# BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE for JULY, 1946 ★ 25 CENTS

**THIS IS OUR LAND—VII**
The Great Waterway
*Painted by*
*HERBERT MORTON STOOPS*

**TRAIL OF THE CROSSES**
A complete novel
*by ALLAN BOSWORTH*

**MY NEPHEW NORVELL**
*by NELSON BOND*

**BOY COMES OF AGE**
*by JOEL REEVE*

# JEDBURGH MISSION HAMISH

**The story of this thrill-crammed OSS adventure behind the enemy lines in France begins on page 86**

*I—SILVER STAR.* By direction of the President, under the provisions of AR 600-45, 22 September 1943, as amended, the Silver Star is awarded to:

First Lieutenant *Robert M. Anstett* (Army Serial No. 01057948), Coast Artillery Corps, United States Army, for gallantry in action from 12 June 1944 to 25 September 1944. First Lieutenant *Anstett* parachuted into France in civilian clothes with two team mates, as an organizer and director of French resistance groups in the Department of Indre. Despite constant enemy activities, he arranged for the safe delivery by parachute of approximately fifty plane loads of equipment with which approximately 3,000 men were armed. He distinguished himself in leading his forces in road ambushes against enemy convoys, in continually cutting the Paris-Limoges railway line, in blowing bridges on main and secondary highways, and in securing and reporting to London highly valuable intelligence information. Entered military service from New York.

* * * * *

BY COMMAND OF GENERAL EISENHOWER:
R. B. LORD,
Major General, GSC, Deputy Chief of Staff.

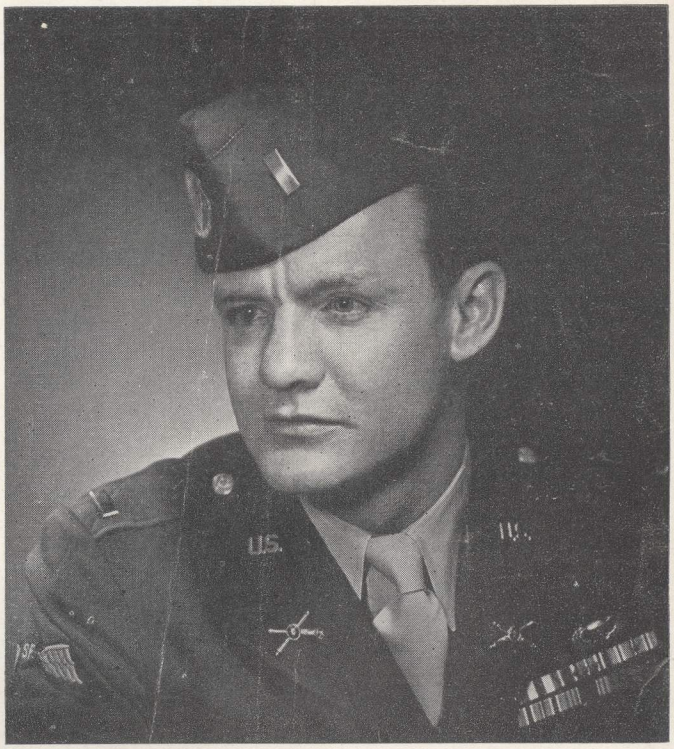

*Photo by John Howard Riley*

*Above: Lieutenant Robert Anstett. At left, Victory parade of the Maquis after the liberation of Châteauroux. At right, group at the farmhouse command post during the final phase of the Jedburgh Mission Hamish.*

*Lt. Anstett behind the enemy lines in France—and seemingly quite happy about it.*

*Sgt. Waters operating the secret radio to London from behind the enemy lines in France.*

*Sgt. Lee Waters of Sandusky, Ohio, received the Silver Star for his work with Mission Hamish.*

# Readers' Comment*

## Four Against the World and Emily Post

*IT has happened here! All my life my mother's been preaching against the bad manners of bringing reading matter to the table—her remarks directed against Pop, who's been having* BLUE BOOK *with his meals ever since I can remember. Then, about four months ago, my brother Jim and myself decided on a little look-see into Pop's obnoxious hobby, and doggone if we weren't immediately converted into hopeless* BLUE BOOK *addicts! That made three down, and one to go, and, just today, the last of the unbelievers—*Mom herself—*plops down at the supper-table with a* BLUE BOOK *clutched firmly in her lovely hands, a look of animation and adventure in her soft brown eyes. United we sit—four against the world and Emily Post. Maybe it "aint etiquette," but it sure is a lot of fun.*

*Jerry B. Ford.*

## Harrowing Experiences, Too?

*HAVING read your magazine* BLUE BOOK *for ten years, I believe I am competent to judge its quality.*

*I have read many other types of semi-slicks, slick and pulp magazines. All have fallen by the wayside but* BLUE BOOK. *Why? Well,* BLUE *hasn't one type of story, but a variety. Science, fiction, murder mystery, true articles and every type one finds in all of the other magazines combined.*

*I have noticed the changing pattern of* BLUE BOOK *and have always enjoyed its style. Now I have a suggestion to make as a reader: And I am certain that there are many* BLUE BOOK *fans who will back me up. Ask them about this, and you will see its popularity. Alternate your special feature "My Most Amusing Experience" with a feature titled "My Most Harrowing Experience." I am quite positive that there are many of us who have had harrowing experiences in the past worth telling about.*

*Continue the good work with your magazine and I'll continue to read it for another decade and more.*

*Anthony J. Taray.*

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

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# BLUE BOOK

July, 1946 MAGAZINE Vol. 83, No. 3


## Two Complete Novels


The Trail of the Crosses — By Allan R. Bosworth — 100
*Illustrated by L. R. Hamilton*

The Man Who Went to Rome — By Fulton T. Grant — 124
*Illustrated by James Ernst*


## Ten Short Stories


My Nephew Norvell — By Nelson Bond — 2
*Illustrated by Charles Chickering*

The Reluctant Rogue — By Wilbur S. Peacock — 12
*Illustrated by John Fulton*

Protection in the Night — By Phil Magee — 24
*Illustrated by Raymond Sisley*

Boy Comes of Age — By Joel Reeve — 32
*Illustrated by John McDermott*

Who Wouldn't Sell a Farm and Go to Sea? — By Bill Adams — 42
*Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward*

A Flyer in Noodles — By Lawton Ford — 50
*Illustrated by Stuart Hay*

Red Sky over Thebes — By H. Bedford-Jones — 56
*Illustrated by Maurice Bower*

The Case of Jenny — By Basil Dickey — 67

The Watched House — By Allan Vaughan Elston — 68
*Illustrated by James Ernst*

Gold Is Where You Find It — By Neill Wilson — 79
*Illustrated by John Fulton*


## Stories of Fact and Experience


Jedburgh Mission Hamish — By Lt. Comdr. Richard M. Kelly — 86
*Illustrated by John McDermott*

***Bluegill* on Patrol** — By Rear Admiral R. W. Christie — 97
*Illustrated by Grattan Condon*


## Special Features


The Tragic Tale of the King's Generall — Richard Hakluyt — 23
*Illustrated by Peter Wells*

Contraptions of Yesteryear—a Quiz — 31
*Illustrations from Three Lions, Schoenfeld Collection*

My Most Amusing Experience — 41

Is There Fame in a Name?—a Quiz — By Bill Wernicke — 66

What Do You Think?—a Readers' Forum — 85

Who's Who in this Issue — Inside Back Cover

Cover Design: The Great Waterway: This Is Our Land—VII
*Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops*


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


DONALD KENNICOTT, *Editor*

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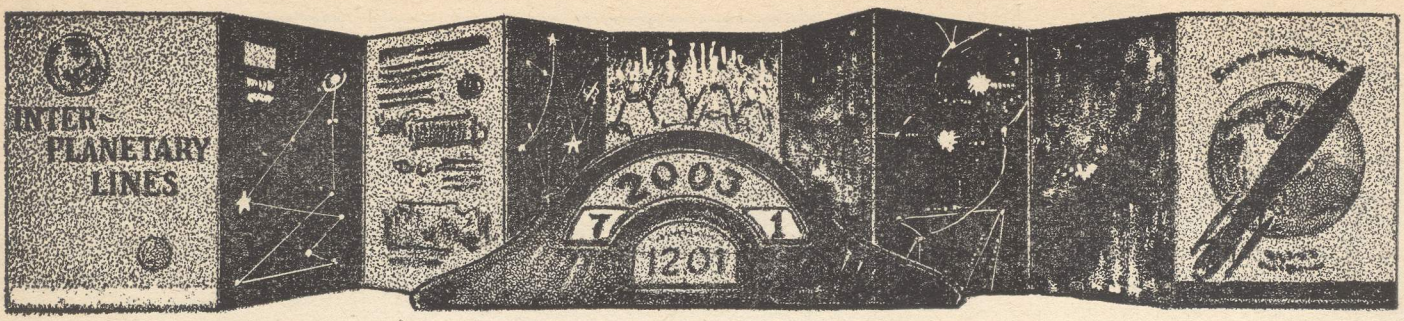



# My Nephew Norvell

**He twists the beard of Father Time and gayly shakes dice with Destiny.**

## by NELSON BOND

I'M not asking any favors from anybody, and I don't want any more trouble—not even with that hot-shot cashier at the First National Bank. I'm a broken-hearted guy, and all I want is to be left alone. I don't want to listen to any more cracks about crystal balls or tea-leaves or Ouija boards, and Mrs. McGill can go whistle up a rainspout for her three weeks' room-rent. I've made up my mind what I'm going to do, and as soon as I can get a refund from the E-Z Payment Gemme Shoppe, I'll be on my way. Only it does hurt, because there'll never be another girl but Winifred for me, and I *did* think the boys at the plant liked me.

But that's water over the dam now, so don't get the idea I'm bellyaching; I just want to put *my* side of the story on the record, that's all. If, after hearing the true facts, people *still* want to say it was my fault instead of my nephew Norvell's, well—

To begin with, I've never been a big family man. I had high hopes, it is true, of becoming one in the reasonably near future, with Winifred and myself as parties of the first and second part, respectively, and to that end I had contracted with the E-Z Payment Gemme Shoppe to pay too many turnips for a sliver of a carat set in what—judging by the price—must have been U-235.

But I've never been one to cuddle up to sundry kith and kin. Which is why I was more or less surprised when my landlady, Mrs. McGill, met me at the door as I came home from work one evening, skewered me with a brace of bifocaled gimlets, and said, "Mr. Grady—"

"Mrs. McGill," I told her, "for once in your errorless life you are wrong. Go look at your calendar. Today is only the 22nd. My rent is not due."

"I know that," she said grimly. "It's not due till a week from next Friday—at which time I'd admire to have it *all*, if you please; not half of it, and half an excuse. What I wanted to tell you is, your nephew is here."

"That's fine!" I said. "That's just wonder— *What?* My *who* is *where?*"

"Your nephew," she repeated, "is here. As they say in plays: 'your nephew is in your room'."

"And as they say in French textbooks," I retorted, "the sister of my wife's aunt is in the garden. It might interest you to learn, Mrs. McGill, that I *have* no nephew."

"He said he was your nephew."

"Well, now," I said, "that's different! Why didn't you tell me that before? That makes everything all right, of course! *I* say I'm Frank Sinatra. Do you feel like swooning, Mrs. McGill?"

"He said he was your nephew," repeated Mrs. McGill, her jaw clamping stubbornly. "There was every reason for believing him: He acted *very* peculiar."

"In such ways," I suggested, "as picking locks? Or trying on my suits? Did you happen to point out to him where I hide my piggy-bank? It's nice to be helpful, you know."

"He said—" began Mrs. McGill, but I was on my way upstairs, taking the steps four at a time. Primed to grapple with a sneak-thief, I burst into the reconverted linen-closet laughingly known as my boudoir—then stopped dead. The room was empty; as empty as a politician's Fourth of July oration!

Except for one thing. There was a white oblong lying on my bureau: a visiting-card; on it appeared, in neat, precise handwriting, the cryptic words:

*Dear Uncle Joseph:*
*Sorry I can't wait. Power running low. Must refill stellium cartridge. Will return later. Affectionately,*
*Your nephew,*
*Norvell*

And on the obverse of the card was the name:

*Mr. Norvell Grady Carson*

For a full two minutes I stood and stared at the card without grasping its meaning. Then, when I *did* try to make some sense out of it, I just got more and more confused.

In the first place, being an only child, I could not possibly be anyone's uncle. So far, so good. But granting a mistake had been made, and that this Norvell Carson character had blundered into my digs by accident, there remained a pair of puzzling question-marks. What in blazes did that cockeyed message mean? And how in the ditto of the same conflagration had anyone left my rooming-house without running the gantlet of Mrs. McGill's omniscient eye?

FOR she had not seen him leave. That point she made very clear when I confronted her for further information and/or explanation.

"Where is he?" she countered my query. "Why, up in your room. Where else would he be? He said—"

"—he was my nephew," I finished fretfully. "Yes, I know. But he isn't, and he's not. Are you *sure* you didn't see him leave, Mrs. McGill?"

"Positive!" she said flatly. "I've been downstairs all afternoon. I can guarantee he didn't—"

"Perhaps the back door?" I offered. "Though why he should leave by the back door, I have no idea."

"He did not leave by the back door," she declared, "nor by the front door, nor by the coal-chute or any window!" And she glared at me as if she were beginning to wonder where I'd hidden the body. "Now, see here, Mr. Grady—I want no funny business around here, if you please! I operate a respectable rooming-house for genteel people."

"The operation," I told her glumly, "was a success. But the patient died. Very well, Mrs. McGill. He didn't go. He's upstairs sleeping in my shoebag. Let's skip it!"

And I went back upstairs to dress for dinner and my regular date with Winifred.

MY date with Winifred was a sales-booster for the aspirin manufacturers. We went to a movie, and in the newsreel saw the latest on the strike situation. That set me off, and innocently enough, on the way home I started yapping about my own grandiose plans for the future of Joe Grady.

I blew off a lot of steam about working for others, and about how some day I was going to branch out and work for myself—on a project or projects unspecified, for the simple reason that I had nothing particular in mind. I was just iffing, you understand; just playing a little game of isn't-it-going-to-be-wonderful-when.

But I caught Winifred in a oh-so-you-think-more-of-your-own-selfish-self-than-of-me mood; and before I knew what was going on, my chatty little monologue became a discussion, and the discussion turned into a redhot argument!

Of course it ended up with me explaining like crazy that I hadn't meant a word I said, and Winifred weeping spots into the lapel of my blue serge suit, and me putting the ring back on her finger again, and her good-night kisses were something out of this world even if they were a bit salty. But I was definitely out of sorts when I got home. And things were not improved by the presence of Mrs. McGill downstairs, awaiting my entry.

"Mr. Grady," she began without preamble, "I am what is known as a long-suffering woman—"

*"Insufferable,"* I demurred, "is the adjective. But never mind. Take it from there. You were saying?"

"I am an insufferable and honest woman, and I run a respectable rooming-house for genteel people—*in the main!*"

She tossed me a nasty look which I picked up on the first bounce and flipped right back at her.

"The *Spanish* Main," I nodded. "Just where they belong. But get to the point, Mrs. McGill."

"The point is," she stated coldly, "that man. Your nephew. He's still here!"

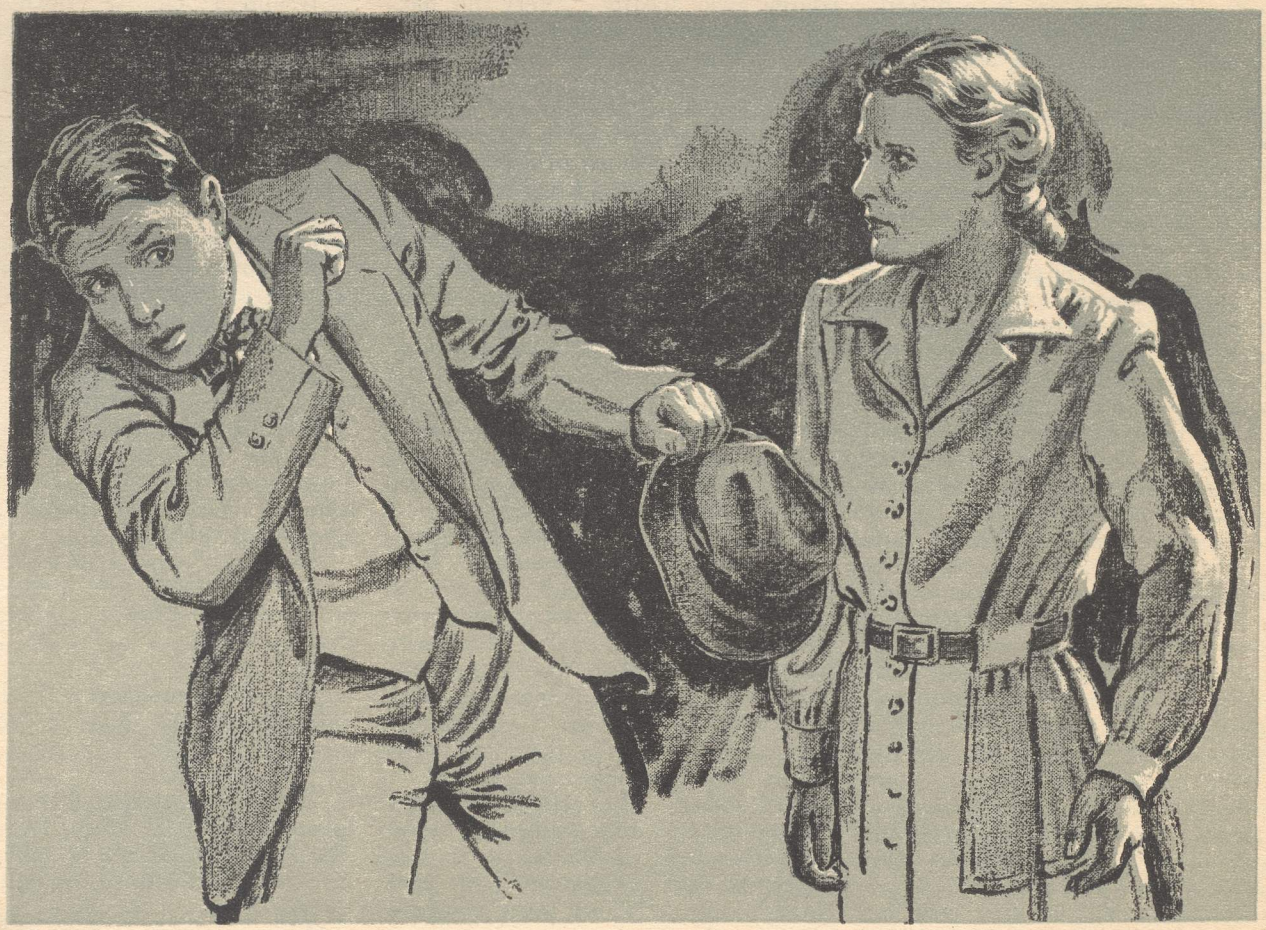
I sighed. "Mrs. McGill, I told you before I *have* no nephew. Moreover, if he's in my room, it must be *again*—not *still!* He was not there this evening when you told me—"

"He was," declared my landlady blandly. "You yourself admitted he was sleeping in your shoebag—though how on earth a body can be comfortable in a shoebag, I don't know!

"However, that's no affair of mine. What interests me is that there is another lodger under this roof, said same paying no rent. I'll thank you to remember that your room is rented on the basis of single occupancy. If anyone shares it with you, your rent will be raised accordingly—and at once! Have I made myself plain?"

"You didn't have to, Mrs. McGill." I smiled acidly. "Eugenics took care of that a great many years ago. However, I'll take care of this other matter immediately. That is, if my elusive namesake hasn't gone out to refill another whozium whatziz. *Au revoir, ma petite!*"

And I hit the staircase while she was still choking for a retort to that riposte.



***"Someone's got to bring to an end this idiotic discussion," said Winifred coldly, "and it might as well be me."***

*Illustrated by Charles Chickering*

My room was at the head of the stairs. There was a crack of light showing under the door, and I knew darned well I had not left a light on when I left before sundown. It was obvious, then, that there *was* someone in the room; but when I turned the knob, I found the door securely locked. This was a puzzler, because I had the only key to that lock, Mrs. McGill having lost hers many months ago. With increasing wonderment I inserted the key, opened the door, and stepped in the room. As I did so, a young man turned from my worktable, stared at me with friendly, happy eyes—then raced forward to greet me with outstretched hand.

"Uncle Joe!" he cried. "Oh, Uncle Joe, I'm glad to meet you at last!"

NOW, of course I know what everyone is going to say I *should* have done at this point. When a guy enters a locked room to find there an utter stranger who claims to be someone who couldn't possibly exist, there are only two possibilities open to him. He should shout for—immediately if not sooner—either (*a*) the bobbies, or (*b*) the booby-hatch.

But I didn't do either of these. I was too numb at first. And by the time the initial shock had worn off, I was surprised to find myself *liking* this guy!

That's right—liking him! Don't ask me why; I'm a stranger here myself. He just appealed to me, that's all. I had a weird sort of feeling about him, a sort of affection, a sort of— Aw, shuddup! Go wash your mind out with soap!

To begin with, he reminded me of someone I knew, or at least someone I'd seen before. Of course, there's nothing strange about that. Lots of people look like lots of people; in fact, anybody who doesn't look like somebody isn't much of a person.

Anyhow, I had an immediate and instinctive liking for this kid, in view of which it wasn't so much a matter of getting him out of there as it was of finding out how he got in, who he was, where he came from, and what this was all about.

As soon as I could reclaim my rapidly-being-mangled paw, I shot these questions to him in a salvo right. He took them all grinning, and answered in his own way. Which was, I might add, only a shade less confusing than Choctaw as spoken by a tongue-tied Swede through an alum-soaked gag.

"Who am I?" he chuckled. "Why, I'm your nephew, of course. Your nephew Norvell!"

"That's—uh—that's fine!" I conceded cautiously. "And your—uh—your mother? How's she?"

"Oh, fine, fine!" he said heartily. "Of course she had her usual cold this winter. Bit of lunar laryngitis, you know. We tried to talk her into taking the Martian cruise, but she's a bit old-fashioned. She *will* go to the moon every season, though nobody who *is* anybody goes there any more."

"No, that's right, isn't it?" I agreed, edging away hastily. "Very old hat, the moon; that's what I always say."

Norvell nodded. "Oh, *very!* But, Uncle Joe—I must say I'm surprised to find you in these"—he glanced around the room in obvious bewilderment mingled with a touch of distaste—"in these surroundings? I had a hitler of a time locating you! Wore out three stelliums, not to mention blowing a diatemporic right in the middle of the Restoration. Why are you living *here?* Where are your mansions?"

"My—my mansions?" I repeated dazedly.

"Why, yes! The one on Long Island, and the one out West in—what was the name of that old State? Oh, yes! Now I remember!—California. And the one in Bermuda?"

"Oh, sure, my *mansions!*" I laughed feebly, backing toward the door. "You mean my—uh—*mansions?* Oh, yes, of course! For a moment I thought you said—uh—mansions! Why, I left them in an old safe-deposit box somewhere, and mislaid my key. Very careless of me—very! Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go look for it—"

But he was younger than I, and he moved faster. He stepped between me and my avenue of escape, and eyed me with a worried frown.

"Now, wait a minute!" he said thoughtfully. "There must be some mistake. I can't have made—you *are* Joe Grady, aren't you?"

"Well, I *thought* I was. But we won't make an issue of it. If there's someone else you'd rather have me be—"

"Joseph T. Grady? Born November 26th, 1916, in New Haven, Connecticut?"

"Guilty as charged, Your Hon—I mean, yes. That's right."

"Educated at Public School Number 131, eight years; Woodrow Wilson High School, four years; M.I.T., four years?"

"Check, check, check!"

"Employed by General Engineering Corporation, 1938; volunteered, Army of the United States, 1940?"

"Check, check!"

"Honorably discharged from Army and returned to occupation, 1945? Married in Sandusky, Ohio, 1947?"

"Check," I began, "ch—" Then the double-take hit me. "Hey, wait a minute! What's that again? Married *where? When?*"

"Sandusky," he repeated, "Ohio. April 19th, 1947?" He glanced at me anxiously. "Why? Is there something wrong? I tried to be very careful—"

"Oh, no!" I moaned. "Everything's perfectly ducky. Except for a few minor details."

"Such as?"

"Well, merely that I've never set foot in Sandusky, Ohio, in my life—that I'm not married yet—and it won't be April, 1947, until sometime next spring!"

He stared at me, a flush of the most abject humiliation climbing slowly

into his cheeks. He murmured: "Oh, *no!* Oh, what a frightful boner! The transtemporal location-stop! It must have short-circuited."

"Check," I said caustically, "and double-check." I was beginning to get just a little irked with his screwball lingo. "Also the hut-sut must have rawlstoned on the rillerah! Would you mind getting down to facts, chum? Who *are* you, and where did you come from?"

"Who?" he repeated despondently. "Why, I'm just who I said I was, your nephew Norvell—and I've come to visit you from the year 2003, A.D.!"

OPPORTUNITY, the maxim books tell us, only knocks once. That's a blatant falsehood. In my case, opportunity whaled the living daylights out of my portals twice—and I didn't have the sense to respond.

Not that I'm bellyaching, you understand! I'm just trying to explain how I stumbled into this mess. I don't expect the police to believe me, and Winifred has made her view painfully clear. But I want to make *someone* believe I didn't commit forgery, and I'll swear on a stack of Bibles I did not at any time sneak a look at the company's research records.

I missed my first chance to keep my nose clean when I failed to holler for the law the minute I caught my alleged nephew in my room. I gave Opportunity its second boot in the puss when, upon hearing his wacky claim of having originated from the Twenty-first Century, I didn't catch on. Those boys down at the plant are great practical jokers, but you'd think they would come through with an explanation when the gag went haywire, wouldn't you?

The stinkers! And I'm a trusting soul. . . .

Yes, I'm a trusting soul. When my visitor gave out with his declaration about having come to me from the year 2003, I didn't make the obvious retort: "Oh, yeah? Chum, wait here a minute. I've got to see a doc about some manacles."

No, I just stood there with my jowls drooping while my nephew Norvell proceeded to drive home his fantastic premise.

"I know it's hard to believe, Uncle Joe," he understated, "but it's the truth. I *am* your nephew. Great-grand-nephew, to be more accurate. And I *did* come back here out of what is to you the future. But I felt sure you'd understand, being the genius you are. And I couldn't write the biography without your help. And of course our family owes its present fame and fortune—everything it possesses—to you."

I found words at last—two words remembered from a childhood love for H. G. Wells' futuristic novels.

"Time travel!" I croaked. "Time travel!"

"Yes, that's right," nodded Norvell. "I'm the first man to accomplish it—although it appears my experiment has been only a modified success. I *meant* to meet you some years from now. About 1955 or so. Right at the height of *your* success." And he smiled shyly. "I hoped you would be proud of me, Uncle Joe."

"Oh, I am!" I said hastily. "I am! Nice going, my boy. But what's all this about my genius creating the family fame and fortune? Mansions, vacations to the moon—"

"Eh? Why, your inventions, of course!"

"My—uh—inventions?"

"Yes! The Hertzian modifier, the countergrav tube, the hypatomic motor—all those things that made spaceflight possible." He stared at me with some dismay. "Don't tell me you haven't started working on the inventions yet?"

I said feebly: "Don't look now, my delirium nephew, but you're barking up the wrong tremens. Not only have I not started working on those polysyllabic monstrosities you prate of, but I haven't the faintest idea what you're raving about. I wouldn't know a Hertzian modifier if I saw one walking down Fifth Avenue in a cutaway coat! What is it, anyway?"

"Why, it's *this*," he said, taking from his pocket a curious stylus-like pen, and with it scribbling a diagram on a scrap of paper as he talked. "An instrument to convert the long and short communication-band waves into the even shorter Hertzian wave range, making possible interplanetary conversation with normal radio equipment." He tossed me the scrap of paper. "It's very simple, really. Any schoolchild can build one. But I suppose *all* great inventions look that way—once they've been discovered."

I stared at his schematic with mounting excitement. He was right; it *was* a fantastically simple instrument he had diagrammed. Yet in its very simplicity lay its cunning. Its basic concept was a radical departure from every line of current thought and research. I could see where engineers might knock themselves out for decades, working along more orthodox lines, without finding this preposterously easy solution. So simple, yet so obscure, was the mystery of the wheel to primitive man—the power latent in steam to the alchemists of the Middle Ages—electronics to a Victorian savant.

*"Can you get me blueprints of this gadget you've sketched?"*

I said: "Hey! This thing should *work!*"

"*Should* work?" repeated my nephew Norvell. "But of course it works. We use it all the time. It, and the dozens of related instruments derived from it. That's what made our family rich, you know. Royalties."

"And I—*I'm* supposed to have invented this?"

"Certainly. It's well known that you did—or will—or—"

He looked a bit bewildered, and no wonder.

"It's very confusing," he said plaintively. "I expected to meet you some years from now, after you had become famous for your inventions. I wanted some data on your life. For the biography I'm writing, you know. It's rather awkward to talk to you about things you haven't even *done* yet."

That's when the Great Idea struck me—darn it! At the time I thought it was a Great Idea, anyway. Looking back on it, I realize I must have been out of my mind, or slightly drunk, or both—because I was taking this lunk's double-talk seriously. Okay, okay—I know! I should have suspected the fine hand of those jokers at the plant right away.

But I didn't. I simply swallowed the whole wacky story, hook, line and sinker, and gave birth to my magnificent brainstorm.

"Norvell," I said breathlessly, "how do you know it wasn't *meant* to be this way?"

His eyebrows questioned me politely. "I'm not sure I know what you mean, Uncle Joe."

"SIMPLY this," I explained. "In spite of what your history books tell you, I'm no genius. I'm just a plain, ordinary, run-o'-the-mill mechanical engineer with an average education, a fair I.Q., and ambition.

"Left to my own resources, I couldn't have invented the Hertzian modifier in a million years. But with this diagram as a clue"—as I jabbed a finger at his schematic—"and with foreknowledge that it *will* work, I can make one! And so far as the world of 1946 is concerned, I'll be its inventor!"

Some of my excitement brushed off on my nephew, and his eyes opened wide.

"You mean it's a sort of a circle? A closed circle in Time! In the year 2003, I will always come to you in 1946 with the details on the inventions which have made you famous in later years?"

"Exactly!"

"But—but that's impossible!" Norvell said wildly. "In that case, *who* invented the modifier . . . and *when?* It couldn't be you, because you didn't know about it until I described it to you. And it couldn't have been anyone else, because in my time you are known as its inventor."

"I don't know about that," I said and laughed happily. "And I don't care. It's the chicken and the egg argument all over again . . . but this time the yoke's on mankind. All I'm sure of is that if we work this right everything happens according to plan.

"Now," I continued, "let's get down to brass tacks. Can you get me blueprints of this gadget you've sketched?"

"Why—I suppose so. Yes, I know I can."

"And of the other things you mentioned? The things I'm supposed to have invented?"

"Yes?"

"Okay," I told him. "Then that's it. You get them for me; I'll build working models and have them patented, and the Grady career will be launched. And don't think," I added gleefully, "I won't be on deck to bust the traditional bottle of champagne! Exclusive Scoop Number One for your biography, nephew, can be the *bona fide* report that upon the occasion of your Uncle Joe's first patent application, he got stiffer than a bluebird's bill in a blizzard."

Norvell said a bit thoughtfully: "It might work. I can't think of any reason why it shouldn't."

"Of course you can't!" I reasoned. "Because it *did* work, or you wouldn't be who and what you are in your era."

"But that doesn't make sense, Uncle Joe!" he demurred. "I never did this before. I'd remember having done it. Yet if I didn't do it, you couldn't have invented—"

"Give it up, pal," I advised him. "Your forehead's beginning to look like a corrugated washboard. We're not interested in theories, anyhow; what we want is results. Is it going to take you very long to get the data I need?"

He shook his head. "No. That is—it will take me several hours to collect the blueprints, but those hours will not enter into your life at all. With my time-travel device, I can shuttle back and forth at will between our eras, coming to you on any given date. In fact, if you'd like me to, I can hop forward to my century, collect the blueprints, and return here *yesterday.*"

"That won't be necessary," I decided hastily. "I'm confused enough as it is. But you *can* get back here?"

"Oh, yes!" My nephew Norvell was smugly confident. "I had a bit of trouble at first with the diatemporic and the stellium supercharger, but I have them under control now—I think. Shall I come back tonight?"

"Tomorrow evening would be better. I'm as eager as you to get this snowball started. But I'm tired now, and I'd like to attack this project with a fresh mind.

"Besides," I remembered, "my landlady's on her high horse already. She'd raise merry blue blazes if she heard us gabbing here into the wee hours. And the fewer people we let into this secret, the better off we are. Right?"

"Right!" nodded Norvell. "Well, Uncle—" He held out his hand and grinned at me. I couldn't help thinking how *very* much he looked like someone I knew. Someone to whom for the life of me I could give no name. "This is—what is that quaint expression of your age? Oh, yes—this is too long!"

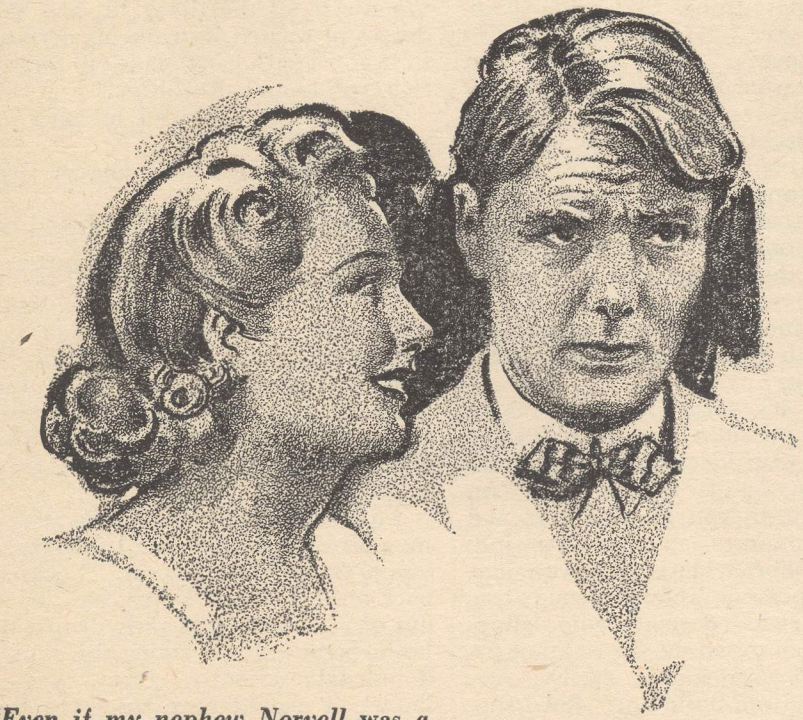
"*So* long," I corrected abstractedly, and slipped to the door, opened it a crack to make sure the coast was clear. "Okay, Norvell. She's gone to bed. I guess you can—"

But there was no answer. My nephew was gone!

I'M not bellyaching, you understand. I buttered my bread, and I'll lie on it. Even if the boys at the plant *aren't* men enough to stand up and confess their part in this, I wish that some day when it has all blown over they'd tell me how their stooge spirited himself from my room while I wasn't looking.

I was standing in the only doorway. He didn't hide in the closet, or under the bed, or anywhere else . . . because I searched that room high and low for him. It is true that the window was open. But it's a thirty-foot drop to the concrete sidewalk, and a twenty-foot leap to the roof. Whatever other strange attributes my visitor may have had, I'm sure he hadn't any cat blood in him.

Curiously enough, I slept well that night. In fact I slept exceptionally well. All my dreams were extra-special deluxe jobs, surrounded by little pink clouds and embellished



***"Even if my nephew Norvell was a phony, he gave me some ideas."***

*"Here's something to balance the account . . . Never mind the change. Go buy yourself a new set of uppers."*

with dollar signs rampant on a field of gold.

The next day I carried my good humor to the office, and broadcast it so offensively that even the hired help took notice. Doris Chandler, who does the stenographic chores for our department, commented on it when she came with my morning mail.

"What on earth has happened to you, Joe?" she asked me. "You look like a Kentucky Colonel in a mint-julep patch. An unknown uncle die and leave you the Standard Oil Company?"

"Close," I chuckled. "Close, my comrade in thralldom. In case your bonny blue eyes fail to penetrate the disguise, you are gazing upon a stag who is on the eve of bursting his shackles with a rousing *yoicks!* and an equally noisy *tally-ho!*"

"This stag at eve," queried Doris shrewdly, "didn't by any chance drink his fill, did he?"

"You do me," I told her reproachfully, "a gross injustice! Such sentiments come rudely from such lovely lips."

"We'll leave my lips out of this," said Doris, "for the time being. If there's anything I can do in the bromo or aspirin line, speak now. You'd better not let the boss catch you in this condition."

