more earthquakes. This will be no place for whites, for Damballa protects only Haimingans."

THE END

A detective story with a new twist but the old fascination.

By HUGH PENTECOST



Illustrated by Charles Chickering

RICHARD GAUNT stood at the back of the theater and listened to the applause that should have been music in his ears. Fourteen curtain-calls and the smiling faces of the critics who had hurried off to make the early morning editions should have given Gaunt the assurance of success that, as producer of the play, he badly needed. Instead, watching the curtain rise slowly for the fifteenth time, while the audience stood in their places clapping and shouting applause, he felt beads of sweat break out on his forehead.

Robert Royden stood alone in the center of the stage, bowing and smiling with all the charm that had made him Hollywood's leading glamour man for more than ten years.

"I hear he's over forty," said a woman at Gaunt's elbow, "but he still looks like a boy! So sweet and unspoiled!"

Gaunt wanted to laugh. To him, there was something diabolic in the actor's shy

Bottom Deal

smile. As the applause continued, Royden turned to the wings with an air of generosity and beckoned the rest of the cast onto the stage with him.

Somebody gripped Gaunt's arm.

"Looks like you've got a smash hit, Richard. Congratulations!"

"Thanks, old man."

"When it comes to putting on a show, there's no one in the world like Royden. He's tops."

"You're right. There's no one like him." And Gaunt had wanted to add, "—thank God!"

BACKSTAGE was a madhouse. The place swarmed with Royden's friends from Broadway and Hollywood. Everyone is a star's friend on the night of a success. There were newspaper people; broken-down actors who hoped to be remembered and to bask for a moment in the spotlight that was focused on Royden; Park Avenue débutantes; show girls who had once done a bit in a Royden picture.

Gaunt wished he could duck them all, but it was his job to make an appearance, to shake Royden's hand publicly, to say in the hearing of as many people as possible that he was grateful; that it had been a marvelous performance. Then he could go home and soak his head in cold towels.

He had just started toward the corridor leading to Royden's dressing-room, where people were waiting their turn to push in, when he saw Marcia. She was standing by the bulletin-board, alone and unnoticed. She wore a white evening dress that set off the coppery lights in her hair. Gaunt had seen that baffled look on her face for days—days that had seemed like years while the show was in rehearsal and on its road try-out.

"Hello, darling," he said.

Marcia held out her hand to him. "Congratulations, Dick. It looks as if he's done it for you."

"It was a pretty good performance," Gaunt said.

DANNY CAYLE

"He'll give worse and better ones before it's done," Marcia said.

"The admiration society too much for you?" Gaunt glanced toward the crowded corridor.

"I—I'm tired, Dick. It's been a long pull. He won't notice tonight, so I'm going to slip away."

"I don't blame you."

Just then a young man elbowed his way out through the crowd and came toward them, carrying Marcia's silver fox wrap over his arm. He nodded to Gaunt and held the wrap for Marcia.

"He's up to his ears in honey, and loving it," said the young man. "Let's get out of here."

Gaunt frowned. "You two partying together, Gary?"

Gary Lloyd's voice was sharp. "So what?"

"So you could be just a touch circumspect," Gaunt said, "unless you want to order one of those special sleeveless Matteawan jackets for me."

"What Marcia and I do is our affair," Lloyd said.

"Gary!" Marcia said. "Dick's got to think of all of us. We'll not be conspicuous, Dick. No columnist will report that Royden's wife deserted him on his opening night to have supper with another man. Were you afraid of that?"

Gaunt nodded.

Lloyd drew Marcia's hand through his arm. "If you want to be sure to get off the nut, you'd better insure Royden," he said. "Cayle might do the insuring, but no sane company would consider him a good risk."

Gaunt watched them go off together toward the stage door. He stood there, tapping a cigarette on the back of his silver case. Cayle! It was a screwball notion, but why not?

CAYLE said he never went to the theater, because they didn't make the seats wide enough.

"But you've caught a Robert Royden picture?" Richard Gaunt had never seen Cayle before, and that in itself was an experience. Cayle, two hundred and eighty pounds of him, was sitting behind an enormous flat-topped table in his private office. There was a tray in front of him on which stood a stone crock of beer, and the remains of three broiled lobsters. Cayle was working on the fourth with a silver nut-cracker.

A young man stood behind Gaunt at the window. He had been introduced as "my confidential assistant, Mr. Donovan." He was tall, broad-shouldered, with curly black hair and blue eyes. Definitely photogenic, Gaunt thought. He always looked at people in terms of theater or movies. Also, the tailor who had made Donovan's dinner jacket knew his business. That same tailor had not, it was safe to say, made Cayle's sloppy gray flannel suit.

"Royden has been in here," Cayle said. "You might say I'd seen him act. Right, Harvard?"

"Right," said Donovan.

Gaunt had to twist in his chair to look at Donovan. "Harvard?"

"Class of '31," said Donovan. "My first name is Claude, and it's a fighting word."

"Your business, Mr. Gaunt?" said Cayle.

"Wipe off your number one chin, Danny," Donovan said.

Cayle blotted at his jowls with the napkin, and leaned back. The chair creaked under his weight. Gaunt wished that Donovan would come around where he could see him. It made him nervous to be under inspection from the rear.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not a betting man," Gaunt said.

"Then why are you here?" Cayle asked.

It was a fair question. To reach the office, Gaunt had come through the outer room of Cayle's place. This was set up like an elaborate customers' room in a stockbroker's establishment. There were

comfortable chairs, tables, a white-coated waiter or two serving drinks. Across one end of the room was a huge blackboard on which were posted the current odds on horse-races, the baseball teams, fights. But it was more than an ordinary book-making place. Cayle, it was said, would take a bet on anything, of any size, provided he could name the odds himself. He was known as the Lloyds of New York. There was only one man in the world who knew more about percentages and probabilities than Cayle. He was a mathematical wizard named Kelley, and he worked for Cayle. Before determining the odds on an out-of-the-way bet, Cayle had to have information on the subject; all kinds of information. That was where Donovan came in. "He's got the stiffest right cross in town, and that goes for Joe Louis; and he can dine on Sutton Place without making a mistake about the forks," Cayle said.

Gaunt said: "I've got a hit play on my hands. I've got the biggest name in the entertainment world in lights on the marquee. The critics are going to give it raves. The public is going to flock to see it." He looked steadily at Cayle. "I want to bet you twenty-five thousand dollars that it doesn't run twenty weeks."

Cayle didn't bat an eyelash. "Why?" he asked.

"I've got fifty thousand in this show," Gaunt said. "If it doesn't run, I'm going to be in hock for a long time. If it runs twenty weeks, I could lose twenty-five grand to you and still make a nice profit. But if it should close tomorrow, or next week, I'd be insured. I'd be able to get out of it with a whole skin."

Cayle was motionless except for his fingers, which fiddled with the silver nutcracker. "But if it's everything you say, twenty weeks should be a breeze," he said.

The lines at the corners of Gaunt's mouth deepened. "Not when it depends on Robert Royden. If he takes it into his head to walk out tomorrow or next week, we're cooked."

"Contracts," said Cayle.

"Robert Royden is bigger than contracts. If he falls for some new dame, I'm apt to get a wire from Bermuda some morning saying he's sorry but he just won't be around. He's completely unpredictable and undependable. He's made his success tonight, and he's riding high. After a few days, when his dressing-room isn't crowded with people any more, and he begins to miss his army of Hollywood yes-men, he may get bored and quit. He's driven us all nuts the last two months. His wife, the other actors, the author, the punk—"

"Punk?" Cayle raised his eyebrows.

"An ex-pug named Joe Strega. Royden picked him up in Hollywood; thought he was amusing. He's become a part of the Royden household. In theory he's supposed to keep Royden in physical trim."

"And in fact?"

"He's a bodyguard," Gaunt said. "Royden insults people, and Strega does the punching."

"Nice work if you can get it," said Donovan.

Cayle looked at him, and his eyes began to twinkle. Then he looked back at Gaunt. "You want me to gamble on Royden's temperament?"

"That's it. Also, of course, on his living for twenty weeks and not having anything happen to him that would incapacitate him during that time."

"Happen to him?"

"Strega might not be around sometime when somebody put the slug on Royden. That would be too bad."

"I think," Donovan said, "that without doubt this is the damnedest proposition that's ever been brought in here."

Cayle smiled. "Twenty-five grand. Nice piece of change."

"Not to lose, it isn't," Donovan said.

"I'm not in this business to lose bets," said Cayle. He was silent for a moment. "Okay, Mr. Gaunt, I'll take you—on one condition."

"And that is?"

"I'll lay twenty-five grand, even money, that Robert Royden will be on hand to act in your play for twenty weeks, provided I can place a man of my own in charge of him."

"Done!" said Gaunt. "But I won't be responsible for your man's sanity at the end of the twenty weeks."

"Harvard!" Cayle's tone was sharp.

GAUNT turned and saw that Donovan had been just about to slip out of the room. The tall young man came back toward Cayle, his eyes blazing. "Now look here, Danny, I've done some screwy things for you, but I'm damned if I'll be a wet-nurse to a temperamental louse!"

Cayle ignored him. "Donovan will go with you now, Mr. Gaunt. You will put him in touch with Royden. If nothing has happened to your actor before Donovan contacts him, the bet is made."

MARCIA ROYDEN

"I won't do it," Donovan said. "I warn you, Dan, I'll quit. There are limits—"

ROBERT ROYDEN knelt on the edge of the rug, made a motion with his closed hand, and rolled the dice out along the parquet floor. He said that baby was in need of a new pair of shoes. As he said it he looked slyly at the woman with henna hair who knelt beside him, as if to imply that she was "baby." Heavy make-up did not conceal the fact that she was looking back at forty.

With an expression of bitterness, a tired little man who badly needed a hair-cut watched the dice come to a halt.

Royden bent his handsome head. "Too bad, Ted, old man," he said. "I'll let it all ride. Give you a chance to get your money back. Fade me again?"

"Why not?" said the little man dully.

Royden looked around the room. "Any other suckers?" he asked.

No one answered. The blonde woman sitting in the wing chair by the fireplace did not open her eyes. The white-haired man hovering over her shook his head.

"Not against that run of luck," he said.

Across the room a man laughed. It was not amused laughter. He was standing by the sideboard pouring himself a drink. He was youngish, and earlier in the evening he might have been rather good-looking. Now his eyes were bloodshot, and his dress shirt had wilted.

The white-haired man spoke to the blonde woman. "Do we have to wait for the morning papers, Lilli? After all, we know it's going to be all right."

"I'd like to see the reviews, John," the woman said.

"Reviews!" The young man at the sideboard spoke louder than was necessary. "'The play, by Harold Caldredge, is a flimsy little piece of no particular merit, but Robert Royden's magnificent performance puts life into it.'"

"Now, now, Harold, you mustn't be so modest," said Royden, picking up the dice. "It's a nice play."

"Nuts!" said Harold Caldredge. Then he added, wistfully: "It *was* a nice play until you cut all the other parts out of it but your own."

"Showmanship, Harold, showmanship," said Royden. "After all, you want to make money, don't you? That's why you write plays, isn't it?"

"You tell me," said Caldredge, and drained a brandy and soda without taking the glass away from his lips.

A buzzer sounded, and a large man with a damaged right ear came from somewhere, crossed to the front door, and opened it. Richard Gaunt and Donovan stood outside, the latter carrying a small overnight bag.

"Hello, Strega," said Gaunt.

"Hi, Mr. Gaunt."

"Mr. Donovan, Joe Strega."

"Hello," said Donovan.

Strega's eyes brightened. "Aren't you Danny Cayle's Donovan? I seen you—that is, I saw you box up to Maxie's gym. You looked pretty good in there."

"Thanks," said Donovan. He was looking at the kneeling figure of Robert Royden. The actor turned.

"Hello, Richard," he said. "I thought you'd given my party the go-by. Who's your collar ad?"

"Mr. Donovan, Robert Royden."

"Forgive me if I'm not formal about introductions," said Royden. "This is Miss Carla Warlen, a persistent old friend"—he indicated the woman with the hennaed hair. "And this is Mr. Ted Havilock, the most famous *First Grave Digger* of our age. How many times have you played the *Grave Digger,* Ted?"

"I don't know," said the tired little man, without looking up.

"Being gracefully weary in the chair by the fire is Miss Lilli Paville, my charming leading lady. The gentleman with the stomach is her husband, John Taylor, who sells something. Insurance, isn't it, John? And by the sideboard is Mr. Harold Caldredge, an author."

There was a tight silence which Royden himself broke by rolling the dice. "Too bad, Ted. You lose again. Shoot craps, Mr. Donovan?"

"Not that kind," said Donovan.

Royden looked up at him. "What kind do you like, Mr. Donovan?"

"I like to play with honest dice," said Donovan.

Mr. Harold Caldredge put his glass down hard on the sideboard. The ice in it rattled.

"I don't think I understand," Royden said.

"I think you do," said Donovan.

Royden stood up, scowling. Strega came forward, uncertainly.

"In my business," said Donovan, "I've got so I can tell loaded dice by the sound of them as they're rolled."

"What is your business?" Royden asked.

"Spotting phonies," said Donovan.

Again that tight silence, and then Royden threw back his head and laughed. "Damn it, Richard," he said to Gaunt, "where have you been keeping Mr. Donovan? He amuses me!"

"That's fortunate, Robert," said Gaunt coldly, "because Mr. Donovan is going to be around for a while."

"Capital!" said Royden. "But you'll have to hang onto your hat if you're going to keep up with me, Donovan."

"It looks to me," said Donovan, "like a pushover."

From across the room came the sound of Caldredge's laughter again. "Darned if the party isn't getting good," he said.

THE party was not, however, much of a success from then on. Donovan's exposure of the phony dice appeared to have cast a pall. No one seemed to think it was very funny now that they understood why Ted Havilock had been losing his week's salary to Royden so consistently. When Joe Strega brought in the early morning editions, which pronounced the play a four-star hit, everyone went away. Donovan and Strega were the only ones left.

Royden stretched himself out on the couch, languidly. "What *is* your racket, Donovan?" he asked.

"At the moment it is seeing that you keep your nose clean and turn up for your performances for the next twenty weeks."

Royden roared with laughter. "So Richard is afraid I'll walk out on him!"

"Or be pushed down a manhole."

ROBERT ROYDEN

"Nobody's going to do that to you, boss—not with me and Mr. Donovan around," Strega said.

"Gentlemen, I'm touched!" said Royden. He looked at Donovan. "Could you really tell about those dice, or were you just playing a hunch?"

"I could tell," said Donovan. "There are a number of ways to test them if you haven't got an ear for music. If you drop one of yours in a glass of water, it will turn slowly over as it sinks. Honest dice will sink down without revolving."

"I'll be damned," said Royden. He yawned. "God, I'm tired." He sat up. "I suppose I ought to wait for my little woman. Touching, the way she sticks around to congratulate me on my success, don't you think, Donovan?"

"Maybe she doesn't like your kind of fun," said Donovan.

Royden smiled. It was a reckless, debonair smile that had a million movie fans swooning. "You've been very amusing so far, Donovan, but don't lay it on too thick. I might not stay amused." He rose. "There's an empty guest-room next to mine. Make yourself at home."

When he had gone, Donovan glanced at Strega.

The ex-pug shook his head. "He's a great guy, Mr. Donovan, a great guy. He could stick a knife into me, if you see what I mean, and I'd say thank you."

"What's his wife like?" Donovan asked.

Strega looked down at a knobby fist. "I hate a two-timer," he said.

"You seem to be a little mixed up, my friend," said Donovan. . . .

Sometime later, Donovan opened his eyes, realizing that he had been awakened by a bright light shining in them. It took him a moment to remember where he was—in the bed in the room adjoining Robert Royden's.

He blinked. The shades were drawn, so it wasn't the early morning sun. The bedside lamp had been lit, and someone was tilting the shade so that the light hit him squarely. He shifted his position.

A woman stood by his bed, a woman with coppery-red hair. Her face was ivory pale.

"Do I pass inspection?" asked Donovan smilingly.

"Who are you?" the woman asked.

"My name is Donovan. I just moved in tonight. Forgive me for not being more hospitable, but who are you?"

"I'm Marcia Royden. For God's sake, come into the living-room. Strega—" She caught in her breath. "I think he's dead!"

The instant her back was turned, Donovan sprang out of bed and pulled on his dressing-gown. He walked to the connecting door to Royden's room and looked in. The actor was sleeping heavily. In repose his face was lined and old.

Donovan cut along the corridor to the living-room.

MARCIA ROYDEN stood just inside the door, her back pressed against the wall as if she were trying to get as far away as possible from the thing in the center of the room.

Strega, in pajamas, lay there, his body twisted and rigid. Near him on the rug were an overturned chair, a smashed lamp, broken glass. It looked as though, threshing around before he died, he had tried to pull himself up by the center table, and in so doing had yanked off the table cover.

Donovan walked around to where he could see Strega's face. He turned quickly from it. Eyes and tongue were bulging. The whole expression was one of agony that remained frozen in death.