"The boss!" I sniffed. "I smile; I leer; I smirk!"

"So you do! But don't forget—where there's smirk there's fire. Or maybe you've decided to enlist in the great Army of Unemployment?"

"Maybe," I replied mysteriously. Then: "Doris, can you keep a secret?"

She met my gaze squarely, speculatively, for a long moment, a curious sort of half-smile on her lips. "I believe so. Why?"

"What would you say," I asked, "if I told you I was quitting the company to go out on my own?"

Surprise widened her eyes and jolted the half smile from her lips. "Joe!" she gasped. "You're joking!"

"The way Mr. Bell joked," I countered, "when he horsed around with a little gimmick called the telephone. Well? Am I crazy? What do you think of the idea?"

"Oh, Joe," she cried, "I think it's just wonderful! I *know* you can make a go of it! I've always thought—" She stopped abruptly. Then in a more cautious tone: "And your—fiancée? What does she say?"

"She'll be delighted, of course. This means we can get married at last. You won't spill this, now, will you? I don't want to tell the boss about it just yet."

"You mean—she doesn't know?"

"She?" I frowned. "The boss?"

"Your fiancée—Miss Overton."

"Oh, Winifred? No, I'm going to tell her tonight."

"I see," she said slowly. "Well, Joe, all I can do is wish you the very best of luck."

"Thanks, kid," I said. "I'm going to need it."

"That you are," she said strangely. "That you are, indeed." She started toward the door, hesitated, turned. "I hope—" she began, and then suddenly stopped again.

"Yes?" I prompted. "Something else, Doris?"

"Just one thing, Joe. Just one more thing. Please don't forget—a good cigar is a smoke!"

On which wacky note she turned and fled. The door slammed behind her. Women are the *strangest* creatures!

I WAS all set for Mrs. McGill when I went home that evening. As I expected, she was waiting in the hallway; as I also expected, she was still watering her plaints with tears.

"That man, Mr. Grady," she sniveled. "That man is still sharing your room!"

"Oh, really?"

"I don't know what his name is. But whatever it is I want more room rent. I'm a very poor woman—"

"You're a very poor housekeeper."

"—and I can't afford to let my lodgers run roughshod over me by taking in their friends and relatives. Moreover, I don't intend to let you get away with it. It so happens, Mr. Grady, I know my legal rights—"

I left her floundering in a sea of *ergoes, to-wits,* and *whereases,* and hurried to my room. But once again nephew Norvell was conspicuous by his absence. However, he *had* been there. Upon my work-table lay two items. One was a note:

*Dear Uncle Joe:*

*Having a little trouble. Transtemporal still acting up. Am experiencing difficulty in contacting your era, then can't stay long when I get through.*

*Also having problem finding blueprints. May take a little time (by your standards as well as mine). However, will contact you as soon as successful.*

*Affectionately,*
*Norvell*

*P.S. In view of your present circumstances, thought you might be able to use this till I get through with desired b.p.*

"This"—the second item—was a magnificently hand-tooled saddle-leather billfold. It was a piece worthy of admiration in its own right—but it never got the appreciation it deserved. For when I picked it up, I discovered its plump little belly to be jam-cram-gorged with luscious legal tender of the United States of America!

And *such* bills! The big, juicy figures in the corners scorned pecuniary bachelordom; they all proudly flaunted one or two opulent zeroes. Fifties—hundreds—it was enough to make a guy greedy. For the first time in my life I understood why they call it "legal tender;" that was the *tenderest* legal stuff I've ever seen.

All told, my nephew's contribution to the Joseph T. Grady Fund for Aged and Decrepit Joseph T. Grady was $12,000! Twelve thousand smackers! That's a thousand a month. Almost two-fifty per, every Monday on the Monday, for a year!

Small wonder I went slightly off my wave-length for a while. I bathed in tepid water churned to a boil by my own racing pulse, dressed in a gray pinstripe fog with necktie to match, and floated downstairs. Mrs. McGill was still holding forth to herself on the subject of my moral turpitude. Forth—or fifth. I'm sure she had repeated herself at least once.

I stunned her into silence with my first words.

"Mrs. McGill," I said, "you are right. One hundred per cent right. I have acted most unfairly."

"It's a lie!" she began stanchly. "Ask anyone who knows me. . . . *What?* What did you say?"

"I have used you," I conceded, "almost as poorly as you use the dustpan and broom. I *have* been sharing my room. And the other occupant *is* my nephew."

"Ah-*hah!*" she snorted. "So your conscience got the better of you after all, eh? And how long has he been there? When did he come?"

"In twenty-oh-three—" I began, then stopped. She would never understand the truth, I figured. I was right.

"In *what?*"

"He moved *in,*" I corrected, "about twenty days ago. Three weeks."

"Three weeks!" she exclaimed starkly. "Three weeks at eight dollars a week—that's twenty-four. And another eight in advance—that's put down your two and carry one—thirty-two! Not to mention extras for water, heat and light—"

"Mrs. McGill," I said grandiloquently, "I'm sorry I deceived you. To prove it, here's a little something to even the account—" I peeled a crisp new hundred-dollar bill off the top of my roll and pressed it into her palm. "Never mind the change. Go buy yourself a new set of uppers."

SHE gaped at the banknote, running the rainbow from flabbergasted green to embarrassed crimson. At last she found her voice. "Why, Mr. Grady, sir!" she croaked. "Thank you, sir! I knew you were only teasing me all the time, sir. I always did say you were the finest gentleman lodger in this house."

"Sir?" I suggested.

"Sir," she said. "But your nephew—poor dear! He can't be very comfortable. Your room has only a single bed."

"Well, he gets by," I answered vaguely. "Some nights he sleeps in the top bureau drawer—some he hangs himself up in the clothes-closet. He's not a bit choosy. But now—if you'll stop licking my hand, Mrs. McGill?—I'm afraid I must run along. I have a date tonight."

And I left, the echoes of her undying affection and pledges to "make things more comfortable for that lovely boy" still ringing pleasantly in my ears.

My ears rang again, but with another kind of music, when I broached the subject of my new venture to Winifred.

She stared at me as if I had just announced the acquisition of a third arm.

"You're doing *what?*" she gasped. "Leaving the company! Have you lost your senses?"

"I never had it," I grinned. "The Government takes it every ten years." Then, rather lamely, as the light of my life failed to laugh with me, "It's a joke, sugar. You know, *senses—census?*"

"Joke! How can you joke at a time like this? It's no laughing matter! Giving up a good job and a steady income to become a—a wildcat inventor!"

"Not me, baby," I said, still struggling to keep it on the light side. "*I* wouldn't invent a wildcat! What fur?"

But Winifred was in no mood for gags. She threw me a look that was ten below zero, Centigrade.

"The poor man's Thomas Edison!" she sniffed. "What makes *you* think you're clever enough to earn a living by your wits?"

I had the answer to that; two of 'em, in fact. One in the history books yet to be written, the other a fat green roll in my pocket. But I didn't want to tell her—or anyone else—about my nephew Norvell. Not yet.

"Well, I could earn *half* a living," I tried feebly. "After all, honeybunch, a guy's got to gamble once in a while if he ever wants to get anywhere. I can work for the company for a hundred and forty-two years, and all I'll get out of it will be a testimonial dinner and a gold-filled watch.

"This way, I've got a chance to make a name for myself. I'm young and ambitious and reasonably bright, and I've got some good ideas—"

"Such as," she demanded, "what?"

"Well," I temporized, "such as a gimmick to convert long and short communication-band waves into the even shorter Hertzian wave range. A sort of modifier, you know—"

"I don't know. And it sounds absurd. What good is it? What would it do?"

"It would make possible interplanetary conversation with normal radio equipment."

"Interplanetary conversa—" Winifred's tone turned acid. "Oh, that's *marvelous!* Simply marvelous! Such a *useful* thing! Every home will need one. I can hardly wait till you put it on the market! Just think—I can speak to all my friends on Mars and Venus."

"That's not as ridiculous as you think," I told her soberly. "This is a new era we're entering. Atomic power is almost here, and space-light is just around the corner. I have

some ideas on *that* subject, too. Someone's got to invent a gadget to provide space-craft with artificial gravity so the passengers won't be swimming around in thin air, and it might as well be me. Someone's got to perfect a deflector to guard space-ships from stray meteors; it might as well be me—"

"Someone's got to bring to an end this idiotic discussion," said Winifred coldly, "and it might as well be me." It was the first time I'd ever seen her lips like that. Thin as a razor, and just about as friendly. She looked just like her mother. "Are you determined to go through with this madcap scheme, Joseph?"

I don't like being called, "Joseph," particularly in that tone of voice. I started dripping a few icicles myself.

"I am."

"Nothing will alter your decision?"

"Nothing."

"Very well." She tugged at her ring finger angrily, and handed me the fruits of her endeavor. "Under the circumstances, you could hardly expect me to continue wearing this."

"I suppose not," I said, and took the ring. But it would have taken a superman to resist the impulse that seized me. "There's just one more thing—" I said casually.

"There's nothing more," she said. "Good-by."

"There's just one more thing," I repeated. "You're apparently worried about my financial future. Well—you can stop worrying. I have nothing to fear on that account."

Nonchalantly I riffled before her startled eyes the big bankroll I had brought to surprise her with, in—I had dreamed—a very different way.

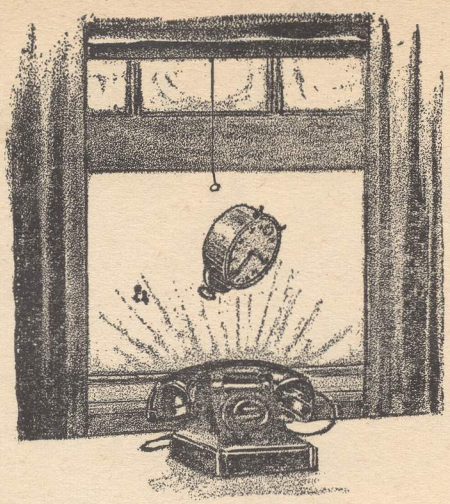
She cried: "Joseph! Where did you get that?"

"From a friend," I replied airily. "Merely an advance on some information he expects to get from me later. Maybe I *am* crazy, my love, but there are a few other fools around who believe in me. Well—toodle-oo!"

And I swung out blithely while she was still thinking up an answer.

MY round, this was, and I should have been gay about the whole thing and happy to get out from under with no visible scars or bruises. But I wasn't. I was miserable and blue, because no matter what her faults, Winifred is the only girl in the world for me. Now that I've lost her, I'll never marry. Never!

I was miserable, so I sought company. I and Hiram Walker holed out in a booth in the back room of Mike Clancy's taproom, and the mere fact that Hi was in a bottle and I was not didn't disturb our friendship. As a matter of fact, in a remarkably short time he had taken up new quarters, closer to the seat of my affections, and I—



*I threw the alarm clock out the window, but the bell kept ringing.*

And I? Well, to be disgustingly candid about it, I don't remember the precise events of that evening so well. I have some hazy recollections of first requesting, then insisting, and finally demanding forcibly that everyone in the taproom drink with me, *on* me. I remember flipping bills at Mike with contemptuous abandon, ordering him to "keep the change," and bragging that there were millions more where this pitiful chickenfeed came from. There was something about offering to match thousand-dollar bills with any man in the house—something else about taking everyone to the moon for the week-end—something else about—oh, I forget! It's all mixed up.

I'm under the impression that at some time or other during the evening I must have visited the Automat and played slot-machine with the little food-cotes, because next morning I found in my pockets six dollars and thirty-five cents—all in nickels—a cup custard, and a dish of cole slaw. I guess that was *after* I took all my buddies home from Clancy's place in a rented hearse, and probably *before* I went to the office; because I remember blotting my letter of resignation, written at the boss' desk despite the protests of an indignant night-watchman, with a slightly frayed pancake.

There may have been other adventures, too. I don't know. I keep hearing things daily. . . .

An alarm bell, driving redhot rivets into my skull, awoke me the next morning. I threw the alarm clock out of the window, but the bell kept ringing, so I staggered out of bed, crawled across the floor on my hands and knees, and snarled a fuzzy, "Yeah?" into the telephone.

It was Doris calling, and she sounded worried.

"Joe? Are you all right?"

"He doesn't live here," I said. "Thissee Ah Sung's Chinee laundly!"

And I hung up, but the phone jangled again before I could decide which of the three beds to head for.

"Joe—" said Doris.

"No spikka da Inglis—" I began.

"Joe, listen to me! You've got to get down here—*right away!* Things are in an awful mess!"

"You're telling *me?* Go 'way!" I said to the little green man trundling his wheelbarrow up and down my right leg. "Things are in a mess here, too. Mrs. McGill has installed a revolving ceiling—"

"You've got to tell them you *didn't* do it," she insisted, "and that precious fiancée of yours is telling everything she knows to the police, and Clancy swears he'll prosecute, and if you *did* do it, Joe, you'd better get out of town before they blockade the highways—"

"Wait a minute!" I bawled. "Do *what?* What's Winifred telling? And why should Clancy want to prosecute? What am I charged with?"

"They haven't finished the list yet," Doris moaned. "They're only on page three. So far they've mentioned fraud, embezzlement, forgery, illegal entry, counterfeiting, assault and battery, both kinds of larceny—"

"Great day in the morning!" I cried. "I sound like a one-man crime wave! Hold everything; I'll be right down!"

"Joe, if you *did* do it, don't come! Skip town till the heat's off. I'll keep in touch with you—"

"Pish!" I said. "Also tush! You've been listening to 'Gang-Busters' again. I'll be there in two shakes."

And I dug my clothes out from under the carpet.

DORIS certainly had not overstated the case; things were in a mess at the office. The joint was alive with characters, some of whom I knew, others whom I'd never seen before in all my life.

My boss was there, and Doris, and a pinch-nosed guy with hair combed sidewise across a billiard-ball noggin; Mike Clancy was there, and the night-watchman, two cops, and a man with a face ten feet longer than the Hudson Tunnel. Winifred was on deck, and a lot of other people named anonymous.

When I entered, they all lunged at me as if it were feeding time at the zoo, and I the table d'hôte. The bobbies reached me first, and as they wrestled for my wrist, one of them bellowed: "Anything you say may be used against you. Why did you do it?"

I said: "Look, stupid, put the jewelry away and get your nose out of my mouth! What did I do? And who says so?"

Winifred cried plaintively from the corner: "Don't, Joseph! Don't antagonize them! Confession is the only

hope. Make a clean breast of it, and they may be easy on you."

"Clean breast of *what?* What's this all about?"

"You see, officer?" said my boss. "A hardened desperado. Brazening it out. You might as well—"

"You too? Good Lord!" I shouted. "Don't tell me a guy can be arrested for quitting this company!"

"I suppose," snarled my late boss, "you're going to pretend you didn't break in here last night—"

"I *walked* in!"

"He *broke* in!" bleated the watchman. "He busted in ragin' drunk, an' assault-an'-battered me into submission!"

"I walked in," I repeated indignantly, "and wrote a letter of resignation. It's true I'd had a short beer or so, but—"

"You went into my office?"

"That's right."

"And sat at my desk?"

"I did."

"And opened my private files?"

"I took a sheet of paper out of the upper righthand drawer, if that's what you mean. I didn't see anything 'private'—unless you mean that picture of you and an overripe blonde playing pretzel on the beach at Coney Island—"

"Never mind that! The point is—you admit you had access to the confidential records of this company?"

"If you want to put it that way," I admitted, "yes. I suppose I did. So what?"

"You see, officer? Hard as nails. I suspected all along that he was the criminal type."

"Joe!" cried Doris. "Joe, don't talk! You've got a right to consult with your lawyer." She set her lips grimly. "Clam up, pard! I'll call the mouthpiece—"

"Quiet, young lady!" snapped the boss. "Now, Grady—since you've gone this far, will you admit the rest? Will you confess having stolen company plans and sold them to outside interests?"

"Who, me?" And I stared at him numbly. "Are you nuts? I never stole anything in my life! Or sold any information!"

"Oh, no? Is it not true that you showed this young lady"—he designated Winifred with a nod—"a considerable sum of money, and confided to her that it was an advance from a friend for some information you were to supply him later?"

I cried: "But, for Pete's sake—" Then I stopped dead, stricken suddenly with the realization of how fantastic must sound any explanation I could offer. Who would ever believe my story about Norvell? Who—

"But, for P-Pete's sake—" I cried.

"Okay!" grunted one of the cops. "Okay, pal, let's get going! Looks

like you're going to have plenty of time in hinkey to think these things over—what with this affair and a counterfeiting rap."

"A—a counterfeiting rap? Did I do *that* too?"

Clancy spoke up mournfully. "You shouldn't've done me that way, Mr. Grady; that you shouldn't. I always thought me an' you was good friends, so I did. It was a dirty trick, it was, an' me acceptin' your money like it was good as gold. Why did you do it? To me, I mean?"

I said carefully: "Look, gentlemen—I have already blundered into one misunderstanding that threatens to deprive me of life, liberty, and the pursuit of further sappiness. I do not, however, have the faintest idea what lies behind this new complaint. If there is any sanity left in this mob, will someone please explain what this is all about?"

The man with the long face looked at the baldheaded man. "You tell him, Mr. Squeers. It was your bank that discovered the forgery."

Squeers nodded.

"Has he any more of the money on him?" he asked the policemen.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Get your hand out of my—"

"Here you are, Mr. Squeers." The cop tossed him my bankroll. The cashier inspected it swiftly, nodded.

"Yes. Just like the rest. A most inept job; most! Obviously the work of a rank amateur."

"Meaning?" I demanded.

"Meaning, Mr. Grady, that you made an inconceivably stupid blunder when you forged these counterfeit bills. I've seen a great deal of what you underworld characters call—uh—wallpaper. But never have I seen such excellent engraving utterly wasted by carelessness—"

"Speak up, man! What's wrong with that money?"

He smiled thinly. "Nothing, Mr. Grady. Nothing . . . except that it's signed by two persons who never held office, and the series designated will not be issued for another decade!"

He passed me a bill, and I studied it with mounting despair. There's no doubt about it; it's always best to read the small print. The notes my nephew Norvell had so thoughtfully sent me were signed by *T. M. Cardovan, Treasurer of the United States,* and *Walter B. Gurk, Secretary of the Treasury.* And above the second signature was the legend: *Series 1956 B!* . . .

Well—that's about all. The rest is routine stuff that wouldn't interest

*A cop bellowed: "Anything you say may be used against you. Why did you do it?"*

you. How they tossed me in the clink, and I got the bright idea of asking Mrs. McGill to testify on my behalf, and it turned out *she* was suing me, too, for three weeks' room rent. How Doris went to the boys at the plant and begged them to explain that it had all been a practical joke, and those stinkers let on they didn't know anything about it. How the newspapers got wind of the story and played it up big for laughs, and Winifred's father pledged to kick me out if I ever entered his house again . . . and how the E-Z Payment Gemme Shoppe refused to give me any refund on the engagement-ring I turned back to them.

It was Doris who wound the whole thing up, I guess. Anyhow, it was she who soft-talked the boss into dropping the company's charges against me after he found the plans he said I'd stolen, down behind the filing cabinets. And it was Doris who got Clancy, the bank, and the rest of my victims to withdraw their suits on the condition I make good their financial losses. Finally, it was Doris who pointed out to the coppers that they really had no case against me until they proved I'd deliberately manufactured and/or passed those phony bills—and after a while, for lack of evidence, they let me go.

So it all just sort of petered out. There wasn't a happy ending, like in a story; there just wasn't *any* ending—except that I'm getting out of this burg as soon as I've tied up a few loose ends, and good riddance! I'm not bellyaching, you understand! I stepped into it with my eyes open and I'll take my medicine. But Doris agrees with me that I got a kicking around for being a trusting soul.

Of course I had to tell Doris the whole story, from beginning to end, when she was trying to help me. Nice girl, Doris. She'll make some guy a good wife some day . . . a guy who likes women, that is. Me; I'm broken-hearted. There'll never be another love for me. . . .

But you've got to hand it to Doris. She's right in there. She listened to my story and didn't bat an eyelash . . . except once. That was when I mentioned Sandusky.

"Sandusky?" she started. "Sandusky, Ohio?"

"That's right," I said. "Why?"

"Oh—nothing," she said. "Except that I just happened to think—my mother and dad live there. It's a pretty place. Quiet, too." She hesitated, casting me a thoughtful, sidelong glance. "Joe, after this mess is all cleaned up, do you still plan to do what you said you were going to? I mean go into business for yourself? Inventing, and all that?"

"I do," I declared firmly. "Even if my nephew Norvell *was* a phony, he gave me some good ideas. Why?"

"Well, why don't you come home to Sandusky with me? Dad has a little tool-shed behind the house; it could be converted into a laboratory in no time at all, at practically no expense. He'd be glad to let you use it till you get on your feet again—"

"For free, you mean? I'm dead broke, you know."

"That doesn't matter. Dad's quite a gambler." She smiled at me, that funny little half smile again. "We're all gamblers in our family—but we know a good thing when we see it."

The strangest kid! I don't understand her half the time, but she's okay.

I nodded.

"All right. Then that's the ticket. Sure is funny how things work out, though, isn't it? When that smart Aleck 'nephew' of mine gave me the double-talk about Sandusky, I'll bet he never dreamed I'd be moving there within a month!"

SO, as I said when I started, I'm not asking favors from anybody, and I don't want any more trouble. I know what I'm going to do, and as soon as I straighten matters out with the E-Z Payment Gemme Shoppe, I'll be on my way.

Only it *does* hurt, because of course there'll never be another girl but Winifred for me, and I *did* think the boys at the plant liked me. And some day I would like to find out who that guy was—the one who pretended to be my nephew Norvell, I mean—and I'd also like to know how he got out of my room that night.

He was a nice guy. I liked him from the start. He looked an awful lot like someone I know. But I can't for the life of me figure out who it is . . . except that when he smiled, it was a funny little half smile—sort of like Doris.

*"My only hope is you," Katherine said. "None will face the wrath of Marchand."*

# The Reluctant

FRANCOIS VILLON dreamed: His suit was blue velvet, and his boots shone like mirrors. He knelt on one knee in gracious dignity, and the King bade him rise to accept the great award. The Court, with its beribboned ladies and its dandied gallants, listened and sighed enviously; for at last the poet was realizing his just deserts, his greatness recognized by the ruler of France.

Villon did not condescend; he accepted the situation as great men always accept fate. Gone were the starved days of his wretched paupered thievery; now he would live in idle grace, composing sonnets and ballads about the great, immortalizing himself.

It was a splendid dream, and François Villon stretched luxuriously like a sleeping cat. His mobile mouth smiled beneath the arch of his bold nose, and his hand groped for the King's. . . .

The smile disappeared; he snorted through his nose, and spluttered into wakefulness. Dirty water ran over his face and soaked the rags he wore for clothing. His dark eyes, blinded by the water, caught sight of the gross man towering over him; and he instinctively rolled aside from a brutal kick, and came plunging to his feet.

"Up, dog," the jailer said. "You have a visitor."

Villon stripped wetness from his face with dirty fingers, and the rage in him swelled the muscles of his neck. The shocking transition from his dream to reality numbed his thoughts for the second, and he felt only the red pulse of his anger in his heart. But he made no outward sign, for he had learned long since who were the masters of Montfaucon Prison.

"Who is it, the King?" he mocked, and gestured at his ragged clothes. "Shall he see his greatest poet in such as these?"

Ladier, the jailer, laughed; and the sound bounced from wall to wall of the mucky cell. "You talk big, Master Villon," he said. "It will be great fun to see you breathing through a neck as long as your arm."

François Villon swallowed heavily, hearing the bright rattle of chains on the brutal gibbets outside the prison walls. Each day, luckless screaming men died there, while the morbid crowds mocked their twitching bodies with hoarse cries of derision. It was an ugly way to pass into eternity, dangling in space, strangling in a murderous noose. And within the week, Villon would dance on air, and discover whether the weight of his buttocks would break his slender neck.

Villon shivered. "Enough of this," he said. "Show me the visitor."

Ladier backed from the cell, throwing the water-bucket aside in a clang of metal to mark his passing. Once he

A desperate adventure of that famous minstrel rapscallion Francois Villon

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

# Rogue

## Ballad of the Gibbet

AN EPITAPH IN THE FORM OF A BALLAD THAT FRANCOIS VILLON WROTE OF HIMSELF AND HIS COMPANY, THEY EXPECTING SHORTLY TO BE HANGED.

BROTHERS and men that shall after us be,
Let not your hearts be hard to us:
For pitying this our misery
Ye shall find God the more piteous.
Look on us six that are hanging thus,
And for the flesh that so much we cherished
How it is eaten of birds and perished,
And ashes and dust fill our bones' place.
Mock not at us that so feeble be,
But pray God pardon us out of His grace.

Listen, we pray you, and look not in scorn,
Though justly, in sooth, we are cast to die;
Ye wot no man so wise is born
That keeps his wisdom constantly.
Be ye then merciful, and cry
To Mary's Son that is piteous,
That His mercy take no stain from us,
Saving us out of the fiery place.
We are but dead; let no soul deny
To pray God succour us out of His grace.

The rain out of heaven has washed us clean.
The sun has scorched us black and bare.
Ravens and rooks have pecked at our eyne,
And feathered their nests with our beards and hair.
Round are we tossed, and here and there,
This way and that, at the wild wind's will,
Never a moment my body is still;
Birds they are busy about my face.
Live not as we, nor fare as we fare;
Pray God pardon us out of His grace.

L'ENVOI

Prince Jesus, Master of all, to Thee
We pray Hell gain no mastery,
That we come never anear that place;
And ye men, make no mockery,
Pray God pardon us out of His grace.

*—Andrew Lang's translation.*

had fawned before the poet-rogue; once he had stood aside to permit the other to precede him. But that was when Villon's purse had been heavy, and when he could buy the food and privileges which Ladier, as head jailer had the right to sell. But now he went ahead, and Villon followed, wincing at the vicious squalor of what he saw.

Montfauçon was square, all cells opening into an inner court. A stone balcony, backed by cells, made a second floor of the prison; and from there the favored prisoners, those with the money to pay for better food and cells, watched the muddy ground of the inner court, where surged a mob of men and women whose destinies lay only in death's pardon.

All kinds were here: murderers, counterfeiters, pickpockets, pimps and harlots. They talked, or sulked, or walked; and the sound of their living was a dank miasma which filled the yard. Some were drunk from the rotten wine purchased from the prisoners' shops; and others followed at their heels, whining, begging, fawning, so that they might taste a bit of watered wine or a thumb's-width of fried pork.

Some were huddled about the food-buckets the law compelled Ladier to furnish those who could not pay for better. Rotten half-cooked meat and wormy bread half-filled the buckets, and the prisoners ate greedily; for any death was preferable to one of starvation. They were gaunt and bony, and their eyes swung up to hate Ladier as he preceded Villon. But they said no word, for the jailer had his ways of dealing with malcontents, not the least of which was the vicious braided whip hanging at his right wrist.

François Villon spat. He had been in prisons before, but none had been so squalid and terrible as this. Montfauçon was a real hell, and the people were damned souls, crying for release from their torment, without hope and without success.

He followed the burly Ladier across the muddy yard, ignoring the cries of greeting from the group at the first wine-stall. His pockets were empty, and his credit no longer good. Later he would return and perhaps sing a song for a loaf of bread and a glass of wine, for his reputation seemed enhanced by this motley company. He smiled unconsciously at the thought;

he who had sung his poems in the great shining halls of the nobility now gave his poetry to another class, and for the same reason—that he might eat. The irony of it touched his warped sense of humor, and almost did he laugh aloud.

He felt no compulsion to hurry, for he was certain of the identity of his visitor. It would be Guillaume de Villon, the chaplain of Saint Bênoit, the priest who had reared him from infancy and whose name he bore because his father was a mystery to the world, if not himself.

The news the priest would bear would be the same as before: the Church would not interfere again as it had in the past. Villon had passed the limitation of its divine patience; now he would have to pay for his earthly crimes in an earthly way.

Mud splashed beneath his boots and was cold on his ankles. He felt incredibly dirty, and his beard was ragged. His lean belly growled with emptiness, and the stench of the prisoners and the foul prison curdled the breath in his nostrils. This was a far cry from the roistering days at the University of Paris, where he had studied and received his degrees. This was different from the rich courts where his bold arrogant poetry and sly wit had brought him favors from the well-born. Then he had been somebody of stature; now he was just another miscreant sweating out his last days of miserable existence.

"IN there," Ladier said at last, and pointed toward the visitors' cell.

He laughed as he said the words, his piggish eyes running the length of the poet's shabby body, finding amusement in the other's appearance. His dislike for the poet was a tangible thing; for though he had stripped a fortune from the prisoners, he never could stand in the places Villon had stood with his paupered brilliance.

And then, seeing the blaze kindling in Villon's eyes, he turned away, fat fist circled about the heavy butt of the plaited whip he used to cut his way through the crowd.

"Some day," Villon promised himself softly, "some day—"

He left the thought unfinished.

The cell was empty, he thought, for his eyes were blinded by the bright sunlight, and he could see no cassocked figure seated on the bench. And then a movement in a far corner caught his eye, and he blinked in astonishment.

"Katherine!" he cried. "What do you in a place like this?"

She would have embraced him, but he held her off, for he knew the filthiness of his body. The clean scent of her hair and the delicate odor of her perfume touched his senses; and he shivered suddenly, fully realizing the depths of his degradation.

*Grim pity touched his heart. . . . Everything seemed*

"François—oh, François!" the girl said, and began to cry.

He soothed her clumsily, seeing again the glory of her light hair and the clean soft lines of her face. He had been in love with her once, when his poetry had gained him access to the King's court. She had been one of the Queen's ladies; and for a time he had aspired above his station, for she was high-born, and he had come up from the gutter.

His bitter biting poetry had changed in those wonder-filled days, and the poem he had written about her had been sung in the King's court. Even His Majesty had been touched with its hopeless sweet yearning, and Villon had profited in the King's esteem.

But François Villon had striven to capture a moonbeam then. Etienne Chantillny had been Katherine's choice. As high-born as she, with the laughing exuberance of youth, he had

*Illustrated by John Fulton*

*so futile here, in the midst of squalor and death.*

won her from a hundred men; and it was said that their marriage waited only the blessing of the King.

And now Katherine cried brokenly in a poet-rogue's arms, soiling the rich velvet of her dress with the dirt from his hands, and caring naught. Villon caught his breath, shaken by her nearness and the depths of her emotions.

"What is it, Katherine?" he asked. "Why are you here?"

She caught her poise again, tears shining unshed in her eyes, and her smooth mouth trembled with the agony in her mind.

"Etienne is here," she said. "You must help him escape."

"Etienne—*here!*" Villon said stupidly, and heard the sounds in the filthy court outside. "But why?"

Katherine turned away and sat on the rude bench. Black roaches moved across the floor, and she lifted her skirts instinctively in distaste, and as instinctively blushed as she realized Villon had seen her legs.

"He beat Marchand," she said tonelessly, hopelessness replacing the grief in her face. "He flogged him with a coachman's whip for daring to lay his hands on me last night."

*"Marchand!"* Villon's hands tightened into fists, and for the moment he forgot the girl. Sire Marchand had sent him here two months before, and his lying testimony would send him to the gibbet at the week's end. He knew Marchand, and felt only hate for that greasy toad of a man.

Impulse drew him to the girl; and he was about to speak, when realization came to him. His hands loosened; bitter irony twisted his mobile lips.

"You forget," he said wryly, "that I cannot even free myself."

PLEADING desperation lay in the girl's fingers as she caught his hand. She held him tightly, and her eyes were wide mirrors of her trust.

"You've got to help," she said. "I have money—not enough, I know, but all that I could borrow." Her gaze clouded again. "François," she finished, "you vowed that you loved me, told me the world held no danger you would not face for me. Did you lie?"

"Lie!" Villon caught his breath. "No, I spoke the truth."

"Then, here!" Katherine thrust a small purse into the poet's hand, and he felt the weight of hard coins. Instinctively he hid the money within his ragged shirt, flicking his gaze to the door to discover if anyone watched. Men died in Montfauçon over mere words; gold would be a death-warrant in the night. Satisfied that he was unobserved, he turned back to the girl.

"I do not know what I can do," he said softly, "and can promise nothing. Ladier is greedy, but he knows who can pay the most, and I do not think that I can bribe him. But the other guards would slit a throat for a silver piece; perhaps I can work through them to aid Etienne. Now tell me what you can."

Katherine nodded. "I know only that Etienne was placed under arrest by the watch and brought here secretly last night. He is charged with political treason; and because of that, there will be no trial." Her slender hands clenched with sudden hate. "Marchand told me Etienne would go free—if I did what he wished."

She flushed at the shame of the words; and in her gaze Villon had an answer to Marchand's question. He knew Etienne would live, one way or the other, no matter the cost.

"The bully, the stinking bully!" Villon said. He knew Marchand, knew of the power he wielded, and had heard the tales of him which paralleled this pathetic one now unfolding.

"My only hope is you," Katherine said. "None will face the wrath of Marchand. *Friends!*" she finished in bitter contempt.

"Aye!" François Villon said broodingly. "I have tasted the court's friendship." His eyes roamed the dark room, and thought twisted his mouth.

"If you can free Etienne," Katherine said, "we can escape to England. We have friends there who will help." She cried into cupped hands, rocking in her grief. "Oh, François, there is so little time!"

A devil danced in Villon's eyes then, and mockery touched his long lips. He knew the impossibility of the task she had given him, and yet he would not concede defeat.

"Go home," he ordered. "Wait there." He touched her shoulder gently. "Believe in me, Katherine."

"You have a plan?" she asked, hope rekindling.

"No," he admitted, shaking his head. "I will do what I can, but I promise nothing."

She kissed him then, squarely on the mouth, and her lips were warm and soft. He envied Etienne then, as he had envied no man for months. He had tried to hate Etienne, when first he knew Katherine was for the other, but he found such hate impossible. And from their common love of the slender girl had come a friendship which bonded them together stronger than any chains could do.

"I trust you, François," Katherine said, and he could see belief deep in her eyes. Then she had pulled the furred hood over her head and was gone through the rear door. The room was a dirty tomb of memories then; Villon, sighing, turned to leave.

HE heard an outcry in the court, and stepped into the sunshine in time to see a wizened little prisoner sink against the wall. Ladier stood over him, a handful of the rotten food running down his chest from where it had been thrown in sudden hate. His braided whip was rising and falling, rising and falling, with a steady brutal rhythm that would not cease until the hapless victim lay in bloody death.

François Villon felt his stomach turn. Brutality was commonplace in Montfauçon; but Ladier was a sadist. Three men he had whipped to death in the past month; now he was murdering another. The prisoners were silent, watching, afraid to interfere; but the wave of hate from them was as stifling as the fetid air. . . .

Then Ladier was through, and the wizened man was dead. The jailer stripped blood from the whip with his free hand and wiped his fingers on the corpse's clothes. He straightened, bullet head swiveling to see the effect he had created. Ropy muscles bunched and loosened in his huge body, and his eyes were glazed with the ecstasy of the moment.

*Ladier laughed. "It will be great fun," he said, "to see*

He was complete master of Montfauçon, and he reveled in the thought. He gave life and death to the prisoners as he desired. The King's government allotted so much money for the keeping of the prisoners, but gave no further heed to them. As a consequence, he fed rotten food to his charges, pocketing the bulk of the allotment; and the prisoners who wanted better than the sickening fare further lined his pockets with what money their families or their friends sent in from outside.

He protected his position with bribes and callous murder, and now he was secure, for he answered any man whose gold weighed the most in a money-changer's scale.

He turned away now, calling orders to extra guards along the wall; and they moved in to carry the body away. A voice spoke, and another answered. A harlot laughed and whispered mockingly to the man beside her, and he chuckled, while watching the corpse's dangling bloody hands. Then the court came to life again, and people moved as they had before the little man had faced the brutality of Ladier.

François Villon spat, and moved along the wall, following the shadowy tunnel along one wall formed by the shops run by prisoners and leased from Ladier. He would have given ten years of his life then to have had a blade in hand with which to face the head jailer.

He went slowly along the semi-dark tunnel, hearing the rasp of feet on the

*you breathing through a neck as long as your arm."*

balcony overhead, wondering if he could ever afford to live there again. He was conscious of the gold at his waist, but he gave it no heed. He was a thief; but strangely, he accepted the fact that the gold was not his.

He went along the wall toward the black door guarded by two men. He had no particular fear of being watched, for the tunnel was masked by the small stalls. He stopped at his cell and buried most of the gold Katherine had given him, then went out again and toward the black door. Except for two six-foot spaces, the way was entirely guarded from the other prisoners' prying eyes.

Behind the door lay the dungeons and torture-chambers where political prisoners spent their last days. Ordinary prisoners could not enter, for the political prisoners might tell things better left unsaid, things which could topple mighty scheming men from their positions of power.

They were caged in foul dungeons, and died on the gibbets outside the prison wall, their mouths gagged so that they might not cry the lie at their accusers, and their heads hooded so that they might not be recognized by friends until too late. And it was there that Etienne Chantillny waited for a hangman's noose.

François Villon shivered, pausing at the last break in the wall's tunnel, standing quietly in the shadow between a wine-stall and a shop where bread baked in a small brick oven.

He saw Ladier standing near the heavy door which led to freedom in one wall. His eyes roamed the court, singling out prisoners. He swung his whip idly. Villon watched, but Ladier made no overt move; he merely stood and gloated over the helplessness of the men and women within the court.

While Ladier watched, François Villon did not dare make the least effort to see Etienne. If the man suspected the poet's intentions, naught would come of this adventure, for Ladier would report swiftly to Marchand. And then, in all probability, Villon would swing prematurely at Etienne's side from a gibbet beam.

THE poet-rogue shifted back into the shadows and waited patiently for the jailer to desert his post. The clamor of the motley crowd pushed at him, and a sense of grim pity touched his heart. Everything seemed so futile here, in the midst of squalor and death. And so it had always been with him; for it was as though his keen mind found only the bitter things to give to his poetry; while in real life, adventure and rocking laughter sought him out, as though he were the Devil's favorite child.

He saw Ladier finally quit his post. And then a muted scream came from behind the black door through which he intended to pass. A shiver touched his body, and for a moment he thought of the poor devils behind that portal.

Just once had he seen a man who had escaped such imprisonment, and never did he wish to see such a thing again. A dead man walked and talked, and fear was his shadow. He had mercifully died from a bully's blade one night in a robbery, and Villon had been glad, for no more would the man live his tortures again in memory. And he was not alone, for intrigue ran deep in France, and many shared his fate.

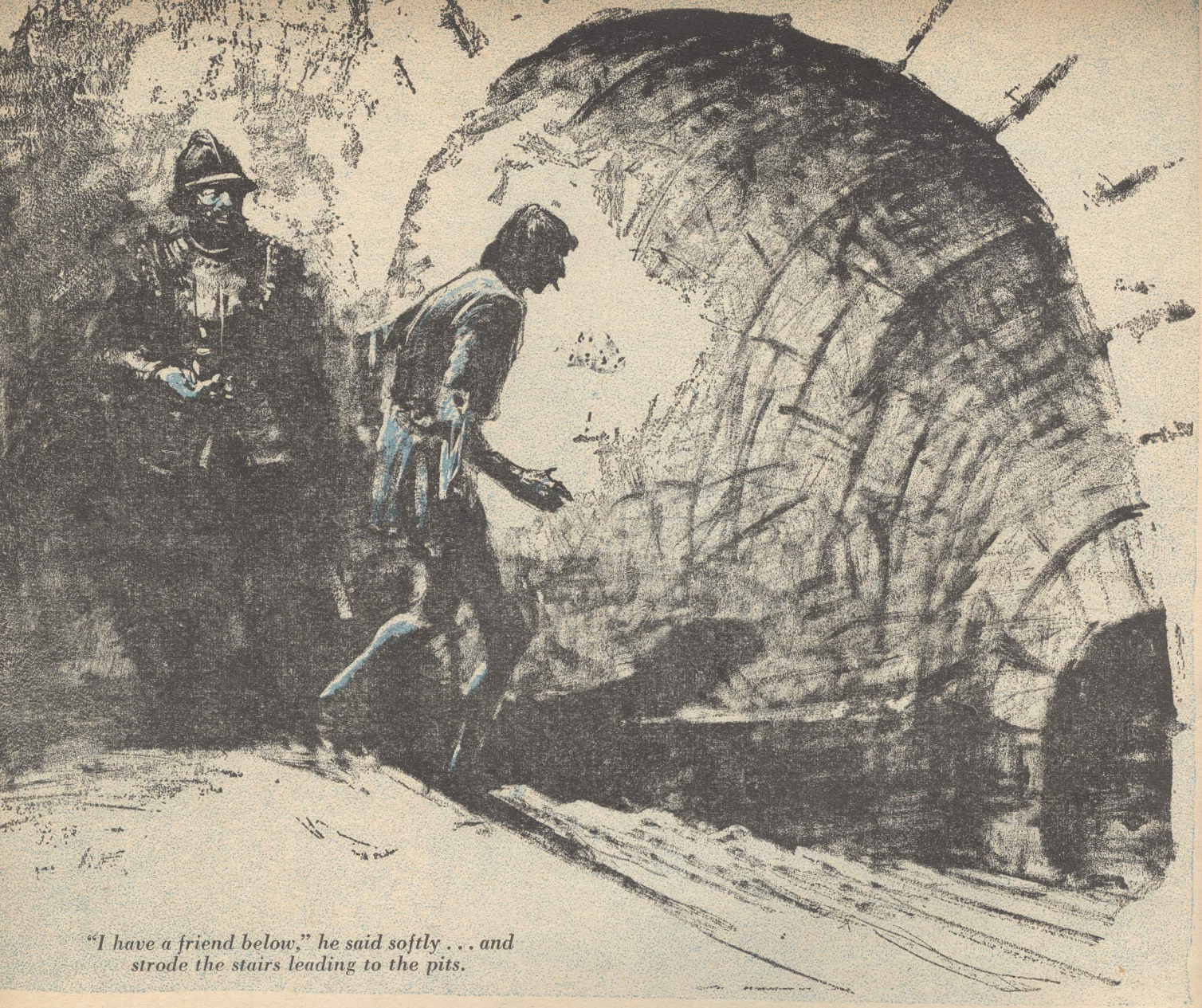
They were doomed, without hope of reprieve or freedom, those who were caged below the ground. And among them now was Etienne Chantillny—who had been Villon's friend.

François Villon shivered again. The hopelessness of the situation was like a blow in the face. He hesitated beside a shop and fumbled coins from the purse hidden at his waist. Ruddy gold gleamed in his fingers, and he surreptitiously slid one coin into sight as he faced the guards.

"I have a friend below," he said softly. "He would like to speak to me."

And thirty seconds later, he strode the stairs leading to the pits. Torches burned feebly in the dank air, and the noisome odors swirled from below in a never-ending tide. Somewhere a man screamed, and a voice answered in a maddened quaver of insanity.

Villon stopped at the foot of the stairs, looking down the tunnel, seeing the cells which lined the sides. Locks were good down here, and held



*"I have a friend below," he said softly . . . and strode the stairs leading to the pits.*

their victims securely. In the main prison, locks were powerless, for none could stand against the clever fingers of the Thieves' Guild. Above, guards were the locks against escape.

"Etienne!" he called, and echoes started a pæan of mockery from the depths.

"Food, ah God, food!" a voice cried from close at hand, and fingers clawed to reach Villon.

The poet turned his head, knowing he could not help and hurried by. Voices called to him; and here on the right, a madman prowled the front of the cage like a dirty ape, fingers plucking at the iron, saliva staining the matted beard drooping from his chin. His face was a whiskered skull, his eyes holes which held no light of sanity.

"Flauvert!" Villon whispered. Once this man had been the closest adviser to the King; then he had made a mistake. And now he rotted in filthy madness beneath the earth.

*"François!"* The single word cut into his consciousness.

Etienne was in the seventh cell. His hands gripped the bars, and he pressed close so that he might see the length of the dank corridor. A purple bruise stained his mouth, and his clothes were ripped; but he smiled at Villon and caught his hand.

"Katherine asked me to come," Villon said simply, liking this man.

Etienne nodded. "Can you get me out?" he asked.

François Villon shrugged ruefully. "I don't know," he admitted. "I have some money, but probably not enough. I bribed the guards to let me in; but I don't think I can bribe our way out." He grinned, and for the second was almost handsome. "Anyway, keep cheer, and I shall do what I can."

ETIENNE drew a deep breath. "Get me a dagger," he pleaded. "At least I may be able to reach Marchand before I die."

Villon shook his head. "No weapons," he said. "Cause no trouble, and I'll see you again later." His hand pressed the other's. "Keep cheer."

Etienne Chantillny forced a smile. "I'll wait," he said wryly.

"Good!" Villon turned away.

He went swiftly down the lane between the cells, trying not to see the shivering wretches in each. On the stairs, he looked back and saw the wave of Etienne's hand. . . .

In three hours dawn would paint the sky with crimson and yellow. But now it was inky black, the stars faded and far away. Montfauçon had stilled, except for the drunken roisterers across the yard on the second tier of cells where the favored prisoners, the ones with money, held a nightly carousal.

François stood at the window of his filthy cell and brooded. He had failed, and the knowledge rankled in his breast. The guards of Montfauçon were easy to bribe; clothes, food, women, anything could be brought into the prison for a piece of silver or gold. But even the toughest of them were afraid of the sadistic Ladier; none would challenge his wrath. Any prisoner, other than one from the political dungeons, could have bought his escape; but no guard would take a bribe to release Etienne, even though they did not know him by name.

Villon scratched at his stubbly chin and idly fingered the few pieces of gold left in his purse. Defeat touched his face and marked it, but his wide eyes were still angry and determined. He had spread Katherine's money judiciously among the guards who walked the court, and had watched the gold disappear in greedy hands, while mouths did lip-service which meant nothing. Only two of the men had had the courage to admit they would help, if he could find a way that would free them of danger from Ladier; and it was on them that he tried to pin his hopes. Both were on the dungeon door; and his mind cast plan after plan, involving them, only to catch the fallacious reasoning in each, and having to discard them one after the other.

Three hours! Villon swore, and reached for the clay jug of watered wine. He drank dispiritedly, and spat through the bars into the street beyond his cell wall. Etienne had no chance of escape; and Katherine would wait in vain for her lover to appear as Villon had promised.

THE poet turned from the window and went to the cell-door. The prisoners slept, in the cells along his side of the prison; and the raucous rhythm of the snoring sounded harsh and ugly in the tunnel between the backs of the prisoner shops and the cells. He went lightly along the tunnel, glancing in each cell as he passed, but unable to make out forms in the blackness. The heavy wooden doors were open to gather what breeze there was, and the stench that came from each cell was sickening, and turned the wine sour in his throat.

He paced to the first break between the booths, peering out. The roisterers on the second tier, across the court, sang drunkenly of the King's mistress; and a woman's voice rose in lying dismay at somebody's attention. A lantern gleamed in the largest cell, and shadows crossed the light, as the prisoners walked about.

Villon watched, stepping farther into the court. His gaze swung about the square, searching for the guards, and he saw one at the main gate, the glow of a small brazier marking his hands as he warmed them over the reddened coals. Another paced the roof of the prison, going around the square every few minutes, and his footsteps made small scuffing noises in the night. All gates were double-chained on the outside; and Villon shrugged, dismissing the possibility of a bold escape through any of them.

François Villon swore. The night was so perfect for any plan. Most of the prisoners were asleep, and those who were awake would not call out at any activity, for a knife-blade spoke a more deadly answer than any tongue. Aye, it was a perfect night for any endeavor; and Villon had nothing in his mind but nebulous thoughts and vain regrets.

He went back to the darkness of the tunnel and approached the door which led to the dungeons. The point of a blade touched his breast, and he stopped, waiting to be recognized.

"Ah," the first guard said softly, "it is the planner. What now, Master Poet?"

"Nothing!" Villon said savagely. "But the night is not yet over."

The second guard rubbed his palms together with a rasping sound. "There is not much time," he reminded Villon. "For a gold-piece, I will strangle your friend and loose the madman. Then he shall not hang, and his enemies will think that he died by misadventure."

Villon shivered at the cold brutality of the other's words. And yet the thought was merciful in its way; far better to die in any manner than on the gallows, mocked by the crowd, with honor stained beyond recall.

"We'll wait," he said bitterly.

The first guard nodded his white shadow of face. "I have a drug," he said, "which will make your friend fear and feel nothing. Why—"

François Villon whirled and stalked the way he had come. His thoughts were chaotic in his mind, and his hands were fists at his side. Futility beat at him, and for once, he had not the will to fight back.

He turned to his cell, sinking to the pile of moldy straw which was his bed. Lice bit at him, and he drank moodily from the jug. Roaches ran for safety. He trapped one in his hand, then dropped it in the water pail and watched critically as it struggled. He felt a sudden kinship with the insect then, for it was no more trapped than he.

Carefully he retrieved the black creature and set it on the floor again. Soaked, but still alive, it kicked spasmodically, then scuttled to safety.

"I save roaches," Villon said aloud bitterly, "but cannot help my friends."

Laughter swirled into the room, preceded by sudden light; and Villon blinked against the flickering radiance of a torch. He looked up at the masked man, feeling rage stirring at the ugly mocking laughter which came from the intruder, and came slowly to his feet.

"You brood too much, Master Poet," Marchand jeered. "Can it be my hospitality does not please you?"

He was tall, and the swirling crimson-lined cape made him seem larger. He wore the narrow mask all officials wore when visiting prisons, and the cloth was black against the whiteness of his features. He smelled of perfume, and his clothes were elegant and very clean.

"You stink," Villon said, "like the carrion you are."

Marchand nodded, leaning lazily against the jamb. A sword was close to his free hand, and the small torch he held was bright against the darkness behind him. His eyes glittered through the mask-holes; and suddenly the laughter was gone from his throat.

"We have jested enough, Villon," he said at last. "I want those jewels returned, and I am here for a final answer from you."

François Villon shrugged. "I know nothing but what you have told me," he disclaimed. "If you were robbed, then that is your concern, not mine."

"I think it is yours too," Marchand said thoughtfully. "You were caught while trying to sell one of the rings." He shrugged. "You were not one of the two who robbed me at sword's-point—but you know who they are. Give their names, and you go free."

Villon considered, estimating and evaluating the situation. He had not talked before, for he had thought to escape from Montfauçon. He knew the bullies, had even helped plan the robbery; but he had no intention of giving the names of his friends to this dandy.

"I know nothing," he said.

Marchand's hand fisted about the pommel of his sword, then slacked; and he straightened. His mouth was a grim slash in his features below the mask.

"I care nothing for you, Villon," he said. "You are a bully and a thief. Your poetry is bad and your reputation worse. If you hang, the world loses little. But I want those jewels back. I offer you a fair trade: your life for the jewels."

VILLON spread his hands. "Did I know, I would tell," he said evenly. "I have no desire to have my neck stretched." Anger came to his tone then. "But do not speak thus of my songs; they will live long after you are dust!"

"Perhaps!" Marchand agreed. "But you shall not be here a week hence, if I do not recover the jewels stolen from me."

"Who knows the future?" François Villon said, and spat thoughtfully at Marchand's right boot.

"I can predict yours," Marchand said, and the cold rage in him was oozing to the surface.

François Villon felt the hammering of his heart. He was tense now with the hopeless fury of knowing he could do nothing. He considered driving for the blade at Marchand's side, and knew the action would solve nothing. Marchand seemed to sense his thoughts, for his slash mouth smiled, and his sword slid looseningly in its sheath.

"What of Chantillny?" Villon asked.

"Chantillny!" Marchand echoed the name. "So you know of him." He stiffened. "So the woman was Katherine; Ladier said you had a visitor."

François Villon scowled. "Surely you are not going through with this farce?"

"It is no farce, I assure you," Marchand said grimly. "He whipped me; he'll hang for that."

François Villon took a slow step forward. He was not as tall as the other, but he loomed larger in the cell, for his anger was almost beyond control.

"Let him go free," he said, "and I'll see that your jewels are returned."

"No!" Marchand's eyes glittered with his hate.

"I'll guarantee he'll leave the country."

Marchand shook his masked head, and the ostrich plumes on his hat bent where they touched the dirty ceiling.

"He'll hang," he said thinly, "and you'll see that the jewels are returned, anyway." The dandy's laughter was low. "You are a rogue, Master Poet," he finished, "but I think you value your life above a handful of glittering stones."

Villon shivered. "What will you gain by killing him?" he asked.

"Satisfaction!" Marchand loosed his grip on the sword and touched the heavy purse at his waist. "Stop being a fool, Villon," he said. "I want those jewels; tell me where they are, and I'll not only free you but shall lay a hundred pieces of gold in your hand."

"A hundred—" François breathed.

"Gold!" Marchand said.

"I'll give you the jewels and you keep the gold—and Chantillny goes free," Villon countered.

MARCHAND straightened, anger riding his shoulders. "You fool!" he snapped. "My patience carries only so far. You think you are clever, making your little bargains. Well, think a moment of what you would think if you were in my place and I in yours, if our positions were reversed?"

François Villon smiled then for the first time. He smiled, and laughter grew in his heart, and he felt a surge of the old daring. An opportunist, he, the irony of the man's words tickled his sensibilities.

"Why do you laugh?" Marchand asked, and the poet-rogue answered.

"I just thought of the future," he said—and came driving in.

His right hand went at the sword, for with it in his grasp, he would be master of the other. He was bent low, and Marchand thrust the torch like a blade at his face.

Blinding heat knifed at his eyes, and sparks touched his dark hair and singed. He cursed deep in his throat and dropped flat, reaching out with both hands to catch the booted feet.

*"You brood too much, Master Poet. Can it be my hospitality does not please you?"*

His fingers clawed for purchase on the shiny leather, then tightened. Marchand grunted, clawing for support on the damp wall, and then toppled, the torch skidding in a parabola of smoking flame across the room.

They made no outcry, for this was a personal thing now. The torch had burned the poet's face, and his teeth were white against the smoke-black. Marchand breathed noisily, using his superior weight to keep the other on the dirty floor.

The torch lay on its side, the flame dying, and went out in a hiss of steam when the water pail was overturned by a kicking foot. There was only blackness in the cell then, unrelieved by the faint glow of the coming morning, and the cell was like a tomb; for the door had been thrust shut by Villon's plunging weight. There would be no interference, for fights were common; and the cell, its door closed, was almost soundproof.

They came to their feet, wrestling erect, the sword clanging dully when it was flipped aside before either could use it. They fought now with bludgeoning fists, finding each other by

touch, for they could not see in the blackness.

And then one cried out in pain, and the other grunted his triumph, locking his hands about a tendon-stiffened throat. A foot tripped the victim, and he flailed with both hands, clawing at his throat, as he toppled to the floor. The other rode him down, gasping with the strain, feeling the agony pounding through him from the brutal blows he took.

The strangler made his final effort, and slowly the other's blows became ineffective. Then the man beneath shuddered and went slack, and the winner leaned back, his breath whistling in his throat. He sat for seconds, spent with effort; and then, after making certain the other was not dead, rose and leaned against the wall.

"The fool, the utter damned fool!" he said, and wiped his mouth.

His foot touched the plumed hat, and he clapped it to his head. Fumbling his way to the door, he left the cell, going toward the black door of the dungeon. Men still slept in the cells, unconscious of the fight that had been so savagely waged.

The guards came erect, as the man approached, and then made silent counting movements with their lips, as gold weighted their palms. A question was whispered, and the first guard carefully unchained the door. The second guard followed the fight's victor back along the tunnel. Cell doors swung blankly to; and when a prisoner called out from one cell, the guard silenced him with vicious curses.

A moment later the guard staggered from Villon's cell, bent beneath the weight of the slack body, and carried it along the dark tunnel, unseen by any in the prison. He disappeared into the dungeon entrance, followed by the hatted man, and shortly he reappeared, grinning at the other guard.

"The gold is good," he said, "and *safe!*" And both laughed in mockery.

Later, when a man emerged from the dungeons, the door was rechained, and all was as it had been. The prison slept, unknowing, uncaring.

IT was dawn, pink rays of light pushing at the darkness. And as though Paris never slept, already a crowd was forming at the gibbets, watching the guards carry the fighting prisoner to his death. His head was hooded, and his mouth gagged; and the motley mob liked that, for there was something stark and terrible about a hanging done in silence.

Ladier watched from one side, flicking his whip against his leg; and further down the street a man, masked and wearing a crimson-lined cape, stood beside his carriage and waited for the rope to become rigid from a dangling weight.

François Villon watched the scene too. He stood at his cell window, gingerly touching his burned cheek, and watching the execution with a detachment that only a man who had flirted with death could know.

There was a shadow of regret in his dark eyes, and then hardness appeared there. He had done what he could, and no one could ask for more than that from any man. He stared at Ladier, hating the man. Ladier had appeared at the last minute, wiping his mouth, and waving his whip at the masked man beside the coach. The guards, as always, brought the prisoner from the dungeon, taking care that none saw his face, doing a task which Ladier would not do, in the belief that if he did not talk to the prisoner, nothing could be proved against him later, should inquiries be made.

The drummed roll of death began, and the hangman adjusted the noose about the throat of the fighting victim. Two guards held him tightly; and suddenly one clubbed him in the face. He slumped in their grasp, and the hempen loop fitted snugly so that the knot was just below the left ear.

*"Requiescat in pace!"* François Villon said thoughtfully, remembering for a bare moment some of the training he had received at the feet of the priest whose name he bore.

The guards lifted the prisoner and dropped him into space. He kicked in a sudden blind convulsion, and his roped hands tried to climb his back to his neck. The crowd cried its approval, like hounds baying for the death.

The body bucked in spasm after spasm, and then, except for feeble twitching, hung slackly, swinging in a slow arc from side to side. The crowd jeered, and the hangman spat his boredom. The guards were already climbing to the ground. Ladier glanced up at the body, then strode away. His hand raised the whip and waved it at the man beside the carriage, and the other waved back in grim approval. Ladier whistled gayly.

François Villon glanced farther up the street and saw Katherine approach the carriage where the masked man waited. Villon shook his head silently; he had known that she would appear. She halted at the masked man's word; and Marchand's coachman did not look around, as the man caught the girl by the arm.

Villon grinned, when he saw the girl's slap caught in midair. Then both had climbed into the carriage, and the driver was lifting his whip. The poet caught the sudden fluttering wave of fingers toward the window of his cell, and thrust his arm through the bars to return in kind.

"Be happy," he said, and smiled.

And then the carriage was gone, and he was turning back from the window, not seeing the body hanging so slackly from a stiffened rope.

"Your new cell is ready, sire," a guard said from the doorway; and Villon tossed him a silver piece.

"Have the barber there," he said negligently, "and bring a tub of hot water, for I would bathe." He smiled. "See to it that the tailor awaits my pleasure, for these rags are not becoming to France's greatest poet."

"Yes, sire," the guard said eagerly, and was gone.

François Villon sighed. It had been a good fight the night before, one he would remember a long time. Luckily, he had won. He touched the heavy purse at his waist, and wondered exactly how much gold Marchand had been carrying. Oh, well, he could count it later at his leisure.

Not that it would matter to Marchand now, swinging as he was in a noose he had fashioned for another man.

Katherine's money had worked well. Marchand had been carried deep into the political dungeons; and there Etienne had changed clothes with Marchand. With only the bribed guards to deal with, and they not knowing who the unconscious man was that one had carried below, the substitution went unchallenged in the dawn's pale light, when Marchand, masked and gagged, was carried to the gibbet. Etienne, as Marchand, had gone directly to the waiting carriage, and watched the hanging from afar. Even Ladier had suspected nothing.

But Ladier would soon know. Not much longer would he swing his murderous whip about Montfauçon.

Soon his feet would prance to an invisible tune, and the mocking crowd would watch him die; for Marchand was the King's favorite at court, and his killer would receive short shrift.

François Villon laughed aloud.

With good hard gold in his purse, and fine clothes and a warm clean cell, he would stay in Montfauçon for a time. Without Marchand to prosecute him, he would be released within days; and he could not be tied in with Marchand's death, for the guards died too, if they talked. Aye, this would be a good place to rest for a time. There was no need to hurry, for he had no place to go.

HIS eyes went to the window, and he thought of Katherine. She had kissed him and told him he once had loved her. Now she was with Etienne, and soon they would be safe in England.

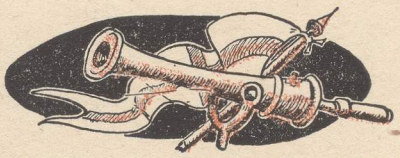
François Villon sighed, remembering. Then he chuckled. His loves were many—the sheen of gold coins, the curves of a woman's breast, the song of a lark in the evening, the ring of steel on steel as blades crossed and parried. Ahead lay many loves and many laughs. The past was behind, and could not live again, except as glorious memories.

He went from the dismal cell, going down the tunnel and into the sunlight. He watched the crowd for a second, and then strode toward the new cell a hanged man's money was buying for a rogue. Laughter bubbled upward in his heart, and his bold nose was arrogant against the lean tanned face.

"Ho!" he cried. "Wine for all!" And he tossed a gold-piece into the nearest wine-stall.

This was his kingdom, a rogue-poet's empire; and for the moment he was the master of all he surveyed.

# A Tragic Tale
## of the Queen's own Generall,
# Martin Frobisher
## from the true report of such things as happened in his *Second* Voyage in search of the NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

A·D·  1577

Richard Hakluyt's
**"Principall Navigations of the English Nation...."**

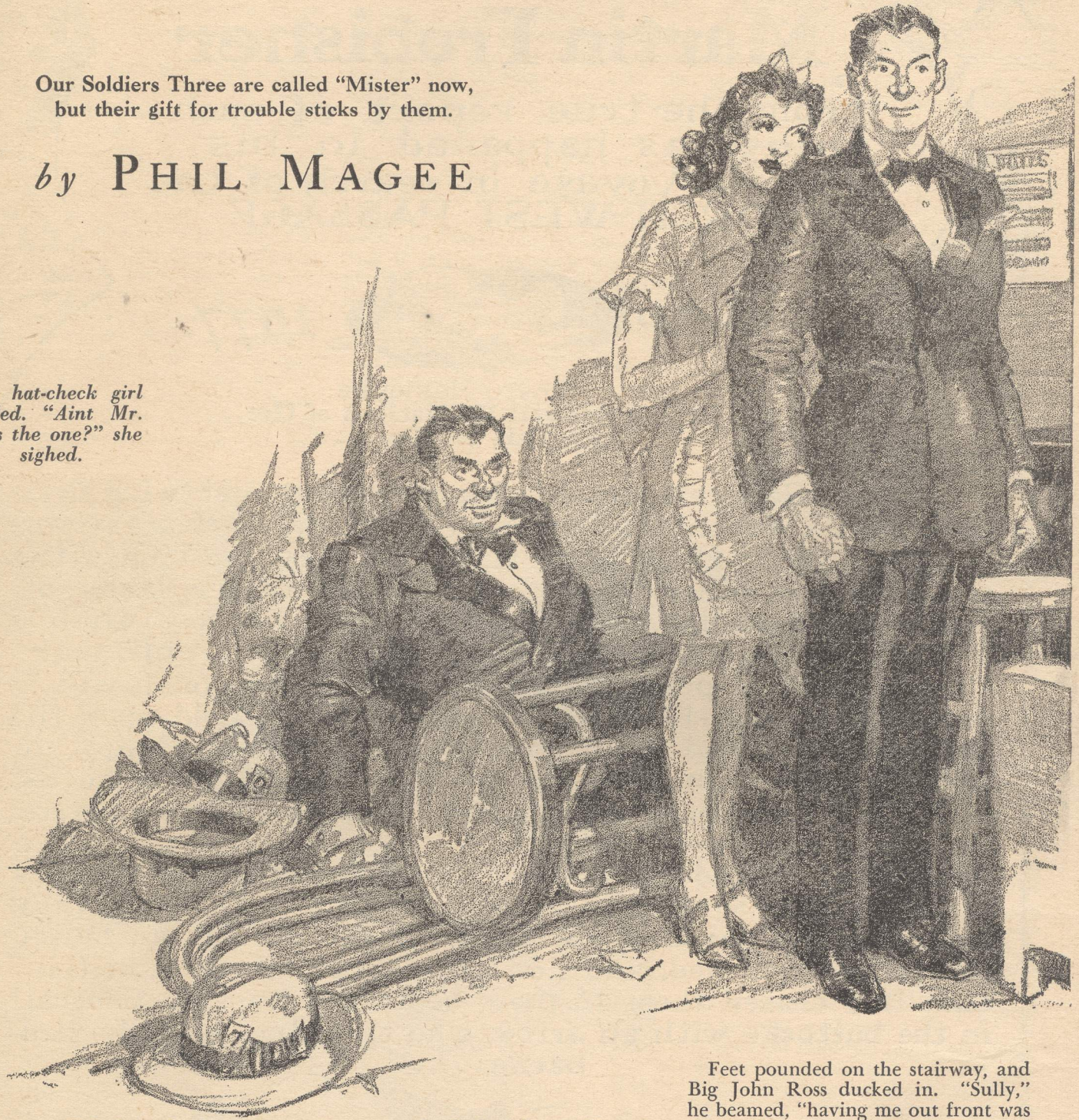
"The Generall and his Maister being met with their two companions {*a couple of extremely skeptical Eskimos*} togither, after they had exchanged certaine things the one with the other, one of the Salvages for lacke of better marchandise, cut off the tayle of his coat (which is a chiefe ornament among them) and gave it unto our Generall for a present. But he presently upon a watch-word given with his Maister sodainly laid hold upon the two Salvages. But the ground underfoot being slipperie with the snow on the side of the hill, their handfast fayled and their prey escaping ran away and lightly recovered their bow and arrowes, which they had hid not farre from them behind the rockes. And being only two Salvages in sight, they so fiercely, desperately, and with such fury assaulted and pursued our Generall and his Maister, being altogether unarmed, and not mistrusting their subtiltie that they chased them to their boats and hurt the Generall in the buttocke with an arrow, who the rather speedily fled backe....."

*Engrossed and illuminated by Peter Wells*

# Protection *in the*

**Our Soldiers Three are called "Mister" now, but their gift for trouble sticks by them.**

*by* PHIL MAGEE



*The hat-check girl smiled. "Aint Mr. Ross the one?" she sighed.*

HANDS thrust in the pockets of a double-breasted dinner jacket, the little man stared at the ceiling. Maybe it would be better not to worry them. After all, he had nothing to go on—nothing except his own unusual sensitivity to sharp practice.

Still, John and Tony were not just his partners; they were—well, they were John and Tony. And if the letter contained a legitimate offer, why hadn't it come through the mail instead of being tossed onto the steps?

Tony Milano stepped inside the office. "Y'wanted me, Sully?" he asked.

The little man nodded.

"I oughta be back on the floor," Tony said. "Nearly all the tables are taken."

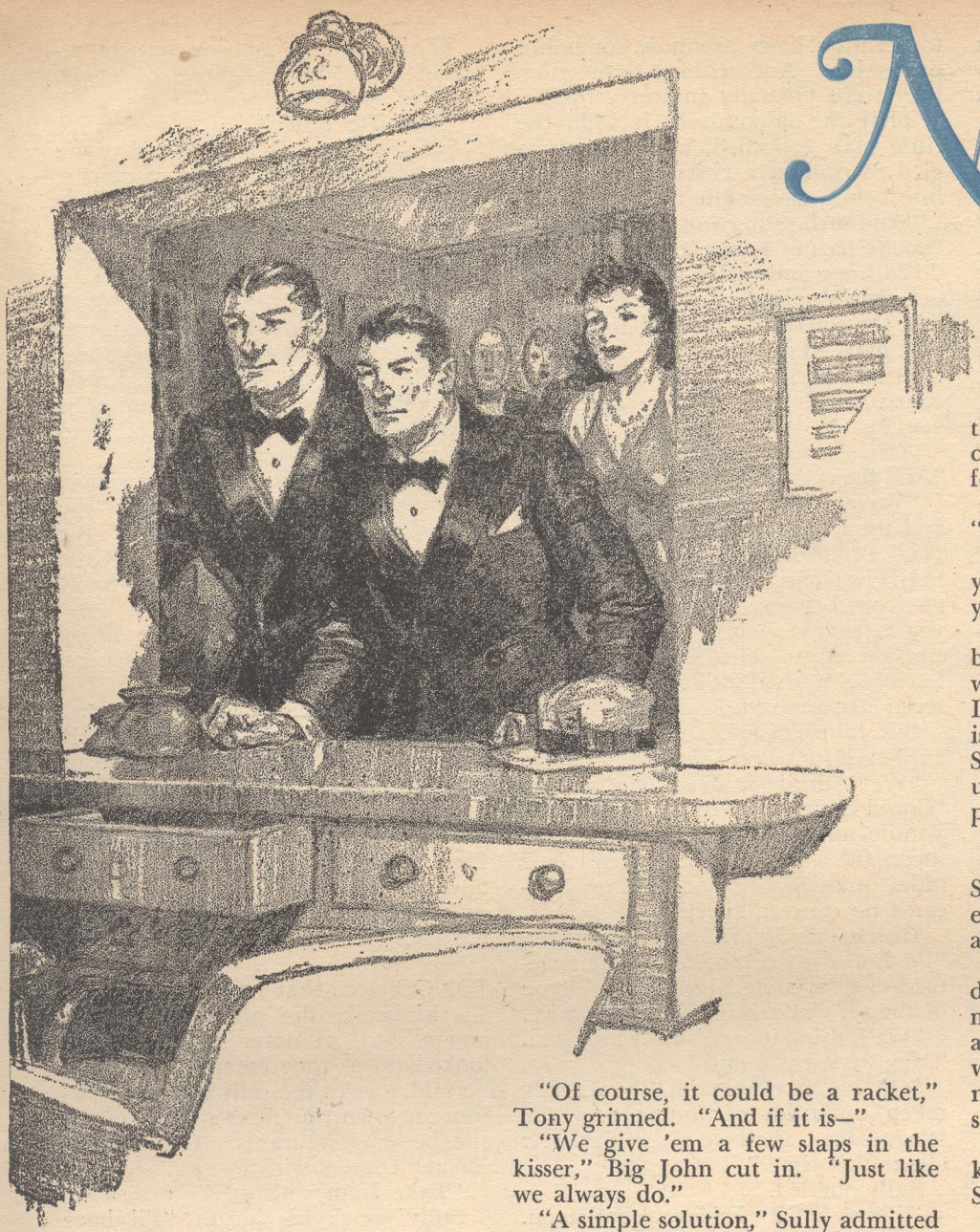
"Sit down," the little man said. "We'll wait for John."

Feet pounded on the stairway, and Big John Ross ducked in. "Sully," he beamed, "having me out front was the best idea you ever had. One look at me in this monkey suit, and the guys can't drag their dolls away. It aint like you and Tony do the drum any damage," he added handsomely. "It's just that some guys got it, and some guys aint."

"Sit down," the little man said.

Big John complied, but there was petulance in every line of his six-foot-four-inch figure.

# Night



"We've been out of the Army six weeks," Sully said. "We've had this place open for four. We've had twice the crowd we'd expected, and they've been the kind of people we'd hoped to cater to. For three shot-at soldiers, we've been doing very nicely."

"Yah," Big John said. "The best people in town are giving us the nod."

Taking a letter from his desk, Sully passed it to Tony. "We are also receiving greetings from other sources," he stated softly.

Tony stiffened, his broad bulk mocking their tailor's effort to disguise two hundred and thirty pounds of easily aroused muscle. But only for a moment. He tossed the letter to John. "So we're invited to join the Night Club and Restaurant Owners' Protective Association," he said. "So what? If it's a legitimate dodge, we'll refer 'em to Mr. Elton."

"Yah," Big John agreed. "Until we pay off Elton Enterprises, we don't really own the place."

"Of course, it could be a racket," Tony grinned. "And if it is—"

"We give 'em a few slaps in the kisser," Big John cut in. "Just like we always do."

"A simple solution," Sully admitted gravely, "providing you overlook the circumstances that put us in business with no investment other than a talent for discouraging interference."

Tony's grin faded, but John saw nothing wrong with a tried and proven formula. "That's just it," he insisted. "When the local lads decide they don't want any competition from a class joint, they have their hoods up here every night lousing up the place. Mr. Elton stood to lose a flock of moo until he met the Colonel, and the Colonel tells him about us."

"And after that?" Sully encouraged.

"Nothing to it," Big John said. "We go down and remonstrate with these characters. They catch on fast."

"Then you suggest we remonstrate with this association?"

"Yah," Big John contended, "there's nothing like a bop on the noggin for smarting up these racket guys."

"Just where do you propose we conduct these negotiations?"

"Why, in their—er—their—"

"Exactly," the little man said. "A third-floor office probably, the sole occupant a large, unlovely, but very female stenographer."

"Lemme think," John sputtered, "lemme—"

"John," Tony interrupted, "suppose you let Sully do the thinking, and you just do what you can do, huh?"

Sully bowed slightly. "This could be a legitimate offer," he said, "—in which case we will decline gracefully. It could also be a racket. And if it is, there are only two possible angles: Some minor chiseler hoping to bluff us out of a few dollars, or—" He paused, his eyes narrowing.

"Or what, Sully?" Tony prompted.

"The only other thing it can be," Sully said. "One of those sweet-scented deals where you pay for protection against the protective association."

"Naw," Big John said. "That we don't stand still for. Leave 'em so much as stick their beaks in here, and—and— But wait a minute," he wailed. "That means it'll be *our* furniture getting bent, and *our* customers scramming for the windows."