"It must have been Robert's brandy," said Marcia.

Donovan saw she was looking at the sideboard. A lower compartment was open, a bunch of keys on a ring dangling from the lock. On top of the cabinet stood a bottle of old Napoleon brandy, the cork lying beside it.

"Robert kept it locked up for special occasions," Marcia said. "Strega must have taken his keys after he was asleep."

Donovan crossed to the sideboard. He bent over and sniffed at the open bottle of brandy. He did not touch it.

He came back to Marcia. "Get out of here," he said. "I'm closing this room up till the police can take over."

"Isn't there anything we can do for him?"

"Nothing."

"Is there—is there something wrong with the—the brandy?"

"Plenty!" said Donovan, grimly.

"YOU were born lucky," Cayle told Donovan over the phone.

"Sure. I'm on the job about four hours, and a murder is committed right under my nose. Where does that leave us?"

"It leaves us all right," said Cayle. "His private brandy stock, accessible only through the use of his own keys, you said?"

"That's right."

"Not too many people could have got at those keys."

"Probably not," said Donovan. "You don't seem very concerned about the poor sucker who died."

"Why should I be? I have no stake in Joe Strega. But I have in Royden. Don't let him out of your sight."

"But—"

"Listen, Harvard: Somebody tried to get Royden—and missed. He'll try again unless he's caught—and quickly! So we have an interest. Hop to it!"

"Just like that," said Donovan with sarcasm. "And where do I hop?"

"What about the wife?" said Cayle. "Where was she? How does she feel about Royden? She and Strega had the best chance of swiping those keys—doctoring the liquor. Strega never did a job on himself. The lady interests me."

"And me," said Donovan. "You'd understand if you could see her. How she ever got hooked up with this cheap, chiseling clown—"

"That cheap, chiseling clown is worth twenty-five grand to us on the hoof," said Cayle. "I don't expect you to be careless, Harvard. Don't call me again before noon. I need sleep."

Donovan heard Cayle's receiver click on the hook.

Donovan got into some clothes and then went through the connecting door to Royden's room. He pulled up the

shades so that the room was filled with sunlight. The actor hadn't moved since Donovan last looked at him. His breathing was steady, undisturbed. Donovan took him by the shoulder and shook him.

Royden opened his eyes. "What the devil's the idea of waking me up in the middle of the night!" he demanded. "Pull down those shades. Get out!"

"You're going to have to get up," said Donovan. "I should think you'd rather be dressed when the police arrive."

"Police?" Royden appeared to be still in a fog of sleep.

"Are you awake enough to understand what I'm talking about? Your yes-man is dead."

Royden sat up in bed. "Strega?"

"Strega."

"But what on earth—"

"Somebody," said Donovan slowly, "had you in mind, Royden. Your special bottle of brandy has enough prussic acid in it to kill off Hitler's army. Strega was sneaking himself a drink and got what was intended for you."

Royden sprang out of bed. He gripped the lapels of Donovan's coat, his hands shaking violently. "What are you trying to tell me? Somebody poisoned *my* brandy?"

"That's right. Strega is dead; very dead indeed. I have sent for the police, and they'll be here any minute. You'd better pull yourself together. I'll get you a drink if you think it will do any good."

"No!" Every spot of color had left Royden's face. He lifted a hand to his eyes. "Joe drank from that special bottle of cognac? It killed him?"

"Yes."

"But, my God, do you realize what that means?"

"I've been trying to tell you what it means."

AGAIN the tapering hands gripped Donovan's coat. "Don't leave me! Don't go away, Donovan! I've been afraid of something like this. That's why I had poor Joe—to keep me safe. You understand, Donovan? Safe!"

"Poor Joe made a mistake when he snitched your keys," Donovan said.

"He didn't snitch them!" Royden's voice shook. "He had my permission to take a drink from the private stock any time he wanted it."

"You're perfectly safe at the moment," Donovan said. "Your wife is the only person in the apartment."

Royden seemed to freeze where he stood. "Marcia!" he whispered.

"She found him," Donovan said. "She woke me."

"Donovan! Donovan, don't let her near me! She hates me; she'd do anything in the world to get me out of the way—she and that gigolo of hers. Don't leave me alone with her. You're supposed to protect me, Donovan. That's your job. You mustn't let them get near me. You mustn't let them—"

"Stop it," Donovan said sharply.

"I've been living in mortal terror of them for weeks. Joe was watching—every move they made. You saw she wasn't here tonight. You saw she wasn't concerned about me. She was waiting—waiting to come home and find me dead. Donovan, for God's sake—"

DONOVAN slapped him hard. "Get hold of yourself, Royden. The police will arrive in five minutes. They're going to ask you a lot of questions, and you can't gibber at them like a hysterical girl. For instance, when did you last have a drink out of that bottle?"

Royden made an effort. "This afternoon," he said. "I have supper about five on the night of a performance. Gaunt was here. We had a drink to the success of the play."

"And nothing out of it when you came back?"

Royden shook his head. "You see," he said, "that bottle is a stage prop. There's no brandy in it—just tea."

"Tea!"

"I'm not allowed to drink," said Royden. "Ulcer. I don't like to make a fuss about it, so I pretend I won't touch anything but my own private stock. It was just cold tea."

"Didn't Strega know?"

The corner of Royden's mouth twitched. "No. It was a joke that didn't come off. I—I told him to help himself any time he wanted. I thought it would hand me a laugh when he tried it and found what it was."

"Then you never offered anyone a drink from that bottle?"

"No. Naturally not."

"And all your friends knew that?"

"Friends!" Royden laughed. It was a theatrical sound. "They thought I was a heel—saving the best for myself. They all think I'm a heel! I've had to struggle to get where I am, Donovan. You don't know what it's like in Hollywood. Everyone has a knife out for you. Everybody

JOE STREGA

hangs around saying how wonderful you are; but underneath, they hate you and want you to fail. They want to—to hurt you any way they can. They want to—"

"Don't start that again," Donovan warned. "Get into some clothes. I'm going to talk to your wife."

"Keep her away from me, Donovan, for the love of heaven. She may have more of the stuff somewhere. She may—"

"All right, all *right!*" said Donovan.

As Donovan went into the hall, he saw Marcia come out of a room down the corridor. She had changed into a simple black dress with a touch of white at wrists and throat.

"You've told Robert?" she asked. Her voice was husky.

"Yes."

"I'm very grateful to you, Mr. Donovan. I don't know what I should have done if I'd been here alone."

"I'm glad I was here, Mrs. Royden. The police should arrive any minute. Is there some place we can talk till they come?"

"There's the kitchen," she said.

"Let's go."

He pulled a straight-backed chair out from the wall for Marcia, perching on the edge of the table himself. "Cigarette?"

"I—thanks."

He held a match for her. "Mrs. Royden, you may be in a spot when this investigation gets under way. I wanted to warn you."

She looked up at him, startled. "I?" There were heavy shadows under her eyes.

Donovan kept his tone quite casual. "Police always jump at the obvious in the beginning, Mrs. Royden. You and Strega were the people with most ready access to your husband's keys. They're going to assume that if Strega had poisoned the brandy, he wouldn't have tasted it. That's going to make you the first and most obvious suspect."

"I see," she said slowly. "It isn't brandy, you know, Mr. Donovan."

Donovan's eyes narrowed. "Your husband just told me that, but he said no one else knew."

Marcia's voice was tired. "He's really a child, Mr. Donovan. He'd rather have people think him selfish, than to have them know there is something wrong with him. I discovered him filling the bottle with tea once. I didn't let on. He would have hated me even more for knowing."

"It doesn't improve your position," Donovan said. "The murderer took a big risk poisoning the bottle, unless he knew that only Royden would drink from it. The fact that you knew is bad."

"Bad?"

"Mrs. Royden, I'm not a detective," Donovan said. "I—I don't want to see them nail you with this."

"But if I did it, Mr. Donovan?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Donovan said.

Marcia looked at him steadily for an instant. "Thank you, Mr. Donovan."

"We've got to get your story straight," Donovan said. "Have you ever told anyone about the tea? Anyone at all?"

"No."

"Not even your—your friend?"

"What friend?" Marcia said.

Donovan studied the end of his cigarette. "Your husband mentioned someone—a man—"

"Gary Lloyd?"

"He didn't name names."

"I have never told anyone," Marcia said.

"Then don't tell the police. It would just help to set their minds working along the wrong track. Your husband said he drank from that bottle at five o'clock tonight. Where were you after that?"

"Here," said Marcia, "until it was time to go to the theater. Gary called for me about a quarter past eight."

"Who was with you during that time?"

"No one. Robert and Strega left for the theater about six."

"Servants?"

"This is only a temporary set-up for the run of the play, Mr. Donovan. I have a cleaning-woman in the daytime. She had gone."

"Then you were alone."

"Quite alone," said Marcia, "and with plenty of chance to get at the bottle."

Donovan crushed out his cigarette, frowning. He lit a fresh one. "How about Lloyd? Did you keep him waiting? Was he alone in the living-room for any length of time?"

Marcia's lips tightened. "Hardly a minute. We can't ring someone else in just to help me."

"All right," said Donovan. "All *right!*" He fiddled with the Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch-chain. "Where did you go after the theater?"

"We drove up the Hudson in Gary's car. We parked somewhere and watched the sun rise."

"Alone?"

"Alone, Mr. Donovan."

"You didn't come back here for a wrap or anything?"

"No."

Donovan turned his eyes away from her. "Are you in love with this Lloyd?"

"Why, Mr. Donovan?"

"It makes a difference."

"To the police?"

"To them too."

"I don't think I'm in love with anyone, Mr. Donovan."

The bell over their heads rang so sharply that Donovan jumped.

"Cops!" he said.

INSPECTOR MORAN was a gray man; gray hair, eyes and suit. He was not the hard-boiled rubber-hose type; nor was he stupid. He was quiet; too quiet, Donovan decided. They had met before, but never on a case. Moran had a habit of coming into Cayle's during the football season and laying a modest bet or two on each Saturday's games. Donovan suspected that somewhere Moran probably had a wife and a couple of kids, and that when he was off duty he puttered around in a garden. He seemed mousy, almost timid amidst the bustle and activity of the special squad from Homicide and the assistant medical examiner. He leaned against the door-jamb of the living-room and watched them work. When anyone asked him a question or delivered a report, he spoke in a quiet monotone, gray and colorless as the rest of him. When the specialists had finished, and Joe Strega, ex-pug, had been carried away in a wicker basket, Moran locked the door once more and walked back to the kitchen.

Donovan was there, alone. He sat on the kitchen table. Beside him was a saucer brimming with cigarette stubs.

"Well?" Donovan said.

"You did nice work," said Moran. "Locking the place up, not touching anything—"

"I read detective stories," Donovan said.

"Yeah," said Moran. "Yeah. Like to tell me how you happen to be here?"

Donovan told him. Moran listened, rubbing his fingers over the stubble on his chin which he had not had time to shave. When Donovan had finished, he said: "You figure Richard Gaunt expected someone to make a pass at Royden?"

"I don't think so," Donovan said. "He expected trouble, but not this kind."

"How do you know?"

"I *don't* know," Donovan said impatiently. "You asked for my opinion. Royden is a screwball. Gaunt wanted to protect himself against eccentricity. That's what I think."

"KEEP talking," said Moran, after a moment of silence. "When did you get here? Who was here?"

Donovan told of his arrival; of the phony dice; of the breaking up of the party; of his finally being wakened by Marcia and the discovery of the body.

"Royden doesn't seem to be popular with anyone!" Moran said. "Makes it nice for us. Was that special liquor cabinet open when the other guests were here?"

Donovan tried to remember. "I don't honestly know," he said. "There were bottles and glasses on top of the sideboard. I wasn't paying any particular attention. There was no reason I should. It may have been open and it may not."

"We'd better find out," said Moran. "I'm sending for all the guests. About the wife?"

Donovan had been expecting that. He drew a deep breath. "She left here about a quarter past eight. She didn't get back till early this morning when she found the body. She couldn't have had any part in it."

"Why not?" said Moran. "The bottle could have been poisoned anytime."

"When you talk to her you'll know she couldn't have done it," Donovan said, and felt foolish.

Moran looked at him thoughtfully. "You *did* say you'd been reading detective stories. Playing a hunch? They always play hunches in books."

"Don't you?" Donovan asked.

"Never. You can't put the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together by hunch. They either fit or they don't. A crime is like that." Moran started to walk away and then stopped. "Have you got a permit to carry a gun, Donovan?"

"Yes."

"Are you heeled now?"

"Yes."

"Then your job is protecting Royden. I figure you'll be even more reliable than one of my own men—with twenty-five grand of Cayle's money on the line. I feel quite happy about that."

"You think there'll be another crack at Royden?"

Moran shrugged. "People don't plan to murder unless they have a powerful motive. Strega's being dead probably doesn't remove the motive for wanting Royden out of the way. The plan misfired. It's our job to see that the next one does too. Your job in particular."

"Aint we got fun," said Donovan.

Moran's gray eyes clouded. "You know," he said, "even after all these years, I've never been able to develop a sense of humor about murder."

DONOVAN decided that Marcia and Harold Caldredge were the only people in the room who didn't seem frightened. The others, their chairs drawn in an uneasy circle around Moran, showed the strain of the moment. Royden himself, huddled beside Donovan on the couch, regarded all of them with fear in his eyes. Donovan could feel him shaking as if he were suffering from a chill.

Miss Carla Warlen had made a hasty and evident attempt to restore her make-up; but her skin was yellow and old in the daylight, and the hennaed hair had a purplish tinge. Lilli Paville looked as if to get up from her chair would require the last ounce of strength she possessed. John Taylor, her husband, was rumpling his white hair and straightening his tie. Ted Havilock, the famous *First Grave Digger,* stared at the design in the rug. If he heard Moran's quiet voice he gave no sign.

Richard Gaunt was explaining about his bet with Cayle, and his usual suavity was missing. He had trouble finding words. Gary Lloyd stood back of Marcia's chair, his jaw belligerent. One peep out of Moran about Marcia, Donovan thought, and Lloyd would play Sir Galahad.

Harold Caldredge was having a difficult time restraining some inner urge for laughter. Each time he looked at Robert Royden, his lips would begin to quiver and he'd turn away.

"Lloyd was only wise-cracking when he suggested insuring Robert with Cayle," Gaunt said, "but it gave me the idea."

"WISE-CRACKING!" Royden's voice was shrill. "I tell you, Inspector, my loving wife and that rat have been out to get me for weeks."

"Why, you louse!" Lloyd started toward the actor, his fists clenched.

"Sit down!" said Moran mildly. It checked Lloyd. "You didn't think anyone was going to attempt to murder Royden?" Moran continued his questioning of Gaunt.

"Certainly not!" said the producer. "If I had, I'd have gone to the police."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Moran.

"I was simply trying to protect myself against one of Robert's temperamental tantrums."

"Maybe that's true, and maybe it isn't," Royden said. "Maybe Richard was just paving the way for himself."

"My dear Robert!" Gaunt protested.

Harold Caldredge could restrain himself no longer. "I'm really getting a kick out of this," he said. "For weeks Royden has had us all on the verge of insanity. Now it's his turn. Look at him, people! He's scared stiff. He's going to live in a state of terror until this murderer is caught. I don't wish you any hard luck, Inspector, but I hope it takes you a long time. It's going to be fun watching Royden come apart at the seams."

Moran looked at the young author. "I don't think you've quite got the hang of this, Mr. Caldredge. Last night, at five o'clock, Mr. Royden had a drink from that bottle. It was all right then. Since then only the people now in this room have had a chance to get at it. Am I being simple enough for you?"

Caldredge's mirth remained unrepressed. "That's what's going to make it so nice for Royden," he said. "How are you betting, Robert? Which one of us, do you think, will sneak up behind you sometime when Donovan is sleeping, and let you have a knife between the shoulder-blades?"

Royden jumped to his feet. "You see what I told you, Inspector? You've got

to lock up every damned one of them! You've got to keep them away from me if you don't want to be guilty of murder yourself."

"Sit down," said Moran, wearily. "I'll handle this, Mr. Royden. If it gets on your nerves, there's no reason why you shouldn't go to your own room. I think you've told me all you know."

"I'm staying here," Royden said, "with you and Donovan!"

"Then be quiet," said Moran, "if you expect me to get anywhere." He turned the pages of a small notebook he was holding. "There seems to be no reason why I shouldn't let you all in on certain facts: There are only two sets of fingerprints on the bottle; Royden's and Strega's. The murderer was careful about that. Mr. Royden opened the cabinet at five while he was having supper, handled the bottle himself. Mr. Gaunt was here then, also Mrs. Royden. He locked the cabinet after supper, carrying his keys to the theater. After you all came back here, he says he opened the cabinet and that it stood open all through the party. He was shooting craps for a good part of the evening, and had his back to the cabinet. He has no idea who might have gone near it."

"I was shooting craps with him," said Ted Havilock.