"You catch on fast too," Tony acknowledged sourly. "What do we do, Sully?"

"We'll know more when their representative calls on us. Until then we'll wait."

They left, and Sully wondered if he'd been right to worry them. But those who strive must be forever wary. And it was unlikely that the cleanest night-spot in Southern California could long escape attention from some racket.

Opening the French windows, he stepped out on the mezzanine. From there he could see the club's entrance, the dining-room, the long bar to his left, and most of the dance-floor. Beneath him, the strains of a carefully selected orchestra complemented the candle-lit tables.

The little man smiled pridefully. Expensive? Higher than a cat's back! But you brought your sweetheart, your wife, your mother, or the kid sister. Big John led you to your table, while you laughed at the exuberance of his greeting. There was a salad you'd remember, food you'd talk about, and drinks prepared by experts. Tony's

pleasantly homely face smiled at you as you danced. There'd be a celebrity or two, and gayety and noise, but noise without disturbance.

For even through an alcoholic haze, the rankest extrovert could see the threat in John's stare, and feel the portent in Tony's change from kindly guardianship to scowling disapproval.

And now this "association." If it was a racket, it would be well covered—hired hoods its front, their leader shrouded in obscurity. No hood who ever lived would challenge Tony twice, or risk a second meeting with Big John. But hoods can be replaced by other hoods, and any prolonged fight would mean a crushing loss of custom. Yet heavily indebted to Elton Enterprises, how big a bite could they stand?

A BUZZER sounded from the office. Sully hurried to his phone. Big John's voice was low. "The guy's here," he said. "An oily guy, and if there's one thing I can't stand, it's—"

"I know," Sully said. "Bring him up."

"But Sully, a tap on the wig might straighten him out. Look, I'll ease him outside, and—"

"John," the little man said, "bring him up. And bring Tony with you."

The Association's representative did not appear to be an "oily guy," and not until he spoke, did Sully understand Big John's allusion.

"I'm Preston," he said, "Alec Preston, general legal practice, third floor Canardi Building. You're Mr. Sullivan?"

Sully nodded. "My partners," he said: "Mr. Ross and Mr. Milano."

"I met him," Big John muttered.

"And I can do without it," Tony stated.

Alec Preston's smile was bland. "Fortunate to find you all together," he purred. "You have my client's letter?"

"Your client?"

"Oh," Preston said, "I see. You thought I was an employee of the Association. No, no, I'm merely their local legal representative. That's another thing your membership will entitle you to—my counsel."

"Aint that just ducky?" Tony said.

"Yah," Big John agreed. "Come on, Fats, park the blubber and tell us all about it."

The lawyer seated himself with a careful deference to his tailored suit, and the nasty-neat preciseness of his furnishings. Red spots dotted his fleshy cheeks, for a fat man's vanity is a tender thing. But when he spoke, his voice held all its earlier persuasiveness.

Quickly he expounded on their hazard of location—here high on a cliff overlooking the bay, a single road connecting with the highway. Charming, yes, but isolated. Much too far to permit a hasty summons for police protection. And without protection, they were virtually inviting trouble.

That the lawyer told it well, the little man conceded, while he struggled to contain a rising gorge at the bite below the eloquence.

"And such protection," Preston said, "you'll hardly know it's there. You do business only with me. I am not permitted to divulge my client's name. The Association's strength lies in its obscurity. To your guests, our operatives will be simply other guests. Of course from time to time we'll bill you for the chits they pay."

"Of course," said the little man. "And the cost of membership?"

"Varies with our cost of operation, and the financial status of each member," Preston said. "Your place has been given considerable study. Allowance has been made for the fact that you're newly opened. In fact, I am empowered to offer you our service for two hundred dollars a week, or seven-fifty a month if you prefer."

Big John gasped, and only Sully's hard-eyed look kept Tony in his chair.

"We'll think it over," Sully said. "Could I offer you a drink?" He tried a smile, and the effort must have been successful. For fat men prize their hides quite highly, and Preston indicated no concern for his.

Rising, he ignored the invitation. "I'd hoped to complete our arrangements this evening," he said; and some of the oil was missing from his voice.

"We'll think it over," Sully repeated. "May we see you out?"

"Oh, no," Preston said, "I've already taken up a lot of your time. It's Wednesday. Shall we say Friday? At about this time?"

Sully nodded.

"Then until Friday, gentlemen. Good night."

"Good night," the little man called softly.

"That fat slob," Big John bubbled over. "If I see his silly-looking pan again, I'll—"

"Two hundred bucks a week," Tony roared. "The greasy shyster! Let 'em throw their hoods in here. They raise a holler, they'll only holler once."

"Yah," Big John supported, "leave one of 'em so much as give off a loud burp, and we'll—"

"I know," Sully cut in sharply. "We'll break their backs. And with the second wave, we'll vary it a bit by kicking in their teeth. Then if there are any customers left, we'll stick them with an entertainment charge."

"But, Sully," Tony argued, "this dodge is sheer larceny. Two hundred bucks a week! With our nut, we haven't got that kind of dough."

"It is significant that Mr. Preston was unaware of that."

"But you tell him we'll think it over."

"This may be nothing but an attempt to collect a piece of fright money."

"And if it aint?"

Sully shrugged. "If they'd done more than case our flow of customers, they'd know we couldn't meet their terms. Maybe this outfit is not as well organized, or quite as large, as Mr. Preston would like us to believe."

"Yah, Sully," Big John protested, "but large or small, they push us; and we gotta make a deal, don't we? And deals aint no good unless you do 'em with the top guy. You notice how careful the moon-faced son is to cover who he's fronting for?"

"'The Association's strength lies in its obscurity,'" Sully quoted. "We have two days to find out things. We will start tomorrow at eight. Right now we'll quit wringing the towel and get back on the floor."

Big John grinned, and the worry faded from Tony's face. "Tomorrow, huh, Sully?"

The little man did not feel his usual warmth at this expression of their confidence. This curve was wide of his experience, a threat coming from an unknown source, and the lad on top operating through a contact-man. Find the lad on top, and they'd make a deal, all right. But it might be quite a trick to find him. "Eight o'clock," he said, "tomorrow."

LONG before that hour Sully was at his desk, the phone-book open and a sheaf of notes beside it. He looked up as they entered. "Tony," he said, "we're the only decent night-spot in town, but here's a list of all the better restaurants. Check them for any contact with Preston's outfit."

"Take John with me?"

Sully shook his head. "I'll have John see what he can find out about Preston—where he lives, what he does."

"Aint that kind of delicate for John?"

"Delicate for me?" Big John bristled. "To me he says that, Sully!"

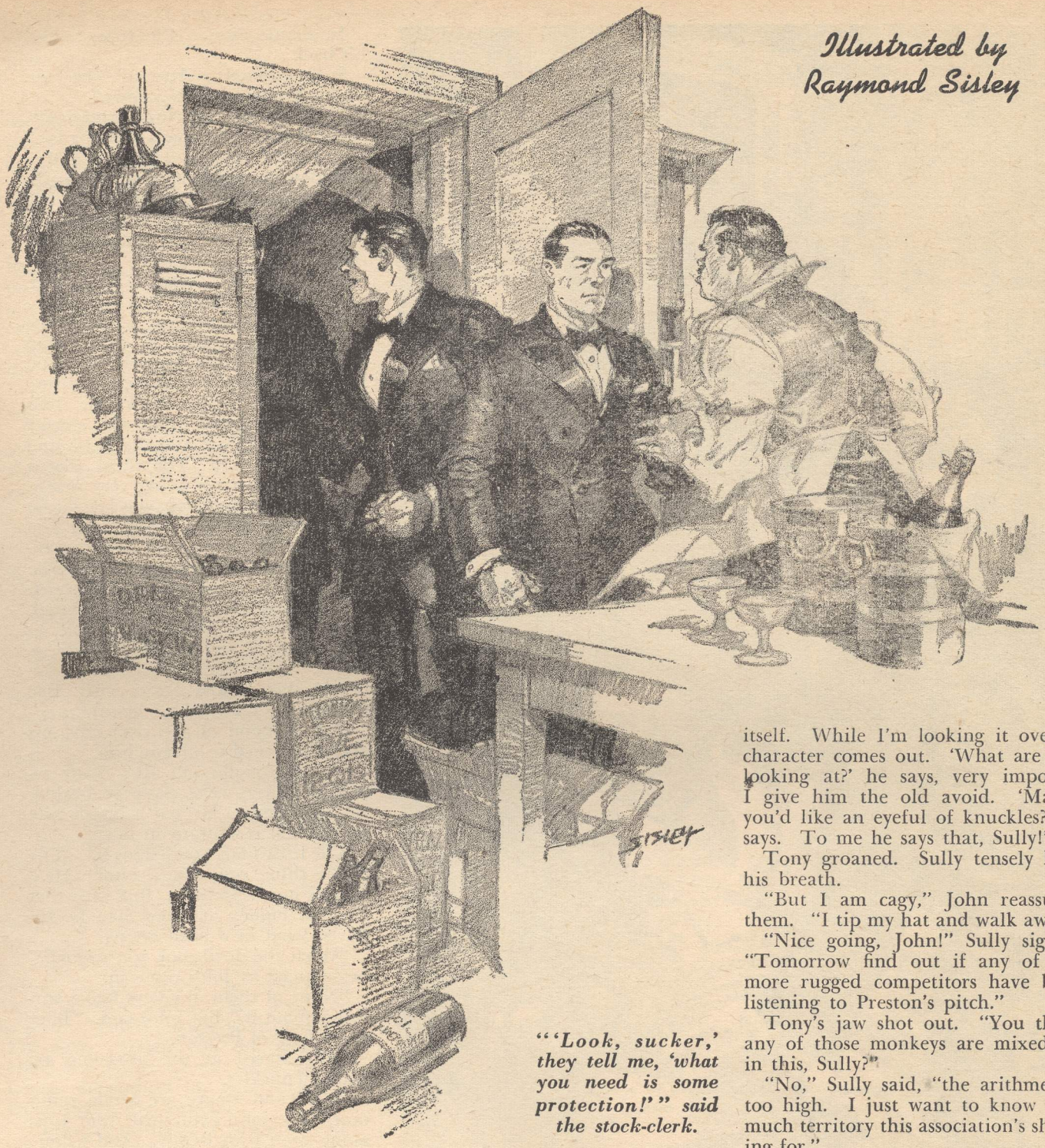
"Skip it," Sully snapped. "Both of you! And John, whatever you do, don't put the clip on anybody."

He watched the door close behind these two, his chosen companions. One would hold conference with potential allies, the other scout the agent of the enemy. Sully smiled, for had assignments been reversed, his admonition would have been for Tony.

Dialing Long Distance, he talked briefly with Mr. Elton of Elton Enterprises. Mr. Elton had never heard of this association. That meant a strictly local swindle, there being very little in Los Angeles of which Mr. Elton hadn't heard, and no major racket ever ducked the big town.

But night-clubs do not run themselves, and Sully had no time to chew this morsel. . . .

*Illustrated by Raymond Sisley*




*"'Look, sucker,' they tell me, 'what you need is some protection!'" said the stock-clerk.*

Tony checked in at five, Big John in time for dinner. "I made most of 'em," Tony said. "Every place I went, either Preston'd been there, or they had word he was coming."

"Catch the rest tomorrow. What did you get, John?"

"Plenty," Big John gloated. "I case the building. I give a gander at his office. He aint there. There aint nobody there but an old bundle goofing off in front of a typewriter. I go downstairs and try the switchboard. The operator's a little frosty at first, so I start giving off with the old charm."

"John," Tony growled, "could we have it without the music?"

"Go on, John," the little man encouraged.

"As I was saying," Big John continued stiffly, "I give her my Number One routine. Like Van Johnson, only with more—er—"

"Schmalz," the little man supplied.

"Yah," Big John said. "In no time I have her singing. Sully, outside of fronting for that racket, this guy aint got any legal business. He don't get two calls a day."

"Find out where he lived?"

Big John seemed somewhat pained. "I told you I have this baby purring. He lives out near Bird Rock. Big house for just one guy. Kinda off by itself. While I'm looking it over, a character comes out. 'What are you looking at?' he says, very impolite. I give him the old avoid. 'Maybe you'd like an eyeful of knuckles?' he says. To me he says that, Sully!"

Tony groaned. Sully tensely held his breath.

"But I am cagy," John reassured them. "I tip my hat and walk away."

"Nice going, John!" Sully sighed. "Tomorrow find out if any of our more rugged competitors have been listening to Preston's pitch."

Tony's jaw shot out. "You think any of those monkeys are mixed up in this, Sully?"

"No," Sully said, "the arithmetic's too high. I just want to know how much territory this association's shooting for."

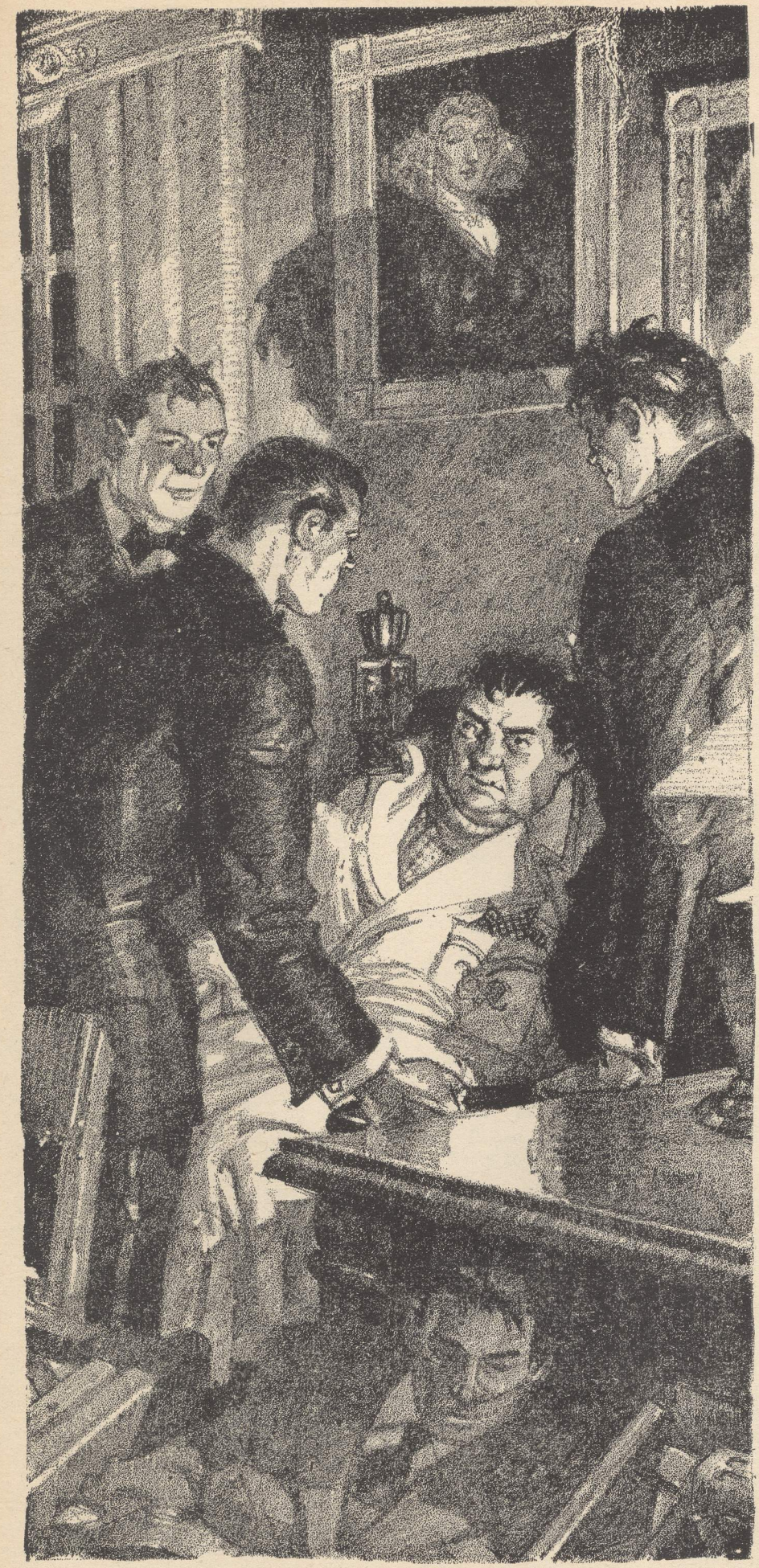
Standing, Big John drained his coffee. "It's a shame you fellers don't get to see me operate," he said. "See you later—I gotta go change clothes."

They watched the big one mount the stairs. "Think he ought to go alone tomorrow?" Tony whispered.

"Why not? He did all right today. And I want you to finish up that list I gave you. You might find a lead."

At the landing, Big John paused. "Sully," he called, "I forget to tell you I have a small charge against the swindle sheet. I gave that cookie twenty bucks."

"John," Tony questioned, "was that before or after you dished up all the charm?"



*"If you're still in town on Tuesday, we'll meet again," the little man said.*

In simple dignity Big John turned his back.

Sully grinned. "After all," he said. "John knows what he knows."

"Yeah," Tony admitted grudgingly, "even if he don't know a hell of a lot."

A waiter pressed a switch, and a soft glow floated swiftly up the walls. The dance-floor shimmered in the subdued light, and in reflection candle-flames danced on the drapes before the dais.

"I better get going," Tony said. "See you later, Sully."

His chin resting on his fist, the little man sat alone. A dome lamp beamed its welcome from the hall, and he caught a glimpse of the saucy uniform worn by the hat-check girl. This was a long jump from the stormy beaches of France, and the muck and struggle of Italy. For three shot-at soldiers, they were doing very nicely. Yet in France and Italy you knew who you were shooting at. And those who poured it to you used no contact-man. The fist tightened underneath his chin.

Big John came down the stairs. "It's getting kind of late," he hinted.

Sully smiled. After all he had no real proof of any threat to their security. And they had another day before they talked again with Alec Preston. "Okay, John," he said.

But by noon of the next day, his doubt returned to plague him.

"Preston made 'em all," Tony reported. "And we're not even leading his hit parade. He put a bigger bite on the best restaurant in town."

The little man worried his lip. The whole thing could be a bluff. He'd said as much himself. But with that kind of money at stake, had he believed what he'd been saying?

"What the devil took you so long?" he snapped as John came in.

"None of them monkeys know anything about it," Big John said. "They never hear of Preston."

Sully stared at the abrasions on John's knuckles.

"Nick and Deuce are kinda reluctant," Big John explained, "but I get along swell with Benny. And I don't waste any time, Sully. The minute I let go of Benny's ears, I hustle right back here."

"We still don't know who the top boy is," Tony said. "So where does all this get us, Sully?"

Quickly the little man summed up what they had. A racket? Yes. But a racket that failed to make more than a casual investigation of ability to pay, and expended no effort whatsoever to solicit the rougher entertainment spots. An organization less pretentious than Mr. Preston claimed. A local swindle, unknown in the only other major city within a reasonable radius.

"The fact they didn't tackle Nick or Deuce or Benny don't spell any-

thing," Tony said. "If they're bluffing, it wouldn't cost any more to bluff those babies too."

"A nice point," Sully conceded. "The main thing is, they're not so big, and their top boy can't be so far away. It may take time, but we'll find him."

"How much time we got, Sully? You don't have to be so big to pick yourself up a handful of hoods."

Sully ignored the question, for he had no easy answer. Preston would be here tonight, and what would happen after that he didn't know. "We can't afford a shake-down," he said. "And there may be no teeth behind this bite. If there are," he added, "we'll wait and see how sharp they are."

"Yah," Big John agreed, "they try any of them minor annoyances on us, they're gonna run up their mortality rate."

Despite his worry, Sully smiled, and John's ego bloomed accordingly.

NOR had it noticeably abated when at ten that night he ushered Alec Preston up the stairs. "Beautiful, aint he?" Big John grinned.

Alec Preston was from many standards a very tasteful sight: His pinstripe suit even more expensively tailored than the one he'd worn before. His tie a thing of color. His handkerchief four-pointed and precise. And this in Southern California, where legitimate business-men sometimes attire themselves like racetrack touts.

With protestations of regret, Sully declined the Association's offer, then watched for a return of the annoyance that had marked the fat man's reaction to their earlier refusal of commitment.

Alec Preston merely smiled. "I'm sorry, terribly sorry," he said, each word a vocal caress. He produced a card. "You'll change your decision, I'm sure. When you do, you can reach me either at my office or my home, depending on your urgency. Good night, Mr. Sullivan."

"The gall of the guy!" Tony sniffed, when the door had closed on Mr. Preston.

"Yah," Big John said contemptuously. "What do we do now, Sully?"

The little man could not resist the contagion of their confidence. "We'll wait," he said, sure that if any play was made, it would be a day or two in preparation. Get this week-end over, and they'd put a tail on Mr. Preston. They'd find his top boy. Right now they had other things to do. For your host does not retire when he's bowed his last guest home, and Saturday's reservation-list was as long as Big John's arms. . . .

Not until Saturday night did they speak again of Mr. Preston. Then with tables filling rapidly, Tony patrolled the place, John scanned each arrival, and Sully, stationed near the orchestra, watched for any incident that might alarm their guests.

By nine o'clock the little man felt reasonably secure. All but two of the tables were taken, and it seemed their usual crowd. He watched the waiters hurrying to and from the kitchen, and saw the steward coming toward him.

"Mr. Sullivan," the steward whispered, "could you and Mr. Ross and Mr. Milano step out back for a minute?"

Nodding cheerfully, Sully signaled John and Tony, and with them at his heels he followed the steward to the stock room.

One look at the stock-clerk, and Sully lost his cheerfulness.

"A hoist," the stock-clerk said. "They only take two cases of whisky. But what d'you think they do with 'em, Mr. Sullivan? They tossed 'em down the hill. 'Look, sucker,' they tell me, 'What you need is some protection.' Honest, Mr. Sullivan, all I need is a permit for a roscoe."

"Let's go," the little man snapped, reviling himself for underestimating the outfit Preston fronted for. A nice dodge, this: Get them all outside while the next act prepared its curtain call.

There were no empty tables now. And two men he hadn't seen before were seated near the wall. He cautioned Tony, for hoods wear no badges on their clothes, and these men looked not unlike the other guests.

Taking his station near the orchestra, he watched John hurry to the entrance. Hands clenched behind him, Sully forced a smiling response to several shouted greetings. His lips dry, he watched and waited, waited as he had at Anzio and Castleforte.

A lanky guest leaned on the counter of the check-room, and Sully saw him straighten, his mouth working angrily as the girl behind it shook her head.

In three long strides Big John appeared beside the guest; in two more, they both disappeared inside the check-room.

Turning quickly, Sully waved to Tony, for fighting-men may not be twice diverted.

The two men near the wall had risen to their feet, and the taller one cocked a punch at his companion. But the punch was never thrown; nor were their neighbors aware of any altercation. For Tony's arms wrapped round their necks, his broad back blocking them from view. And Sully knew that the lack of outcry was due to Tony's fingers closing on their necks.

"We'll see you to the door," he whispered. "Mr. Milano will take you by the arm. Believe me, gentlemen, if you wish to use those arms again, you'll go out quietly."

At the door, Tony shoved them down the steps. "Get going, bums," he ordered.

The tall one's lip curled upward. "There'll be other nights," he said. "Better get yourself some protection, chum."

"Tony!" Sully snapped.

Reluctantly, Tony followed Sully to the check-room.

The lanky guest sat on the floor, one eye closed, his left cheek swollen.

"Claims we lost his hat," John said. "I use the lie-detector on him. He never had a hat."

The hat-check girl smiled sweetly. "Aint Mr. Ross the one?" she sighed.

The lanky hoodlum struggled to his feet. "My mistake," he said. "But if you're smart, you'll get yourself protection, shorty."

"Get out," the little man said.

Grinning crookedly, the hood swaggered to the door.

"Think they'll make another try tonight, Sully?"

The little man shrugged wearily. "Let's get back on the floor," he said. Again he took a place beside the orchestra. Laughing couples waved to him from the dance-floor, while others sought his company at their tables. Grimly he returned the pleasantries of his guests—his guests, who preferred this place above all others. For here no raucous note had ever pierced their gayety, no disturbance ever spoiled their fun.

Bitterly alert, he watched for any further incident. But the Association seemed satisfied with their first attack; and at the closing hour, Sully climbed to his upstairs office.

FOR some time Sully sat alone in the darkness. He didn't hear his partners enter. Tony snapped a light on, John held out a cup of coffee.

"I guess we show them a thing or two," John said, but his bombast sounded very hollow. "Next time—"

"John," Tony said, "aint we feeling bad enough?"

Finishing the coffee, the little man stood up. There couldn't be a next time. Tonight they'd been merely lucky. And luck like that can't last. "Unless we find the top boy, we're—we're—" He couldn't say it, but they both knew what he meant.

"Two hundred a week, or seven-fifty a month," Tony said heavily. "The shoestring won't stand much of that, Sully."

"Call him," Sully said, taking Preston's card from his pocket. "We'll go and see him now. Get the car, John."

And these three who'd never known defeat went forth despondently to take their beating.

They drove in silence, Big John at the wheel. At Highway 101 they headed up the coast, past Point Loma and the beaches. Turning right, they

climbed the hillside. Behind them moonlight shimmered on the ocean.

John parked before a house set well back from the road. A big house, two-storied, the lower floor dark.

"Let's go," the little man said.

He rang the doorbell. The lock clicked, and they stepped inside a barnlike room, its gloom broken by a splash of light from beneath a corner door. A switch snapped on, and three lamps glowed dully from a broken chandelier, disclosing sparse furnishings, and a stairway leading to the upper floor.

Mr. Preston hailed them from the landing. "Come up, gentlemen," he urged. "Come up."

Mounting the stairs, Sully thought he heard the sound of stealthy movements from behind the corner door.

Clad in monogrammed pajamas, Preston bowed a greeting. "This way, please," he said. The room he led them to was in strange contrast with the litter of the floor below. And despite the bitterness of his obsession, Sully took quick note of his surroundings: the Chinese rug, the two oils on the wall, the ceramics on the mantel, the divan and the chairs, the drapes of rose-taupe damask that hung before the windows.

Preston's smile was mocking. "My own things," he said. "I always have them with me." Seating himself at a teakwood desk, he motioned toward the divan.

Sully stayed on his feet, John and Tony ranged beside him.

"You've been having trouble?" Preston asked. "Well, we'll soon take care of that." Again he extolled the services of those he represented.

But Sully wasn't really listening. Needling an active mind, he added to the things he knew. This room, these things, the lawyer's wardrobe: Could they be purchased from the earnings of a racket's front man? Preston had no other practice—of that John had been sure. And poor reconnaissance was not among John's failings.

Fingers tingling, Sully chose his words with care. "We can't meet your terms," he said. "How about three hundred?"

Preston shook his head.

"Five?" the little man offered, the tingle racing to his elbows.

*"Sully," he beamed, "one look at me in this monkey suit and the guys can't drag their dolls away."*

"Six-fifty," Preston said. "That's final, Mr. Sullivan."

Sully strove to hide his quick elation. Final? Front men make no final deals. "Take us to your boss," he snapped. "We can make a better deal with him."

"Impossible," Preston scoffed. "Besides, there isn't time. It would take several days to reach him, and you need our service now."

Now Sully sighed happily. "There was time enough to fill our place with hoods," he said. "Boys, we've been underestimating Mr. Preston; he has been fronting for himself."

Sharp annoyance creased the lawyer's face, but swelling vanity soon replaced it. "And that changes what?" he challenged.

Tony grinned. "Nothing, Mr. Preston. Not a thing," he said.

"Naw," Big John beamed. "We just deal direct with you, that's all."

"A concession to your cleverness," Preston drawled. "Shall we say six hundred?"

Smiling gently, Sully shook his head. "You don't quite understand," he said. "You'll keep your hoods out of place, and we'll do things for you."

"Yah," Big John said, "we'll leave you keep right on breathing out of your nose, Blubber. Play nice with us, and you'll still have teeth to brush."

Preston leaned forward. "You're threatening me?" he snarled. "Why, I'll—I'll have you—"

"I'd advise against it," the little man warned mildly.

But Preston's foot stamped on the floor, and a bell echoed through the rooms below. They heard the crash of furniture, and the pound of feet upon the stairs.

Tony grinned. Big John yawned.

THE door flew open. Five men charged in, three of whom they'd seen before. John and Tony moved to meet them, Big John's long arms booming, Tony hooking savagely.

The phony guests were in the lead, and John's Sunday throw cracked dully on the tall one's chin. Tony grunted with his pitch; and with mouth open the shorter hood collapsed.

The two they hadn't seen before made a very decent try. Ducking under Big John's arms, they both converged on Tony. Given hammers, they might have had success. But letting go with left and right, Tony drove them to the wall. John grabbed them as they ricocheted, his fingers closing on their collars.

The lad who'd tried the check-room dodge made still another error. For those who know use caution when they choose the very small. He rushed the little man, too fast.

Side-stepping neatly, Sully extended a leg. Whirling, he chopped a right behind the stumbling hoodlum's ear. The lanky lad dived headlong into Mr. Preston's desk.

The lawyer gasped, his fat lips quivering.

"Distressing, isn't it?" the little man acknowledged.

Big John faced the desk, a hood in either hand. The big one's arms swung wide, and Preston's hands flew to his face.

In one well-practiced motion John brought his hands together, a hoodlum's head in each. "Ten-dollar hoods," he sniffed, and dropped them to the floor.

"Well, what'd you expect?" Tony snapped. "Alan Ladd and Humphrey Bogart?"

"You see?" the little man said.

That Preston saw was obvious. But sight alone will leave no lasting memories, and Sully reached for Preston. For the stout of soul perform their job, no matter how distasteful.

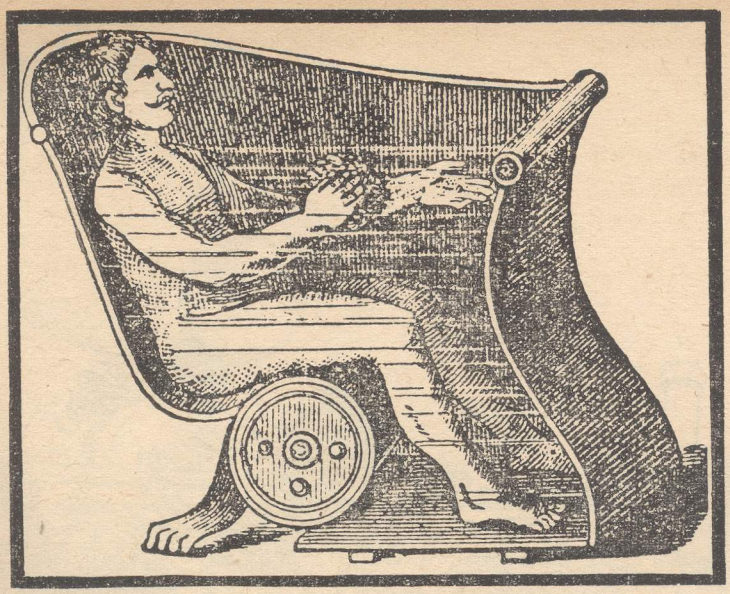
Four times the little man's hand slashed back and forth across the lawyer's face. "If you're still in town on Tuesday, we'll meet again," he said. "But with a man as smart as you, I hardly think it likely."

"He may not be as smart as you think," John said. "So tell him to wear something different, just in case. You know me, Sully. I'm the sensitive type. I can't bear the thought of him bleeding on those nice pajamas."

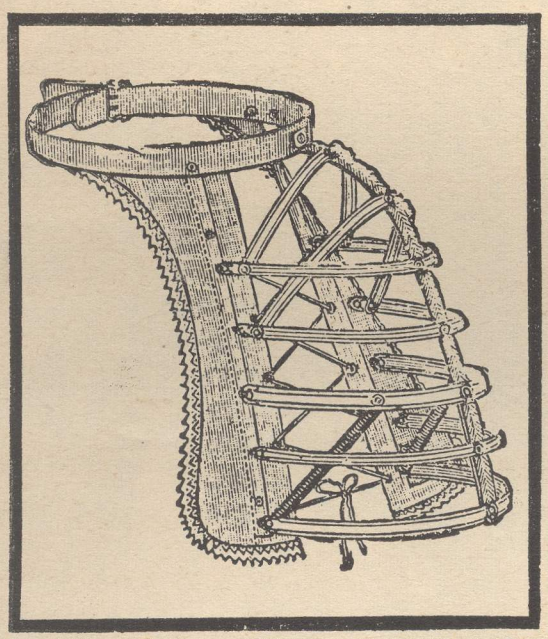
"Let's go," the little man directed. "Shall we say good-by, Mr. Preston?"

# Contraptions of Yesteryear

**"Gadgets of a Bygone Day," in our May issue, provoked so much interest that we are printing pictures of a few more here. If you are in any doubt, you will find the answers on page 96**

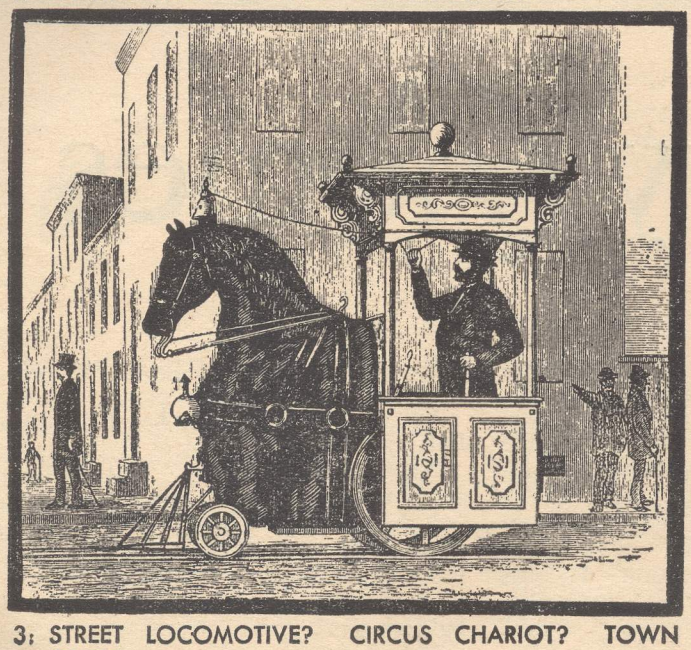


1: POSTURE CORRECTOR? AIR-PRESSURE CHAMBER? SELF-HEATING BATHTUB?



2: ANIMAL TRAP? BUSTLE? FENCING MASK?

**Old prints from Three Lions, Schoenfeld Collections.**



3: STREET LOCOMOTIVE? CIRCUS CHARIOT? TOWN CRIER?

4: CARNIVAL MASK? RESPIRATOR VEIL? CAREFUL HUSBAND'S SAFEGUARD?

5: ARCTIC EXPLORER'S OUTFIT? OFFICIAL RUSSIAN COURT DRESS? RAILWAY TRAVELER'S OVERCOAT?

**A Delilah from the rival camp, added to rumors of a deadly secret punch, give our young fighter all too much to think about.**

# Boy Comes

"THIS is an important year for me," said Willy Boulder. "This is the year I am a man. This is 1936, and I was born in 1915, see?"

Pat Hafey said: "If you beat Chasen in Brooklyn, we go into the Garden against Boo Dorengo. Is that good enough for you?"

"You know it," said Willy. He said it with enthusiasm; and his square, slightly scarred face was bright with appreciation of his manager. But underneath, he was not quite satisfied: Chasen was a good middle, and Boo Dorengo was right behind Steele, Yarosz and Apostoli, and for a youth not yet twenty-one it should be fine to mix with these boys. But he was, as always, in a hurry.

Pat said: "After the Dorengo fight my baby is due." He always called it his baby, to Willy's secret amusement, as though Sue had nothing to do with it. They had been married since '32, and now the baby was coming, Pat was ridiculously serious about it, like any other green father-to-be. Pat had always been tough and realistic, ever since he had been a lightweight contender and had met Benny Leonard, Goodrich, Kansas, and Canzoneri twice before retiring to manage Willy Boulder and some others. But about the baby he was wildly romantic and solemn.

Willy said: "It really is an important year. And fight business—smells."

"Just as everything does," fretted Pat. "Look at Europe; look at business here in America. Look at most anything. It's tough to make a dollar. My baby will need lots of things."