"If you call it that, after Donovan's demonstration," said Caldredge.

The Inspector turned on the author. "I understood that you stood by the sideboard most of the time, getting yourself tight. How about it, Caldredge? Did you interest yourself in that Napoleon brandy?"

"Would you believe me if I said no?" Caldredge asked.

Moran rubbed his chin. "I might and I might not," he said. "I might if you told me who *did* handle that bottle."

Caldredge said: "Do you think I'd tell you if I knew?"

"No," said Moran, "I don't think you would."

"You're just beginning to grasp the beauty of this situation, Inspector," the playwright said.

MORAN'S quietness was wearing. He knew how to ask questions, and he asked them over and over in his monotonous voice until suddenly it had all the nerve-punishing quality of a phonograph record caught in a groove.

He was trying to reconstruct the party. He had each person tell exactly what he had done and said through the entire evening. He checked and cross-checked until it began to take on a pattern. The results, however, were negative. At some time or other during the evening everyone had been in the vicinity of the liquor cabinet.

In the course of this long grilling, fragments of personal feelings came to the surface. It seemed to Donovan, after it was over, that only Harold Caldredge had emerged without a really sound motive for murder. The playwright's grievance was literary. He hated Royden for having maltreated the play, but somehow Donovan could not see this as sufficient reason. If it was, half the producers, actors and editors in the world would have died violent deaths. Caldredge had known none of these people before the production of the play; he was not interested in any of the women. It was decidedly to his gain to keep the play running.

BUT the rest of them!

"As nice a collection of motives as you could find in years," Donovan told Cayle, when he phoned about four that afternoon.

"Our client?" Cayle asked.

"Gaunt? Moran half believes that the very fact he came to us is a sign he expected something to happen—maybe planned it himself. Royden has held him up for a terrific salary. He has pushed him into a deep financial hole. For all his suave manner, Mr. Gaunt is a pretty desperate man."

"The others?"

"The women," Donovan said, "have all been in love with Royden at some point. The wife has taken a kicking around you wouldn't believe. Lilli Paville and the Warlen dame were given the air when Royden got tired of them. Naturally the Paville woman's husband, Taylor, hates Royden, and he may see that in spite of everything, Royden still has some kind of hold on his wife. Lloyd is crazy about Marcia Royden—and he's a hot-headed juvenile."

"More likely to slug it out with Royden," said Cayle. "Poison means planning. Woman's way to kill, Harvard. Don't forget it."

"I'm not! Then there's Havilock, a pathetic, broken-down actor. He hasn't much left but his own pride, and Royden takes a delight in puncturing that."

"Hell hath no fury," said Cayle.

"What's that?"

"Dames," said Cayle, in a bored voice. "Dames."

"What do you want me to do about it?"

"It's getting on toward five o'clock," said Cayle. "You've had nearly ten hours. You're not getting anywhere."

"All right," said Donovan. "All *right!*"

"Where did the poison come from?" Cayle asked.

"That's Moran's job. He's working on it."

"No reason why you shouldn't have a stab at it too, is there? Are you watching Royden carefully?"

"He's locked in his room now, dressing to go to the theater. He won't come out till he knows I'm standing by."

"Okay, Harvard. Keep digging."

DONOVAN turned away from the phone and found Carla Warlen standing in the doorway watching him. She held a cigarette between her scarlet-tipped fingers.

"Playing detective, Mr. Donovan?"

"That seems to be the general idea," Donovan said. "Cayle's idea!"

"Maybe I could help you," Carla said.

"Why?" Donovan realized she had been waiting deliberately to start this conversation.

"That thing on your watch-chain," Carla said, smiling.

Donovan glanced at the Phi Beta Kappa key. "What about it?"

"Suggests imagination," said Carla. "Your friend from Headquarters is too interested in getting a floor plan of the action."

"Can you think of a better attack?"

"I might." She came into the room, stopped to put out her cigarette, and then dropped down onto the couch. "A smart investigator would go after more essential facts."

"Such as?"

"You've got to understand Robert to understand this set-up," Carla said.

"He doesn't seem very complicated to me," said Donovan.

"You disappoint me, Mr. Donovan." Her tone was mocking. "I thought a professional psychologist would want to know subtler things."

"Who's a professional psychologist?"

"A gambler is really a psychologist, isn't he, Mr. Donovan?"

"All right," said Donovan. "You can have it that way if you like. But if you've got something to spill, why not spill it to Moran? My job is to protect Royden—to get him to the theater, to keep him working. Moran is the man-hunter."

"Moran hasn't got the right kind of ears," said Carla. "He wouldn't understand what I was saying. You'd be more likely to succeed at your job if the murderer was caught, wouldn't you?"

"I would."

"Then why not let me give you my angle?"

Donovan looked at her thoughtfully. "In my business," he said, "we're always suspicious of free information. What's the pay-off for you?"

"I want to see justice done," said Carla.

"The band will now play 'The Stars and Stripes Forever,'" said Donovan.

"You mean you won't listen?"

"I'll listen," said Donovan, "but I'll keep wondering why."

Carla shrugged. "The police are always looking for simple motivations—blackmail, jealousy, money. It makes it so much easier if they can have it in black and white. The real motives behind human behavior are more complex." She looked steadily at Donovan for a moment and then went on. "Robert is not just an unvarnished heel as you seem to think. I tell you, quite frankly, I have been in love with him for fifteen years. I couldn't love a man for all that time who had no plus qualities."

"It's been done," said Donovan. "They call it biology."

"That's not love," Carla said. "I would go a long way for Robert. I know that under his selfish, cruel exterior, he is a frightened kid—hungry for real admiration, afraid for his security."

"Dear me," said Donovan, "now we come to that well-known commodity, the inferiority complex."

"A CHESTNUT, I know," said Carla Warlen with a smile, "but none the less true. Everybody who really knows Robert knows that, and makes allowances for it. I have made allowances all these years; Lilli too. We've taken a pushing-around, but we understand why. You don't hate a person for his weaknesses." She leaned forward. "No, Mr. Donovan, you won't find your motivation in jealousy. There isn't a person connected with this case, unless it's young Caldredge, who doesn't understand Robert."

"Are you trying to tell me that there is no motive?"

"I'm trying to tell you that it isn't simple," said Carla. "When you understand, you don't hate, *unless*—" She

hesitated. Her tone was very confidential when she continued: "Unless, Mr. Donovan, in spite of understanding you are being forced to live a kind of life you don't want to live; being driven along a road you don't want to travel; being deprived of all the things you believe are essential to your happiness."

"Who do we have that fits?" Donovan asked.

"Not I," said Carla Warlen. "I go my own sweet way, live as I choose. Not Lilli. She is an actress, first and last. No matter how difficult Robert may make things for her, he is advancing her career. John Taylor may hate him for the way he treats Lilli, but Lilli's career is vital to him. Richard Gaunt's hair may be turning gray, but he's a producer, and this play promises to be a whopping success. Putting up with temperament is his business. Ted Havilock is a pitiful soul. He's never quite made it. He may envy Robert; he may secretly hate him for being made the butt of jokes; but a long run in this play means more jobs for him, perhaps even a chance to go to Hollywood. Harold Caldredge is in the same kind of boat; Robert is his meal ticket."

Donovan's face had grown slowly hard as Carla talked. "That leaves Gary Lloyd," he said.

"My dear Mr. Donovan, don't tell me you've caught it too?"

"Caught what?"

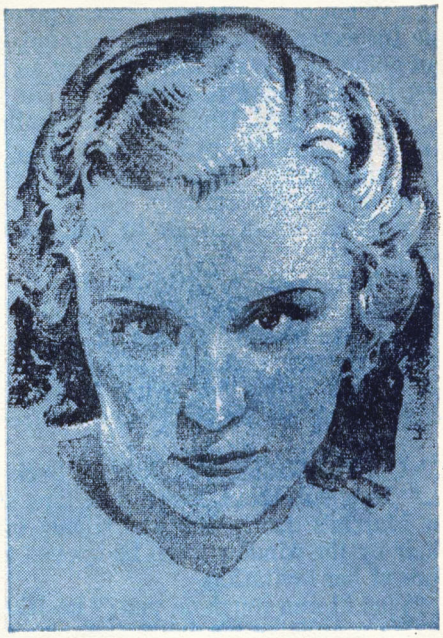
"The Marcia disease. Young Lloyd is a boy scout! He might call Robert out for a duel. But poison! I just heard you refer to him as a hot-headed juvenile. No, Mr. Donovan, that leaves us Marcia."

"But why should she—"

"Be honest," Carla said. "She had all the opportunity in the world, so we can skip over that. As for motive, try this on your piano: she was a simple socialite living in Santa Barbara. Robert swept her off her feet. They were married. She expected a home and babies and a family life. She found herself on a merry-go-round. She found me, and Lilli, and a dozen other women! None of the things she wanted worked out. She's been dragged around from pillar to post, embarrassed, shoved into the background, forgotten, and finally held, against her will."

"Against her will?"

"Quite. Her family went down in the crash. Robert supports them. If Marcia leaves him, they're in the soup. But as



LILLI PAVILLE

Robert's widow and heir to his estate—" Carla shrugged expressively.

Donovan stood up. "You wouldn't be trying to chisel your way back into favor with Royden, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't, Mr. Donovan. Robert prefers our relationship exactly as it is. I don't want any more than I've actually got. I'm just trying to point out some elementary facts to you."

From down the hall came the sound of Royden hammering on his door. "Donovan! Where the devil are you?"

Donovan looked at Carla. "I'm sure," he said dryly, "you have the very best motives."

ROYDEN stood in the middle of his room, wearing a tan coat, a polka-dot scarf at his throat, a snap-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes.

"It's time to go to the theater," he told Donovan. "I've got to rest before the performance. I can't rest in this madhouse. I'm afraid here. They're all gunning for me, I tell you!"

"We can go if Moran gives us an okay," said Donovan. "I'll talk to him." When he stepped out into the hall, Royden closed the door and locked it again.

Moran, who was questioning Gary Lloyd in the living-room, said he thought he was losing his grip. "I oughtn't to let these people go till I get to the bottom of this. I ought to tell the District Attorney to go jump in the lake."

"Come again," Donovan said.

"I've got orders to let the show go on," the Inspector said. "But so help me, it's not going to stop me from making an arrest if I can make it stick."

"Orders," said Donovan, and smiled. The District Attorney was one of Cayle's best customers. Danny was not lying down on the job entirely.

"Royden wants to go to the theater now."

"Take him away," said Moran. "You can have the whole bunch if you like. But anyone who leaves here has got to be at the theater where I can reach 'em." He smiled. "I might come down and have a look at the show myself—free."

DONOVAN didn't go directly back to Royden's room. Instead he knocked on Marcia's door. She was sitting in a chair by the window when he opened the door at her invitation.

"Was Moran rough on you?" he asked.

"He was doing his job."

"We're on our way to the theater. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She lifted her eyes to his—baffled, tired eyes. "You can tell me if you've decided anything about this, Mr. Donovan."

"I have," he said. "I've decided that you're going to need help. Will you come to me when you do?"

"Yes—yes, I'll come to you, Mr. Donovan."

He turned to go, and then hesitated. "Have you any idea where the poison came from that was put in that bottle?"

Her blue eyes did not look away. "Yes, I know."

"You *know!*"

"Yes."

"But—"

"From my medicine cabinet," Marcia said.

Donovan stared at her. He moistened his lips. He flexed his hands because the palms felt damp. "From your medicine cabinet?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing with it? Why did you have it?"

Marcia looked out the window for a long time. "You've been nice to me, Mr. Donovan. You haven't jumped at conclusions like the others. I—I hate to have you lose your good opinion of me."

She was too quiet, too self-contained. Donovan took her by the shoulders, forced her to face him. "You had it because you intended to use it—yourself?"

"It's funny," she said. "I don't suppose I would have if I'd come down to it. But it was a comfort, knowing it was there. Like having the key to your cell door, and knowing you can get out any time."

"The damned rat!"

"Robert can't help being the way he is," Marcia said.

Donovan drew a long breath. "Who knew about the poison? Who knew that you had it?"

"No one."

"Has Moran searched the apartment? Has he been in your bathroom?"

"I don't think so."

"Is any of the stuff left?"

"Yes. I looked this morning—after we found Strega."

"And you left it there?"

"Yes."

"My God!" Donovan groaned. "Tell me exactly where it is."

"In a small paper packet behind a large bottle of hand lotion on the second shelf."

Donovan strode past her into the bathroom. He opened the cabinet and took down the bottle of lotion. There was nothing behind it. "Come in here, Marcia!"

She joined him. "That's where it was," she said, looking at the empty shelf.

Donovan searched the other shelves, though he felt certain he wouldn't find anything. He didn't. Royden was pounding on his door again.

"Donovan! *Donovan!* I can't stay in here all night like a prisoner!"

"YOU'LL wait, pal, and like it!" said Donovan under his breath. He turned to Marcia. "Either the murderer or Moran has taken that stuff. I can't ask Moran. If it's the murderer, he plans to use it again, or to hold it over your head. You need a lawyer, Marcia—someone to advise you."

"Won't you do, Mr. Donovan?"

"I've got to stick with Royden. That's my job. Listen: if Moran starts asking you leading questions about poison, shut up. Tell him you want to see a lawyer before you talk. Better to draw suspicion than to make a mistake. And watch yourself, Marcia. There are people here who don't like you, who'd love to frame you."

"I know."

"Will you be careful? After tonight's performance, I'll get in touch with Cayle. He'll know who the best man is."

"I'm coming to the theater," Marcia said. "I don't want to be here alone."

"Good. I'll be there—backstage. Don't hesitate to call me if there's anything."

"I won't." Then she smiled. "What *do* people call you who don't call you 'Mr. Donovan'?"

"My acquaintances call me Donovan; my friends call me Harvard; my first name is Claude!"

"Thank you, Harvard," said Marcia.

ROYDEN said in a petulant voice: "I'm hungry!"

They were in his dressing-room at the theater. Donovan sat in a straight chair, tilted against the wall. Royden lay on the *chaise-longue,* wrapped in a silk dressing-gown. Carla Warlen, who had arrived just a few moments before, was sitting in the chair by the actor's dressing-table.

"I'll order you some food, Robert," she said.

"No," said Royden, "Just for the record, Carla, no! You'll get it, won't you, Donovan? Some sandwiches? You'll watch them made?"

Donovan laughed. "You don't suspect the local delicatessen, do you, Royden?"

"It's not funny!" the actor said.

Donovan let the legs of his chair drop forward and stood up. "What'll it be?"

"Two ham and cheese on rye, and milk."

Donovan went out. Richard Gaunt was standing in the wings, watching Ted Havilock, who was also stage manager, check the set. Gaunt made a wry face.

"I didn't realize what I was getting you in for, Donovan."

Donovan said there was nothing like a murder to liven up the day's work. "From all indications, you're going to have a fine, jittery performance tonight."

Gaunt shrugged. "These people are troupers. They'll come out of it when the curtain goes up."

Donovan walked past the stage doorman onto the street. There was a delicatessen across the way. He ordered the sandwiches, smoking a cigarette while they were made. Then he took the paper bag and a bottle of milk and recrossed the street.

It was just as he stepped through the stage door that the lights went off and he heard the shots. There were three of them. A woman screamed. There was a babel of excited voices. And then above it all came Royden's voice, raised hysterically.

"Donovan! *Donovan!* DONOVAN!"

Donovan dropped the paper bag and the bottle, which crashed noisily on the concrete floor.

"Doorman! Don't let anyone out of this place or I'll have your neck! Where's the electrician? Get those lights fixed."

He stared in the general direction of the corridor to Royden's dressing-room.

"Donovan!" Royden shouted. *"Donovan!"*

Someone bumped into Donovan, cried out. He thought it was Gaunt, but he couldn't be sure. The woman was steadily, rhythmically screaming now. Donovan staggered into a pile of flats, got his bearings, hurried along the corridor.

Then, just as he was a step or two from Royden's door, the lights came up. The odor of cordite was definite.

In the doorway he stopped in his tracks. Royden stood against the wall at the farthest end of the room. He looked shriveled inside the dressing-gown. He was staring with bulging eyes at something on the floor.

IT was Carla Warlen. She lay face down. Donovan had to hold on hard to keep from turning away. The back of her head had been blasted at close range. There was another wound below the left shoulder-blade. Donovan didn't need to be told she was past help.

Royden began to blubber incoherently. "She went to get cigarettes—someone followed her back. She—she saw them just in time—jumped in front of me to protect. . . . Carla! Carla, darling!"

He stayed where he was, in the corner.

Donovan swung around and was nearly knocked down by Richard Gaunt, who arrived on the run.

"Did they get him?" Gaunt demanded.

"No," said Donovan. And quickly he slapped his hands over Gaunt's clothes. The producer, startled, tried to back away. "Just making sure you weren't heeled. Stand here at this door. Don't let anyone get near Royden."

Gaunt's voice choked in his throat. He had seen Carla. "A d-doctor?" he stammered.