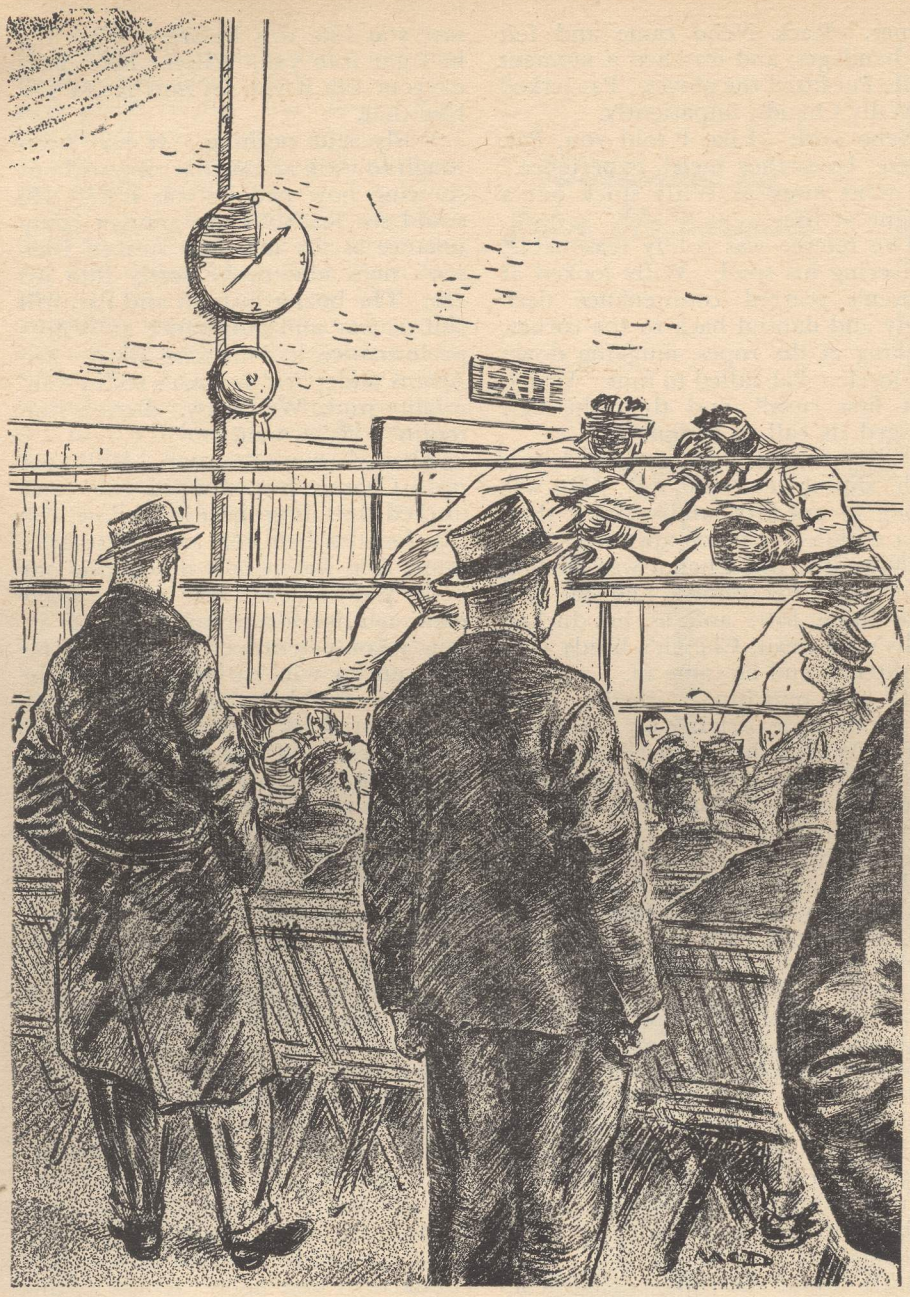
Sue was back in Midburgh, Midstate, calmly knitting and sewing and waiting. Pat and Willy were in New York. Tomorrow night Willy fought Chasen over in Brooklyn; and if he won, the Garden would open its magic doors. It would be a main bout—at least half of a double-main-bout deal. Willy had been training faithfully at Stillman's for the Chasen bout, and was sharp, he thought. He was boxing with some of Pat Hafey's old skillful style, and hitting harder than Pat had ever tried to hit. The boxing writers of New York were taking notice of him since his recent victories over various good boys.

It was a time for triumph savored in advance. The two sat in Lubin's famed restaurant and the fight mob knew them. Willy ate a steak; and Pat, thinking of his newly gained tummy, nibbled a fruit salad, determined that his offspring should not come into the world to eye a fat father.

Rack Nebo paused at the table. Rack was a thin man with a nose like a cleaver, and clothing faintly impossible in cut and color. He wore a scarlet necktie and a huge diamond pin. He dressed this way for one reason—to attract attention. He was manager of both Chasen and Boo Dorengo, and one of the cleverest men in the fight game. He said pleasantly: "So you're eating good? That's fine, pals. Many happy returns to the table."

Pat said: "Hello, Rack. You got Boo ready for us?"

Nebo laughed gently. "You should get past Chasen first. You got a nice boy there." He nodded at Willy. He never addressed a fighter directly, on the premise that fighters did not speak or understand English. To Nebo, fighters were pawns from which an agreeable living—without work—was to be made. This attitude made him




*"What about this secret wallop, kid? Is that some more of Nebo's hay?" asked Lacey.*

# of Age

by JOEL REEVE

a man of awesome proportions to most boxers, mainly because his estimate of their intelligence was partly correct. "A nice boy. But green, y'unnastand? Lots to learn, he has got. Chasen, now—I would not care to swap you Chasen for three like this inexperienced boy, ha?"

"How you talk!" grinned Pat.

"And if he should luck in over Chasen—which he aint—what will Boo do to him, ha?" Rack Nebo laughed merrily. "Ah, well, boys must learn. It will do him good, ha?" Nebo departed, still laughing to himself.

Pat said: "That is psychology, applied by a master. You are supposed to be scared."

"I wish I could have pie," said Willy. "With ice-cream. I can wish, can't I?"

"Help yourself," said Pat generously. "So long as you don't eat it."

Willy waited while Pat drank tea with lemon like a native Jacobs Beacher, and talked to various other gentry of the fancy. It was pleasant in the bustling, clean delicatessen-restaurant with all the Broadway people around. He saw Florrie Grey again, and she waved to him. She was a beauty, all right.

He left the table and went over to where she sat with a crowd which included Rack Nebo. She had large black eyes, shadowed with mascara, and dark make-up to enhance the velvet quality of her skin. She was soft and full of curves, and as friendly as a kitten. She said: "Hiya, Willy? Long time no see!"

Bo Martini nodded from across the table; once Bo had been Willy's close friend, but now he was just an acquaintance. Two of Bo's bodyguards were there, and a columnist from a tabloid, and a sports reporter. Rack Nebo said in his penetrating voice: "This boy gets around. Chorines, he knows yet. My Chasen will strictly murder this boy, ha?"

Bo said: "A C-note'll get you two."

Florrie said: "Don't pay any attention to these heels. Have a hunk of pie, Willy? With ice-cream?"

He said with *sang-froid* he did not feel inside him: "Don't think a thing about those fellas, Florrie. How about duckin' out to a movie?"

Much to his amazement, she arose promptly. He had only been showing off, never expecting her to accept. She said: "I want to see that Garbo thing so bad, and no one will take me. Men always want to either drink where they can be seen, or drive around the park in a taxi." She made a *gamine* face at the others, and took Willy's arm and swept him away from their smiles and nods. It was necessary to acquaint Pat Hafey with the fact that he was leaving, and Willy gulped at Pat's incredulous expression, but managed to brazen it out. He was sweating when he hit Broadway, but within him pride was raising its little head. For the first time in his life he was actually dating a Broadway girl!

He had a moment's thought of Mary Carson, back in Midburgh, but shrugged it away, man-style. Mary was sixteen—no, seventeen. Just a baby. Florrie was grown-up—older than Willy. Florrie had been around the shows for several years before Willy ever came to Broadway. . . . He took her to the picture and boldly held her hand, and in the tender moments of the plot she pressed his palm tenderly and even leaned a shoulder against him.

Afterward they walked a bit, then dropped into 31 Club for a drink—milk for Willy, a Martini, very dry, for Florrie. She said: "The picture was good and you're good. A good kid. You are good for me."

Willy said: "What are you in now, Florrie?"

"I'm—resting," she answered. "They want me for that new musical, but I've been working so hard—" She paused, stared at him. She said: "Heck, I forgot. You're not one of them. Willy, I'm out of work."

His hand went instinctively to his wallet. "Hey, do you need something? I've got a taxi business back home. I'm doin' good. I could let you take something, Florrie."

She said: "I'll remember that. Not now, Willy. But I won't forget it."

He said: "Heck, anything for a—pal."

"Sure," she said. "I know. . . . Let's just have fun. That'll help more than anything. Let's just have dinner. I'll break a date, and we'll see a show. I've got passes for a couple things."

IT was fun, too. She was a gay girl, and she knew her Broadway. It was the most fun Willy had ever had, going around that way. He had always been a serious trainer, the hardest of hard workers, and until now he had been a boy, and his troubles had been boyish troubles, his joys juvenile. This soft, gay girl did something wonderful for him.

It seemed to Willy that he carried some of it into the club with him, over in Brooklyn. He was so gay and facetious that Kid Atkins, the colored welter in Pat's stable who insisted on working Willy's corner because Willy had discovered him, was worried. Kid said: "Yo' makin' spo't, but Chasen done beat betteh boys than us did, Willy."

"I'll moralize him," said Willy, striking an attitude. "I'll knock him in that silly damn' Nebo's lap."

Pat came in, all business, and said: "Let's go. We're on next."

"Where's the funeral?" asked Willy. Florrie had asked him for a ticket, and was sitting at ringside. He pranced out and down the aisle of the old club, and when the crowd gave him only a medium-sized hand, he grimaced, mitting them, milking them for more.

Pat shoved him onto the stool and said sharply: "What the hell has come over you? Who do you think you are, Rudy Vallee?"

Willy said: "Aw, nuts." He looked down, and there was Florrie, in a big hat, beaming and clapping her pretty hands together. He waved airily at her. Chasen, a dour, wizened, experienced East Sider with a bugle like a pretzel, came across and limply shook his mitt, then trotted back to his own corner. Rack Nebo came and felt his bandages, and watched a moment while Pat fitted the gloves. Pat jerked at Willy's hands, impatiently.

Nebo said: "Like I told you, Pat. These boys—they need experience." He went away as Willy stuck out a tongue at him.

The referee was coldly reasonable, delivering his spiel. Willy looked at Chasen's scarred countenance derisively and danced back to the corner, yanking at the ropes, mugging down at Florrie. Pat called to him: "Watch that first rush!" and then the bell clanged its call to action.

Willy wheeled and got his hands high, sliding on rapid feet. He was strong at one-fifty, and quicker than most middles. Chasen appeared slow, shuffling in. But Chasen was moving faster than he seemed, and his fists were hung low; and as he ducked Willy's left lead, Chasen's beady eyes brightened and he came in.

He was punching wickedly, from the short angle, driving for the body, where Willy's high guard did not cover. He was grunting a little with every blow, like a blacksmith working over his anvil, making every shot count while the iron was hot. He was going in deep, searching the wall protecting Willy's belly, seeking to find a bit of weakness there. He was an artisan, working neatly and expeditiously at his trade.

Willy's knees came up, just a bit. Willy doubled over the hairy arm and brown fist, his cheek muscles jumping with the pain which seemed to go clear into the depths of his soul. He retched, tried to grab with suddenly sweating arms. Chasen slid away, crouched, shuffled without grace, came back again to his work, busy as a squirrel storing nuts.

Willy found the ropes, used them, rolling and tincanning most ingloriously as Chasen followed him. The crowd was not even unduly interested—they had seen Chasen before, doing young men in the middle, and doing them up brown. The blows boomed, and a disappointed reporter asked: "When does the bum fall down?"

From far away came a clamor, and Chasen spread wide his arms, withholding a last sound blow, turning and sliding the rubber piece out of the corner of his mouth, looking for the stool beneath him. Willy had to walk clear across the ring to his corner, and the shame really bit into him then, for that was a trick Pat had always warned about, and which he himself had used on Pat's advice. He sat down, and the seat of his pants went heavily against the stool Kid Atkins held for him. The Kid opened his trunks and poured water on his belly muscles.

Pat said irately: "You walk out there and let him get you! I never saw you like this before. What the hell got into you, Willy? He'll beat off your can if you let him get to you like that."

Willy said nothing. It had been tough to walk across that ring without showing how bad he was hurt. He could see Rack Nebo's amused countenance as the manager rubbed Chasen's neck and spoke softly into his ear. The buzzer buzzed; and Pat, still full of fear and annoyance at Willy's performance, had to climb down. Kid Atkins said: "Yo' tummy's rollin'—an' mighty pink, Willy boy. Betteh stop foolin' wiff 'at man!"

The bell came too soon. Willy got up. Chasen just shuffled over and ducked, speeding up a little now, trying for the belt-line always, scrupulously fair, intent only on dealing out body punishment. He was a good man, neither champion nor near it, but a competent performer, and he was out to win without dirty tricks or other skulduggery; and down in his corner Rack Nebo's wise features were gleeful. These were men near the top of the profession, meeting the challenge of an upstart. The second round went by, and Willy suffered from their knowledge.

Pat and Kid worked gently on him between rounds. The third slipped by, and the fourth. In the fifth the kink went out of his waist-line, and Chasen slowed down one step and shifted suddenly to the head. It was a sharp attack; and this, Willy knew at once, was it.

He stole a glance at the clock over Chasen's shoulder as he clinched. He sucked in all the breath he could. He wrenched away, then swung back. He chucked a left at the head and immediately went in with a right. It was a big right hand, the first he had chunked in that fight. It was a Sunday punch, directed at Chasen's jaw.

It landed. Chasen spun around like a docile bull which has been hit with a maul. It was easy to step in and slap the one-two on Chasen's chin. The game boy went down to his knees, then fell face forward and lay still.

RACK NEBO came and picked up his fighter. Willy helped carry him to the corner, and Chasen was all right in a moment. Nebo looked at Willy and laughed. He said: "If he could do it to you, think what my Boo will do! Ha!"

Willy went across to where Kid was bringing the robe. He saw Florrie standing on her chair, applauding like crazy. He waved to her, but tonight he would not have so much fun, he was aware. In the first place, his ribs ached too much. In the second place, he had come so close to losing the fight that he was really frightened. If Chasen had not scented a kayo and switched to a head attack—

PAT said agonizedly: "It's one of those things that shouldn't happen to a dog. Imagine a baby of mine coming too soon! I've got to take that plane, Willy. You've got Kid; you've got everything running perfect at the camp. If anything should happen to Sue, Willy—"

"Do not even talk about things like that," said Willy. He put down the bag and stared around the Penn Station. This was crushing; this was something no one could have foretold. He was fighting in the Garden next week. Pat could scarcely get home, attend to the birth of his first baby and return before time to go into the ring. And if anything went wrong, Willy would have to go in there against Boo Dorengo without Pat to advise him. It was unthinkable. It was the first time he had ever been frightened in advance of a fight.

Pat said: "You can do the routine blindfolded and I know you will work, Willy. You have always worked. But there is one thing." He hesitated, embarrassed and worried.

Willy said: "I will not be overconfident again, Pat. I got taught."

"It is not only that, Willy." Pat took a deep breath and blurted: "It is that girl—Florrie. I would rather you did not see her until after the bout. Not that I have anything against her," he added hastily, stiltedly.

"I know you do not like her," said Willy stiffly. He made no promise, and out of his pride he would never make one.

Pat said: "Okay. . . . Maybe I should not have said anything. Just go along, kid. You're all right. Hell, you're my boy, aint you?"

Willy said: "That man is hollering your train is ready. Don't worry about me, Pat. I am even studying my grammar-books at night. I even noticed you said 'aint,' and Sue would give you fits if she heard you!"

Pat had to grin at that, seizing his bag, dashing for the iron gate. He waved once more, then disappeared down the runway, a worried, harassed figure. For Sue Faye Hafey was all his life outside the boxing world. Pat lived for nothing else. His boys, their welfare, their advancement—and money enough to take care of Sue were all he desired from life. The impending advent of a child was something he had scarcely prepared for, and the complication which called him to Sue's side assumed the proportions of a major calamity in his fevered mind.

Willy, sensing all this, turned away, and suddenly he was lonely. In this City of Millions, where he was in his own sphere somewhat of a figure, where he could call a dozen acquaintances on the telephone for luncheon, he was amazingly and thoroughly alone. He had not quite realized

*Illustrated by John McDermott*

*She said: "I'll come up and watch you for a while. I'm getting interested in this boxing racket."*

what a prop Pat Hafey made for his ego, how he depended on the former lightweight boxer. He scowled, walking toward the waiting-room. Some one jostled him. He turned and saw Rack Nebo.

The manager said: "Hiya, son!" Beyond him were three others of the fight fraternity and a couple of women. Recovering himself from having unwittingly spoken to a boxer, Nebo turned and said: "This poor bum just lost his right arm. He has got to fight my Boo and Pat leaves town yet. I would never have thought it of a guy like Pat, ha? Deserting this poor bum!"

FROM behind the two women Florrie drifted forward. She was wearing a light suit for a spring day and a close-fitting hat and shoes of gray alligator skin which made her feet pretty as little dancing mice and to Willy she was like a breath of mountain air. She said airily: "Lay off my boy, you old crumb. Can he help it if his manager's got troubles? Stop trying that old psychology game on a kid. I think you're scared he'll kayo Boo."

Nebo scowled darkly, then smiled in a sheepish manner. He said: "She takes up for him, ha? I buy her lunch, a posy for her buttonhole, she turns me down yet for a bum."

"Well," Willy said, drawling, his confidence having returned, "I see I've been promoted, anyway. Before I pushed over your Chasen I was always 'boy'. Now that I am about to kayo your Boo—you call me 'bum.' What do you call fighters who can lick 'em all, Nebo?"

The slim veteran said to his companions: "Listen to him! Like anyone did not know what he asks, ha? Naturally, he never will. On account of guys which can beat 'em all—we call 'em *'Champ.'*"

They went away, like actors making a stage exit, laughing. But Florrie remained. She was smiling and she said, "He's worried, pal. You hit too hard. A hitter always worries them. How about a movie, pal?"

He gulped. Pat had been so wrong about this pleasant girl—yet he had never deliberately disobeyed Pat. He hesitated for a second—then he said: "I'm boxin' at four. . . . I got plenty of time. Let's go."

She said, walking beside him toward Times Square, holding his arm gently in her soft hand: "Then I'll come up and watch you for a while. I'm getting interested in this boxing racket."

Willy said seriously: "Then you should not call it a racket. Pat says talking like that never helps a show. There are racketeers in the business, but we are trying to clean them out, most of us. I will say for Nebo that he is not a crook. He stays away from the mobs—"

She interrupted: "Here's a show I want to see. 'The Great Ziegfeld.' They say Rainier is wonderful. I wish Ziegfeld was alive. I wish I could work for him."

Willy said: "Okay, let's go." He enjoyed her shrewd comments, her frank enjoyment of the musical extravaganza. She was, he thought, a Big Time girl. She was full of fun, she ate ice-cream sodas with the same zest she displayed in consuming dry Martinis. She liked to walk, and later, down at the gym, she was intent watching him box against Kid Atkins and other sparmates. He took her to dinner after the workout. . . .

There was a wire from Pat the next day: "SUE NOT IN DANGER, BUT BABY SLOW IN ARRIVING. MORE LATER. KEEP PUNCHING."

In the gym, Willy was faithful, as though to make up for his preoccupation with Florrie Grey. Kid Atkins, who was lighter and not so strong, complained a little. "Yo' sho hittin' fo' keeps, Willy! Mebbe you betteh save 'em for 'at Boo fella. He a good boy. He a slick boxeh *an'* a hitteh."

## That Others May Live!

**AT this moment a quarter of the world's population is facing death from sheer starvation. The Emergency Food Collection, now under way throughout the United States on behalf of UNRRA, assumes great significance in this world famine. Its purpose is to supplement the minimum subsistence diets planned for in UNRRA's general relief program.**

**Both food in tin cans and money to buy food are sought. Every penny contributed will be used to buy more food. The contributed food will be distributed free, without discrimination, on the basis of greatest need.**

**Among the kinds of foods needed are: milk (condensed, evaporated, or dried), meat, fish, peanut butter, baby foods, baked beans, stews, soups, honey, fruits, juices, and vegetables. Handling and shipping problems restrict the collection to foods canned in tin.**

**Food collection depots have been established in every community in the United States. Those who wish to make cash contributions may do so through their local committees. If more convenient, checks or money orders can be sent to national headquarters of the Emergency Food Collection, 100 Maiden Lane, New York 7, N. Y.**

So Willy boxed with a couple of featherweights, around and around, scarcely landing a jab, taking a thousand annoying light blows from the swifter, smaller fellows, sharpening his boxing. He worked like a day-laborer at his daily stint—and every day now he saw Florrie.

They did not stay up late. They just chummed around together, he told himself. She was the best of company. He would have been terribly lonely, he thought, remembering that moment in the station after Pat had left. She filled in the gap and there was no harm in her, he concluded violently and defiantly. In fact she was good for him. She even advised him intelligently after watching his workouts and then going over to Brooklyn where Boo Dorengo was working out and watching his. She tipped Willy off about Boo's shift.

She looked comical, but very appealing, in her small apartment where she had summoned Willy in secret, posing with her small, soft fists extended. She said earnestly: "He comes in, see, like this." She danced forward, awkwardly graceful. "He starts his left. Then he pulls it back, and his feet shift." She shifted. She said excitedly, "Then he throws the right. Hard! He really chunks it in there, ha?"

Willy said: "Gee, thanks, Florrie. It was swell of you to tell me."

She lowered her hands and said anxiously: "You sure you got this, now? He only uses it when no one is watching. I got to know a guy, see, and they let me in for one of his secret workouts."

Willy said: "Gee, I never knew they had those things any more. Secret stuff, huh? That Nebo is a smart cookie, isn't he?"

"You bet," she said. "But you'll beat him, won't you, Willy? You know what? I am drawing some money from the bank to bet on you."

Willy said: "I wouldn't do that, Florrie. Boo is a very experienced boy and I am just a green kid."

"I wanted to show you how I felt," she said vigorously. "I got confidence in you, Willy."

He said: "Gee, that is swell of you, Florrie. Should we go to the pictures now? I gotta see this 'Anthony Adverse.'"

ARRIVING home, he realized there were only two days more, that his boxing was over, he had only to taper off. He walked about the apartment-hotel suite in which he had lived with Pat off and on for so long. He thought about many things. This was the year he became a man, all right.

The telephone tinkled and he ran to grab it. The operator for Western Union spoke matter-of-factly: "Girl born six pounds Sue well am flying in."

Willy heaved a sigh which came from his soul. Sue Faye Hafey was almost as much in his life as in Pat's. He had been hiding his anxiety even from himself—it was Florrie Grey who had helped him, he told himself honestly. The relief was so great that he dialed Florrie's number and told her the news, his exuberance flowing over the wire.

Florrie said oddly: "That's fine—fine. . . . Some people have all the luck."

"They deserve it," Willy bubbled. "They're great, wonderful folks."

He slept like a top that night. In the morning he was sharp for his run through city streets, a practice he had always preferred to country gallops. At noon he went down to the gym and hung around until time to go through the tapering-off exercises which would bring him to ringside in perfect shape.

A reporter came in and said: "Boo Dorengo has been working out privately. Do you think he has perfected a new punch?"

Willy said cautiously: "I wouldn't know."

The reporter said, "Nebo is a smart guy. Boo is an odds-on favorite. Do you think you can win?"

"I wouldn't go in there to lose," said Willy.

The reporter seemed pleased. He said, "You're a pretty nice kid. . . . If Dorengo pulls anything I hope you can overcome it. They say he has some kind of shift or something."

"I heard," said Willy evasively. "Maybe I'm ready for it."

The reporter said: "Oh? You *did* hear?"

Willy said hastily: "Well, you know how it is—"

The reporter nodded wisely. He was a new man on the sports side and wanted to show he was right in there, Willy perceived. He said: "Okay, Willy, thanks." He went away.

A gambler who worked for Bo Martini, Willy's old employer and mentor, came in and said in Willy's ear: "Bo hasn't been doin' so good lately. What you got for us on your bout?"

Willy said, "Nothing. Like always. Just tell Bo hello and good luck."

"What about this secret punch? Anything in it?"

"The shift?" Willy batted his eyes. "Oh, well. Boo is a good boy."

"You should not ought to be like this with Bo," said the gambler reprovingly. "He is your pal. Right now maybe I would be getting rough with you only for Bo telling me not to."

Willy said, "Here comes Joe Lacey."

The gambler winced and drifted off down the stairs and out of the gym. Lacey, the Broadway cop, square-jawed, beetle-browed, looking not unlike a prize-fighter himself, came close and said: "What about this secret wallop, kid? Is that some more of

*"I know it is tough, ha? This boy's manager deserted him."*

Nebo's hay? Or had you better look out?"

"I will look out," said Willy. "I hear a mob is laying odds like crazy."

Lacey said: "Sure. All this chatter about secret stuff. Naturally a mob is getting down on Dorengo. But it could all be portis on the prawn portisan, y' know."

"With a mallister ganzing?" Willy grinned. The Broadway double-talk of the moment was amusing. He patted Lacey's shoulder reassuringly and went into the dressing room.

KID ATKINS was waiting for him, brow furrowed. "What this I heah in Harlem 'bout secret punches an' voodoo an' sich? This Boo boy got somethin'?"

"It's been gettin' around so much I wouldn't call it secret any more."

"I is worried," said Kid. "We betteh send Mist' Pat a wiah."

"He's started on the plane trip, but not coming through," said Willy. "We better just hope he makes it."

He went through the afternoon workout and still there was no plane from Midburgh. He ate alone and the worry built up within him. Back at the apartment there was still no word from Pat. He was like a lost soul. He wandered about the rooms and then the phone rang, but it was Florrie.

She said: "No word yet? Why don't you come over after awhile?"

"I don't like to crowd you," he said. "You should be out and around with the mains, seeing about a job. I have been very selfish about you."

She said: "You poor kid! You're all alone. I'd break any date for you. Come around in an hour, Willy."

He said: "Well, maybe I will. It's awful decent of you."

"Not at all," she replied heartily. "You're a swell kid. . . . I want to make sure you're ready for that shift Dorengo is going to use."

He said: "Well, it would sure save my life to have company."

"I know just how you feel, with Hafey gone and everything. The odds are away up, aren't they?" she said.

"Yeah. I guess nobody thinks I have a chance to win. Except you—and Kid and Pat." He sighed.

"You come on over—in an hour," she said.

"Gee," said Willy. "That's swell of you, Florrie." . . .

At two o'clock, when they weighed in, there was a telegram: "GROUNDED IN CINCINNATI BUT MAY MAKE IT. KEEP PUNCHING."

Nebo said to the Commissioners: "I know it is tough, ha? This boy's manager deserted him."

"Nuts," said Willy. He was looking at Boo Dorengo, who merited attention. Dorengo, smooth-muscled, was hairless, slightly balding. Yet he was only twenty-seven and he was a top-flight middleweight. He was intelligent and he looked it. He spoke quietly and easily, using good grammar. Here was no burly heel, come to slaughter or be slaughtered.

Dorengo said: "I wish you luck, Boulder. Tough about your manager."

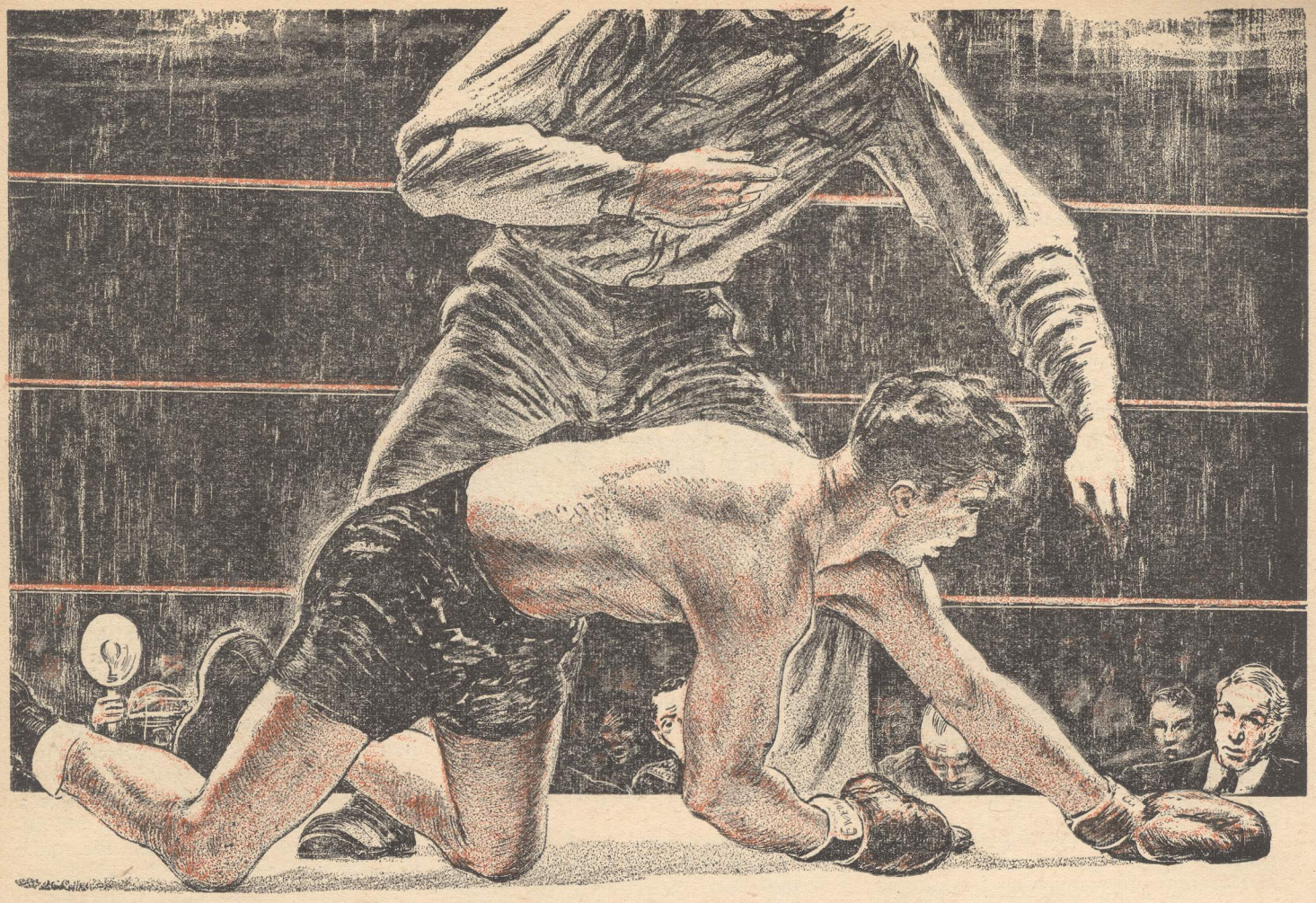
"Nothing tough about it," Willy said. "He'll be here. And good luck to you, pal."

Nebo said: "Such politeness! In my day, they slugged each other, ha? This poor bum, he keeps trying to butter up people, ha?"

Willy said: "Go butter a parsnip, Nebo." It was not very smart, but he was worried to death about Pat's absence and determined that they should not know it. He left the Commission office and went back to the apartment and walked the floor. After a while Kid Atkins came in and walked silently with him.

They got through the day. There was not a single phone call until just before they went out to dinner. Then Lacey called to say that the out-of-town crowd was throwing the money in recklessly on Dorengo. The odds were mounting and Lacey warned: "This is the sort of thing that looks bad, kid. Last-minute climbing makes it look like it was in the bageroo. Make it good in there tonight. I'm with you, kid. There won't be any funny stuff."

Willy hung up and shook his head at Kid. They went around the corner to a diner and Kid ate heartily, but Willy couldn't have more than milk



and fruit. They went back to the apartment and Kid began packing things in the zipper bag. Willy tried to relax, but it was very difficult. He called the airport, but there was nothing new on the plane bearing Pat Hafey. It was due in an hour, so they said without hope.

It was borne in upon Willy then that Pat was not going to get there, that he was making his debut in the Garden terribly alone. He swallowed hard, but the lump in his throat would not go down. He sat and stared at the telephone. As if in response, it rang.

It was Florrie's voice, not gay but worried. She said, "Hafey didn't get here? Willy, this is awful."

"It's all right," he said mechanically. "I'm all right."

"It's terrible," she moaned. "Dorengo's all ready and relaxed and with new, secret stuff and poor you—not even a manager. Willy, what are we going to do?"

"Fight," said Willy. "It's my business."

She said, "Oh, Willy! . . . I'll be right down there, at ringside."

He managed to quiet her and get her off the line. Still there was no telegram from Pat. He hated closing the door, but it was time to go at last. He got into the cab with Kid and they rode uptown. When he got off at the side entrance he deliberately waited, hunched inside an upturned collar, hoping until the last possible moment that Pat would make it.

At last he could delay no longer. He went in and undressed and lay stretched out on the table while Kid rubbed him gently with unguents smelling of wintergreen. Then Kid put on the bandages. Kid could do it, all right. Kid was expert. But it was not like Pat doing it.

WILLY lay down again, covering himself with the robe—lettered, "Willy Boulder, Midburgh Middleweight." He closed his eyes, but he had to open them too soon and arouse and face Kid Atkins. The colored boy said, "They ready fo' us, Willy. I kin git us a water-pail boy. Looks like jes' yo' an' me, Willy, fo' this time."

Willy said: "I couldn't have a better guy in my corner, Kid." He drew on the robe and straightened his back. They went out and down to the floor of the most famed amphitheater of fisticuffs the world has ever seen since Rome fell.

They were in the ring under the glare of the battery of white lights before Willy could worry too much. There were so many working press seats that he had trouble locating Florrie but he saw her at last, on the aisle, alone, in a dark suit and beret type of hat. She looked wonderful. There was a vacant seat next to her—there had been no one to use the other ticket he had procured.

Dorengo came in, suave, smiling, a great favorite with the cognoscenti. The gallery booed tentatively—this was the Garden gallery and a fighter had to convince them and they only loved thundering fists. Boxers must needs be very great and also sharp hitters—and still would never reach the heights of regard accorded a pole-ax hitter.

The referee called them out, finally. It was the wind-up bout, and attention was complete as his voice went out over the speaker, pronouncing his jeremiad. Willy jiggled a little, then touched the gloves of Dorengo and went to his corner, shedding the robe. For the first time, he had come to the Garden and under those staring lamps he was pitifully naked and alone. Silence fell, as though the thousands of eyes were examining him critically, reserving opinion. He felt the impact of the combined stares so that he winced, looking down at Kid's rolling, prayerful gaze.

The bell clamored for his blood and he shoved off the ropes and did a small circle, to avoid any opening offering from his clever opponent. Down behind Dorengo's corner the thin-faced Rack Nebo chuckled and

*He was far down in the depths, like being in a well. He dreamed he saw Pat Hafey's spread hand, giving him the count.*

nodded, a gnome-like figure all sharp eyes and nose. Florrie Grey sat on the aisle seat, tapping a cigarette against a crimsoned nail. A man leaned admiringly to give her a light. . . .

Boo Dorengo was an adagio-dancer with knives in his hands. He sped in and lanced his blows where he wished, then sped out. The long muscles in his legs, Indian muscles, were the sort which never tired. It had yet to be proven that Boo Dorengo was not one of the truly greats.

It was enough for Willy that Boo had the best left he had yet encountered. It came in straight and it was sharp and then the third one hooked a little. At first Willy smothered it, but he had no chance to counter. Too busy defending himself, he tincanned, trying to get oriented, throwing short blows of his own which were slipped or warded off by Dorengo's smooth arms.

It was a miserable first round. Willy lost it by a mile and he knew it. He came to his corner and sat down. Dorengo had not hurt him like Chasen, but the humiliation was as great. Kid said nothing, plying the sponge and rubbing softly at the back of Willy's neck. . . .

The second and third rounds were about the same. Dorengo had the fight in hand and was conducting it along his own lines, Willy knew. It was a very unpleasant situation, but Willy felt helpless to remedy it. He dropped down off his toes just once, in the third. Dorengo hit him with a jarring right hand to the body which almost leveled him. Memories of Chasen's busy fists playing away at his middle returned to Willy, and he covered himself like a turtle, not taking any unnecessary chances.

He was making a bad fight and he knew it better than anyone. He was getting beaten and worse—he was not performing up to his own standard. He could not untrack himself. He kept going out and working with all his might and main and—as if in a horrible nightmare—not getting anywhere at all.

HE thought hard about it between the fourth and fifth. He knew he needed Pat's guidance and he tried to figure how to get along without it. Kid whispered, "I don' see none of 'at secret stuff. He's jest beatin' on us, Willy."

Willy nodded. He saw beyond the sharp etched edge of lights to where Florrie sat smoking her cigarette—one of many. He saw across to where Rack Nebo laughed and laughed, working easily on his fighter. He saw the referee eye him speculatively and remembered what Lacey had said about the mounting odds, and he shivered.

He went out for the fifth with his jaw set. He let Dorengo come to him. He accepted a sharp left, wincing, but refusing to duck. He chunked his own left inside, straight across. Dorengo slipped it and hammered a right to the body. Then Dorengo feinted with the left, once, twice, and the picture came back to Willy, and he saw Florrie in her comical way explaining just what Dorengo would do and how he would shift and throw the right.

It was the pattern she had explained, all right. There could be no possible doubt of it. Willy leaped, getting close. He fell upon Dorengo and hugged him. The danger passed for that moment—but it would return, Willy knew. Dorengo was the smartest fighter Willy had ever met—by far. The worst was yet to come.

Willy got loose of the clinch—and a right snaked out from Dorengo's crouch, a new punch, one he had not essayed hitherto in this bout.

It was a very nice right-hand punch. It tipped Willy over as neatly as though he had been one of those five-and-dime store Humpty-Dumptys. He went flat and he even rolled around a bit, foolishly, like a doll. Dorengo skipped gayly to his corner and smiled at Rack Nebo, nodding. The kid had suckered for the right, finally. He had worried about one too many

things, that nod said, and at last he had left an opening. . . .

At *"Nine,"* Willy was coming to his knee. He could not pause, the deep instinct of the boxer told him, because the time was running out. He had to climb up the invisible rope without being quite ready to face the fists which flew about his head like buzzing bees. He essayed to get close and hang on, but brown gloves drubbed him and he went sinking slowly to the canvas again.

This time he was far down in the depths, like being in a well. He had to make each rung of the ladder slowly, painfully, coming to the top again. He even dreamed a little.

He dreamed he saw Pat Hafey's red face, over the edge of the apron, and Pat's spread hand, giving him the count: *"Six . . . seven. . . ."* Well, if Pat had been there maybe he would have thought of something and this catastrophe would not have happened to Willy. Whatever *had* happened—he couldn't be sure. . . .

*"Eight* . . . get ready, Willy . . . *nine.* . . . Up, Willy!" He came up just as though it was really Pat Hafey and he had the strength left to rise. He came up and faced Dorengo and was ready to accept more punishment if need be. It was part of the business and even if he had not fallen for the shift which never materialized, he had not been able to evade that lethal right which Dorengo carried behind his lancing left.

There was some kind of interruption. He was very fuzzy in the head, but he saw Dorengo's back and the disappointed stare Boo gave over his shoulder as he went away. There were hands on him, leading him some place. He sat down and that felt mighty good.

A voice kept saying: "You got to box him. Get your hands high and stab him. He looks like he favors his left leg. Go for him and pin him in a corner and try him. Maybe it won't work, but try him."

Willy said: "If I was not dreaming, I would say it was you, Pat. I would believe it, because it sounds like you."

PAT HAFEY, still in his street clothing, hat on the back of his head, said tightly, "Look down at the first row, kid. Take a squint and see who came all the way with me, just to see you fight. Look!"

Coming out of the dream, Willy wheeled, peered. There was Florrie, all right. And there, in the seat he had reserved but not used, sat another figure. It was a girl, a young girl, slim, serious-faced, without guile. Her make-up was skillful enough—but there was little of it. She sat straight in the seat, hands folded in her lap, outwardly unexcited despite her dramatic entrance with Pat Hafey.

Willy said: "Omigosh, it is Mary Carson!"

Pat said: "Okay, so you're awake. What's all this jabber Kid gives me about secret punches and stuff?"

"Aw," said Willy sheepishly, "nothin', Pat. He just tagged me, that's all."

"Stop being cautious," snapped Pat. "You're a fighter. Go get him!"

The buzzer sounded. Willy took a breath of air. The crowd was restless, expecting the kayo in this round. He looked at the clock, at the still scowling referee. He got up just before the bell and the stool swung out and away.

Dorengo was in a hurry. He came clouting, but shrewdly. He led with the spanking left hand which had done him in such good stead. It landed high on Willy's head and then Boo started to crowd the younger fighter.

Willy's hook exploded viciously against Boo's middle. The right came with wings on it, right down the middle. Boo backtracked like a manikin on wheels, going around a circle, amazed for the instant.

Willy danced, this way, then that. Dorengo moved desperately to get out of the corner and let the shock of those two punches wear off. A murmur, as though a bass string had been plucked, ran through the Garden.

Dorengo, unable to get out, stood in the corner. His hands came up, made motions. He feinted twice, three times, and again the pattern repeated itself and it was like Florrie in her apartment, demonstrating. Dorengo's intelligent eyes watched hawk-like.

Willy pretended to fall close. Dorengo did not shift. He threw the fourth left, a swinging wallop which would decapitate a steer. It whistled at Willy's skull. Had Willy duplicated his earlier maneuver, it would have ended the fight.

But Willy was ducking and throwing his own right. It was a short punch, to the body. When the force of Dorengo's empty swing had expended itself and the results of that body blow made themselves felt, Boo was facing the ropes, arms half extended.

There was a rhythm about the punching, Willy thought happily, a one-two three-four, slap the right. One-two, three-four, punch with the right again.

Then there was no target. Dorengo was down, he was flat as a rug. The referee was steely-eyed, motioning Willy away. The ropes in the neutral corner were taut beneath his outspread arms. Dorengo was pale and still on the canvas, but he would get up. He was built to get up and the courage of him was undeniable. Rack Nebo's face was drawn, watching the count.

Dorengo got up. He lifted his hands. His features were indrawn, blank, only the flaming courage showing in expressionless eyes. Willy went in and feinted. He stepped aside. Dorengo tried to clinch. It was not good to have to hit him, but Willy chopped for the chin, almost gently. Dorengo fell down and this time he would not get up.

Willy turned and walked away and the deep-throated wolf call went to the rafters and came down. It was the accolade of the gallery, extended to a hitter. It changed everything in an instant. The lights were brilliant but warm and friendly now. Willy raised his face and spread his arms and let go with his kid's grin. He had come to the Garden and it was good.

IN Lubin's it was late, but the fight crowd lingered. Rack Nebo came in suddenly, walked to the table where the three sat. He said to Pat, "Your bum is pretty good, at that. But if you had not got here, we would have him, ha?"

"You gave him a time with that phony secret stuff," Pat said quietly. "You are a very smart cookie. You worked hard over a green kid, trying all that mental stuff."

Willy stood up. In a voice which could be heard by at least four columnists and a half dozen sports reporters, he said: "And look, Rack. Give my regards to our friend, Florrie. Tell her it was swell. She kept me out of trouble. I had good, clean fun with her. She might even have fooled me about that fake shift and all that other malarkey if she hadn't hung around you so much she even talked like you. She even said 'ha.' You know, Rack, like you always say. 'Ha!' . . . And then last night when she gave me that razzle-dazzle about getting rid of her date and me coming around in an hour—I came early, Rack. I saw you sneaking out like a smart li'l' ol' rabbit. . . . What's the matter, Rack, ha? Not leavin', Rack, you old psychology king, are you? Ha?"

Before the astute manager reached the door the gale of laughter engulfed him. Lubin bowed him out, unknowing of the cause and he cursed Lubin, something for which he would never be forgiven on Broadway. . . .

Mary Carson said: "Going around with show-girls. That is just like you, Willy Boulder. I am not one bit surprised."

Willy said: "It was a gag. They were trying to worry me, see, with Pat away, and they sicked her on me."

"I'll bet they had to hold you down and make you promise to see her." The slim girl's eyes were accusing. But in their depths Willy thought he saw something else—a reluctant admiration, a recognition that he had grown up. It was his year, all right. He had about become a man.

# My Most Amusing Experience

## Trouble Overside

A FEW years ago a physician recommended that I take a sea-voyage for my health; but lacking the funds to travel as a passenger for an extended trip, I signed on as a seaman in the steward's department of a big passenger ship on the New York to Buenos Aires run. It happened that a close relative was employed in the office of the steamship's company, and he arranged the necessary details, even supplying me with letters to the ship's officers.

He advised me to be sure to bring some American cigarettes with me, a bit of counsel that proved of great value to me during the trip, because through judicious distribution of them among the crew I obtained their coöperation in teaching me my duties. And believe me I needed it, for I was strictly a landlubber.

I was assigned to the Officer's Mess, an easy berth, as my duties were only to take the food as it came up from the galley on a dumb-waiter and serve it. After clearing the tables, I would gather the left-overs in a big bucket and merely heave the contents over the side.

All was clear sailing, and I was congratulating myself on becoming adept (thanks to my cigarettes) in things nautical—for instance saying *bulkhead* instead of door and not making the mistake of referring to the companionway as the stairs—when on the morning of the twelfth day we dropped anchor in the beautiful harbor of Rio de Janeiro.

Our ship was held up at Quarantine to await the arrival of the port officials who come aboard all incoming ships to inspect, but I did not know we were anchored for that purpose. After serving the officers their breakfast, I cleared the tables as usual and stepped out on deck with my bucket of garbage. The sight of the magnificent Sugar Loaf mountain rising majestically over the harbor, a world-famous spectacle, held me enthralled as I gave the garbage the heave-ho.

Shouts from below roused me from my revery, and looking over the side, I was stunned to see a group of officials in natty white uniforms angrily gesticulating from the bow of the launch which was alongside our ship. They were pointing directly at the spot where I had thrown the garbage over the side, and were busy wiping their spattered white uniforms. In my admiration of the harbor scenery I had not noticed the arrival of the official party, and my pail of garbage had landed squarely on top of the launch's canopy just as they were gathered in the bow to come aboard our ship, and had splashed all over them.

It took a lot of Good Neighbor diplomacy to convince the outraged officials that it was an accident, and an equally outraged chief steward demanded to know why I had not thrown the garbage down the canvas chute used for that purpose when a ship is in port. I didn't even know it was there!

Well—I regained my health. But it was not because of the polishing brass and chipping paint I did on the return voyage.

*R. E. R.*

WHAT is the funniest thing that ever happened to you? Tell us about it. Anecdotes offered for publication in this department should not be longer than five hundred words and may be much shorter. For all anecdotes published by us we will pay from five to twenty-five dollars, according to our appraisal of their quality both in presentation and in story. Please address them to the My Most Amusing Experience Editor, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. We cannot acknowledge or return unpublished contributions, but all will be carefully considered. All published material becomes the property of McCall Corporation.

## Blue Boy

WE were encamped in those horizontal garbage cans called Nissen huts at a place outside Newport, England. It was a day of great expectation. No less a personage than a one-star general was to make an inspection of the camp and our colonel was all nerves in his desire to see that everything was perfect, or if possible, better than that.

Benny was the battalion artist and the colonel instructed him to put the finishing touches on a new stage which we had constructed in one of the larger huts. I was adjusting the draw curtain so it would work flawlessly under the critical gaze of the general and Benny was standing on a chair, a can of bright blue paint in one hand and a brush in the other, touching up his handiwork.

Suddenly the door flew open and the cry "'Tenshun" split the air. The chair wobbled and crashed; the can of paint flew up in the air and came down on Benny who was now sprawled on the floor.

But Benny was a soldier. Dripping but obedient, he snapped to attention and, with blue paint running out of his hair and covering his glasses, he reported in the accepted Army manner. The title "Blue Boy," like the paint, stuck with him a long time.

*J. W. B.*

## No Comparison

MY favorite hostler, a gangly colored boy by name of Porgy, was paddling for me one morning early in the season. He was also custodian of my one and only bass—a beauty, scaling a scant four pounds. Deciding on a little rest, I handed my fly rod to the boy that he might try a few casts to further his education, and proceeded to fill my pipe. He had the good luck to immediately hook into a fighting gamester giving promise of a real battle, and since he was adept with the rod I decided to let him carry through.

He seemed unable, however, to get into position to play his bass—he had been dragging his big foot in the water, and now, although he twisted around like a pretzel, that foot remained submerged as though anchored there. With that bronze-back in there tearing up the water, and Porgy jabbering dementedly as he awkwardly played him, it was plainly up to me to put the battle on a solid two-footed basis. So I reached down, grabbed an ankle, and yanked the oversized pedal extremity to the surface. Oddly enough, a cord, knotted around the big toe, extended down into the water. Slashing through this with my knife, Porgy was thus released, and with both feet planted in the boat he was able to play his bass with considerable skill, finally bringing it to net.

"Four pounds!" I whooped admiringly, holding it up after the weighing. "Here—let's compare it with mine."

But Porgy, instead of beaming expansively, only rolled his eyes apprehensively.

"Dey aint gonna be no comparin', Boss," he announced finally.

"What?" I joshed him. "So you think yours is the bigger?"

"Yassuh, de biggest—an' de onliest. Dat other ol' he-bass was tied to mah big toe!"

*E. L. M.*

# Who Wouldn't Sell a Farm and Go to Sea?

**"Man overboard!" delayed one ship, and the fresh fruit of Pitcairn Island the other; and so they were even again as they raced round the Horn for home.**

## by BILL ADAMS

TIM MURPHY, master of the four-mast barque *Shenandoah,* at anchor in Frisco bay loaded with California canned goods, was looking black as a doldrum squall when I went up to the poop a half-hour or so before the tug was to take her to sea. 'Twas seven bells of the morning watch.

Though I had but a second mate's ticket, I was Murphy's first mate. He'd taken me on in Liverpool the day after I passed for second, which was a week after I finished my four-year apprenticeship in the Blue Nose barque *Speedaway.* No need to tell you *Shenandoah* was a Yankee ship. Who ever heard of a fellow with but a second's ticket going first of a Limey ship? 'Twasn't done. There's two ways of spelling *Limey.* The other's *Red Tape.*

I'd been mate of *Shenandoah* six months. For over five of them *Speedaway* had been at the sea bottom, with her master Ned Paine, who'd made a sailor of me the hard way—which is not such a bad way, the sea being no place for lily-fingered men. I'm speaking of sailing-ships, you'll understand; going in steam-kettles not being what a *sailor* would speak of as going to sea.

I wondered why Murphy would be looking so glum. Might be a woman was at the bottom of it: though that I doubted, Tim being entirely married to his ship. I had but filled my pipe and taken one draw when he came to me and growled, a scowl on his Irish face: "Sold under our feet, lad!"

"I don't get you, Captain," said I.

"She's sold to the Blue Noses," he muttered, as sorrowful as though he'd just heard of the deaths of his old folks, with a half dozen close relatives thrown in.

"Is this some sort of outrage, Captain?" I asked.

"'Tis rape, murder, robbery and corruption, lad," he replied, and looking to the flag at *Shenandoah's* lofty peak, he asked: "Can y'imagine the Limey ensign flying on this ship?"

"I take it we don't either of us have to stay with her, Captain," said I.

"That may go with you, lad, but I've been master of her sixteen years. She's part of me," he replied, looking sorrowfully over the wind-rippled bay. And then he gave a start, and exclaimed: "Look yonder! There's the living image of your old ship—but *Speedaway's* been lost this six months, more's the sorrow."

For a minute I stared at a tall packet towing down from Sacramento

River, where ships loaded grain for Europe; and had not I known she was lost, would have sworn 'twas *Speedaway* herself. And then I cried: "It's *Stormalong!* She's *Speedaway's* sister ship, and said to be even faster!"

"Is that so, now? She'll be Falmouth-bound just like ourselves!" exclaimed Murphy, thinking of the race we'd have; but next instant he was looking gloomy as ever. "With the Limey flag at *Shenandoah's* peak, why would I be caring?" he muttered, the heart clear gone out of him. . . .

There was a step on the gangway. Unnoticed by either of us, a boat had come alongside. Up to the poop came a big broad-shouldered man in a fine well-pressed brown suit, new brown fedora hat, and shiny tan oxfords; over his vest a heavy gold watch-chain and in one hand an ebony walking-stick with a big gold knob.

"You're master of this ship?" he asked, eying Murphy with a calculating stare.

"I was that, Mister Whoever-you-may-be. But she's sold under my feet and the new owner will be putting a Limey in command, may the devil take him!" replied Murphy, a look on his face as of a chained terrier seeing a fat rat at play beyond its reach.

"I'm your new owner, Whoever-you-may-be yourself," retorted the stranger, and pointing to *Stormalong,* added: "She's my ship too, and the fastest on the water. I bought this ship to replace her sister, that was lost with all hands."

"Why would you not be buying one of your Limey ships, instead of *Shenandoah?*" asked Murphy, hot anger in his eyes.

"I'd have done so, could I have found a good one for sale. Heaven knows I'd no wish to take a ship thrown together in some Yankee yard," replied the stranger.

"Thrown together, is it, Mister Whoever-you-may-be!" cried Murphy, his Irish eyes blazing.

"My name's John Starr, whoever you may be yourself. I'm from Halifax, Nova Scotia, and well you know no Yankee ship could ever outsail a Nova Scotiaman," retorted *Shenandoah's* new owner.

"From Nova Scotia, eh? Well, I call 'em Blue Noses, Mister John Starr, and well do I know no Blue Nose ship was ever built could whip my *Shenandoah,*" replied Murphy, and he asked: "When does your new master come aboard, so I can go ashore?"

"You'll not be going ashore till this ship reaches Falmouth. You're on the articles, and you'll stay with her till then," answered John Starr, and looking at the flag at *Shenandoah's* peak, he added: "You'll haul that flag down and hoist the Red Duster in its place, Captain."

"That I will not! Sixteen years I've sailed this ship, and never will I be the one to haul her flag down," replied Murphy, hot-eyed.

"I did not mean that you yourself should haul it down, Captain," replied John Starr, and noticing me for the first time, he said: "This young fellow—" There he stopped, and gave me a long stare which I returned to him eye for eye. "Where did I see you before, young fellow?" he asked.

"NEVER that I know of," said I, which was a lie; well did I remember the day I'd signed my apprentice indentures in his office four and a half years ago; thereby binding myself to serve him four full years without a cent of pay, that being the custom in the Limey ships. Four full years I'd served him, and eaten the poor fare provided by Limey shipowners—nigh starving on flinty sea-biscuit and rotten salt pork. Truth it is, that many a time I'd cursed Ned Paine, *Speedaway's* master. May God rest his soul in peace on the sea bottom! Truth it is also, that I came to have a sort of affection for him, because after all, he was *Speedaway's* master: a part of her, as she was part of him. Had not I loved her from the day I first stepped to her deck? A ship can heal many sorrows if a young lad be at heart a sailor, and can bind men of opposite characters together in comradeship.

"I'd have sworn you were once an apprentice in *Speedaway,*" said John Starr.

"He's been my first mate for six months," interposed Murphy, catching on that I'd no wish for my late owner to know who I was.

"That settles it, then. If he were the fellow I thought, he could not so soon be first mate," said John Starr; and to me: "Mister Mate, I want that flag hauled down from this ship's peak, and the Red Duster hoisted in its place."

"If you think I'm going to haul that flag down, or to order any man to do so, you can go get yourself a new first mate for this ship, Mr. Starr," said I, looking full in his eyes.

"What the devil's the matter with you two? Why be so hot-headed about a flag?" asked John Starr, with a puzzled look on his face.

"Listen here now, Mr. Starr," said Captain Murphy: "Maybe the feelings of my mate and me don't matter at all; but ye might at least consider the feelings of this ship."

"Feelings of the ship? Who ever heard of a ship having feelings?" asked John Starr, smiling for all the world as though he thought we were pulling some sort of joke on him.

"Ye may be a shipowner, Mr. Starr, but plain it is ye know nothing of ships. I was going to whip *Stormalong* to Falmouth, but if you have that flag hauled down, 'twill take all the heart out of this ship and I'll never be able to. I'm hoping you'll give me fair play, will you not?" replied Tim Murphy.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed John Starr. "You think changing her flag would make a difference to this ship's speed, eh? Well, just go ahead and fly that flag at each of her four mastheads if you've a mind to. She'll never whip *Stormalong.* That you can lay your last cent on!"

"Being a decent seafaring man 'tis little money I have, but I'll bet you all of it, and I know well my first mate here will do the same," replied Murphy.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed John Starr. "Now see here, Captain! If you can whip *Stormalong* I'll give you this ship just as she stands on the day she gets to Falmouth. How's that, eh?"

"Done!" said Tim Murphy quietly, every trace of anger or worry gone from his face. "Done, Mr. Starr! That's fine. I'll retire from the sea, and buy the farm I've long been wanting, and have some cows and pigs and such things. My first mate here will go master of *Shenandoah.* Sure, I'm grandly obliged to you. Red Kerry cows I'll be having, and the fine black Irish pigs."

"Ha-ha-ha! You and your cows and pigs! Ha-ha-ha!" laughed John Starr.

And then Murphy said to me: "Here comes our tug, lad! Let's get away! *Stormalong's* towing right out to sea, and we'll show her master how we sail our Yankee packets." And to John Starr he said: "You'd best be going ashore, Mister."

The words then spoken by *Shenandoah's* new owner fair took the breath out of Murphy and me. "I'm coming to Falmouth with you. A long while I've been wanting a voyage in one of my ships." And he asked me to have his baggage brought up from the boat, and went below to take a look at the spare cabin.

"'Tis queer he'd not be going in *Stormalong,* lad, instead of in a ship that was thrown together in some Yankee yard," Tim Murphy said to me.

"Captain, you can see by the belly on him that he likes his eats. Well he knows this ship is provisioned in the American fashion. You never heard tell of a Limey ship in which the crew ate baked beans, fresh bread, pies, codfish cakes, johnny-cake, or indeed anything but pea soup, hardtack, salt pork and salt horse," said I.

"Well, now, I did not think of that," replied Murphy, and then in a few minutes *Shenandoah* was towing through the Heads, with *Stormalong* close on her starboard beam.

UP came John Starr, while the two ships passed side by side through the Gate, and he set the megaphone to his lips and shouted to *Stormalong's* master: "Captain, if you let this ship whip you to Falmouth, you'll never again sail any ship of mine."

"How came you to buy *that* tub, and *what* have you been drinking so early in the day to get such *peeculiar* notions in your head?" came the reply of *Stormalong's* master, a Welshman by the name of Garth Llewellyn, and slow over the wind-rippled water his words came, in the drawled way the Taffys have of speaking. And he spat in the water in a contemptuous sort of fashion, and his Limey crew went to cheering like mad, all standing on their ship's topgallant rail.

High above Garth Llewellyn flew the Red Duster of the Limeys: high above Tim Murphy the flag that *Shenandoah* had flown through long years. And from *Shenandoah's* long white deck came not so much as one cheer, nor any answer at all. . . .

All in a row stood the eighteen able seamen *Shenandoah* carried in her forecastle. Some when they spoke had the Irish, some the Swede, Norwegian, or Dane accent. One small swarthy Eyetalian there was, and one big bull-muscled Finn. Every one of them was good American, as were also the skinny Chinese steward, the giant Negro cook, Chips the Rooshian carpenter, and Sails the sailmaker, who was a Frog from Bordeaux. All in a row they stood, and now and again you'd see one look for a jiffy up to the flag at *Shenandoah's* peak; and you'd

*Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward*

*"Go hoist that flag, Captain! We'll drink to it now," said our owner.*

see him grin, or nod his head in a knowing sort of way, or spit over the side toward *Stormalong*. Word was gone round, of course, of how John Starr had wanted that flag changed, and of how Tim Murphy had replied to that notion.

The second mate came to me, as I stood watching our crew. A year older than I, he'd been but two years at sea, was from the State of Texas, and the only native bred-and-born American aboard. "By all the bucking bronc's and long-horned steers back home, I hope when Murphy puts you master of this ship, you'll take me for your first mate!" said he.

"I will that. You bet I will!" said I, and we shook hands on it.

And then in a few minutes both ships were casting their lower topsails loose outside the Heads. A fresh cold wind was blowing, and by when each had lower topsails set, the sprays were starting to fly. Plain we heard the chantey of the Limey sailors as they hoisted their upper topsails, using a capstan to make the work lighter.

*Rolling home, rolling home,*
*Rolling home across the sea,*
*Rolling home to merry England,*
*To the land where we would be.*

But *Shenandoah's* able seamen hoisted her upper topsails with their own strong arms, while the chanteyman, a yellow-headed Swede, sang, "A Yankee Ship Came Down the River" and all hands roared the chorus: *"Blow, boys, blow!"*

A Yankee ship came down the river,
*Blow, my bully boys, blow!*
Her masts and spars they shone like silver,
*Blow, boys, blow!*
Her masts and spars they shone like silver,
*Blow, my bully boys, blow!*

"And now what d'ye think of my ship, Mr. Starr?" asked Tim Murphy, as with half her thirty-five sails set, *Shenandoah* took the bit in her teeth, and danced, plunging to the big Pacific rollers; spray flying in clouds across her deck, her long wake streaming astern.

"*Your* ship! That's a good one! Wait till she gets to Falmouth and finds *Stormalong's* been in two weeks or more," replied John Starr, his eyes on Garth Llewellyn's grand packet running neck and neck with us. He'd but spoken when a big spray drove clear above *Shenandoah's* high poop, soaking his fine brown suit and knocking his new brown fedora hat to the sea.

"Mr. Starr, this is sailor weather. You'd best be getting below out of it," said Tim Murphy, with a bit wink at me.

"That's a good one!" retorted John Starr, and strode to where two of the hands were hoisting the gaff topsail close by, and reached up and grabbed the halyards, and putting all his two hundred pounds to it, sang out: *"Yo-ho-ho! Haul-away-oh! Lay back now!"*

Up ran the gaff topsail, and the two hands eyed John Starr with a new look on their faces.

"YOU took me for a lubber, did you?" asked John Starr, turning to Murphy. "Well, let me tell you I was raised in a dory on the Banks of Newfoundland."

"Ye're in no dory now! Ye're aboard a Yankee clipper, and we're going to show you how to sail a ship. As for your dory, *I* was raised in a smack off the stormy west shores of a country called Ireland. Might be ye've heard of it?" replied Murphy.

"So it's the wild Irish against the Blue Noses, is it?" asked John Starr, dripping with cold sea water, but shivering not at all.

*In quicker time than I'd ever seen it done, a boat was in the water, four good men at her oars.*

"'Tis not so! 'Tis a Yankee clipper fornist a Limey—an' may the best ship win!" retorted Murphy.

"Take a good look at the best ship while ye yet can see her, Captain!" laughed John Starr, his eyes on *Stormalong* racing through the long Pacific rollers a little on our beam; running neck and neck with us still. He scarce had spoken when the cold gray California fog rolled in, and hid her.

ALL that day, that night, next day and next night, *Shenandoah* drove under all sail through the cold California fog. At the third dawn it cleared of a sudden, like when a lady draws back her window curtain. The sun shone on a bright blue sea, with the whitecaps tossing high. Running neck and neck with us was *Stormalong,* still a little on the starboard beam.

"Thirteen thousand miles ahead, lad, an' it's going to be a race," Captain Murphy said to me, a smile upon his face.

With nightfall it started to blow. Clouds hid the stars. Black as a preacher's best hat it was, and still swinging her thirty-five sails, *Shenandoah* raced through the darkness like a colt freed from its stall to race o'er the prairie.

"You've a good ship, Captain Murphy, I'll admit," shouted John Starr by Tim's side in the chartroom doorway, his ebony walking-stick under one arm.

"How come ye always carry yon stick? Did the dory men play wi' such fandangles?" Tim Murphy shouted back.

"'Twas a present from Captain Ned Paine of *Speedaway.* He brought it me one time when he came in from a voyage out East, saying 'twould fetch me good luck," replied John Starr, as he stepped to the poop deck and went to pacing to and fro in the dark. In a minute or two eight bells struck, and a foremast hand came up to the poop to relieve the man at the wheel.

"Watch out for yourself, Mr. Starr! Here's a hard squall!" sang out Tim Murphy; and down went *Shenandoah,* with her lee rail deep in the sea.

I saw John Starr stagger, and heard a click on the deck. He'd dropped his ebony walking-stick. And then I heard an oath from the foremast man. He'd stepped on the big gold knob of the walking-stick, which rolled under his foot so that he fell and was carried hard against the taffrail by a boarding sea.

"You there! Get up and hustle to that wheel!" I sang out.

"Me leg's broke, Mister Mate!" he replied, and sure enough it was.

"Devil take it! We're a man short!" cried Tim Murphy, and bade me get another hand aft to relieve the wheel.

"Hold on there!" shouted John Starr. "Captain, I told you I'd give you fair play, and I will. 'Tis I will take the wheel, and will stand watch with the rest of your foremast hands till this fellow's leg's mended, that you may not be a man short in your race against *Stormalong.*" And he tossed his walking-stick into the chartroom and strode to the wheel.

Having seen the hurt man carried forward, and sent Chips the carpenter to put a splint on his leg, I made haste to the wheel to see how John Starr was doing. It took a good man to hold *Shenandoah* to her course in that sort of weather. With the least careless handling, *Stormalong* would be running away from us. Halfway along the poop, I bumped into Tim Murphy on his way from the wheel.

"He's doing fine, lad! I've told him I'm leaving the ship to him, and I'm going below. Call me at once if you want anything," said Tim, and went down to his cabin to turn in. . . .

For two hours John Starr steered *Shenandoah* cleverly as ever a jockey steered a galloping mount down the Grand National race-course. When relieved at midnight, he was wet with sweat, and tottered a bit as he walked to the chartroom. "She's a fine ship, son, and I'm fair fagged out. I'll sleep this watch below in the chartroom. Call me at eight bells, so I can stand my watch on deck with the rest of your men," said he, and lay down on the settee.

"I'm going to sleep this watch in the chartroom. Call me at once if you want anything," said I to the second mate, turning the ship over to him.

Lying on the chartroom deck, beneath John Starr on the settee, I slept with one eye and both ears open. Darkness was absolute, the wind a steady roar. Half a dozen times I'd a notion I'd best go on deck, but remembered each time that were *I* second mate, I'd not want the mate butting in. He was looking a bit shaky when he roused me at four of the morning. "Did you have to take any sail off her?" I asked.

"I came near it a half dozen times, but she's still swinging all she's got, and *Stormalong's* light's right where it was at nightfall," he replied.

"Fine and dandy! Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?" said I, and he went grinning off to his cabin.

"MR. STARR!" said I, laying a hand on his shoulder. "Mr. Starr!" said I, shaking him hard. "Mr. Starr!" I shouted, my lips at his ear.

"Where am I?" he asked, sitting up and rubbing a hand over his eyes.

"You're aboard *Shenandoah,* sir. I guess you'd best go back to sleep," said I.

"I told Captain Murphy I'd give him fair play, and I will," he replied, and rose stiffly to his feet, and having stretched his aching arms, started forward to stand his watch on deck with the rest of my men.

"Wait till I call the skipper so he can get you a suit of oilskins and pair of seaboots from the slop-chest!" I called after him.

"You'll leave him be! If I can't wait till he's had his sleep out, 'tis too bad," he called back, and went down to the water-swept main deck to join my watch.

BY dawn's first light I saw *Stormalong,* going through the seas like a stag through tall bracken; leaping light-footed, sprays dripping from her lower sails; her decks knee-deep in white water, as were our own. In the lee of our fore deckhouse stood my watch, John Starr amongst them; his fine brown suit sea-soaked and clinging to his frame. All about him my lads stood, keeping the wind and spray a little from him: so that I knew word was gone round he was a man and no mollycoddle.

Up came Tim Murphy, and watching *Stormalong* said: "'Tis going to be a race, lad, I'm thinking."

"I'm thinking that same, sir," said I. "The owner's down on deck with my watch, and much needing oilskins and seaboots. He'd not let me rouse you to get them."

"John Starr, come aft here!" shouted Tim, a grin on his lips; and aft came the owner, and got himself into a suit of stiff shiny yellow oilskins and pair of heavy leather seaboots.

"It's many the year since I was rigged out in this fashion, Captain," said the owner, and walking uneasily because of heavy unaccustomed sea clothing, went back to his place with the rest of my lads.

Black as thunder the sky was, and fast growing blacker. "Call all hands on deck! Get the kites and gallants off her or she'll be losing her sticks!" ordered Murphy; and as we clewed up those sails ready for furling, I saw *Stormalong* clewing up hers.

"You'll stay on deck and get the ropes coiled up, John Starr!" I sang out, when the owner started into the rigging to go aloft and help furl those sails. There were men enough without him, and I'd no wish to see him go overboard. Looking a bit sullen, he obeyed.

"Furl the crojick and mainsail!" ordered Murphy, as soon as the men were down from furling the kites and gallants.

"All hands to the mainsail first!" I sang out, when those two great sails were ready for furling. A hundred and four feet across the head, the mainsail was, by better than fifty deep; and soaked with sea-water.

John Starr made for the rigging with the rest of my watch, and the cook, steward, sailmaker, carpenter and second mate. About to order him to stay on deck, I held my peace because of the eager proud look on his face as he ran heavily past me.

"Get out to the lee yardarm, you there, John Starr!" I shouted; the lee yardarm being the place where go the weaker or less experienced of a crew when it comes to furling a clipper's mainsail. Though looking a bit disappointed, he obeyed.

Scarce was the owner come out to the lee yardarm when *Shenandoah,* struck by a hard squall, took a heavy roll down to leeward, nigh dipping the yardarm into the foaming sea below. Gripping the lifeline lest I lose my footing on the steeply canted deck, I heard a wild yell: *"Man overboard!"*

"All hands down from aloft! Back the main yard! Get a boat away!" roared Tim Murphy from the poop. In quicker time than ever I'd seen it done, the ship was stopped; and a boat was in the water, with the second at her tiller and four good men at her oars.

When we had the owner back aboard, *Stormalong* was a good five miles ahead. Up to the poop he stumbled, gasping and choking, water pouring from him, and to Tim Murphy cried: "I'm sorry, Captain! I'm right sorry I've lost you the race!"

"Get to blazes off this poop, you!" shouted Murphy, his eyes on *Stormalong.* And to me: "What the devil did ye let the lubber go aloft for?"

'Twas the first time ever Captain Murphy had found fault with me. His words cut deep, and 'twas easy to see that the owner, making his way forward, was cut as deep as I.

All day, all night, that wild wind blew: *Shenandoah* running like a deer with the wolves at heel; *Stormalong* keeping her distance full five miles ahead. Next day it moderated, and picking up a steady southeast tradewind, we piled all sail on again. Tim Murphy paced his poop like an old lion newly caged, his savage eyes on *Stormalong's* white canvas far ahead. . . . So it went, day after day, till on a bright morning with the tradewind fallen a little, we sighted, far away on our starboard bow, the island of Pitcairn rising from the blue water between the horizon and our rival.

THE hands stood by the bulwarks, watching the green island rise from the blue sea; suddenly a great cheer rose. Tim Murphy joined in that cheer, and the second mate also, and I. Only the owner was silent.

Nigh more savage than had been Murphy's were the eyes of John Starr as we sailed past *Stormalong,* lying with her main yards aback, the islanders' boats alongside her, and natives climbing aboard with bananas, pineapples, oranges, and such things, to trade with her hungry Limey crew.

"What the devil are ye doing up here? Get back to the deck where ye belong!" stormed Tim Murphy, when John Starr came up to the poop.

"That I will not, Captain! *Stormalong's* my ship, and I want to know what Garth Llewellyn means by stopping her. You'll hoist a signal and ask the fool!" replied John Starr.

'Twas I myself hoisted the signal to *Stormalong,* just beyond hailing distance to leeward. And what did Garth Llewellyn reply but that his crew had threatened to refuse duty, did he not give them a chance of some food fit to eat!

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Murphy, who never was what you would call a laughing man. "I hope you're satisfied, Mr. Starr! If you Limeys did not so starve your crews, yonder ship would be five miles ahead still."

For a moment or two Tim Murphy and John Starr eyed one another as two tigers meeting in the green jungle might eye one another. Then Tim said, quietly, "Get forward with the hands, where you yourself said you belong." And forward walked the owner, with all hands and the cook grinning at his discomfiture.

FOR a few days after we dipped Pitcairn under the sea the tradewind blew, and *Stormalong* followed us a full five miles astern. Then, with a strong westerly on their quarters, both ships ran on a gray sea under a gray sky for the Horn.

John Starr had lost much of his plumpness, and had become handy as any man in the forecastle, where he ate and slept, taking the wheel in regular turns with the rest, going aloft when there was need to go aloft, acting for all the world as though he never had been aught else than plain common foremast sailor. Never word nor look did Murphy give him: but to me said one day, his eyes on *Stormalong* astern: "I'm going to be owner of this ship, lad, and you her master."

"That suits me finely, Captain Murphy," said I.