"No use. If anyone gets by you, Gaunt, you'll have the Homicide Squad all over your neck."

Donovan had his mind fixed on just one notion as he ran along the corridor toward the stage door. He wanted to be certain that no one left the theater; but even more important, he wanted to be certain that *no one got in.* Marcia was back at the Royden apartment. She was

GARY LLOYD

due to arrive at the theater any moment. If he could keep her out of this mess, it would go a long way toward making her safe.

He was aware of Ted Havilock, standing in the wings, his face the color of yellow typewriter sheets; the door of a dressing-room opened, and John Taylor looked out. From inside came that steady, rhythmic screaming.

"Shut her up!" Donovan ordered. "She'll have the whole place wacky!"

"Did somebody get Royden?" Taylor asked.

Donovan didn't answer. He darted down the steps to the stage door. The doorman was there, staring up with frightened eyes.

"Anybody try to get out?" Donovan demanded.

"No sir."

"Don't let anyone go. And don't let anyone in except the police. How did you fix the lights so quickly?"

"A fuse blew, sir," said the man. "We've got a separate system in case of something happening during a performance. I switched it on. It only took a minute."

"Good work! Hold the fort here; and no one's to leave. Not Mr. Gaunt, not anyone. Understand?"

"Yes sir."

Donovan turned and hurried into the wings. There was a single bright light burning in the middle of the stage. He vaulted over the pit into the orchestra section, ran up the aisle and on out into the lobby. The box-office man was unconcernedly taking a reservation over the phone.

"Anyone come out of the theater in the last five minutes?"

"You'll have to wait, Mac. Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Put that damn' phone down! This is an emergency."

The man was disconcerted by the sharpness of Donovan's voice. He lowered the phone.

"You see anyone come out of the theater?" Donovan repeated.

"Not lately."

"Okay. Keep your eyes open. Call Inspector Moran at headquarters and tell him to step on it. There's been a shooting, backstage."

"Good God! We've got a sell-out. Did they get Royden?"

"Call Moran, you fat-head! They didn't get Royden—and keep your mouth shut if anyone asks you questions."

Donovan cut back into the theater. There wasn't anything more to do until Moran got there. Nothing except to keep people away from Royden and quiet Lilli Paville, who was still yipping at the top of her lungs. He paused to light a cigarette. His own nerves were worn pretty thin.

IT was then that cold fingers reached out of the darkness and closed over his. He turned as if he'd been struck. In the dim light from the stage he saw Marcia looking up at him.

"Has it happened, Harvard?" she asked in a too-calm voice.

"Marcia!" Donovan felt sudden anger well up in him. "What are you doing here?"

"I—I was sitting in the back of the house. It was restful and quiet. Then I heard the shots, and the lights went out. I—I was too frightened to move. Then you came running. I tried to stop you, but—"

"All right," said Donovan wearily, "all *right!* So we're stuck with it. Moran won't have his gloves on this trip."

Donovan was right. Moran and his men struck the theater like a cyclone about ten minutes later. The little gray detective was no longer mousy. He sizzled and snapped like a high-voltage wire. His first blast was delivered at Donovan.

"Your job was to watch him! You left him!" he accused.

"He had to eat," said Donovan. "He was afraid someone might monkey with his food."

"That's great! He's lucky, but pretty soon there won't be anyone left to take the rap for him. And another thing, when you do a job, Donovan, why don't you do it?"

"Come again."

"You blocked off the stage door, and you blocked off the front entrance; but on the left of the stage is a fire exit onto the street. It was wide open to air out the theater. The whole damned communist party could have come in and out with nobody to stop 'em."

"Take it easy," Donovan said. "It wasn't over two minutes from the time the lights went out and the shots were fired, till the lights came on again. If anyone used that exit to leave Royden's dressing-room, they had to get clean across the stage in that time."

"A hundred and fifty feet," said Moran impatiently. "I could do it backward."

"You'd have to know your way in the dark."

"If I worked around here, I would, wouldn't I?"

"Besides, Gaunt and Havilock were on the stage."

"*They* say."

Moran had pushed everyone around in a hurry. Both tiers of dressing-rooms were occupied, and a man stationed outside each door. Royden, chattering with fright, had been taken from his own room, where the Headquarters experts were at work, and put in one adjoining. Lilli Paville and her husband were together. Havilock, Gaunt and Marcia were on the upper tier. Other actors in the company who had not been involved in the first killing were herded together in the green-room.

"DOES this mean we don't ring up tonight?" Gaunt asked, as Moran and Donovan entered his cubicle.

"I don't know," said Moran. "There's an hour before you're due to go. From the looks of Royden he won't be much use to you, even if we permit it. Hell, you can't blame him. He's playing the part of a clay pigeon at the moment!"

"The whole thing is unbelievable," Gaunt said.

"Yeah; sure," said Moran. "Donovan tells me you and Havilock were on the stage when he went to buy Royden's food. Did you stay there all the time till the lights blew?"

"I was afraid you'd ask that," Gaunt said. "I didn't. I went out through the theater to leave some instructions at the box-office. I came back, climbed up onto the stage and had just got into the wings when it happened."

"Was Havilock on the stage when you came back?"

"I hate to get Ted in trouble," Gaunt said, "but the truth is, I didn't *see* him. He's stage manager. His job is to arrange props and see that everything is in order. He could have been almost anywhere back of the set. But I didn't actually *see* him."

"Did you talk to the box-office man?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"A matter of seconds. It was about some seats I wanted left. I came straight back into the theater."

"You know how the electric system works in this house?" Moran asked.

"Yes."

"That's all for now," Moran said, and walked out.

TED HAVILOCK sat on a straight chair in the corner of a dressing-room. His arms hung down between his knees. His face looked blank and bewildered.

"I didn't do it," he said in a dull voice.

"You were on the stage when the lights went out?"

"Yes—or around there somewhere."

"There's a difference!"

"I—I was just in back of the set by the center entrance. I was arranging some things on the property table."

"Did anyone pass you headed for the fire exit?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. They could have gone straight through the set without my knowing. I—I was scared when I heard the gun. I might not have noticed."

Donovan spoke up. "Havilock was on the stage when I left Royden," he said, "and he was on the stage about a minute after the lights came back on. I saw him standing there."

"He could have crawled from Royden's dressing-room on his hands and knees in a minute!" said Moran.

Havilock shook his head. "I didn't do it."

"You hate Royden," said Moran. "He's kicked you around for years."

"Yes," said Havilock slowly, "I hate him. But I didn't do it."

"Where did you get the gun?" Moran demanded.

Havilock looked up at the Inspector. "Really," he said, "—really it won't do you any good to be tough, Inspector. I don't know what happened. I didn't see anyone who might have done it. I didn't do it myself."

"You understand the electric system here?"

Havilock nodded. "I've worked out all the light cues with the electrician. I know all about it. But I—"

"—didn't do it," Moran finished.

LILLI PAVILLE was stretched out on a cot in her dressing-room. Her husband, John Taylor, was sitting on the edge of it beside her. There was a wet towel over Lilli's forehead. Taylor stood up as Moran and Donovan came in.

"Gentlemen, my wife is in no condition to see you now," he said. "She is very close to collapse."

"You aren't sick, are you?" Moran said unpleasantly.

"No. I'll be glad to answer questions. But can't we go somewhere else?"

"I like it here," said Moran. "Where were you, Taylor, when the shots were fired?"

Taylor moistened his lips. "I—I was here, with Lilli," he said after a decided pause.

"Let's start over," said Moran.

"I tell you, Inspector—"

"You can both answer questions down at Headquarters if you like it better!"

Taylor rumpled his white hair. "We arrived shortly before five," he said. "Lilli was upset, naturally. We planned to have supper here. I was in this room every second, Inspector, until—well, until just before it happened."

"That's better," said Moran.

"I went looking for Havilock. Lilli was worried about one of her first-act props. It hadn't been in the right place on opening night."

"Did you find Havilock?"

"No-o. He wasn't on the set itself. I was going around back when the lights went out and—and—"

"What did you do then?"

"I guess I must have frozen where I was. Then I heard Lilli scream. I started back toward her dressing-room. I heard Mr. Donovan shouting. Then I bumped into someone that I thought *was* Mr. Donovan. I had just reached the door of this room when the lights came on again; I've been in here ever since."

"Where was your wife when you came into the dressing-room?"

"She was by the open door. When she heard all the commotion, and the lights went out, naturally she started to see what it was."

"Naturally," said Moran. He sounded sour. "You anything to add to that story, Miss Paville?"

Lilli opened her eyes. They were bloodshot and swollen from crying. "It's as John says. I—I was lying here when it happened. I got up and ran for the door. Then John was there, and I—I guess I must have become hysterical. I—"

"Skip it," said Moran. "I know the words by heart."

One of Moran's men called as they stepped out into the corridor again. With him near the stage door were Harold Caldredge and Gary Lloyd. Lloyd broke away from the detective's restraining grip.

"Where's Marcia?" he wanted to know.

"I let 'em in, Chief, because you said anyone who was at the party last night."

"Okay," said Moran. "And stop shouting, Lloyd!"

"Where's Marcia? You can't keep her shut away! Good God, you can't treat a sensitive woman like some kind of a thug! She needs me."

"Where have you been for the last half-hour?" Moran asked.

"It's tragic, Inspector," drawled Caldredge, "but I'm afraid we're in the clear. Lloyd and I have been drinking in the Astor bar for nearly an hour. One of the best indoor sports. I can recommend it to you. We just heard the news when we got here."

"You were together all that time? Neither one of you left the other alone?"

"UNFORTUNATELY, no," said Caldredge. "It narrows down the field, doesn't it? Rather too bad. I had hoped all would be confusion until our friend, whoever he is, improved on his aim."

"Take these two monkeys away out of my hair," ordered Moran. "Have someone check their story at the Astor."

"Right, Chief."

"I'm going to see Marcia," said Lloyd, his jaw jutting forward. "I've got a legal right to."

"Go on," said Moran, massaging the knuckles of his right hand. "It would help, the way I feel, if somebody got ugly." He sighed as the plainclothes man led Lloyd and Caldredge away.

"That *does* narrow the field," said Donovan. "Gaunt, Havilock, Lilli, Taylor."

"You make me sick," said Moran. "You've been trying to cover up for that Royden dame from the beginning. Well, let's see if she can take it. And I'll have you deported too if you stick in your ten cents' worth; don't forget it."

MARCIA was standing by the window of the dressing-room which looked out on the blank wall of an adjoining theater. She turned as they came in. Donovan saw that she was pale, but her calm was still with her. He walked past Moran to her side.

"All right, Marcia?" he asked.

"All right, Harvard."

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks."

"Sorry I can't offer to serve you afternoon tea," said Moran.

"You've found out something, Inspector?"

"Plenty of nothing," said Moran. "But maybe I started at the wrong end."

"I don't think I understand."

"It's time," said Moran, "that you and I let our hair down, Mrs. Royden. The same person who muffed the poison job made this second attempt. *And I know where the poison came from!*"

"You know!"

"I know. And I've got what's left of it! I guess I was suckered like Donovan here. I knew everybody at the party had probably been in that bathroom at some point during the evening. I thought anybody might have taken it. I figured it was left there to frame you, and I was waiting for somebody to pull a boner. Well, the only boner pulled was mine! By trying to play smart, I let someone else get knocked off. What did you do with the gun, Mrs. Royden?"

"The gun?"

"The gun you missed your husband with and killed Miss Warlen instead?"

Marcia's hand was quite steady as she raised the cigarette to her lips. "I don't own a gun, Inspector; I have never fired one in my life; I was sitting at the back of the theater when the shooting took place."

"Listen," said Moran, almost persuasively. "You had the poison. You had easy access to that bottle of your husband's. You *knew it was tea,* and that he wouldn't let anyone else have a drink from it. You knew it would be a cinch to get him that way. You could have taken his keys after he was asleep. Hell, I can nail you to the cross with that evidence, Mrs. Royden. All I need now is to find out where you got the gun, and what you did with it after you accidentally killed Miss Warlen."

"I don't think I'd answer any more questions," said Donovan. "He's admitted himself that anyone else could have taken the poison."

"I warned you, Donovan," Moran said.

Marcia reached out her hand to Donovan's sleeve. "Thanks anyway, Harvard," she said. "But I'm not afraid. I never had a gun, Inspector, and I didn't use one tonight."

"You were sitting back in the orchestra, eh? Anyone see you?"

"I don't know," said Marcia. "Just before the shots Mr. Gaunt came up the aisle and went to the box-office. He came back almost at once, and went on the stage again. He may have seen me. Then it went dark and I heard the reports. A few moments after the lights came on, Mr. Donovan ran up through the orchestra and went toward the front of the house. When he came back, I spoke to him."

"IT checks, Moran," said Donovan. "She couldn't have seen Gaunt if she'd been somewhere else."

"Why not? She could have seen Gaunt from the stage, and then got out into the orchestra before you turned up. *After* she had done the shooting."

"You seem to think everyone is a star sprinter!" Donovan said.

"The murderer didn't let any daisies grow," said Moran.

"Why not ask Gaunt?" Donovan persisted. "Maybe he saw Marcia."

Moran scowled at him. "Okay," he said. "*I'll* ask him—*my* way. Understand?"

Donovan understood. He turned to Marcia. "Keep your head up," he said, and followed Moran out of the room.

Gaunt was looking at his watch when they rejoined him. "How about the performance, Inspector?"

"The hell with that. I want to ask you something. When you left the stage and walked up the aisle, did you notice anyone sitting in one of the orchestra seats?"

Gaunt frowned. "Yes—yes, I did," he said.

A grin began to spread on Donovan's face.

"Who was it?" Moran asked.

"Well—the house was only dimly lit, but I *thought* it was Marcia."

"Nice work," said Donovan.

"You speak to her?" Moran asked.

"No. She was sitting nearer the far aisle. I had my mind on other things."

"Was she there when you came back from the box-office?" Moran sounded hopeful.

"Yes—yes, she was still there. Mind you, I'm not dead certain it was Marcia. But that was my impression."

"How do you like that for apples, Moran?" Donovan asked.

Moran rubbed his bristling chin. "I don't like it a damn' bit," he said.

"ABOUT the performance—" Gaunt said.

Moran hesitated. "If you want to use your understudies for Havilock and the Paville dame, and Royden can make it, okay. But you and every other suspect in this case has got a date with me!"

Donovan felt a grudging admiration for Robert Royden that night. The performance went on. Donovan stood at the actor's side in the wings, waiting for entrance cues. Royden was in a state of terror. Every movement behind him, every sound, had him clutching Donovan's arm. But when he stepped out on the stage, there was not a sign of what he felt. The whole company, nervous at first, was pulled together by his assurance and skill. When the final curtain fell, he drew an ovation from an audience that knew something of the strain under which he had performed. The story of Strega's death was, of course, plastered over all the newspapers.

Donovan went back with Royden to the dressing-room, promising the actor he would not move from the door until Royden was ready to go home.

Then Moran appeared, looking very tired.

"I let the whole flock of 'em go," he said.

"What do we do?" Donovan asked. "Start over?"

"We play cagey," said Moran. "We take this guy home and put him to bed, with a sleeping-powder if necessary, so he won't bother us. Then we wait."

"What for?" said Donovan.

Moran rubbed his chin. "I'm dammed if I know," he said. "I wish I did."

Royden knocked on the door and said he was ready to leave. Donovan told him to open up. Royden unlocked the door and opened it about six inches.

"Where is everybody?" he demanded.

"Everybody is being watched," Donovan said. "Moran and I are going to take you home. It's safe. Quite."

Royden came out. His coat-collar turned up and his hat-brim pulled down almost concealed his face, gray with fatigue.

"I've a police car outside, Mr. Royden," Moran said.

Donovan and Moran walked on each side of the actor out through the stage door to the car waiting at the curb. A detachment of uniformed cops held back a curious crowd of spectators.

Royden sat between his two protectors as the car swept away from the theater. His chin was sunk forward on his chest. His tapering hands, encased in chamois gloves, twisted in his lap.

"I don't know how I got through tonight," he said. "I don't know how I did it."

"It took guts," Donovan conceded.

"Guts!" Royden laughed. "You don't know what guts are till you get on the spot. You don't know who your friends are till there's a show-down. Do you realize that Carla gave her life to save me? She just got a glimpse of that maniac, and literally threw herself on me to protect me."

"Instinctive," said Donovan.

"Of course it was instinctive! It means that deep down, Carla had never stopped loving me. It means that while my precious wife and my other so-called friends were completely indifferent, *she* was willing to give her life for me. She told me, when you went out, Donovan, that she had some premonition of danger. She told me that. I thought she was just being dramatic. God!"

MORAN shook his head. "It doesn't seem possible you couldn't get a glimpse of your attacker, Mr. Royden. The lights didn't go out till after he'd shot."

"Carla saw him in the corridor, as she was coming back with the cigarettes," Royden said. "She screamed and ran to me—she was between me and the door. Then the shots came. I ducked; instinct again. Then it was dark. I felt Carla, slipping out of my arms. I—" He stopped, his voice shaken.

"What I don't understand is how the murderer shorted the light system from where he was. He had to do it, then get out of the corridor unseen," Donovan said.

"Kid trick," said Moran. "Penny in the light-socket just outside the door. All he had to do was give the bulb a twist to make contact. Prepared ahead of time." He leaned forward and tapped on the window. "Pull up at that drug-store on the corner."

As the car came to a stop, Moran said: "Mr. Royden, I'm going to get you some sort of sleeping-medicine. Do you want to come with me so you can see with your own eyes it's not tampered with?"

Royden laughed, a desperate sound. "If I can't trust you, Moran, I'm as good as dead now!"

They got Royden home, doped him to the eyes, and saw him in bed. Before Royden would touch the sleeping-medicine, he exacted a promise from Donovan to lock the doors to his room, and to look in on him every fifteen minutes. Moran and Donovan agreed to stand watch between them. One of them would be awake and on guard throughout the night. Donovan sat in darkness in the actor's room until Royden fell asleep. Then he tiptoed out, locking the hall door and the connecting door into his own room.

As he started for the living-room, he saw a light shining under the crack of the door to Marcia's room. He knocked.

"Come in."

Marcia was sitting up in bed, wearing a white wool bed-jacket. She put down a book across her knees.

"You're all right?" he asked.

"As right as you could expect," she said. "Robert?"

"Asleep. We've given him some dope. He'll be quiet until morning."

"You're guarding him?"

"Every instant."

A faint shudder shook Marcia's shoulders. "It's horrible, Harvard: knowing that there is someone waiting—waiting for another chance."

"They're not going to get it," he assured her.

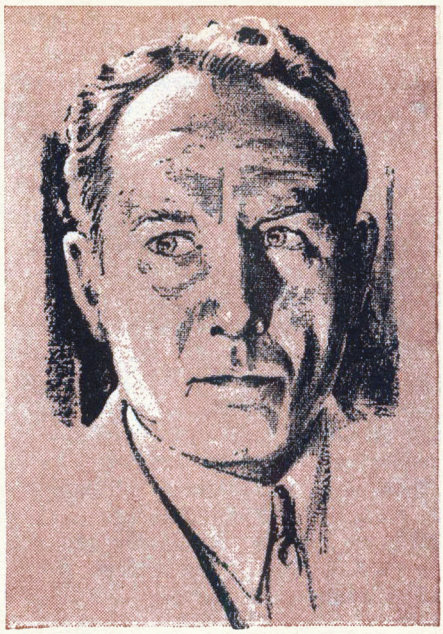
"Harvard, *who is it?*"

"I wish I knew, Marcia. But we'll get him." He looked at her intently for a moment. "And when we do, you've got to get out of this. You can't stay tied to Royden. There must be some other way to help your family."

"You know about them?"

"Carla told me."

"Carla! You know, Harvard, I've been unfair to her. I didn't understand how she felt about Robert. God knows this proved it."



RICHARD GAUNT

"Don't think about it," Donovan said. "Maybe you ought to take something to make you sleep, too."

She shook her head.

"Then turn out the light and try to rest. You don't know how done-in you are."

"I'll try," she said.

"And you'll let me help you when this is all over?"

"You're very sweet, Harvard," she said.

It was only when he got out into the hall again that Donovan realized she hadn't really answered him. . . .

Moran agreed to stand the first watch. Donovan went to his own room, took a look at Royden, and then lay down on his bed without undressing. He thought he would sleep. He was tired enough. But for some reason his eyes stayed open. Everything that had happened in the last twenty hours went round and round in his head, now in sequence, now disconnected. Who had taken the poison the night before? Where was the gun? Moran's men had practically torn the theater apart to find it. Was it Gaunt or John Taylor he had bumped into in the dark, just after the shots were fired? Poison! "A woman's way to kill!" Cayle had said. There was only one woman in the picture, if you eliminated Marcia. And he had to eliminate her. Lilli Paville! She could have fired the shot and short-circuited the lights while her husband was hunting for Havilock. Per-

haps she and Taylor were in on it together. He'd mention it to Moran.

Whether he dozed for a few moments, Donovan couldn't be certain, but suddenly every nerve in his body was drawn tight. He had heard a sound—the sound of a board creaking in the hallway. Not Moran! For at that moment he heard Moran cough, back in the living-room.

Another step, coming closer to the door of his room.

Cautiously Donovan swung his feet to the floor. He stood up. He felt for his gun, and realized that he had taken it out of his hip pocket and placed it on the table on the other side of the bed.

Whoever it was in the hall was just outside the door. Donovan tensed himself. Then made a dash for it, at the same time shouting for Moran at the top of his voice. He collided with the prowler and brought him down with a hard tackle, pinioning his arms. There was a startled cry, and then the light-switch clicked.

"Okay, Donovan," Moran said. "I've got him covered."

DONOVAN looked down at his captive. It was Richard Gaunt.

"Frisk him," Moran ordered.

Kneeling beside Gaunt, Donovan went over him for the second time that night. The producer was still unarmed.

"Nothing," Donovan said.

"Okay," said Moran. "Into the living-room, Mr. Gaunt. I've been just dying for someone to talk to!"

Gaunt, still shaken by his fall, followed the detective into the living-room, with Donovan bringing up the rear.

"I can explain this, Inspector," Gaunt said.

"Sure you can," said Moran. "It ought to be easy—sneaking in, in the middle of the night like a second-story worker. There ought to be a million simple answers. Well, all I want is *one* of em!"

"I came to see Robert," Gaunt began. "I—"

"How did you get in?"

"I have a key."

"That's great," said Moran. "Donovan, telephone Headquarters for them to send a couple of the boys up after a prisoner. We might as well have a little action while Mr. Gaunt entertains us."

Donovan picked up the phone.

"I rented this apartment for the Roydens before they came on from Hollywood," Gaunt said. "I was in and out then, seeing that everything was ready for them. I had a key. I never gave it up."

"Fine," said Moran. "You figured you'd have a use for it."

"I never thought about it at all," Gaunt said. "Naturally, I'm worried about Robert. I decided to see him tonight if he was still up. I'd made up my mind that it was asking too much of him to continue with the play till this thing was over."

"That's mighty generous of you," said Moran. "Especially with Cayle's twenty-five grand to save your hide. So you came to see Royden; you sneak in without making a sound; you tiptoe down the hall in the pitch dark. Do you always impersonate the *Shadow* when you call on your friends?"

Gaunt was in a corner, but his voice was perfectly controlled. "I have no intention of holding Cayle to the bet," he said. "I was asking for odds against Robert's having a tantrum. I didn't dream we were about to be confronted with murder. As for my coming in quietly without turning on the lights, I didn't want to disturb Robert if he was asleep. He's had a tough night."

"Aint he the thoughtful one," said Moran sourly. Just then the front doorbell rang. "Say, that's quick work. Let 'em in, will you, Donovan?"

Donovan went to the front door and opened it. It wasn't the cops. It was Cayle, his huge bulk blotting out the hallway.

"Hello, Harvard."

"You're just in time," Donovan said. "Moran's making a pinch."

Cayle's eyebrows went up. "So he got onto it, eh?" He walked past Donovan into the living-room. He gave Gaunt a puzzled look. Moran was jubilant.

"I guess we've got our man, Danny," he said.

"Gaunt?"

"In person," said Moran.

CAYLE eased himself into an armchair with a sigh. "Why did you do it, Gaunt?" he asked.

"I didn't do it," Gaunt said. "I came here to see Robert. Moran thinks it is suspicious because I had a key, and because I didn't turn on the hall light. I didn't want to disturb Robert if he was resting."

"Why does *Moran* say you did it?" Cayle asked.

"We'll get the motive out of him," Moran said, "at headquarters."

Cayle stared thoughtfully at Moran. From his pocket he took a pack of cards and began to shuffle them. It was a characteristic gesture. When he wasn't eating, out came the cards. Those pudgy fingers, lightning-quick, were never allowed to get out of practice. Unwillingly the three men watched as Cayle accordioned the deck from one hand to the other. The fluttering cards seemed to have an hypnotic effect on Moran. He waited for Cayle to speak. But the silence was broken from the other end of the room.

"Richard!"

MARCIA stood in the doorway. Gaunt crossed quickly to her.

"I heard the commotion," Marcia said. "What's happened, Richard? What is it?"

"I came to see Robert," Gaunt said. "I let myself in with my key. I didn't want to disturb Robert if he was sleeping, so I didn't turn up the lights. Moran thinks that I—that I came here to—"

"I think I've got the murderer, Mrs. Royden," Moran said.

"But that's ridiculous, Inspector!" Marcia said. "Richard's like one of the family. There's no reason why he shouldn't have let himself in at any time he chose."

Cayle looked at Marcia and Gaunt. "Motive," he said. "Motive, Moran."

"The hell with it," said Moran. "He had opportunity in both the killings. He came sneaking back here tonight to finish off the job he'd muffed twice before. He insured himself against loss by his cock-eyed bet with you. It fits perfectly."

"I've already told Moran I don't consider our bet binding, Cayle," Gaunt said. "Under the circumstances—"

"I made the bet," said Cayle. "I considered all the angles. It stands." He looked at Moran. "I hope you aren't going to give up guarding Royden. Until you've proved your case, I'd like to feel there was some chance of saving my money."

Moran was annoyed. "You don't have to pay your bet. Not with Gaunt deliberately pulling one on you."

"But Gaunt hasn't pulled one," said Cayle, his fingers riffling the cards.

"Listen," Moran said. "If you've got evidence, spill it."

Cayle looked at the Inspector thoughtfully. He was about to reply, when they all heard Royden hammering on his door.

"Donovan!"

"Might as well let him join the party," said Moran. "He ought to be interested in your revelations, Cayle."

Donovan went down the hall, and Royden unlocked the door when he was assured that everything was all right.

"Sounds like a political convention," he said. "Woke me up, dope and all. What's doing?"

"Moran is about to make an arrest. Cayle is trying to persuade him he's making a mistake."

"An arrest, eh? Who?"

"Gaunt."

"So it's Richard!" Royden sounded genuinely surprised. "Why, the heel!"

He made quite an entrance. He walked straight up to Gaunt. "So I have you to thank for all this hell, Richard! By God, I should have guessed it!"

"Don't be an ass, Robert," Gaunt said.

"That's sound advice, Richard. It would seem to be about time I did some house-cleaning among my so-called friends." He never once looked at Marcia. "Well, Inspector, where are the handcuffs? They should be very becoming on Richard."

"IF you're going to stay in here, Royden, shut up and listen. Cayle's about to dish up some new evidence."

Cayle looked at Moran. That peculiar dead-pan squint that gamblers get from working under bright lights all their lives came over his face. "I haven't got evidence. Not yet," he said. "But I can demonstrate the theory on which the murderer is working."

Moran snorted. "You're like everyone else who gets mixed up with a crime, Cayle. You think you're smarter than the cops. If you've got something to tell me, do it and let me figure it out. We know how it was done. Somebody poisoned Royden's liquor and then took a shot at him. That's how it was done!"

"The murderer's been fooling you," said Cayle. He reached out and pulled a little end-table around in front of him. "Can you detect a bottom deal, Moran?"

"Sure I can."

"All right. Call the ones off the bottom," Cayle said. His fingers began to fly as he dealt the cards, as if for a hand of bridge.

Donovan looked at Moran, at Marcia, at Gaunt, and then back to Cayle. This, he thought, was insane. Card-tricks while a man was waiting to be taken to headquarters to be charged with murder!

"Well, call 'em," said Cayle.

Donovan watched Cayle's fingers, frowning.

"That beats me," Moran said.

"Cleverest thing I ever saw," said Royden.

"All right," said Cayle, "I'll call 'em for you this time." He gave Donovan a quick sidelong glance as he picked up the cards and reshuffled. Then he dealt again, calling them as they fell. "Top, top, bottom, top, top, bottom, bottom, top, top, top, bottom, top—"

Moran shook his head. "Even when you call 'em, I can't see it. But what's it supposed to prove?"

"It's supposed to show you," said Cayle, "how the murderer has fooled you."

Donovan felt a prickling sensation at the base of his neck. He had seen Cayle work a thousand times. He knew what to watch for. The screwy thing about it was that Cayle had been deliberately fooling Moran. *On neither deal had he slipped a single card off the bottom of the deck.* He had told Moran he was bottom-dealing, and Moran had believed it. But actually every card had been dealt from the top of the deck.

Cayle looked at Donovan as he picked up the cards and slipped them back in his pocket. "Get the idea, Harvard?"

"No."

"Think about it," Cayle advised.

THE front doorbell rang. Two plain-clothes men were there for Gaunt. Moran, looking less happy about things, ordered the producer held as a material witness. The murder charge, he said, would come later.

Marcia spoke to Cayle.

"Will you go with Richard, Mr. Cayle? He'll need a lawyer—someone to arrange bail."

Cayle slowly smiled as he reached out a huge paw and patted Marcia's shoulder. "I'll go with him," he said. "Don't worry. There may be a little thinking done in the right direction before long." He gave Moran his slow smile. "The pattern of this crime is just like the pattern of the trick I showed you. When you get it figured out, you'll arrest your real murderer. Meanwhile, for Pete's sake keep a close watch on Royden." He looked at the actor, and there was a cold glint in his eyes. "Somebody beside the murderer might decide to shut him up, just for the hell of it."

Any chance there had been for Donovan to sleep had now disappeared. He took Royden back to his room, mixed him another sleeping-powder, locked the doors and stretched out on his own bed again. He lay there, staring up through the darkness at the ceiling, trying to figure what Cayle had been driving at.

Once before, in a tight spot, Cayle had tried to tell Donovan something by the manipulation of cards, and Donovan had muffed it. Cayle hadn't wanted to talk, for some reason. He had resorted to the hocus-pocus with the cards as a means of getting something across to Donovan.

"The pattern of this crime is like the pattern of the trick I just showed you."

Donovan pressed his hands against aching temples. Why the flim-flammery? What was there about the crime that appeared to be one thing, which might actually be something else entirely? Something that appeared to be one thing—but was actually the reverse.

DONOVAN sat bolt upright in bed. His throat was suddenly dry. He felt beads of sweat standing on his forehead. He sprang to his feet and unlocked the door into Royden's room. He went in, bent over the actor. Royden's breathing was deep and regular. He tiptoed to the other door and made certain it was locked. Then he went back to his own room, relocking the connecting door again.

He walked down the hall to the living-room. Moran looked up from where he was sitting by the table. He was fooling with a deck of cards. He looked like a small boy caught stealing jam.

"It beats me how he does that," he said. "I couldn't learn it in a thousand years."

Donovan cleared his throat in an effort to make his voice sound natural. "You better get some sleep," he said. "I can't make it myself. I'd just as soon stand guard."

"Sure?"

"Positive," Donovan said.

Moran stretched and yawned. "Okay. I won't have any trouble myself. Use your room?"

"Right."

Moran went out. Donovan heard him go along the hall, heard the thud of his shoes as he removed them and dropped them on the floor, heard the squeak of the bed as he stretched out. He waited for what seemed hours before he heard Moran's choking snore.

Quickly he tiptoed down the hall to Marcia's room. Her light was out now.

He opened the door, stepped inside, and closed it behind him. He fumbled for the light-switch. As the lights went on, Marcia sat up, with a startled cry.

"Sorry to frighten you," Donovan said. He crossed over to the bed and looked down at her. "You trust me, don't you?"

"Why, yes, Harvard. What is it?"

"I want you to do exactly what I say. No questions."

"What is it?" she repeated.

"I want you to get up and get dressed. I want you to leave this apartment at once and go to some hotel. I don't want you to tell anyone but me or Danny Cayle where you are. And once you're installed, I want you to stay there until I tell you you can leave."

"But Harvard—"

"No questions," he said. "You promised. I want you to be out of here just as quickly as you possibly can. Have you ever stayed at the Farragut?"

"No."

"They don't know you there?"

"No."

"Then register under your maiden name—or any other name but Royden. We don't want newspaper men catching up with you. Now, will you get moving at once? I wouldn't ask you to do this, if I didn't think it was vital to your safety."

"*My* safety?"

"Your safety," Donovan said, grimly.

IT was ten o'clock in the morning.

Donovan, red-eyed from lack of sleep, sat in an armchair in the living-room, an ash-tray heaped with butts at his elbow. The lines at the corners of his eyes and mouth seemed to have deepened during his long vigil.

From down the hall came the sound of Royden, pounding on his door.

"Donovan!"

Donovan pulled himself up out of the chair. He went to the door of Royden's room.

"Hello," he said.

"What about breakfast?" Royden said.

"You can open your door," Donovan said. "We're the only ones here."

Royden opened the door. He had shaved before calling Donovan. He wore a silk dressing-gown over his pajamas, a white scarf knotted Ascot fashion at his throat.

"How do you feel?" Donovan asked.