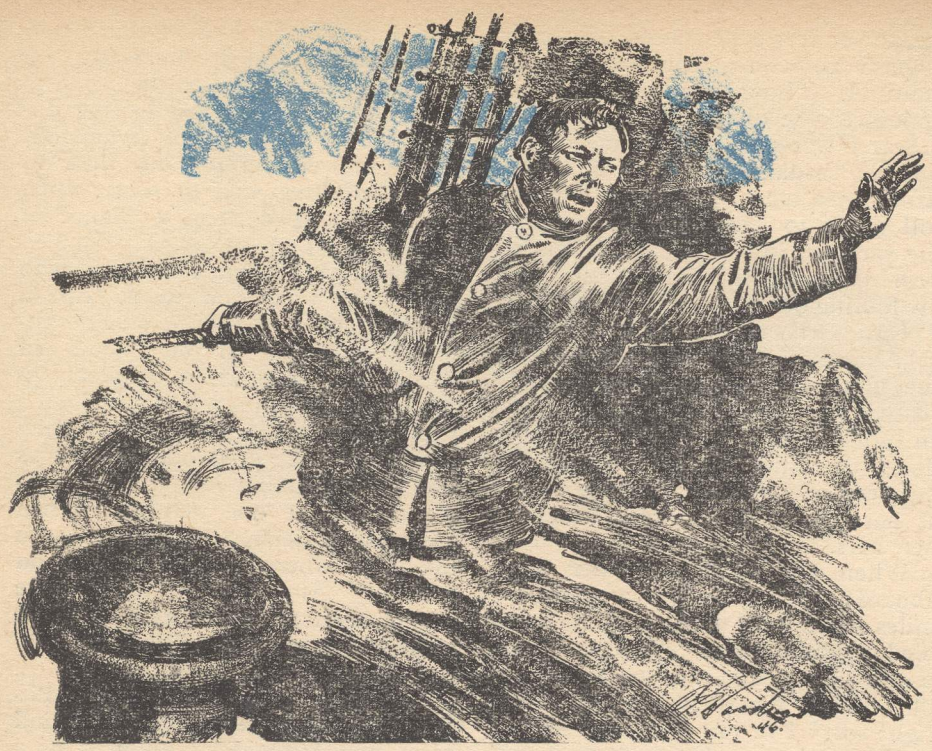
Later the second mate, who'd overheard our words, came to me, asking: "You'll not forget you promised me I'd be your first mate, eh?"

"I will not forget," said I.

The westerlies blew ever harder as we neared the Horn, so that both ships must take in their high kites and gallants. Under six topsails and foresail we passed the black cape at two of the morning: full daylight, because this was December and midsummer down there; emerald seas rolled after us eighty feet high, with all manner of seafowl big and little wheeling and screaming at our rolling sides.

"Yon's a fine ship, lad, but we'll whip her to Falmouth," Tim said to me, *Shenandoah* riding high on the summit of an eighty-foot water mountain; *Stormalong* on the summit of another full five miles astern.

Scarce had Tim spoken when John Starr, on lookout on the forecastle head, shouted words that were lost in the roar of the wind and the sea: then, aware that his warning was lost,



*"Ice right ahead!" yelled John Starr.*

he leaped down to the main deck and sped aft thigh-deep in white water, yelling like mad, with his hands on the lifeline.

*"Ice right ahead!"* yelled John Starr.

We saw it next time the ship rose to a sea summit: a monstrous great berg glittering and gleaming in the cold morning's light, and to north and to south of it other bergs that were smaller. Lifting and rolling, pitching and rocking and tumbling, with spray flying hundreds of feet in the air all about them, those bergs stretched from northward to southward before us. Our bow was headed straight for the midst of the monster! If ever you heard a crew curse! If ever you saw a crew run for the ropes! For maybe five minutes the decks were a madness of shouting and yelling, of heaving and hauling—till, with her yards braced up, *Shenandoah* was running due south to get clear of the peril where water was open. But Garth Llewellyn, seeing us alter our course and guessing the reason, had to alter his own not so sharply, so that by the time we were clear of the ice, his ship was running neck and neck with us again.

Up to the poop came John Starr, and said to me: "Mr. Mate, I was come near thinking I might be going to lose this ship to Captain Murphy, but his luck's out and mine in from now on."

"You there, John Starr! Get back to the deck where you yourself said you belong!" ordered Murphy, with a snarl in his voice like that of a fierce chained dog teased with a fat bone.

"I do not have to act as a foremast hand any longer, Captain. That fellow's leg is well mended," replied John Starr, and asked: "Did not I give you a square deal, as I promised?"

"You did that, Mr. Starr," replied Tim, a bit red in the face; and held out his hand which at once the owner gripped in his own.

"Did occasion arise, I'm sure you'd do the same by me, Captain," said John Starr.

"That you can surely count on," replied Tim Murphy.

TOWARD noon the wind eased. Rain fell, a torrent that, hiding our rival, beat down the sea-crests—a dark day, the barometer so low that Murphy dared set no more sail. Night came cloudy, without moon or star. Rain changed to hail and lashed a man's face, rattling on masts, spars and deckhouses. All night, all next day, we sailed alone, the sea hidden a few hundred feet from our sides. Not till well up in the South Atlantic did the weather clear, and a wan sun with scant warmth break out, shining on a desolate gray sea. That morning we met and signaled an outward-bound ship, asking had she met *Stormalong*. Not since she crossed the line had she sighted any sail.

At noon we signaled a steamer, come out of Magellan Straits. After the fashion of some who, going to sea in kettles, call themselves sailors, she passed us without deigning to reply; this made Murphy swear mightily, and John Starr also, and every man aboard. But when the wind freshened during the afternoon watch, *Shenandoah,* under her thirty-five sails again at last, sped by that smoky kettle while all hands stood on the topgallant rail yelling taunts at her, and Murphy himself hoisted a signal which read *"May I offer you a tow?"*

Whereat John Starr laughed till the tears ran down his face—which, no longer pouchy, was now well sea tanned.

Not a thing more did we see, save maybe a whale or two, or a marlinespike bird circling and screaming high above our mastheads, or a school of porpoises at play beneath our bow, till we were far north of the Line and running before a fine breeze in the blue Sargasso Sea. Now, like a newly caged lion, John Starr paced the poop at all hours, night and day.

"Let be your fretting, Mr. Starr! *Stormalong's* somewhere well astern," said Murphy as we drove past the westernmost of the Azores.

"D'ye really think so, Captain? D'ye truly believe that?" asked John Starr, his tones eager as those of a child with a birthday coming on the morrow.

"Ye can lay your last dollar on it," replied Tim.

"I wish I could feel so sure myself, Captain," said John Starr, and had but spoken, when a hand serving a new splice at the mizzen skysailmast head a hundred and ninety feet above the sea, shouted down to the deck: *"Sail on the port beam, sir!"*

Into the chartroom ran John Starr, and out again in a jiffy with the telescope. Into the rigging he sprang, and ran like a monkey to the masthead, whence he shouted in a moment to Murphy, "It's *Stormalong,* Captain!"

Then Starr grabbed the slender skysail backstay, and instead of coming down the ratlines step by step, lowered himself hand over hand, his feet about the stay, and was back on the poop in a quarter the time 'twould have taken had he come down the usual sailor way.

"Dot faller he iss lifely like yoong 'prentice boy, py gar!" exclaimed the Rooshian carpenter.

"I tells you, poys! I tells you vot der owner of dees sheep ees! He ees *sailor,* py yiminy!" cried the yellow-headed Swede chanteyman.

"Dree sheers for der owner off *Shen-an-doah!"* sang out the big bull-muscled Finn. And if ever you heard a crew cheer! And a kid cutting its birthday cake never looked a whit happier than did John Starr.

"Had ye not better have all hands take a good pull on the sheets and halyards, Captain?" asked John Starr, rejoining Murphy on the poop.

"They're tight as steel rods, John! One more pull, and something would part," answered Murphy.

"Is there not a thing you can do to get more speed out of her?" pleaded our owner.

"Devil a thing," answered Murphy. For the rest of the day our owner paced to and fro, to and fro, nervous as a cat on a hot stove-lid.

With nightfall the wind freshened, and hauled a little ahead, so that, with her yards braced sharp up, *Shenandoah* was but just able to lay her course. Not once in the whole passage had we had a day's headwind, and all hands were looking a bit glum lest it haul yet farther forward—every sailor wanting a voyage over as soon as it might be, race or no race.

"How's *Stormalong* in a stiff headwind, John?" asked Murphy.

"I was never in her; but it seems I've heard Llewellyn say she pitches considerable when meeting a high head sea. He claims her sharp bows are a trifle too hollow for heavy weather from ahead," replied our owner.

" 'Tis going to be a close finish, lad," Murphy said to me at midnight, as *Stormalong's* green sidelight winked on our port beam.

DAWN saw the two ships driving under all sail in a yet stronger wind and wilder sea. So it went for three days, with the owner nervous as a woman whose only child is missing at nightfall in a blizzard with snow flying.

"For the love of heaven, Captain, can you not get a bit more speed out of her?" he cried on the fourth morning, with a sort of wail in his voice; *Stormalong,* neck and neck with us, going through the water like a Grand National winner with the finish-posts close ahead.

"She's doing her best," shouted Murphy; and as he spoke *Shenandoah* took a great plunge, dipping her bows deep so that water thundered high over her buried forecastle head and rolled in a cataract down to her foreward deck. Her speed checked by that heavy weight on her, she lifted slowly, shaking herself like a tired horse rising from a water-jump it has failed to clear.

"Never did I know two ships could be so close matched, young fellow!" the owner cried to me, his eyes on *Stormalong* also shaking tons of water from her foredeck.

"Captain Murphy, may I have a word with you?" asked the second mate, running up to the poop.

"What's on your mind, son?" replied Murphy.

"There's some saddle-stock rides light, and some that comes down heavy on their forefeet. I'm thinking did we shift a little cargo from the fore to the after hold, might be that we'd run away from that Limejuicer. We're carrying a bit too much weight in the bows, like when a horse is shod too heavy on his forefeet, Captain," answered the second.

"Get all hands at it, and look alive!" cried Murphy, and in a tick all hands, with cook, steward, sailmaker, carpenter and second mate, had the fore hatch off and were lifting cases of peaches and apricots and such things from the fore, and running with them to the after hold.

"That'll do, lads!" shouted Murphy after ten minutes or so, and to John Starr said: "She's plunging less, and making better speed, John."

"Bully for you, my bucko boy!" cried Murphy when the second came to the poop, with the hatches in place.

"If we beat *Stormalong* to Falmouth, son, I'm going to fire Garth Llewellyn and put you master of her in his place," cried Starr, clapping his hand on the second's shoulder.

"Ships and horses is much alike, sir," said the second, and added: "Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed our owner, and said: "Come into the chartroom, you three clipper-ship sailors!"

"You there, steward!" called our owner down the cabin companionway when Murphy, the second, and I were in the chartroom, "You'll find two bottles of the best in my cabin. Bring 'em up here, and glasses for four!"

"Go hoist that flag, Captain Murphy! We'll drink to it now," said our owner, and in a tick Tim had with his own hands hoisted *Shenandoah's* old flag and was back with us. Proudly it whipped in the wind while we drank to it. Then, with our glasses empty, our owner's face fell.

"What's ailing you, John? Sure, 'tis a fine taste in liquor you have, man," said Tim Murphy. As he spoke, the lookout-man reported Lizard Point right ahead. Stepping from the chartroom, we saw opening before us Falmouth harbor.

"I've lost this ship, Tim. She's yours," answered our owner. And if ever you saw a sorrowful face!

Past Lizard Point went *Shenandoah* under all sail, with her flag at her lofty peak. In a few minutes her anchor was down, and every sail clewed up; with *Stormalong* entering harbor maybe a sixteenth of a mile astern.

"Come into the chartroom, you three," said our owner, and sat down and wrote with pen and ink a deed of gift of *Shenandoah* to Captain Timothy Murphy, which the second mate and I signed at his bidding as witnesses. Truth it is that I saw him fighting to keep tears back as he handed the deed to Tim.

Tim took the deed of gift, set a hand to each side of it, and ripped it into two pieces, then set the two together, one on top of the other, and ripped it into four; which he again set one on the other, and ripped into eight—which he took to the taffrail and dropped to the wind-rippled water.

"I'm not taking her from you, John. You've the heart of a sailor and love her as do I my own self," said Tim Murphy; and, his voice fallen low, his face of a sudden gone sad, added: "There's a favor I'd ask of you, John, did I dare."

"Anything you ask is yours, Tim," said John Starr, wiping his eyes with a handkerchief.

"Would ye be willing to let her fly her own flag, John?" asked Tim.

"Why, Tim, man, that's easy! I'll just keep her under American registry," answered John Starr, and held out his hand, which Tim took and gripped tight in his own.

" 'Tis greatly obliged I am to you, John. Now I can retire in peace, and have the farm I've long wanted, with cows and pigs and such things. Red Kerry cows I'll be having, and the fine black Irish pigs," said Tim Murphy.

There was a step on the gangway. Unnoticed by any of us, a boat was come alongside. Up to the poop came Garth Llewellyn, and looked into the chartroom. "Mr. Starr, I am done with the sea," said he. "You will haff to find a new master for *Stormalong.* For the first time a ship hass beat her, ant itt iss too much for me. Besides, I haff long wanted to re-tire, ant haf a farm and raise the fine Welsh sheep, ant little Welsh ponies, ant the big rett cattle with white faces."

"NO hard feelings, Garth! I was a bit sore with you for stopping at Pitcairn, but after all, it was my own fault your crew behaved as they did," said John Starr, and held out a hand which Garth Llewellyn gripped tight in his own. "Tim Murphy is also retiring, and will have cows and pigs and such things like yourself, Garth," added John Starr, filling a tall glass for *Stormalong's* master.

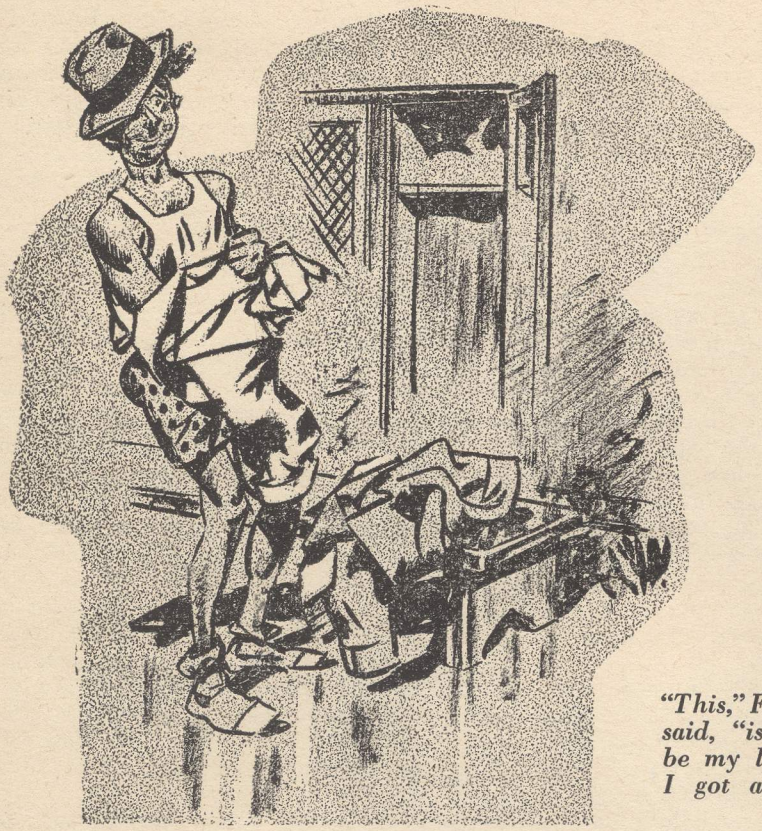
"Iss that so now inteed, Captain Murphy?" cried Captain Llewellyn.

"That is surely so," replied Tim; and next minute the two of them, face to face, their hands on their tall glasses, their noses nigh touching across the chartroom table, were at it—talking like any two old farmers.

With a wink at the second mate and me, John Starr refilled a glass for each of us. Looking full in my face then, he said: "You're a liar, young fellow, and you know it. I knew it right along. You served me four full years in *Speedaway.* Isn't that so?"

"That is so, sir," I answered, and lifting my glass, said, my eyes meeting those of the second mate: "Here's to a dandy fine owner to serve under!"

And to that toast the new masters of *Stormalong* and *Shenandoah* gayly drained their tall glasses.



*"This," Freddy had said, "is going to be my lucky day. I got a feeling."*

THE MIND REELS BEFORE THE SOUL-SHAKING DISASTERS THAT BEFELL OUR HERO AT HIS JOB IN THE NOODLE-FACTORY.

# *by* LAWTON FORD

JUST to show you how wrong a fellow can be, listen to Freddy. "This," said Freddy, as he got off the bus in front of the Manelli Spaghetti Factory, "is going to be my lucky day. It's going to be one of those days. I got a feeling."

In truth, things seemed to go fairly well. The bus took him to the factory in time to dash across to the diner to grab a quick Danish and coffee before punching the time-clock. On his way to his locker he met Sally, the new blonde laboratory technician, and she gave him a big hello.

Freddy stripped off his street clothes in the men's locker-room and pulled on a pair of loose work pants. He was a worker in the fan-room and warming chamber of the spaghetti-processing department and wore only work pants over shorts and canvas shoes over cotton socks.

As a further indication of the pleasant day in store for him Fate arranged for Freddy to run into Caesar Ferrandocci, the spaghetti and noodle packaging foreman, outside the locker-room.

"Hey, Freddy!" greeted Ferrandocci heartily. "You're just the guy I want to see. I got it in mind for the past couple weeks to talk to you. How would you like to transfer downstairs to my department? I could use a good man."

"It listens swell," said Freddy.

"I wanna get a fella that don't fool around with the girls too much." Ferrandocci's manner was as of man to man.

Freddy saw that this was indeed his lucky day. He'd been trying for weeks to get a chance to talk to Rosie Cellani, of the noodle packaging line. A transfer to Ferrandocci's department would fit the situation like a glove. Of course, there was no need to reveal this idea to Ferrandocci.

"How about my own foreman?" Freddy asked. "Will Joe let me go, though?"

Ferrandocci looked uneasy. "That's just it," he admitted. "I spoke to Joe, but he doesn't seem to think so much of the idea. But don't worry." The burly foreman brightened. "We'll fix that somehow. Just give me a couple days and then everything will be all fixed for you to drop down." Ferrandocci moved away and Freddy hastened to his job. A date with Rosie Cellani was as good as in the bag. He determined that he'd drop down to Ferrandocci's department during the morning and have a look at the layout. It was one of those days.

Well, it certainly seemed as though everything was going Freddy's way. But don't be deceived. Freddy was due for a shock. Not that he deserved all he got, but this just happens to be one of those stories where there is no moral, no reward, nothing but bitterness and disaster for an innocent bystander—meaning Freddy.

One minute the sun is shining, the world is bright, the prospect vastly pleases and Fate is a cute trick in a short skirt. The next minute—*slap!* Fate is a shriveled old hag with a sharp tongue and a wicked back-hand swing.

A few hours later Freddy savagely averred that something had slipped. Someone had put a banana-peel under the heel of Freddy's approaching destiny. Someone had substituted a ton of bricks for some of the good things which were coming his way.

At about twenty minutes before lunch Joe came into the fan-room and told Freddy casually that the Third Vice-President was bringing a visitor to see the works. That didn't fit into the picture; it wasn't good news. Something was wrong.

Joe's lean, morose face was indifferent to Freddy's visible anguish.

"I'm hungry," said Freddy. "I don't want to stick around and show anything to any Third Vice-Presidents. Why does he have to come at lunch-time?"

Joe's habitual speech when he found it difficult to answer a reasonable question was a careful recital from memory from the printed rules and regulations of the Manelli Spaghetti Factory—as: *"Employees are expected to show, at all times, the same loyalty and faithfulness to their Company as they would in their own homes."*

"That doesn't make sense," protested Freddy. "Besides, why doesn't the Company show the employees a little loyalty? It's my lunch-time."

Joe spoke on calmly: *"When necessary the foreman may request that the employee alter his working schedule to conform to emergency or expediency. You are asked to coöperate."*

"Sure!" cried Freddy, growing bitter. "How about altering the schedule for the Third Vice-President, so I can go to lunch on time?"

The Employees' Handbook made one more stab at it, shooting its most powerful big gun: *"Advancement is based on your understanding of the job higher up. Learn your job first, then look upward."*

Freddy scowled, turning his shoulder in resignation on the fair face of his promised destiny. It was one of those days, all right! "If I ever look for a better job around here," he raged, "I'll skip yours! Look upward! Cripes, you can't look up to a Third Vice-President!"

Joe was placid. "Remember, he will have a visitor with him, too."

# A Flyer in Noodles

Freddy glared and mimicked, "Our Third Vice-President is bringing a visitor to see the fan-room!" He hiked his baggy cotton trousers higher. "So what? What's it to me? I got my work to do!" He yanked angrily at a big stubborn rolling rack of wet spaghetti and muttered under his breath.

JOE inspected his thermostats and recording dials. "Just make sure everything is O. K.," he admonished. He turned down the humidifier and increased the r.p.m. of the three huge fans in one wall of the room. Conditioned air circulated in all corners, stirring the hanging strings of wet spaghetti.

"Our President, Mr. Manelli, expects every man to work for the best interests of the Company," recited Joe. "And anyway, the Third Vice-President might some day be the President. Did you ever think of that?"

Freddy snatched at Rack No. 14 viciously and swore openly. Strings of spaghetti swayed like an upset lampshade fringe. He found the swiveling wheels of the rack bent upon frustrating his intentions. Or it might be that Rack No. 14 had some devilish morbid intention of its own, for just when Freddy tugged his hardest, it complied docilely and swiveled obligingly toward him. Freddy himself swiveled backward fast. He swore later that Rack No. 14 pushed him. The whirring fan received him briskly.

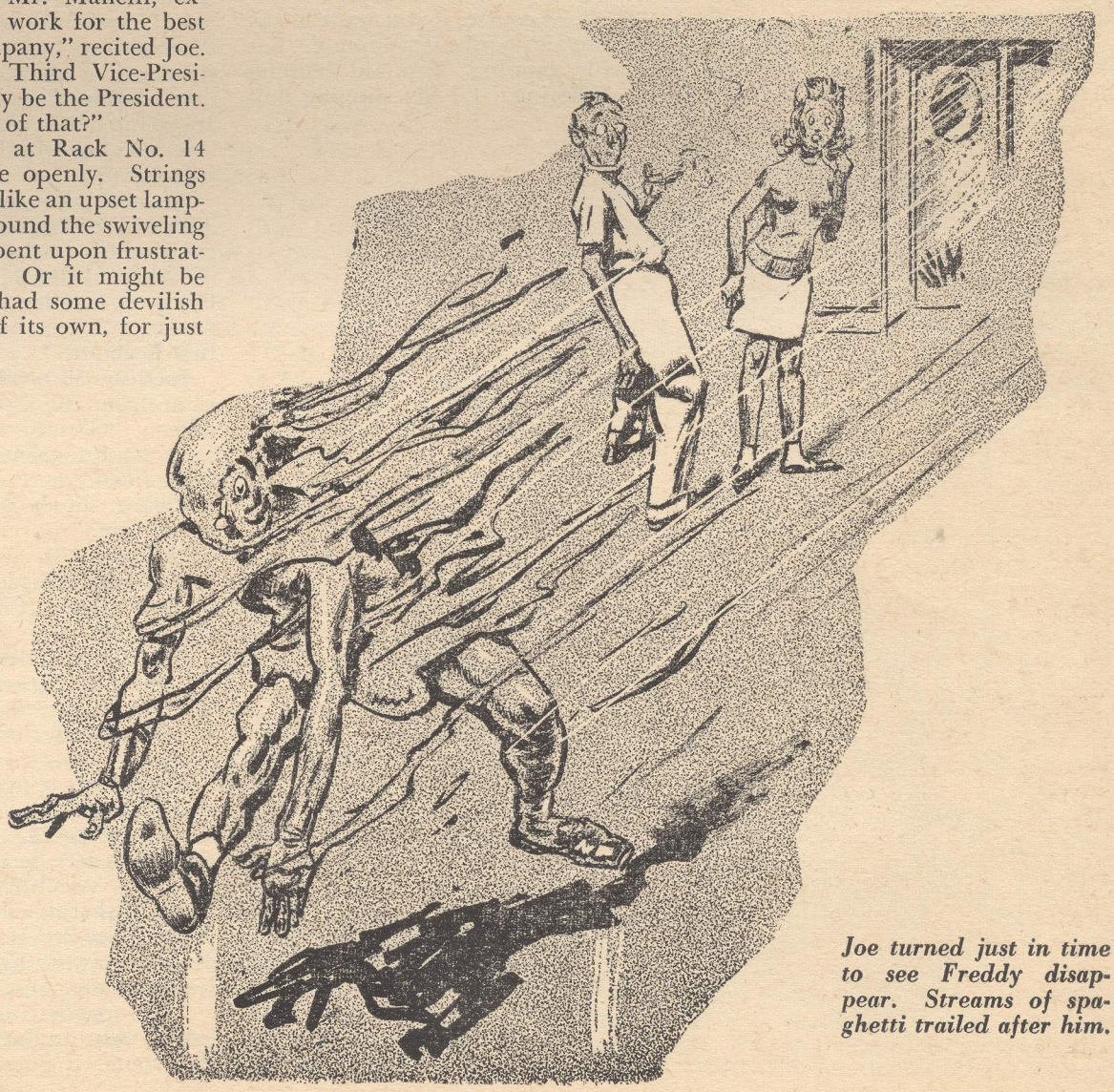
Freddy's pants shrieked in horrified anguish and parted from him. Only Freddy's active leap forward saved his shorts and large areas of his skin from following his pants out through the ventilator slats to the quiet of the Williamsburg street.

Joe put his hands on his hips and surveyed Freddy with a critical eye. "Very neat," he offered, "but it would have been easier on the pants if you took them off a little slower."

"Vice-Presidents!" gritted Freddy, quite justifiably. "Third Vice-Presidents come and bring visitors and ball up the works! Why don't Vice-Presidents stay in their offices and—and—" He threw his hands about wildly.

"And preside over vices?" offered Joe helpfully. "Anyhow, the Vice-President didn't tear your pants off. If he had, I bet he'd draft a new regulation forbidding shorts with small purple dots on 'em. Or am I merely bilious? Those *are* purple dots, aren't they?"

Freddy clutched his shorts despairingly. "I wish I had a whole suit covered with purple dots right now," he exclaimed.



*Joe turned just in time to see Freddy disappear. Streams of spaghetti trailed after him.*

"Don't be silly," Joe remonstrated. "What earthly difference does it make as long as you still have at least the shorts? We can get you another pair of pants. There's no one up here to be squeamish about a man in shorts, even if there is nothing in the rules about purple dots. I might agree if you apologized for the dots, but not for the shorts."

"Huh!" snorted Freddy. "A lot you know! Here comes the Third Vice-President and his visitor."

Joe turned and gaped through the little glass window in the door of the fan-room. "This is going to take some explaining," he said, "since it's definitely not covered by regulations."

"I wish I were," said Freddy.

"Were what?"

"Covered—by anything."

"Well, at least the visitor is a man. Maybe he is also an addict of purple spots on his shorts. He might even—" A sudden gust of air marked Freddy's passing. With a swish his scantily clad figure raced for the warming chamber. The full-length swinging doors parted with a bump and Freddy sped headlong into the warm damp recesses of the long room.

Joe turned resignedly to welcome the Vice-President.

"Mr. Betheridge," introduced the Vice-President, "this is Joe, our spaghetti processing foreman. Joe, Mr. Betheridge is interested in spaghetti and noodle drying. Well, we'll just take a little look around. Mustn't interrupt the wheels of progress too much, you know." He laughed in jolly fashion as though what he'd said was dryly amusing. Joe smiled, but he was thinking of purple spots. Mr. Betheridge smiled too, amiably, but his smile froze on his lips as a splintering crash and a slithering flop broke upon their ears. All three turned toward the warming chamber whence the eerie sounds were continuing.

"My God!" said the Third Vice-President. "What's that?"

"What is what, sir?" asked Joe, calmly enough.

"Don't you hear that?" demanded the V.P. "That slapping and slithering?"

Mr. Betheridge was pale.

"Slithering, sir? Did you say slithering?"

"Certainly I said slithering!" The Vice-President was positive.

"More like a slathering," put in Mr. Betheridge. "I'd say it was certainly a slathering."

"Sorry!" said the V.P. tersely. "To my mind, it can be nothing other than a slithering. You must agree."

"Well, of course, if you want to say slithering, it's perfectly acceptable, but not with 'slapping.' You said slapping and slithering. I'd say slipping and slithering, or slapping and slathering. Being more consistent, y'know."

"Perhaps you're right," allowed the V. P. grudgingly. "But at any rate, a most unusual sound. I want to know what it's all about!"

"Oh, possibly some of the wet spaghetti has slipped—slapped—slipped from the rack, sir," said Joe. "Don't give it another thought." He clasped the visitor's hand and shook it determinedly, steering him away from the warming chamber. "Now, here, Mr. Betheridge, we have the aërating fans," he went on formally. "When the spaghetti racks are filled, they are wheeled in here for aërating before going into the warming chamber."

"STOP!" said the V.P. firmly. "Joe, I demand to know what all that slithering—and I *mean* slithering—is about. Who is in there?"

"These fan-blades, Mr. Betheridge," persisted Joe, "are just like airplane propellers. Each fan has four blades, each one over three feet long. They operate at 1750 r.p.m., drawing fresh air through this room and aërating the spaghetti, which, as you see, is spread on rods in our rolling racks. Each rack has sixty-four rods of spaghetti; each rod holds over five hundred strings of four-foot lengths of spaghetti, or about two hundred four-foot lengths of macaroni. The goods are aërated for two hours, and then the racks are wheeled into the warming chamber."

"In the warming chamber?" the Third Vice-President was finishing grimly. "Joe, who is in the warming chamber? What is going on in there?" His jaw muscles were bulging ominously. "I demand to know what all this is about!"

Joe listened briefly. No sound now came from the direction Freddy had taken. "Oh, the warming chamber, sir?" he questioned. "Was there a noise in there? Perhaps I'd better investigate, sir, if you gentlemen will excuse me?"

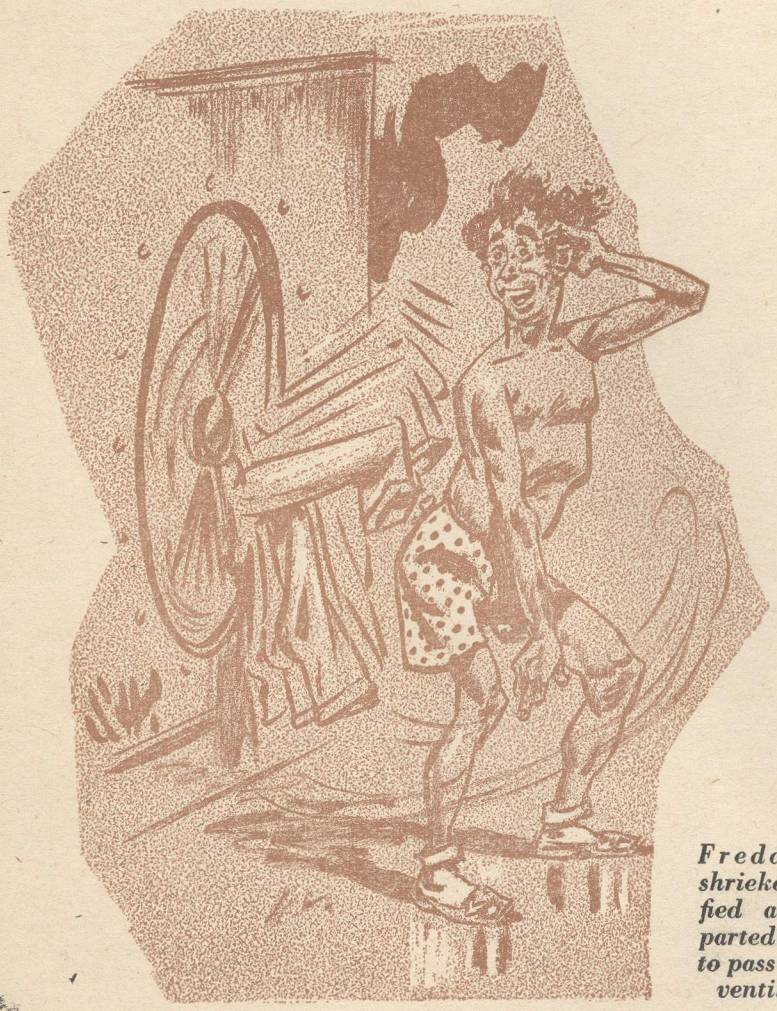
"I'll go with you," said the V.P. "Mr. Betheridge, let us see the warming chamber. It should prove most interesting."

Joe slipped ahead and peered quickly about. There was no sign of Freddy. Relieved, the foreman started to explain the warming-chamber process.

"Here the temperature is held at ninety degrees Fahrenheit, at all times," he stated. "The racks of spaghetti are left here for two hours, to start the 'sweating-out' process."

Mr. Betheridge nodded wisely. The Third Vice-President's attention was divided between his guest and a visual search of the premises.

"The spaghetti begins to harden in here," went on Joe. "When it leaves this room, it goes to the dry-houses



*Freddy's pants shrieked in horrified anguish and parted from him, to pass through the ventilator slats.*

for final drying and curing for forty-eight hours or more."

Mr. Betheridge was following Joe's recital closely. "But the spaghetti is always on those racks, is it? It stays on the racks until it is dry?"

"That's right, sir," said Joe.

This was ground the Third Vice-President knew. "From the moment the spaghetti emerges from the extrusion presses until it is cut to size for packaging," he declaimed, "it is never touched by human hands. Only the advanced methods—"

Mr. Betheridge was pointing nervously down the aisle between racks of hanging "long goods." At the end of the aisle a strange pale mound was looming in the dim warm glow from overhead lights. "Then, sir," stammered Mr. Betheridge, "what is that?"

Joe's head did not turn but his eyes slid around to follow the visitor's finger. The V.P.'s jaw muscles began to twitch again. "Joe—" began the Third Vice-President.

Joe gave up trying to hold off the inevitable. "I—I don't know, sir," he said. "I'd better have a look."

"Decidedly," said the V.P. "Let's all have a look." They advanced on the pale mound cautiously. Only Joe suspected what it was, of course. At least, knowing Freddy had passed that way, he could venture a very good guess. Apparently it was going to be futile to try to cover Freddy's mishap.

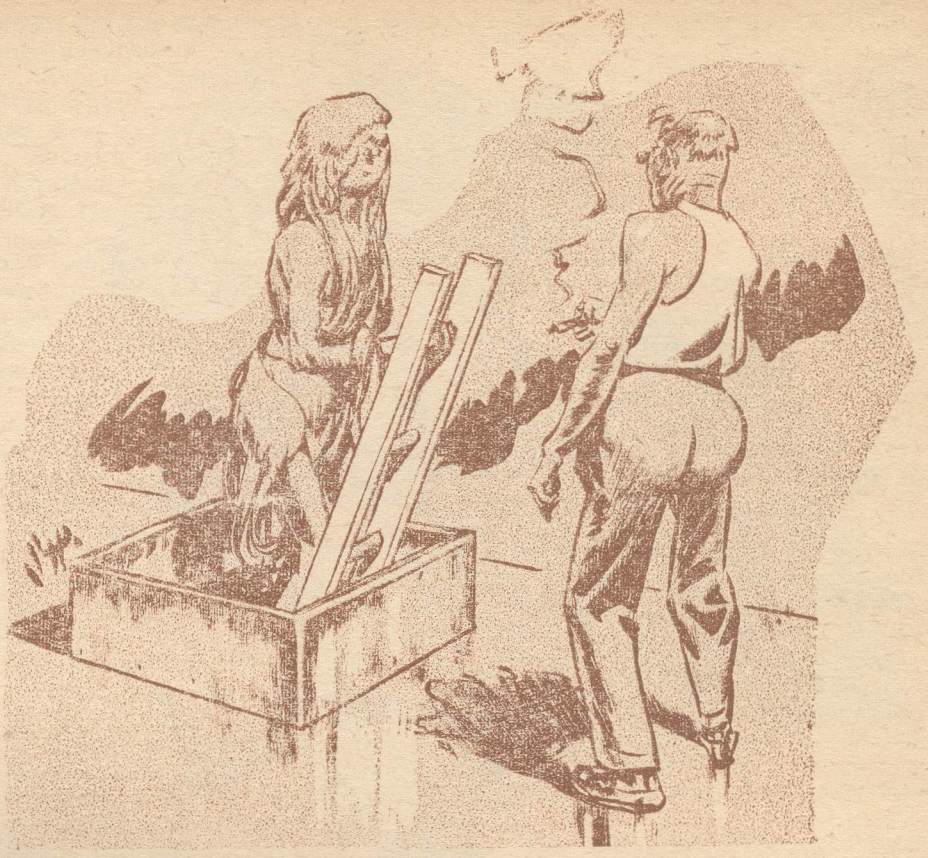
The pale mound at the end of the aisle was a mass of twisted, coiled, and looped spaghetti measuring roughly the size of an overturned washtub. Nothing but spaghetti could be seen—partly dry spaghetti, yet moist enough to form a curled, compact mass. Joe had no doubts about Freddy's present whereabouts. A broken, overturned rack and scattered rods told the story of how Freddy's mad flight had been halted and what that splintering crash and slithering and/or slathering had been. Freddy had been stopped suddenly, and concealed completely, all in one reverberating catastrophe.