"Pretty good," said the actor. "That stuff really got me some sleep. You look as though you'd had a rough time."

JOHN TAYLOR

"No sleep," grumbled Donovan.

"You're not blaming yourself for what happened to Carla? You mustn't. Nobody could figure on such recklessness. No one could have expected a poisoner to turn gunman."

"I should have," said Donovan. "I should have covered every angle."

Royden produced and lighted a cigarette. "When a man gets the kind of break from fate that I have in the last thirty-six hours, you wonder what the pay off is going to be. I've been lucky, in a way. I've lost two good friends—but I'm still here. It'll even up. It always does. I'll have to pay in some way for that luck."

"I'm not a fatalist, personally," said Donovan.

Royden leaned forward. "Do you or Moran really *know* anything? I mean, the field is limited, but if you don't get your man, I might better be locked up in jail, under guard."

Donovan said: "You might help, Royden."

"How, in heaven's name?"

"Motive," said Donovan. "We've been given motives, plenty of them; all very personal. But do any of these people have a motive that we don't know about? It's no time to hide anything, Royden, even though it makes you look bad. A little mud on your character would be better than dying, wouldn't it?"

"I don't understand what you're getting at," Royden said slowly.

"When you plan to murder someone the provocation must be terrific. Have any of these people a reason to want you out of the way stronger than jealousy, or some petty professional grievance?"

"For example?"

"It's occurred to me that you might be holding something over one of them; that one of them might have to kill you to preserve his own liberty, his life perhaps."

"That's sheer nonsense," said Royden. "However,"—and he looked straight at Donovan,—"Marcia would be a very rich woman if I were to die."

"Would she?" said Donovan. "Cayle's been making some inquiries about your finances while you were asleep this morning. He was surprised to find that in spite of all the dough you've cleaned up in the last few years, your assets are comparatively small."

COLOR mounted in Royden's cheeks. "He had no right to do that! Damned impertinent, I call it."

"It's interesting," said Donovan, "that both you and Carla Warlen *stressed* this inheritance that would come to Marcia if you died. You, at least, know that's poppycock."

Royden's voice flared angrily. "Why the devil are you cross-questioning me?" he demanded. "I'm the one who's in danger!"

"Are you?" said Donovan.

There was a moment of dead silence. In it, the traveling-clock on the desk-table seemed to tick loudly.

"Just what do you mean by that?" said Royden. The cigarette bobbed between his lips. He still leaned back, his hands sunk in the pockets of his dressing-gown.

"Have you ever interested yourself in sleight-of-hand or card tricks?" Donovan asked.

"No."

"They're all founded on one basic principle," said Donovan. "You make the observer think you're doing one thing, while actually you're doing another. You make him concentrate on your right hand, while you are really doing the trick with your left."

"Would you mind," said Royden, "telling me what you're getting at?"

"Not at all," Donovan said, very quietly. "We've all been concentrating on an obvious fact—the fact that someone is out to get you, and that you have been lucky enough to escape two attempts. We have seen all this happen; we have believed that the murderer has blundered twice."

"Well?"

"That was the illusion, Royden. The thing that the right hand was doing while the left hand was actually performing the trick."

"What kind of damned riddle is this?"

"No riddle at all," said Donovan. "I'm simply pointing out to you that the murderer is a clever illusionist. He has made us believe that one thing was happening, when actually something else was happening, all the time."

Royden stood up, glowering down at Donovan, who didn't move. "Would you say that in words of one syllable?"

"Sure. Sure I will, Royden. We were led to believe that the murderer was after you and made two mistakes. Actually no mistakes were made at all. Strega was *meant* to die. Carla was *meant* to die. All the motives we've been dealing with were hogwash, because they had to do with reasons for killing you. What we need is the motive for killing Strega and Carla Warlen. What was it, Royden—blackmail?"

"I think you've gone mad," said Royden.

"Let's say it was blackmail," said Donovan, calmly. "You had access to that poison. You had egged Strega into taking a drink from your private bottle. He fell for it. That got him out of the way. Then you sent me for sandwiches. You had Carla alone. You short-circuited the lights yourself and shot her. Shot her as she was running for her life! Shot her in the back! And then you did one of the best pieces of acting in your career. We were meant to believe someone was after you, and we fell for it."

"And what did I do with the gun?" asked Royden.

"There's only one place," said Donovan, "that no one looked. Why should they? *In your pocket*, Royden! Why should they search you? You were the intended victim!" He knocked the ash from his cigarette. "That's why I blame myself for Carla's death. Because I fell for a trick."

IT was then that the gun came out of Royden's dressing-gown pocket. He leveled it straight at Donovan. A nasty smile twisted his lips.

"There is going to be no illusion about *this*, Mr. Donovan." He laughed. "Another attempt is going to be made on me, and my faithful bodyguard is going to

die in my defense. You've outsmarted yourself, Mr. Gambler. You didn't figure the odds properly."

Donovan got slowly to his feet. "You should never," he said, "use any kind of drug when you want to stay on the ball. I took the shells out of your gun about five o'clock this morning, when you were sound asleep."

He was only two steps from the stunned actor.

"They are going to call this self-defense," said Donovan.

His left shot out and caught Royden squarely in the teeth. His right, traveling a scant six inches, came up underneath, lifted Royden off his feet, and sent him sprawling into the corner, where he lay, head on one side, a trickle of blood running from a corner of his mouth. . . .

Cayle sat behind the flat-topped desk in his office, riffling a deck of cards. Richard Gaunt and Marcia sat opposite him. Donovan stood over by the window, scowling down at Broadway's traffic.

"It has to be blackmail," Cayle said. "When I checked on Strega and the Warlen woman this morning I discovered they had surprising bank balances. The odds were about a hundred to one that they were in cahoots. They were bleeding Royden dry. Whatever it was they held over him would evidently have ruined his professional career.

"Royden couldn't take it any longer. He figured the whole thing out very cleverly. After the opening, when he went to bed, he evidently told Strega to help himself out of the private bottle. Strega fell for it. Royden had taken the poison you had, Mrs. Royden, and he left some of it in your medicine cabinet. It would throw suspicion on you. I think he hoped to get a third bird in the process; you were intended to take the rap."

"But why?" said Gaunt.

"I think he knew, Mr. Gaunt, that Gary Lloyd was not important to Marcia. I think he knew that you were the only man who really counted in her life. He couldn't forgive the blow to his vanity."

Donovan continued to stare out the window. He didn't want to see the way Marcia's hand had slipped into Gaunt's.

"Carla Warlen didn't guess the truth," Cayle continued. "She thought that an attempt had really been made on Royden. She wanted the murderer caught, and caught quickly, because Royden was her meal-ticket. That's why she went to Harvard. She was convinced Marcia was the most likely murderer. She never guessed the truth; not until Royden pulled a gun on her in his dressing-room and it was too late to save herself."

Marcia looked across at Donovan's broad shoulders. "Harvard had guessed the truth when he sent me to the Farragut? He thought Robert might still try to strike at me?"

Cayle chuckled. The cards did a neat accordion pass from one hand to the other. "Harvard had the bulge on Moran after my little demonstration. He knew exactly what I'd done. He's a smart guy. That's why I hire him. I couldn't say what was on my mind, in front of Royden. I had no real evidence then; only a theory. I didn't want to give him any chance to wriggle off the hook."

"It was terribly clever of you, Harvard," Marcia said.

Donovan turned to look at her and Gaunt. "I take it you really came to the apartment last night to see Marcia," he said to the producer.

Gaunt nodded. "I had a hunch Moran was going to arrest me. I didn't want Marcia caught off guard. I was afraid she'd go out on the limb for me. I didn't dream the truth about Robert. I was only afraid if he learned about Marcia and me, he would make things even worse for her."

The producer stood up, Marcia with him, clinging to his arm. "The bet is off, Cayle," he said. "I simply won't accept payment. I'll take this show on the road with someone else, and after all this publicity I'll clean up with it."

"As long as you don't lose by it I think it's a fair arrangement," Cayle said.

"Good-by, Harvard," Marcia said. "You've been very sweet. I can never tell you how grateful I am."

"Forget it," said Donovan.

They shook hands with Cayle, thanking him for his help, and went out. Cayle played with his cards, glancing under lowered lids at Donovan. Finally Donovan said:

"I ought to find Gary Lloyd and get drunk with him. It looks like we both took a sleigh-ride."

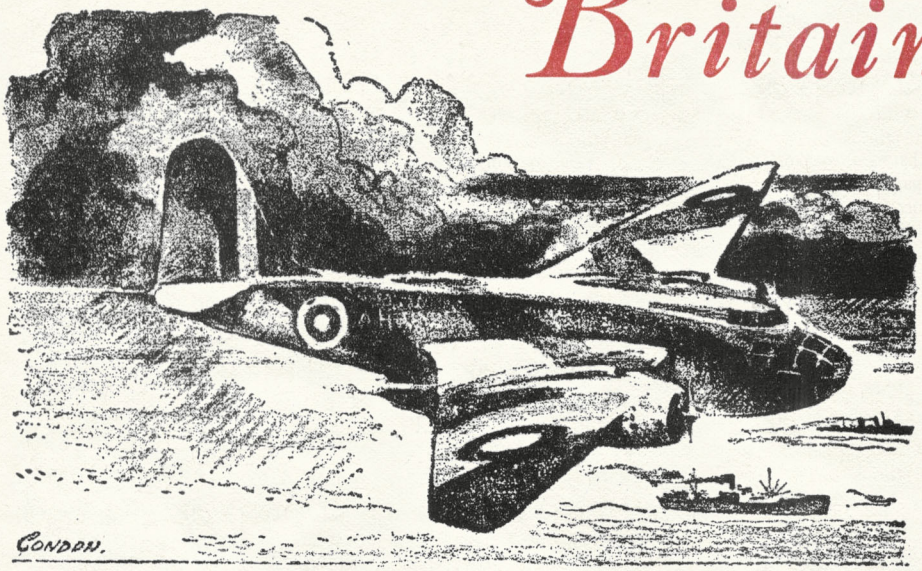
"A smart gambler never puts all his chips on one card," Cayle said.

"Not even a woman?"

Cayle chuckled. "He fixes it so he's got another one to turn to—just in case."

"Death Comes to Life," a murder mystery by Gordon Keyne, will appear in our next issue.

Britain



A DOZEN of us sat around a long table in an underground bomb-proof. Bottles were on the table and glasses were filled—but untouched. I noticed a faraway look in several pairs of eyes and supposed my own were equally blank. It was a look of concentration, of watching, of waiting. Jimmy had not been reported yet.

For the last two hours American bombing-planes had been roaring out of the skies and down for a landing on British soil. Eleven of us had made our contact with the English airdrome, and watched while British mechanics hastily gassed them again, and British ferry pilots flew them away to other fields. This was a landing-field for bombers from America; no other activity went on there, and all planes were whisked away as soon after delivery as they could be serviced.

Eleven of us were down, tired but safe after the transatlantic flight. It had been an uneventful crossing, just monotonous, cold and a problem in navigation. Fog had jammed our route. Rain had given us clear spots, and snow had forced us high into the rarefied air where we had to use oxygen; all but Jimmy had made it, and he was fifteen minutes overdue.

Somewhere in another dugout the navigators and gunners who had made up our crew were turning over papers and passing along information to personnel and intelligence officers.

An officer at one side of the dugout sat with head-phones clamped to his ears. He held up his hand and waved it slowly in a circle and then brought his fingers down. A sigh of relief exploded through the room. Through the detectors he had picked up the sound of Jimmy's motors, and we knew he was circling for a landing. The last ship was making it in—another delivery of bombers successfully completed. The officer spoke into a loud-speaker system, notifying the batteries surrounding the field that an American plane was about to land.

I never got tired of watching their system—neither did I ever understand it. But I knew it worked smoothly, probably because it worked secretly.

Jimmy and his crew came into the dugout. He looked around and silently counted noses. A grin spread over his tired freckled face. "O.K.—I'll buy. I'm last in but I damned near kept on going to Norway, or Davy Jones' locker. Flying too high, I guess."

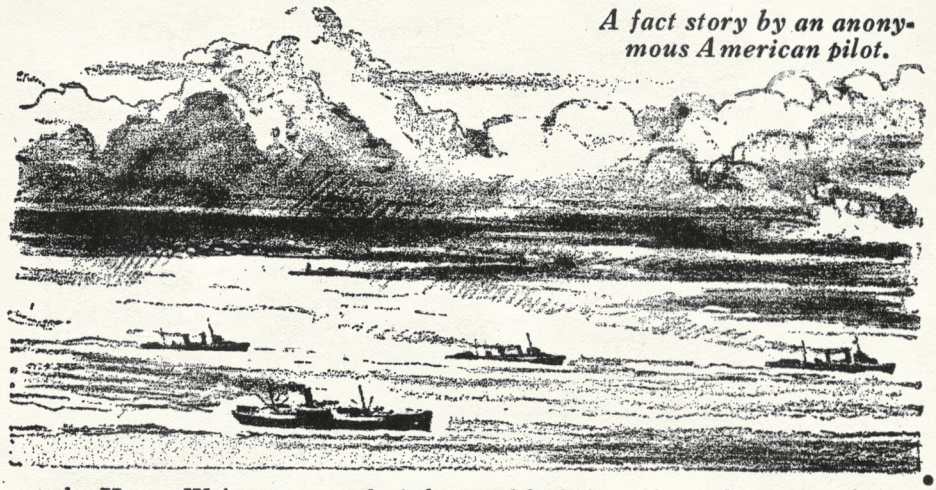
It's hard to describe the let-down that comes after a flight like that. It's not just that you have spanned the Atlantic. It means nothing that we never run into the Jerries. It's more like a game, a dozen or more players, and no game ended until every man is down. So far, we've been lucky, and we have always got down safe. I guess half the trouble is, we're always waiting for the first time and then we'll be wondering and worrying whether it was a forced landing far out on the waters of the bleak Atlantic, or whether some Jerry finally outsmarted one of us and got a burst into the right place. Honestly, I don't think anyone worries much

REAL EX-

(For details of our Real Expe-

Gets Delivery

A fact story by an anonymous American pilot.



about the Huns. We're not exactly helpless and have plenty of tricks up our sleeves. It's like a game of stud poker: a lot depends on the hole card.

Jimmy filled his glass and a hearty toast was drunk; we had been thinking it was to be a silent toast.

A gray-haired Britisher wearing the pip of a lieutenant but whom I was told had been a staff officer during the last war, came in and announced things were ready for us to roll. Old stuff now. We joined up with the navigators and gunners and moved off the field to where a couple of transport busses were waiting, loaded in our duffle-bags and at a word from the Britisher to the drivers, we were off. The windows of the bus were frosted over so there was nothing much to do but loll back in the comfortable seats and rest, and think of the party we'd throw when we got to the embarkation point.

Somewhere we were transferred to light cars and rolled through the streets of a large city, a seaport. We'd been there before and knew what the city was, but names of places are seldom mentioned over there. I noticed more bomb signs as we rolled through the streets, but nothing bad. There were few men to be seen, but women were about with baskets on their arms. Many of them had friends on the ships, and they managed to get an extra bit of food that had been brought in from foreign ports. If it had not been for the rows of anti-aircraft guns spotted around with their uniformed crews, and the piles of sandbags, we would not have been reminded much of the war.

At the hotel our guide told us we'd be taking a boat at mid-morning next day; until then we had the freedom of the city, but must be sure not to go out without our police cards.

A few of our crowd went shopping, searching for little gifts for those back home. Darkness came. We had dinner. A few nips of Scotch perhaps, and then to bed and rest. . . .

Unconsciously an airman will pick up the sound of an airplane motor without realizing it. Hendricks got it first. It had been violently quiet, the dull roar usually heard in a large city conspicuous by its absence. The dark of the blackout deadened such activities as there were.

"Listen!" said Hen, and we stopped our chatter and strained our motor-deadened ears to get what he had heard. "That's a Jerry, sure. Get the throb of the two motors? They don't seem able to get them synchronized. Take the American or the British and the motors purr along as one, but not this one. No, it's a Jerry all right."

Just then the quietness was blasted by a screech that would have made Fullerton's banshee sound like the purring of a Persian kitten. Up and down, shrill, then deepening into a sullen moan that jiggled the bottom of my stomach.

"Let's go to the roof and see the show!" someone shouted and we raced pell-mell down hallways, through doors and upstairs. On every floor we were met by wardens who told us it couldn't be done.

PERIENCES

rience story contest, see page 3.)

Where were our gas-masks? What did we mean running around during a raid without tin hats? "—Oh! Americans!"

There was a watch-tower atop the hotel, and a crew of four. Two were armed with rifles; sandbags were scattered around, and they told us they were to fight fires. Just in case. The siren still roared its deep-throated warning, but it did not sound so bad out in the open. There wasn't a Heinie plane to be heard, but I think that was because the motors were tuned at about the same pitch as the siren. Suddenly about a mile away there was a violent *crump* and a blast of flames. It was a big one, all right; and right after that one there came a string of five or six. The flames didn't die down right away.

Over on our left another series of explosions began to rock the city, and there was a rush of wind as though something had created a vacuum. Searchlights were crisscrossing the sky in every direction. Sometimes a dozen or more lights would concentrate at one spot, and there the bursting anti-aircraft shells would form into a cloud of smoke. Once, way high up —we estimated it to be over twenty thousand feet—there was a violent explosion that told of a bomber getting a direct hit. The firing of the guns, the explosion of their shells and the crashing of bombs was so violent it was difficult for us to tell where the bombs were exploding.

Fires began to flicker over the city. On a roof near by something exploded like a giant pinwheel—a Molotov basket, I suppose. We could see dark shadows flitting about the fires, and in a few minutes they darkened and died—the sand had proved its worth.

Along the docks there was a string of blazes. The blackout was a joke now. Fires lighted the darkness. Searchlights reflected their beams from the clouds and from the smoke of fires. High and low in the heavens floated parachute flares, their blinding light illuminating parts and throwing others into the deepest shadows.

MOST of us were silent in awe. This surely must be the end, for nothing could possibly live through such a terrific burst of explosions. I noticed that the air-raid wardens on the roof were alert but unexcited. Apparently this was an old story to them. I eased over to one of them, and cupping my hand to his ear, shouted: "How does this stack up as a show? Is it the real thing?"

The warden turned toward me, and I remember thinking I was sorry his tin hat shaded his eyes—I'd have liked to have seen their expression. Then a little silvery peal of laughter tingled my ears, and for the first time I realized my air-raid warden was a girl. "Aye, it's the real thing, all right!" she said coolly. "About the worst all-out raid we've had so far. May not last long, though, for the A.A's are sending up a lot of heavy stuff. . . . They're trying for the docks. Look!"

She pointed toward a string of fires—nothing big but wavering as though fanned by a strong wind. I knew this port with its miles of docks and warehouses, probably the most vulnerable for a fire attack of all the British Isles.

Then I heard someone calling my name. Our British guide was rounding us up. Finally he got us down below again, into one of our rooms.

"Get your stuff," he said gruffly. "We're making a run for your boat. She's going to pull out of the harbor to get away from the raid. Hurry!"

WE hustled to our rooms for our bags, and the next act of the raid is a bit difficult to describe. I was just leaving the room, bag in hand, when it felt as though some powerful force had cushioned me in something soft and was forcing me ahead of it. The door of the room was plastered to my back. I tried to put my feet out to brace myself, but I just slid along. Fortunately, I had been moving lengthwise of the hall and not across it. It was like the helpless feeling in an airplane when all your controls go dead. Then there was a sudden let-up of the pressure, and I fell backward as though a support had been removed.

Dazed, I got to my feet and found my bag still clutched in my hand. I heard the Britisher calling somewhere down the hall, but I had difficulty in moving my feet. I looked back to where my room had been. It was still there, but the door was gone—it lay on the floor of the hall where it had fallen with me; that part of my dream had been true. I looked through the doorway, out through what had been the window, and then I realized what had happened. A bomb, no doubt one of the big ones, had caught the outside wing of the hotel. Where it had stood was now space.

Slowly I walked to the ruined window and looked out and down. A floor or two below I could see the outlines of jagged walls, not distinct, for a dust-haze hung over everything. Death had missed us by a very few feet.

Our British guide checked us over like a group of tourists and herded us down the stairway to the ground level. Almost on the run he led us through streets filled with débris. Once on the ground, things did not seem nearly so bad as they had from our vantage point on the hotel roof. Bombs were still crashing, but in the general din it was impossible to tell where they were landing. Once I heard the roar of a German plane and the stutter of its machine-gun as it strafed the street.

Then we crossed a wide stretch of cobblestones, and I knew it faced the harbor front, and on that wide cobblestone way I saw men feeding fires with gasoline, and I realized that they were creating a false water-front for the Germans to bomb, so saving the docks. We raced down a landing stage, where we were halted by a guard until the Britisher identified himself, and us. Men were fighting a small fire upon the dock, and everything was lighted up. We filed down the gangway and onto a boat—what kind of a ship we could not make out; nor did we care.

Once on board, we were left to shift for ourselves. The gangway was cast off, and I think the guy lines were cut; anyway I could feel the pulsations of the propellers, and we were twisting away from the docks. The tide or current seemed to catch the nose of the boat, and we were swung violently around; bells jingled frantically, and we were away into the waters of the harbor.

Something exploded to one side of us. Water rose up like a huge wave and the boat felt as if it were being lifted. Behind us came another explosion. I saw the white wake of a ship ahead of us, the low squat form of an oil tanker. There were more explosions ahead and to the right of our boat. I saw the tanker rise slowly, sluggishly, higher, higher—and then she seemed to turn slowly over, and with a sound like a mighty escape of air, it disappeared from sight.

I knew now what the air-raid-warden had meant when she said they were after the docks. We were ringed with fire bombs. The roar of planes was incessant as they dived to unload their hate with machine-guns and bombs. On our boat a battery of light guns up forward and another aft were boring away at the swooping planes. I think they got one, for there was a mighty splash a hundred yards to one side of us, an explosion, a flash and then burning gasoline spread over the water, making things lighter than ever.

I doubt if ever a ship made faster time out of that harbor. Gradually the sound of planes and bombs died behind us; the light of fires and the haze of light reflected against smoke and clouds became grayer and darker, and finally only a faint glow. By daylight we had left it all far behind, a strong wind was pushing us along, and I heard the skipper say we were in luck, for it was too rough for the subs; and anyway, we'd pick up our escort shortly, and before we knew it, we'd be back and ready for another ferry job.

Ten hours before, we had been waiting at a quiet field, waiting and cussing because this ferrying job was so monotonous. Maybe it's because this is a new kind of a war, or perhaps it's just hard to satisfy some people.

Each Turn of the Trail

Where we see no enemy but winter and rough weather.

By CHARLES NEWTON ELLIOTT

THROUGHOUT the daylight hours Bill and I had climbed. Early dusk found us almost at timber-line, where hardy pioneer trees fought for the very breath of existence. Beyond, the gaunt barren rocks were covered with snow, and a black torrent of wind poured across the forehead of the mountain. Far below us we had left a remnant of Indian summer, with brilliant aspens and alders, with forests of yellow pine. I had been reluctant to leave, but more anxious to cross this howling divide with the old ranger on his fall patrol.

We stopped on a rock shelf, where the last tree dug its claws into meager soil. Below and beyond, the valley dropped into dusky nothingness.

"We'll go back into the timber," Bill said, "and cross the divide in the morn-

ing. I wanted you to see this sight after sundown. Few people have."

I was cold. Wind picked up fine particles of snow and stung my cheeks. I was about to suggest that we hunt cover, when the ranger swung on his heel and stared past me at the last tree which stood above the cliff, against the slope of the mountain. I followed his gaze.

Crouched in the flat forks of the tree was a cub bear. So close against the trunk and motionless it was, that we had not noticed it on our approach to the cliff.

"Grizzly," said Bill between his teeth. I fingered my rifle.

"The old she is somewhere around," the ranger said, "probably getting ready for her winter nap. She's ornery at this time of the year, and I don't want to meet her. Let's get out of here."

HE spoke too late. A bulky shape had appeared on the skyline above us. Against the darkening sky, she stood as huge and formidable as a rogue bull elephant. Above the tones of the wind I could hear her grunt, and then the growling rumble in her throat.

"She hasn't seen us yet," Bill whispered, "but she's winded us. Watch out. I'm going to try and stop her. If she slaps you with one of those big paws, you'll land a full thousand feet below in the spruce."

He pulled the rifle-stock to his cheek. I could see his jaw-muscle tighten, and the steel barrel glint in the dusk. The bark of his gun was flat, like a toy up there on the windy cliff. The huge animal flopped on her side, and then with a roar righted herself and charged.

With almost half a ton of infuriated muscle and claws thundering down upon him, the ranger never for an instant lost his poise. He stood in his tracks and shot again and again, slowly, deliberately, without fear. I threw up my own gun to help check that avalanche of death. I pressed my cheek against the cold stock, trying to find the sights. But in the last fraction of a second before death struck, Bill moved, and I have never seen any living thing move faster. He swept us both to safety against the trunk of the old tree. In a clatter of stones the bear disappeared into the empty void at the cliff's edge. My heart was in my throat, choking me, bringing out beads of sweat on my forehead, but Bill's only comment was: "Poor old devil!"

He roped the cub and turned it loose half a mile below camp in the timber....

Into the lives of most of us have come such moments we have never forgotten. Some are not so dangerous as this, perhaps; but if we think back we shall recall them, just as vivid as the climax of eternity itself. . . .

I had always heard that the Rocky Mountains were rugged and harsh and dominating, that nothing about them was soft or sweet. Yet one of my most graphic memories is a Rocky Mountain valley in the summer twilight.

For fifteen hours we had ridden down a series of plateaus, which had the appearance of a gigantic stairway. The steppes were forested with huge pines, and the spongy forest floor gave forth no sound from the hoofs of our horses.

We had come suddenly, abruptly, to the top of the last steppe. Below us lay a flat, narrow valley, filled with the crash and roar of running water. The entire valley itself was choked with wild roses. The very air was rose-tinted and fragrant. So delightful was the spot that we camped for two weeks upon the shore of the stream. . . .

Out in America's wilderness I have found ticking seconds of eternity that hung by a thread. In the fast-moving drama of life and death, it may appear upon any turn of the wilderness trail.

A few years ago I lived on Isle Royale for almost three months. Those three months witnessed the most destructive forest fire the island has ever experienced. Each day was a dramatic, dangerous twenty-four hours. A sudden shift of wind, an explosion of flames eighty feet high through dead spruce and balsam and white birch, and a hundred C.C.C. fighters might have been trapped between walls of flame. Both the air and the forest were dry, and no one ever knew just exactly where those torches of hell would break next. There was constant vigilance against death, a constant strain on foremen and crews.

DURING the last month, in early fall, when the rains had come and the forests were wet, when the danger was no longer so great, I had an excellent chance to study the island, its fauna and flora and a bit of its history.

The birds, animals and plants were typically northern. Covering the slopes and ridge tops were forests of spruce, fir and white birch. From the high, open cliffs, one could see the blue waters of Lake Superior on all sides, and Canadian shores upon the northern horizon.

The swamps around the cold lakes were white cedar and tamarack swamps, with high grass and innumerable logs. There were lakes, large and small, crystal clear, dotted with small islands. All combined to make this one of the most magnificent natural masterpieces in this section of North America.

No deer lived on the island, but the moose population was slightly more than the island could support. Each year the Michigan Department of Conservation trapped large numbers of the bulky animals and released them on the mainland. The abundance of rodents and smaller mammals had brought large numbers of coyotes across the ice from Canada.

The beauty of the island still casts a charm over many of my pipe-dreams; but one incident is outstanding among them all. It alone was worth the two-thousand-mile trip and the long, tedious hours on the fire-lines.

MOOSE are shy creatures during the summer months; and even where they are numerous, the average man seldom sees one. But when the cold nights and the harvest moon draws near, and the time for the mating season is at hand, moose no longer turn aside from the trail. Not only will they fight with one another to the death, but will attack any living creature, man included, that disputes their lordship of the forest domain.

In late September I stepped out of the trail for several gigantic bull moose and let them have the right of way. It was late in September too, that I sat on a high bluff, overlooking the northern end of the island. Behind where I sat, a hot fire had raged, burning the rock barren of its vegetation, leaving only a few blackened snags to show where the liquid river of flame had flowed. Beyond was an unbroken sea of green, in ridges and swamps like the giant rolling waves of some mythical sea. The sun was bright, the day cloudless, the air cool and invigorating. I had walked all morning through a trackless forest and was resting through the hour of noon, with my feet hung over a fifty-foot precipice.

I must have been spellbound, for I woke to the realization that heavy footfalls were behind me. I turned my head cautiously. Not twenty feet away stood a bull moose, in the edge of the burn, watching me out of red-rimmed eyes. I drew my own eyes away with an effort and examined the cliff at my feet, trying to find a way to climb down. There was none. Fifty feet below were rocks. It was a long flight with a rough landing.

I do not know how long I sat there, as still as possible, waiting. I could not decide whether the heavy thumping was my dollar watch or my heart. Every individual hair in my scalp had time to turn white and back to its normal color before the moose finally decided that I was an inconsequential object in his empire, and stalked away into the shadows of his world.

I do not doubt that I was forgotten by him within the next ten seconds; but for me that eternity was too long, too breathless, too fraught with suspense ever to forget. . . .

I was in the southern Appalachians one summer, studying the bird-life there. In order to attract the attention of the birds, to bring some of the shy species out of the brush, I made a squeaking sound with my lips, much like a wounded mouse. I recorded a number of very interesting individuals which had been attracted by my squeaking, and was about to rise and leave my seat against the base of a log, when a rustling noise behind me attracted my attention. I turned my head. On the log, scant inches from my face, was a timber rattlesnake; the squeaking noise had meant a meal to him.

The movement of my head brought his own back into striking position. I could see the elliptical eye-pupils, the significant pits below his eyes that classified him as a pit viper. I was too paralyzed to move. I knew that if I did move, my life would be snuffed out like candle-light by those deadly fangs in my face. I knew that no living thing could move faster than the striking head of a snake.

I have often wondered how long I remained in my cramped position. Whether they were seconds, minutes or hours, they were eternity-long. Finally the reptile turned slowly and majestically, moved down the surface of the log and back into the leaves. I removed the beads of perspiration ungraciously from my forehead—and the next time I sat down to attract birds with my squeaks, I chose an open spot where I could view the ground from all sides.

"SERMONS from stones, books from running brooks," and a wary, surprise-filled wilderness world. Drama and suspense wait at every turn of the trail. Some of us know that adventure is by no means a mere word belonging to the dusty limbo of yesteryear.

Tough Little Men

IN the current resurgence of Japanese ambitions in the Far East, it is forgotten by many that Japan was allied with Great Britain and the United States in the World War. Siberia was the meeting-point of these three allied empires, ostensibly in a common cause.

To me, the meeting of the forces of great nations has always been intensely dramatic. The gathering of the armies of these three nations in Siberia in 1918 provided an element of suspense that heightened that drama. This suspense was due to the uncertainty of Japanese loyalty to the Allied cause.

On duty in the Philippines at that time, I was ordered to take over a battalion of infantry for duty in Siberia. The original plan of this expeditionary force was to mobilize all the pro-Ally elements in Russia with a view to establishing a new Russian front against the Germans in Europe.

Upon the arrival at Vladivostok of the first American contingent, the Twenty-seventh United States Infantry from Manila, we found that the Japanese, instead of sending a force of seventy-seven hundred men, as had been agreed upon, had slipped a cipher and had occupied Vladivostok with forces of over seventy thousand men, with more landing in every bay and inlet. The harbor was filled with Japanese cruisers and transports; hundreds of Japanese boats were loading every particle of scrap-iron they could find in the city, and the streets teemed with swaggering Japanese soldiers.

These latter were extremely hard and tough little men, invariably armed with bayonets while on leave, and dressed in ill-fitting mustard-colored uniforms, and shoddy caps that appeared to have been sat upon heavily by a baby elephant before use.

These soldiers had been accustomed to lording it over Koreans, Chinese and the disorganized Russians, customarily jolting them off the narrow sidewalks whenever opportunity arose. They were somewhat startled when they tried these tactics on the Americans and the British, both of whom jolted right back, with promptness and efficiency. The Oriental will always be puzzled by the sudden swift devastation which an Anglo-Saxon packs in his fist; and the Japanese, with all his vaunted jiu-jitsu, is no exception. Like the rest of his racial brothers, he invariably led with his chin, with the monotonously same results.

These little lessons in politeness led to some heavy strictures from the Japanese high command on the "brutality" of American and British soldiers and sailors, and served to intensify a situation none too smooth at best.

For the great Japanese flag, flaunting a scarlet sun on a white background, lazily dominated Svetlanskaya, the main street of the city; and both British and Americans were outnumbered at least ten to one. The city was under military government, its affairs carried on by boards of officers composed of representatives of the various Allied forces. As is customary in this sort of affair, the ranking member held great influence, and the ranking member was invariably a Japanese major-general or lieutenant-general, while the highest ranking among the rest of us would be a major. We soon found out that the Japanese representative was placed there for no other reason than to prevent action of any sort, and nullify the attempts of the board to accomplish anything.

While effectually delaying Allied efforts, the Japanese were intensely busy upon their own affairs. Their military engineers were out in large detachments, surveying, measuring and mapping every inch of the defenses of this well-fortified Russian stronghold in the Far East. The railroad terminals of the Trans-Siberian were busy entraining heavy detachments of Nipponese troops. Great trains of cars were filled with Japanese merchandise being shipped out to the interior in charge of pseudo-soldiers, actually merchants in uniform. Every Russian industry and manufactury was taken over by Japanese technicians swarming through Siberia and following up the armed forces like a horde of locusts.

These armed forces were engaged out at Spasskoi and Nikolievsk with large forces of Reds. Japanese wounded drifted back to the base, but there were no prisoners. Had Japanese slaughtered these, as we had reason to suppose?

After much insistence and the overcoming of a great deal of opposition from

An American officer recalls a significant episode in Siberia.

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

the Japanese, we at last were allowed to take the field—the British and Americans under Japanese high command. At this stage of the game the American forces consisted of a peace-strength regiment of not much over a thousand men, possessing little except their rifles and bayonets, and with only six machine-guns and a one-pounder as extra armament. The British were in even lesser strength—a battalion of the Middlesex, as I remember, with about six hundred men. Neither of us had any artillery.

Looking back now upon this march, it seems a foolhardy thing that this little force of white men headed forth into the interior, far from its base, surrounded and outnumbered ten to one. For the news from the Western Front was none too comforting. The last great German push was under way, and was meeting with some success, as we could very easily tell from the attitude of the Japanese. With favorable Allied news from the Western Front, the Japanese were polite and suave. With unfavorable news, they became immediately overbearing and arrogant. Meanwhile they saw to it that the Allied forces, American, British and scattering detachments of Czecho-Slovaks, French, Italians and Chinese, were kept separated.

As we approached Spasskoi, the marching became highly unpleasant; for the woods and fields were filled with dead Bolsheviki, and the air was heavy with the stench of decaying human flesh. It became even more unpleasant with the increasing arrogance of the Japanese as more bad news came in from the Western Front in far-away Europe. There was not the slightest doubt in our minds that a German victory would mean a quick switch over to the winning side by the Japs, with resulting annihilation for us. The word *annihilation* is used advisedly, for it was taken for granted amongst us that we would go down fighting.

We came after one march to the far side of Spasskoi, as I remember now. Our camping-place, selected for us by the Japanese, was a valley. Making my rounds after camp was established, I found that both ends of the valley were covered by Japanese machine-guns and artillery, and the heights crowned with Japanese infantry. Far off on the flank, separated from us by a brigade of Japanese, was the British battalion, a little island of white men in a sea of yellow.

It was about dusk when I was called to our headquarters, with the other field officers, to help receive the British colonel and his staff, who were paying a formal call upon us.

They filed in politely, and there was courteous talk of this and that. It was the first time we had encountered them since leaving Vladivostok. Not until the close of the visit, when the British colonel was at the tent entrance preparatory to leaving, did he speak out concerning what was on all our minds.

"I say," he said casually, "these infernal Japs are getting quite too cheeky. I suppose you've seen the field-guns and infantry blocking off the exits from the valley? Frankly, I don't quite like it. I suppose if there's any trouble popping, the old adage still stands—blood is thicker than water, and all that sort of stuff?"

For a second or two men's faces grew impassive. There was a silence in which one could hear his neighbor's breathing. The two groups of officers, American and British, stood facing each other, and for a time no word came. The full drama of this meeting of two empires, this casual question as to the solidarity of white men against a common danger, came upon me, and I felt my scalp tingle.

The silence was broken by the voice of our colonel. It came quite as casually as had the British voice.

"The old adage still holds, Colonel," said the American officer. "Blood is thicker than water!"

The silence dissolved in other casual remarks; the British officers departed. That night they quietly moved their force next to ours, and we established a common outpost line and defense sector. The next day brought better news from the Western Front. The Japanese became polite again. Upon such a slender thread did the loyalty of our Japanese allies hang, that I am convinced that our little handful of white men, Americans and British, were only saved from annihilation by a hair's-breadth on that fateful evening.

Over the Ruhr

A bomber's story told to—

RALPH MICHAELIS

IF you want to see *flak* (anti-aircraft fire) at its best, you must go down "The Happy Valley." That's what we call the valley of the Ruhr, you know, where the Germans make their munitions—or rather, where they used to make their munitions.

I have flown over there dozens of times. Oberhausen, Duisburg, Essen, Bochum; I've seen them by moonlight; I have peered down at them through holes in the clouds; I have searched them out by the light of my own flares—and other people's. I have seen their factories go up in flames; I have seen them go up in explosions; I have seen them just crumple up with clouds of sparks, and sheets of colored flashes belching from the ruins.

It's been a gradual process, and a hard fight. They hung on to their industrial center as long as they could; and they gave us hell as soon as we put our noses over it. You've never seen such flak or such concentrations of searchlights as they used to put up for us—at least not outside London; but I've never flown in that, so I can't say.

One night they punctured our tailplane like a sieve. Another night they fairly stripped the port wing, and tore the cowling off one of the engines. These airplanes are tough; they have to be. But on one occasion I didn't think we'd ever get back!

The searchlights were fairly active; they were picking us up and losing us again—picking us up and losing us again; and the flak was heavy, but not unusually so. Then a searchlight flicked our wing-top, and glanced off without spotting us. Others came groping their long greedy, silver fingers toward us; but we left them some way behind.

Suddenly one caught us in its beam; and in a split second some twenty or more joined it, and we were enveloped in a great cone of searing, blinding, white light thrown up by a thousand million candle-power.

I threw the machine over in a quick climbing turn to the left, and then dodged over to the right again in an attempt to lose the lights. But they hung on. Then the flak started coming up at us. It was bursting all round us; under the wings in ugly black puffs of smoke that looked simply gigantic against the glaring white light of the searchlight beams and threw the plane about as if a giant fist were pummeling us about the wings.

Madly I threw the plane about. I dived, and climbed; I side-slipped, and turned and twisted. I darted this way and that, until the sweat was pouring down me with the physical effort of throwing the big machine about. But the searchlights still hung on like grim death, and the anti-aircraft guns followed us wherever we went, putting in some very good shooting.

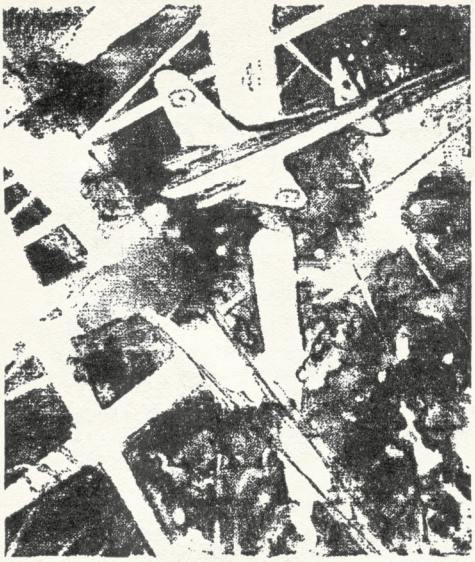
One shell burst amidships underneath the cabin, and splinters came whistling through the floor, luckily without hitting anybody. Another burst over the top of us, and pieces of it went clattering on the tops of the wings and of the cabin. Then a fierce one burst just under the tail. The tail went up in the air, the nose went down, and we went into a dive. While I was pulling out, and other shells were barking all round us, the tail gunner shouted over the intercommunication telephone that there were holes in the tailplane.

That didn't sound so gay, because the tailplane is an important stabilizing surface; and any serious fault there tends to make the airplane uncontrollable. However, I hoped for the best. I asked the tail gunner if the damage was bad.

He said, "I think she'll hold together"; and I threw the plane over in a turn, wondering if the strain would pull the tailplane off altogether and send us down in a spin.

The controls felt a bit groggy; but the tail gunner's instinct was right. The tail just about held together.

Meanwhile I was throwing the plane about like mad to try and throw the lights off; but new reinforcements followed us wherever we flew, throwing a complete canopy of blinding glare right



over the top of us. The light was so fierce that it was impossible to see the instruments in front of me. It flooded the cabin like a tornado of light.

For half an hour I dodged about the sky, followed by those all-enveloping lights, an Aunt Sally for every aircraft gunner in the Ruhr. In the end I rammed the nose of the machine down and dived right down into that great white pit. Down we went by the thousand feet. I couldn't see my instruments, and had no idea how far we had to go. I counted the seconds, and by the time I had counted twenty-three, I thought we must be nearing the ground. But still the lights enveloped us.

TWO or three seconds later I sighted a black patch looming up ahead, and I made straight for it, pulling out almost as soon as I reached it, just above the roofs of a town. At last I had shaken off the lights; but down here there was other trouble in plenty. Every few yards I had to swerve to miss a church-spire or a chimney-stack; and all the while every light anti-aircraft weapon in the neighborhood was concentrated on us. Tracer bullets, white, red, and green, were coming up from all directions. Flaming onions were sizzling up in strings, and small shells were bursting all around us. We must have been right on top of the batteries; and it seemed a marvel how they could miss us; but they did.

I kept doing flat turns to put them off their aim as far as possible, alternating these with frantic swerves as we went heading for a roof or a chimney-stack. Thus, after throwing my crew about until they were black and blue with the bumps and the falls, I managed to wriggle out into less hostile country.

We had had a near shave—the nearest that any of us had ever had before; and we were relieved to get a good laugh on the way home. The long tussle with the lights and the flak and the reduced speed caused by the damage to the plane, had thrown us out of our course, and it was already daylight when we were over the North Sea.

In fact, the fighters were out scrapping already; and although we couldn't see them—they were either too high or too far away—we caught the running commentary of it on our earphones; and I must admit the language of those fighter pilots turned us green with envy, though the best bits are unprintable:

"Look out, Bill, there's a bandit on your tail."

"All right, leave the blankety-blank son-of-a-blank to me."

A burst of machine-gun fire, followed by: *"Take that, you blankety-so-and-so!"*

Then came a shout from another part of the fight, *"Look out, John, there's a bandit behind you,"* followed by the classic, *"Leave the blankety-blank-blank to me."* Then, a fierce burst of machine-gun fire. Then, wafted on the ether: *"Oh, you would, would you, you blankety-something-blank? Well, take that, you blank—" Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat . . . . rat-tat-tat-tat-tat . . . . rat-tat-tat-tat-tat.*

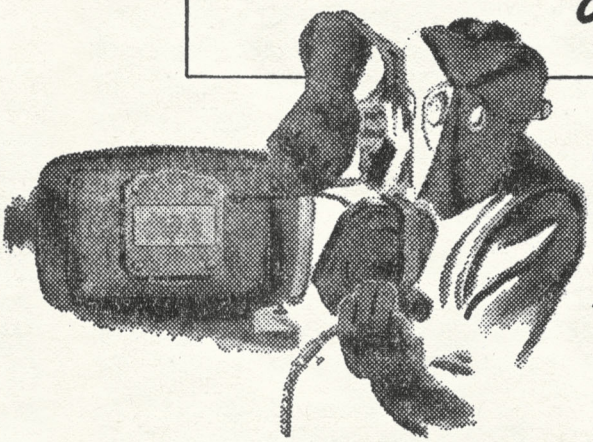
We had a good laugh—and needed it!

Talking of the scrap that we could hear but couldn't see reminds me how seldom it is that we see another plane in the air when night-flying.

The other night, however, I had that rare experience. We had just dropped our bombs, and were flying away from the nice fire which we had started, when I caught sight of another of our bombers going in. He was several thousand feet above us and, caught in the beams of three searchlights, he looked somewhat like a moth hanging in the sky.

There were anti-aircraft shells bursting all round him with red flashes set in black puffs of smoke. It seemed uncanny to watch another fellow going through just the same experience as one had so often had oneself. All at once he slipped into the black, and the lights lost him. A minute or two later we saw big flashes in the target area, followed by blue and yellow flames licking out of the fire which we had started; and we knew that he had got through and dropped his bombs.

The Memory of an Atom



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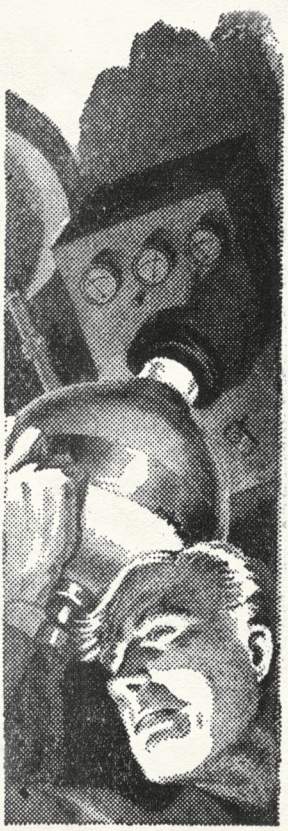

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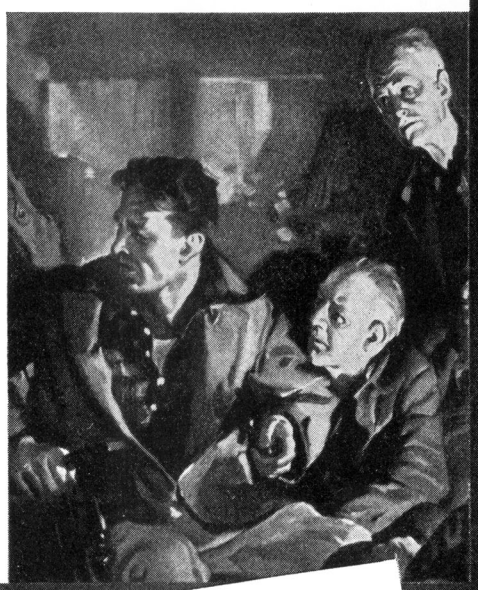
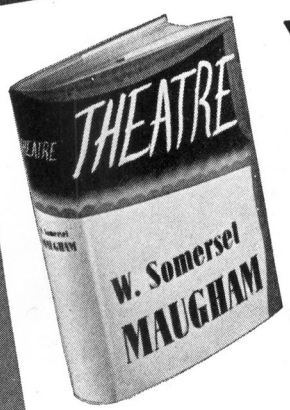
RUFUS KING





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Our Readers* Write Us—

ESCAPE FROM TODAY'S TROUBLES

I think BLUE BOOK *Magazine sets a standard of entertainment far above that of any magazine in its field. Most of the others seem to assume (from the type of story they publish) that their readers had a hard time negotiating the sixth grade. It is a relief to buy a magazine for men whose editors understand that their clientele does not consist either of morons or morally deficient males.*

I like chiefly your stories of the historical type. Past wars seem far enough away from reality to provide at least a temporary escape from today's troubles. I think your policy of complete novels in each issue an excellent idea but I like serials too. Your best stories are too long to be compressed into a short novel and I like to read them in full.

Thomas E. Brearton
Troy, N. Y.

MORE PRESENT-DAY FACTS

You asked for it, so here goes. Why can't we do without some of the old and mythical stories and have more on modern, present-day facts? I could stand more than one novelette, and less of that "Uncle Elmer and the Wolf."

I especially enjoyed "A Million for John J. Destiny," and "Panama Peril." And I believe that "Anything Might Happen," will be up to their standards.

Don't worry about the serials. I think most of us like them. Give us a few more good murder mysteries in the book-length novel and I'll be quiet from now on.

Myron Brejcha
Long Beach, Calif.

WIM, WIGOR AND WITALITY

Today, I have read a copy of BLUE BOOK *for the first time in my life. I am both surprised and delighted. Probably, I have been rather snobbish in confining myself to what are known as the "quality" magazines; at any rate, I found more real life, more "Wim, Wigor and Witality" in* BLUE BOOK *than in most of the issues of those magazines which place so much stress on style and phrasing that the real story emerges on the printed page, emaciated and emasculated.*

I thought some of the stories, especially "Monaco Madness," tedious and pedestrian, but "Mister Snow White" is as clever a fantasy as I have ever read, "Camera Angle" a rattling good yarn and I relished especially "Honesty Racket" with the O. Henryish twist at the end.

I noticed an occasional solecism as in the phrases "raw sobs" (raw) and "white-burnoused city," but taking this issue of BLUE BOOK *as a whole, I think you are to be congratulated.*

Elizabeth Williams Cosgrove
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

A CHILEAN PREFERS SHORT STORIES

It was with the utmost satisfaction that I came upon your advertisement inviting all readers to give their opinion on the BLUE BOOK. *And here it goes:*

Do I read book-length novels? Would I like more novelettes? Well, I do read some of the long novels, but not always. I think two or three novelettes could replace it. The reason I read a magazine is because I'm in the mood to read short stories. Whenever I want to read something long, I read a book.

I think war material is the best thing you have. It sort of gives the magazine an up-to-dateness, if you get what I mean. Eighteenth Century stories are also an interesting feature. ("The Bishop's Pawn" in the September issue was a peach).

My best authors are: Robert Mill with his Tiny David stories, Fulton Grant with his weird tales about reporters always getting into strange adventures; Bedford-Jones with his series about everything in particular from "Ships and Men" to "The World was Their Stage;" William Makin with his Red Wolf of Arabia stories, and Gordon Keyne with his wonderful Eighteenth Century novels like "Gunpowder Gold" and his "Strange Escapes" series.

Edward Paulsen Espejo-Pando
Valparaiso, Chile

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*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the half-dozen or so we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.

We specially desire for our Real Experience department true stories from the fighting men in training and overseas.