A FOURTH figure now joined the three men bent over the pale gleaming mass. It was Sally, the little blonde laboratory technician.

"What's up, Joey-Poey?" she asked brightly. Then she saw the two other men were the Third Vice-President and a stranger. Nothing daunted, she smiled at the V.P., which was superb technique, and she also smiled at Mr. Betheridge, which was good business practice. "Research problem?" she queried. "What is it?"

"I'm damned if I know," said the V.P. "Perhaps you can tell us."

Sally bent over and studied the mass thoughtfully. With an air of one who has reached a decision, she straightened and spoke authoritatively. "It is spaghetti."



*"Come on out, Freddy. Don't just stand there. I should think you've had enough noodles for one morning."*

"Of course, it's spaghetti!" sneered Joe. "What did you expect, Frankenstein?"

"What happened?" Sally asked.

"Oh, somebody must have upset Rack No. 14," said Joe. "Dumped it all over."

"But I've got to get a sample of Rack No. 14!" said Sally.

"Well, it's all there. Go ahead."

Sally looked dubious. "I don't think it will do much good now." She waved a long glass thermometer and a quart jar. "Well, give me a handful of that spaghetti, Joe. I've got to run a moisture test on it."

Joe gingerly tore off a lump of strings and put them in the jar. "Also I've got to get a temperature," said Sally. She plunged the thermometer into the quivering mass of long goods. The glass rod went deep.

*"Eeyah!"* said the pale mound of spaghetti.

"I beg your pardon?" asked Sally.

"What for?" asked Joe.

"That spaghetti yelped," said Sally. "I heard it!"

"That's ridiculous," said Joe. "Spaghetti can't yelp."

The Third Vice-President stiffened. Mr. Betheridge eyed the exit. "Now see here—" began the V.P.

"I heard it," insisted Sally. She bent over the thermometer, which was embedded deeply. It pulsated strangely.

"There must be something wrong," announced the V.P. with an authoritative air. "We all know spaghetti doesn't throb."

Joe looked bewildered. "Spaghetti doesn't what?"

"Throb," repeated the V.P.

"Who is throbbing?"

"Not who—what. That spaghetti is throbbing."

"Do you suppose it's feverish?" asked Mr. Betheridge.

"But," protested Joe. "You just said that spaghetti can't throb, sir."

"It can't. I mean, I don't think it can. Of course it can't!"

"But it is!" cried Sally. "Look, it fairly beats."

"Suppose we start over again," decided the V.P. "It isn't the spaghetti, anyway. It's the thermometer that is throbbing." Sally peered at the glass. "This is preposterous!" she said firmly.

"I beg your pardon," said the V.P.

There was a wild look in Sally's eye. "That spaghetti," she reported, "has a temperature of 98.6!"

The Third Vice-President seemed relieved. "Normal, eh?"

Joe pulled the thermometer out quickly and extended it to Sally. "Scram, nurse!" he barked. "Ixnay! Ixnay!" He herded the V.P. and the visitor toward the door. "Better not stay in here too long, sir," he advised. "The dampness, you know, sir."

"Of course. Of course," muttered the V.P., casting a lingering glance in the direction of the heap of spaghetti. "Well, clean up that mess." It seemed

*"Oh, my God!" gasped a girl. "That isn't a noodle!"*

as though the morning had been too much for the Vice-Presidential mind.

"Yes, sir! Right away, sir!" Joe got his visitors to the door and bulldozed them through it. When they were on their way to the mixers and kneaders, safely out of the area of the fan-room, Joe went back in with a dogged purposefulness on his face.

HE kicked the remains of Rack No. 14. "Come out of there!" he snarled.

"Foreman or no foreman," said the spaghetti, "you can't do that to me."

"Oh, I can't, eh?" sneered Joe. "You come out of there!"

"I can't come out," whined Freddy. "I won't come out."

Joe buried his foot again.

"Is Sally gone?" asked the spaghetti.

"They've all gone." Joe raised his foot for another try.

Freddy surged to his feet, spaghetti streaming from his frame in coils and loops. He felt his jaw gingerly. "She damned near jammed that thermometer down my throat," he complained, removing strings from over his ears. "Why didn't you warn me?"

"How was I to know where she'd aim?" defended Joe.

Freddy gave him a nasty look. "Now what am I going to do? Where are my pants?"

"Cut to ribbons," said Joe. "What did you expect?"

Freddy strode up and down, tastefully arrayed in three thousand feet of Grade A Fancy Semolina. "What am I going to do now, Joe?" he repeated hoarsely.

"Well, wait here," decided Joe, "and I'll get you a pair of pants from my locker."

"Hurry!" pleaded Freddy. "This spaghetti is drying out. It's beginning to harden."

"What do you want?" asked Joe, "mushroom sauce?"

Freddy kicked at masses of strings entangling his feet. "Get going after the pants and stop making with the wisecracks!" He stopped in his tracks and pointed dramatically. "My God! Sally is coming back. Now what'll I do?"

Joe looked casually over his shoulder. "So she is," he confirmed. "Lie down in the corner again."

"Not on your life I won't!" screamed Freddy. "She's got another thermometer—a bigger one! Besides, this spaghetti is hardening. I can't lie down!" Sally was at the door.

"Better tell her all about it," said Joe. "She'll understand."

"Nobody would understand," quavered Freddy. "I've got to get out of here. Stall her off." He turned and fled through the warming-room.

Joe met Sally at the door. "You could be doing me a favor," he began, when a crash and a shriek silenced him. He turned just in time to see Freddy disappear down a chute to the floor below. Streams of spaghetti trailed after him. "Oh, my God!" Joe moaned. "Now he's fallen into the noodle-hopper!"

"The Third Vice-President?" asked Sally.

"No, Freddy. He was dressed in spaghetti!"

Sally clutched Joe's wrist and looked at her watch.

"I'm not delirious," said Joe. "I mean it!"

Sally sniffed. "Was he dressed in anything else?" she inquired.

"Spaghetti and shorts," said Joe.

Thumps from the noodle-hopper announced Freddy's arrival at the bottom. Astonishment, shock, and disbelief fought for place in Sally's eyes. "Freddy?" she gasped.

Joe nodded dumbly.

"In the noodle-hopper?"

Joe gulped.

"But Joe!" whispered Sally. "Why?"

Joe found his voice several octaves higher than it had been when he lost it. "Why?" he croaked. "Don't ask me why. Fate and Freddy are inscrutable to me."

"But—how?" whispered Sally.

"That's better," said Joe. "I can tell you how. Through the floor—down the chute."

"But there are fifteen girls down there packaging noodles," said Sally. "Why?" She choked.

"Why was he dressed in spaghetti?" prompted Joe. "Just Freddy's inconsistency. I suppose you think he ought to be dressed in noodles?"

"Well, in a noodle-hopper—" she began. "Oh, Joe, you're impossible! I mean, why is he in the hopper at all?"

"He fell in, I suppose. I don't think even Freddy would deliberately mix spaghetti and noodles."

Sally waved her hands helplessly and ventured to the edge of the chute at the end wall of the warming-room. She looked down fearsomely. The chute was galvanized iron sheeting, about three feet square. It descended into black depths below. Faintly she could hear a thrashing and floundering.

"How awful!" she moaned. "I do hope at least that the hopper is full of noodles to break his fall."

"Broad or fine?" asked Joe civilly.

"What difference does it make?" demanded Sally.

Joe pursed his lips in thoughtful consideration. "I don't suppose it really makes any difference," he said at length. "But I do think that perhaps we ought to get down there. I imagine there will be some expressions of surprise—not to say amazement—when Freddy's presence is fully known to the packaging-girls."

"From the sounds now coming from the chute," she prophesied, "Freddy is no longer dressed in anything but noodles."

"I hope he still has his shorts," said Joe, alarmed. Sally grasped his arm

and hurriedly pulled him toward the elevator.

"You're right," she said. "We'd better go down there and warn them. And help Freddy out, if he can come out."

Sally and the foreman hastened down the stairs, not waiting for the elevator. In the packaging department, directly under the processing floor, myriads of girls in white uniforms and caps were busily engaged in packaging all sorts of spaghetti, macaroni, macaroni elbows, noodles and vermicelli. The burly packaging foreman strutted about in a long white coat ignoring a cute little trick at the end of the vermicelli line who had just come into his department that day.

JOE and Sally rushed over to where the noodle-hopper was suspended from the ceiling. Under it a dozen or more girls were raking egg noodles from small sliding doors in the sides of the hopper, packing the short dried ribbons of dough into bags, and sealing the bags. The packaging foreman hurried after them.

A sudden small scream broke the rhythm of the work of the girls under the hopper.

"Oh, my God!" gasped a girl. "That isn't a noodle!"

"What isn't a noodle?" inquired her neighbor.

"That!" the girl exclaimed. "That's an elbow!" She paled and faltered.

"What's this?" demanded Ferrandocci. "An elbow in the noodles? Elbows should be in with the macaroni elbows, not in the noodles!"

"Sure," agreed one of the girls. "But Rosie seen it in there."

Rosie put trembling fingers to her lips. "It was an elbow, Mr. Ferrandocci. But not a macaroni elbow!"

Joe nudged Sally. "Freddy!" he whispered.

Sally looked at him uncertainly. "Don't you think we ought to tell Mr. Ferrandocci right away?" she asked. "And get Freddy out of there?"

"I suppose so," said Joe, but he seemed to be relishing the situation. He was in no hurry to break the news to the packaging foreman.

Rosie had closed the little sliding door from which she had been raking noodles. Now her neighbor gasped and slammed shut the door in front of her.

"Another one?" barked Ferrandocci. "What's all this?" He shoved his burly way through the working line and opened the door. "Another elbow?"

"Not an elbow," said the girl. "A noodle!"

"Well, what did you expect?" growled Ferrandocci.

"Not an egg noodle!" shrilled the girl. "A real noodle—with hair on it!"

Sally giggled. Joe coughed to cover the sound. Ferrandocci purpled and thrust his arm into the hopper, groping about wildly.

"Hair on noodles!" he shouted. "Joe, what kind of noodles you making these days?"

The girls fluttered around excitedly. Ferrandocci seemed to have something. He tugged and swore. Abruptly he fell back, pulling something white and yet colorful out of the hopper with his big fist. He held up in consternation a pair of purple-dotted shorts. They matched his complexion perfectly.

Shrieks and giggles greeted this revelation. Joe felt it was time to interfere. He pulled the choking foreman to one side and whispered to him earnestly and at length.

"All right, girls!" ordered Ferrandocci when Joe had finished. "Close the hopper and take your lunch period now." The foreman had a beaten look in his face. "Take your lunchtime now, girls. It's almost twelve, anyway. Close the hopper doors before you go, all of them."

"How are you going to get him out?" asked Sally. "Should I stay here?"

Joe inspected the sides of the hopper. "We could take off one of the plates," he said. "We could unbolt one square and get him out that way."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"But first give him back his shorts," Sally warned.

"Even with shorts there'd be something of a mild furor in this department with all these girls around," advised Joe. "Especially *his* shorts. And we can't send all the girls to lunch now. Maybe we could get him out through the chute."

"You could put a ladder down," suggested Sally. "The chute is big enough, isn't it? If it's big enough for Freddy to fall into the hopper, it's big enough to climb out through."

"Maybe that would be better," answered Joe. "We'll try."

"But I got to junk all them noodles!" wailed Ferrandocci. "I can't pack egg noodles that have been tramped all over by Freddy! It aint sanitary."

Joe could imagine Freddy's wild thrashing and clambering over and through piles of crackling noodles inside the big hopper. "Indeed," he agreed, "I'd say it was strictly unsanitary. Soon as we get Freddy out you pull all the noodles out and junk 'em. Sally, you better go back to your laboratory and stay there."

"Aw! I miss all the fun!" protested Sally.

"Run along and take some more temperatures," advised Joe. "I'm going upstairs and haul Freddy out. Bring those shorts along, Ferrandocci, and we'll get a ladder." Joe and the packaging foreman hastened on their errand of mercy.

"I'm hungry, too," said Ferrandocci. "Can't we wait till after lunch?"

"If we do," said Joe, "Freddy'll suffocate. Come on, it won't take long."

"Incidentally," said Ferrandocci, "I think we better forget all about that talk I had with you, Joe, about Freddy's transfer to my department. He could never work for me now."

Joe nodded. "He'll be a better fan-room man after this. He'll have more respect for the fans."

It took only five minutes after they located a ladder for Freddy's head to appear in the opening of the chute in the warming chamber. He trudged wearily up until he could balance himself near the top of the ladder and put on his shorts. He spat out bits of noodles and blinked tiredly. This was what had started out to be one of those days.

"I've got another pair of pants for you, Freddy," consoled Joe. "Come on out. Don't just stand there. I should think you've had enough noodles for one morning."

Freddy was too bemused to speak. Fate's calloused knuckles had rapped hard.

"Fine thing!" snorted Ferrandocci. "Well, I'm going to lunch." He bustled off, turning back at a little distance. "I'm going to have me a mess of noodle soup. Wanna come along, Freddy?"

# Red Sky over Thebes

*"If the Nile ran the other way, the water would be red. There's hell to pay!"*

NEKHT was his name. With a wooden-fork plow and a bullock, he was tilling his field outside the tiny Nile village of peasants, when the Greek captain came from Thebes with the news. An odd fellow, Nekht—tall, thewy, bronzed as any other farmer in the village, but with a hawk-nose and quick eyes of striking intelligence. He usually kept them half shut, and in the village itself passed for a fool. No one here knew or suspected his secret.

He lived alone with his mother, who told the Greek, named Peleus, where to find him. Nekht saw him coming along the edge of the fields, and recognized him; for although the soldier wore a tunic over his armor, the proud lift of the head and the step of authority could not be hidden.

"The captain of the temple guards," Nekht said, and pulled the bullock out of the furrow. "That means a message for me. What now, friend Peleus?"

"Greetings," said the other, who knew him well, "and news. I have a boat waiting; the high priest of Amon wants you."

"And the news?"

"If the Nile ran the other way, the water would be red. There's hell to pay, but the news must keep until we're afloat."

"I'll take the bullock home, and go," Nekht said simply. "Come along."

He unyoked the bullock from the plow, and they started back to the village. As to the news, Nekht had heard enough to guess what it must be; he was already seeking beyond the words, mentally. He, of all people, needed no telling that Egypt was a leaky boat in a bad storm shaking the world. During the past two hundred years the great country had been gradually disintegrating. Still powerful, still crammed with all the looted riches of the earth, it had been ruled by Assyrians, Ethiopians, Greeks—anyone strong enough to seize the throne and defend the desert frontiers. The present Pharaoh, Samthek, was the grandson of an army general who had

THE SPHINX EMERALD APPEARS AGAIN, SHAPES THE DESTINY OF EGYPT, AND AGAIN GOES INTO HIDING WHEN CAMBYSES LEADS HIS PERSIAN HORDE TO SACK THE CITY.

# *by* H. BEDFORD-JONES

done just this, bringing Egypt up to a fragment of its former greatness, with Greek help.

THE last native dynasty, that of the great Ramses, had conquered practically the known world, pouring into Egypt an enormous flood of treasure and slaves. Softened, slothful, the old hard Egyptian race became easy-going. Now, in this fateful year of 528 B. C., Egypt still existed intact, like soft ripe fruit ready for the taker. Greeks had flooded in like a swarm of summer flies. The army was composed of Greeks—and the Persians were coming. During the past two years, the Persian ruler Cambyses had been pushing armies across the northern deserts, intent upon plucking this ripe fruit.

Yet one faint breath of hope lingered; Somewhere in this great land, unknown, was a descendant of the last royal Egyptian line. Who? Where? Nobody knew. But the chief priests of the gods had announced it as fact. Prophecy said that some day all foreigners would be expelled, and the royal line of Pharaohs would again lift Egypt to greatness. When? Perhaps this year, perhaps a hundred years hence; but the hope lingered.

Four soldiers in the boat, Greeks like Peleus, saluted as he and Nekht appeared and got in; the boat pushed off, swung out into the current, and was on its way to Thebes, still the greatest city on earth. Nekht and Peleus sat together in the stern.

"The news?"

"The worst," said Peleus. "Cambyses has captured Pelusium and is marching up the Nile. The army is completely destroyed, the Pharaoh a prisoner. Phanes of Halicarnassus, commander of the Greek troops, went over to the Persians. They'll be in Thebes in two or three days. They're coming up by ship."

Nekht caught his breath. The worst, indeed! Egypt was no more.

Like a symbol, the shapes of ruined buildings along the river-banks caught his eye. Once barracks had stood here every few miles, each post holding two hundred iron chariots and equipment. Now all were empty, ruined, forgotten. Egypt was forgotten too. The blow was crushing.

"What—what hope for the city, for Thebes the glorious?" he asked, dry-lipped.

"None," Peleus replied. "No army there, except for a few of us guards—and we're Greeks. A huge, sprawling, unkempt city like Thebes can't be defended. Already refugees are pouring out. Cambyses, we hear, has given the loot of the city to his Persian legions. The gods are dead, Nekht. Egypt's dead."

"I'm not dead," said Nekht. "And there's a girl—I must see her."

"You and your girls!" jeered the soldier. "You may be a student, a friend of the chief priest of Amon—but you're a peasant, a villager, food for Persian steel. Your girl is one of thousands destined for Persian couches. We Greeks are safe enough, as allies and friends of the conqueror; but you Egyptians are as dirt under Persian sandals."

Nekht said nothing. It was bitterly true. To Peleus, he was only a farmer, a mere nothing, like all his people—grass doomed to the fire.

He himself knew better. He was one of a few hundreds chosen from those people—chosen for descent, for character, for vigor—and secretly given most careful training, as soldiers and rulers; being made initiates of the Mysteries and heritors of all the higher learning preserved in the priestly castes. Men in each generation were thus chosen and made ready for the day when Egypt should rise again—and one among them all was the heir of the royal line, his secret guarded in bitter darkness for his own safety.

"We hear that Memphis is already taken and looted," Peleus went on. "Until the King and army arrive, we serve as we are; then, naturally, we join our fellows. If you want to get your girl out of the city, Nekht, I'll lend you a hand. Call on me. Some of us have our eyes on the temple treasury—we'll stick together."

NEKHT broke into soft, bitterly ironic laughter; the temple guards meant to loot it! Everything was falling to pieces. Yet he liked this Peleus—a strong, tough Greek from Samos, highly intelligent and famed as a soldier.

"Not a bad idea, Peleus," he said, watching the river reaches. "Perhaps I can tell you a thing or two about the temple treasury that you don't know, too."

The Greek gave him one lightning-swift glance. Well he knew there were temple secrets known to no guard—and this brown fellow educated in the temple of Amon might well be aware of them. He drew closer.

"A trade, friend Nekht! You and me alone—not now, but when the need comes. Keep it in mind."

Nekht gave him a nod, and said no more. The river below them was covered with all manner of boats; the panic flight from Thebes was under way. Escape? There was none, yet the wild thousands fled in terror of the coming wrath—fled to starve, to wander into the southern deserts; and chariots raised clouds of dust on the highways in desperate hope of reaching the Nubian frontier.

So they came to the vast city of Amon-Ra, whose temples and palaces surpassed anything in the world—the "hundred-gated," so the marveling Greeks called it, because of the countless and enormous gateways of these gigantic structures. In the temple quarter along the Nile was little confusion, the guards from Karnak and Luxor keeping fair order here. From the remainder of the city, smoke rose in places, denoting that the mob was looting and burning; but no one cared—no one except Nekht. He, catching the arm of Peleus, spoke rapidly.

"Friend, I'll take you up on your bargain. Whether I'll be detained an hour or a day with the chief priest, I don't know. The afternoon's at an end. When it gets dark, send word to the house of the Royal Architect that I'll come when free—get the message to the hands of the Lady Amenartis. Will you?"

Peleus nodded. "Take it myself," he said. "Come along, and I'll turn you over to the beloved of Amon, who'll taste Persian steel before he knows it."

A tough, cynical fellow, this Greek, but a good man in his way, with a laugh often in his eye. Nekht did not hesitate to trust him—a little.

The two men made their way to the towering Karnak temple, where the high priest of Amon lived. They passed the guards and crossed the vast, almost empty courts where thousands had once worshiped; but few believed in the gods these days. The lofty columns and long walls, sculptured and painted gloriously, flitted past, and they came to the innermost court. Here, said the guards, a conference of priests was under way, and Peleus pushed on into the holy of holies—a high-pillared chamber where sat a dozen priests. A mere dozen, out of the thousands in Thebes, and these all high priests of various gods.

"Here is the man you wanted, my lord," called Peleus, standing on no ceremony. Then, giving Nekht a clap on the shoulder, he went his way.

AN old man, wrinkled, shaven-headed, left the others and came to Nekht. This was Amon's high priest, greatest man in Thebes.

"Greetings, my son," he said. "Go into my study. You'll find wine and food there; help yourself. I'll join you immediately. You know the way."

Nekht obeyed, passing into a small room holding only the tables of scribes and that of the priest. Obviously the temple service had broken down: wine and food were set on the tables haphazard; clothes were scattered about; documents and letters were strewn on the floor. Being hungry, Nekht helped himself to the food, poured a goblet of wine, and was gulping it when the high priest joined him.

"Well, the end has come," said the old man abruptly. "Peleus gave you the news?"

"Such as he had, yes."

*"We hear that Memphis is already taken and looted," Peleus went on. "If you want to get your girl—"*

*Soldiers came driving along, killing any in their path. Nekht drew*

"Worse has arrived. The Persians are on the way upriver; they may be here tonight. They're killing, looting everything. Memphis was put to the flames. Cambyses himself is with the vanguard—a drunken despot now maddened by triumph, who hates our gods and us. Those of us not murdered will become slaves. No mercy at all."

"And your plans?"

The old man gestured hopelessly. "We have none, except to die. Everything's ended. Egypt is lost . . . . I didn't get you here merely to rail at fate, however. The time foreseen has come. You will live while others, all of us, perish; you'll have the traditions, the written scripts, the secrets, to revive Egypt once more, you or your descendants. I must show you how to reach the things that have been put aside for that day."

"What about the temple treasures?" queried Nekht.

A thin, horrible laugh came from the high priest, who poured some wine and drained the cup. "Let the gods protect their own gold and silver—the treasure is too huge to be moved, anyway. But now, listen well! You know the underwater chambers, the secret rooms I showed you when last here?"

*Amenartis away from one furious rush, holding her against a wall.*

Nekht assented with a nod.

"They hold the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, the records, the chief relics, and all the treasure that can be packed in to fill the place; and the river has been turned in. The slaves who did the work are dead; I soon will be dead; this leaves you as the only person who can reach that hidden treasure in case of need—you and your children. Some day it will serve to rebuild Egypt. Were this entire temple destroyed, the cache would remain intact to serve its purpose."

Again Nekht silently assented, and waited.

"You," said the old man, "are the last Egyptian, last of the blood of the great Ramses; tell your sons these secrets, that they may tell their sons, and some day Egypt will have a Pharaoh of the ancient blood. Go back to your village. Be a simple farmer. That is your one chance of salvation, Egypt's one future hope. Nothing of your existence as such is known, but there may be danger from these Greeks who for so long have been a part of Egyptian life. They may have picked up rumors. Now—what are your plans?"

"To get out of the city with Lady Amenartis, the daughter of the Royal

*Illustrated by Maurice Bower*

*Amenartis said, "Look into this stone a while. See what it tells you."*

Architect. We love each other. If we can get to my village, we'll be safe."

Nekht spoke simply and to the point. The old man peered at him.

"Good. I can help you a little. The maddened people are fighting up and down the wharves for the boats. I'll show you where one is hidden safely, and how to reach it. But first I have a gift for you, left in keeping of the high priest by the last Ramses, twelfth of the kings thus named."

So saying, he took from his table a small wooden box, and from the box a little object wrapped in cloth—two objects, in fact. One was a doubly convex glass, used by Chaldean priests in studying the stars,* and inherited from them as a deep secret by the priests of Egypt. The other was a lumpish green stone, such as Nekht had never seen.

"A bit of glass, and an emerald," said the old man. "The one will enlarge the other. No time now for lengthy explanations. . . . But tuck them away and use them at leisure. Now we must go, and I'll show you the secret of the boat. A long way to go."

"Wait!" exclaimed Nekht. "An emerald, you say?"

"Yes, from the crown jewels, originally. A wondrous thing, too; guard it well, but for the present put it out of sight. We must go."

The old man was impatient, anxious, filled with fears, as well he might be.

*One such glass, dug up at Ur, is now in the British Museum.

Two hours later Nekht made his exit from the temple, free; in his girdle was knotted the Sphinx emerald and the glass. He paused at the entrance, seeing Peleus, and spoke to him. The Greek took his arm.

"Hello! You still here? By Zeus, man, but you can't get away now—no horses left, no boat obtainable without a savage fight! I hear the Persians are already at the city outskirts. Where's your girl? I left the message for her."

"I'm going for her now. I'll be back here. You'll be here?"

"Probably. We want to get into the temple treasury before the Persians arrive."

"I can help you to that," said Nekht. "Wait for me."

"Well, perhaps," agreed the other doubtfully. "You'd better get hold of a Greek outfit—the Greeks are safe. Look at the sky! Damn the fools!"

It was now full night, and red flares from blazing houses dotted the horizon. Nekht broke away and departed. He had some distance to go into the residential quarter, but at first found everything deserted and quiet here, though northward lifted a far, thin, terrible sound—distant screaming that ceased not. He hurried faster. If the Persians were already at hand, there was bitter need for haste.

Flitting shapes suddenly were in the dark street—fugitives. Stone buildings were few here. Only temples and palaces were of stone. The great mass of structures were of wood, perhaps with stone fronts; many were of fire-resistant palm trunks, towering high. An abrupt torrent of screams and shouts turned the corner ahead as a chariot and two horses came tearing madly into the crowd—some noble or priest trying for a belated escape. Blood flowed blackly on the stones. Horses and drivers were stabbed; the whole street was blocked by the uproar of ferocity; corpses or wounded lay everywhere.

Nekht somehow got past the tumultuous, heaving blockade. Light came from the flaring sky ahead. He swung into a street where frantic swarming crowds were threaded by killers of the mob or by slaves, striking and tearing like wolves. Lights flickered through the houses. The sound of screaming voices began to dull everything else. Yet all this was merely a beginning, a symptom of the flood of death which was to come.

Thankful for the plain cotton robe that did not single him out for attack, he hastened on his way; nearly there now—but from northward was increasing momentarily a thunderous dull roar mounting athwart the sky. He knew what it meant; Persians pouring in from the suburban districts, driving before them a furious, helpless mob of many thousands, killing as they came, looting houses, going to every extreme of rapine. The greatest city in the world was going down in flames and blood. All the northern sky was now a ruddy conflagration that threw the streets into plain sight with its reflected glare.

ARRIVED at last, and the house dark, apparently deserted.

Nekht went to the side entrance, and a voice spoke—that of a slave. Recognized, he was led inside. In the central patio he found Amenartis, dark and cool and composed. She gave him her hand, then turned to the crowd of slaves grouped at one side.

"You are free," she said. "I cannot help you. Go where you like; take whatever pleases you. Well, Nekht! Thanks for the message. Where my father is, I don't know. The family left this afternoon. I knew you would come."

"We'd better be gone too, and lose no time about it," he said.

"Why? What good?" She looked at him in the ruddy glare. "Everything's gone. The old order's dead, my dear. Do we just walk out—into nothingness?"

"Hardly that. Life in a village up the Nile, as a farmer's wife, providing we can get there. I have a way, if you are willing."

"Certainly," she said. "A new order, eh? Well, I'm confused, bewildered, helpless. It's like the end of the world, in very truth. So I'll trust to you."

"Things are pretty tough in the streets, and we must reach the temple. Find me a weapon of some kind; leave your jewelry and fine gown and get a cheap robe and a shawl to cover your head. Smear your face with dirt. Do it fast. I'll wait here."

She vanished into the house. The slaves came up and crowded around Nekht. He spoke frankly to them, told them that order, law and government were gone; the Persians were looting the city—they had best go, be free, try to save themselves. Inane, useless words, but all he could offer. They melted away like shadows and left him waiting, alone, while into the reddened sky lifted the sounds of hell. The wild roar was everywhere now, closer, filled with horror and ferocity.

The end of an order—a people, a civilization! She had spoken aright. Beauty and knowledge were being trampled into a mire of blood and tears this night. The Persian and his gods had come to destroy Egypt and her ancient deities—no mercy, no pity.

She came, wrapped in a common blue robe, hair streaming, face and hands smeared with ashes; yet she was calm enough. She put a belt and sword into Nekht's hand.

"This was my father's greatest treasure, Nekht; it belonged to the great Ramses."

With fumbling fingers he buckled on the belt, then took her hand. They went out by the side entrance, and were caught in a whirlwind of screaming, running and fighting humanity pressed by mailed figures—Persians and Greeks, cutting a way through to reach the houses. Nekht drew her to one side, coolly waiting a clear space, then seizing it and darting ahead. They were on their way. No force could avail here; coolness could get them through—and did.

They watched incredible scenes—the helpless fleeing mob had gone stark mad. Soldiers came driving along, laughing, singing, killing any in their path, smashing into houses, seeking loot everywhere. Nekht drew Amenartis away from one furious rush, holding her against a house-wall, waiting.

"Why the temple?" she breathed at his ear. "Will it be spared?"

"No!" he said. "But we'll find safety there, can we reach it."

Like a ravening force of wind, the fury was in all the houses. Beautiful inlaid ivory was trampled on in the streets; delicate screens were smashed; rich broideries were underfoot; figures of gods and men were flung down from the windows; rare furniture was hurled afar—the loot of the world, here stored for centuries, was given over to savage destruction, and corpses were piled up in the highways. Syrians, Chaldeans, Carians, desert Arabs, Iraki, Greeks of the islands and from all the Greek cities—this flood from the north was avenging the woes and fulfilling the hatreds of thousands of years upon the once proud and mighty mistress of the world; and after the looting came fire.

THROUGH the madness Nekht and Amenartis worked their way—the two persons in all this horror who knew whither they were going. Half a dozen times Nekht had to use his sword; once a running burst of insensate Greeks sent them rolling amid the corpses, but passed on; at length they came into comparative quiet, and in the glare saw the great high gateways of the Karnak temple, barred and silent, before them. Nekht sent a shout pealing up; he heard a reply from Peleus, and led Amenartis forward to the tiny door in the gate. It was opened, and they were inside.

"Well done," said Peleus. "The end's getting close here—they'll come in from the sides and back. The priests are all in the temple, awaiting the decree of the fates."

Nekht rubbed splashes of blood from his face.

"I can offer you sure hiding, and your will of the temple treasures, which no one else can find," he said. "The only condition is that you and your friends remain safely until we

can get away—perhaps a few days. I can supply a boat, also."

"By the gods, you do better miracles than the priests!" cried Peleus. "How many of us? There are six of us in my own crowd."

"Get them, and let's be going. I'm about done in."

Peleus swung away.

Amenartis came close, with a low, awed word.

"But Nekht—the temple treasures! What are you about to do?"

"What the high priest instructed me to do, to insure our safety. The priests know that for them it's the end. . . . Here, I've got a couple of bad slashes on my right arm. Bind them up, will you? Take a bit of my robe—"

Before she had the cuts bandaged, Peleus came back hastily, with five others of the mailed guards.

"Hurry, if you've some place to go!" he exclaimed. "They're coming in the back now!"

Nekht led the way straight back through the temple courts. In one court they came on a number of Persian and Greek soldiers wandering, sword in hand, staring aimlessly at the magnificent sculptured walls. These paid them no attention, and Nekht turned out into the side courts, the glare in the sky making everything bright as day. He came to the spot indicated by the high priest, counted the pillars, and behind one of these pointed to a tall slab of stone.

"Peleus! Push, all of you, on the right side of this slab."

The Greeks obeyed with a will. The great slab moved on a pivot; one end swung out, and an opening was disclosed.

"In, everyone!" ordered Nekht, as a sudden burst of voices rose. "Quickly! We'll find lamps inside—"

INSIDE with the men Nekht felt in the darkness until he found the rope attached to the counter-weights. He attacked it with his sword, cut it, and there was a heavy clash as the slab swung shut. The Greeks cursed in alarm.

"It's all right," said Nekht. "I couldn't trust you fellows—but there's another way out, fear not. Now we're safe. Feel around for a shelf with lamps on it."

This was found, and presently a lamp was alight. The silence here was profound; the ray of light showed a down-sloping passage. This led to a number of rooms furnished for living; one was stacked with food of all sorts. Nekht stopped at a door and held up his lamp.

"There you are, Peleus," he said. "That goes to the temple treasury. Run along and help yourselves; it can't get away. I'm for a wash-up and rest. Come back to the rooms when you're ready."

He turned away, wearily, and went back to rejoin Amenartis, who had waited in one of the living-chambers.

AN odd, and in some ways a dreadful place, these deep underground rooms constructed to hide treasures and priests from passing dangers; now there were no priests here—for above was no passing danger, but the end of everything.

Any small party could remain here undiscovered for a long time. Food, a running current of water, vents for air, an access to the Nile—everything needed was here. Nekht washed, showed Amenartis where to bathe, then dropped on a couch, and was asleep in two minutes, while overhead, Thebes was dying horribly.

When Nekht wakened at long last, Amenartis was asleep and the lamp burning low. He took it and went to the water-clock in another chamber. Ten hours had passed. Peleus and his friends, exhausted by frantic looting, lay snoring with treasures of gold and precious things heaped around them. His lamp refilled, Nekht returned to Amenartis, who was sitting up, yawning. He had to tell her the whole truth about himself, and did so.

"You and I, my dear, are less than the dust; look at the larger pattern of things," he concluded. "Egypt, the country, the nation, is prostrate under Persia today. Her gods are being destroyed, her civilization wiped out. But a hundred, two, three hundred years from now, she will rise again as a nation; the priests have taught me this. And when she does, one of our children's children will be at her head. The greatest treasures, the records of the gods and of the people, are safely hidden away beyond any discovery, to serve her in that day."

The hand of Amenartis tightened on his; her luminous dark eyes flashed and glowed under the emotion of his words.

"Truly magnificent, Nekht!" she exclaimed.

He shook his head. "No; for us, quite the contrary. You must realize what it means before making your choice. I can take you to safety and leave you, to work out your own future; or you can remain with me. What will this mean? Life as a farmer's wife in a little village. Entire sacrifice of your past, of the future you dreamed. Careful hiding from any discovery of the secret. Poverty, work, no more soft easy living. Make no hasty choice. Here, see what the high priest gave me, his last gift. There is deep reason, but I know it not."

He unknotted the little packet from his girdle and got out the glass and the emerald. They looked at the stone together, beside the lamp.

As a precious object, the emerald was disappointing—a rather shapeless lump of beryl, pale in color, poorly polished. Under the glass, all this changed. The flaws and angular bubbles of the crystal came together in one place to form a distinct, clearly cut image of the Sphinx. Under this, on the bottom of the stone, had been cut a single hieroglyphic—that showing the human eye, emblem of Thoth or Horus, the god of truth. This, at first look, was all. Wonderful as it was, this was all.

"Why did he give me this?" Nekht mused thoughtfully. "Far more beautiful and wonderful things were his, by the thousand. Why this?"

"Perhaps—for me," said Amenartis. "Let me keep the thing a while."

"Gladly. An odd toy," he said carelessly. "Well, you see the difficulties ahead?"

"Yes. They terrify me," she said frankly. "I can't be hasty, impulsive; what you say frightens me. The sacrifice of so much, Nekht! Never to have any hope, any ambition, of better things for ourselves—that's terrible, hard even to realize."

"I know. I was brought up to it from boyhood, as my children must be." A smile touched his thin, hard lips. "I'm a good farmer, Amenartis."

"I can't be a farmer's wife," she said flatly. "Not for ever. I warn you!"

"Take your time, my dear. There's no hurry," he said. "It's not what you can, but what you will. That's one of the great lessons of the Mysteries—the use of man's free will. We're not just puppets of fate, you know."

She grimaced. "The Mysteries are gone. Everything's gone!"

"True. We have to begin anew the task of building—everything. A slow, sorry job."

"Then why do it?" she flashed. "Because your own fathers began it? Because you were trained to it? Because the priests told you to do so?"

"No. I could go off and be a soldier with Peleus if I chose—and I'd much sooner do that, too." He smiled at her. "A matter of decision, I suppose. Duty, perhaps. I must do what is given me to do, for I've so decided, my dear. As you must, without compulsion."

"I was a fool ever to fall in love with you," she said gloomily.

THE Greeks were stirring amid their gold, and so the conservation ended.

Now began a strangely unreal period when, as the Greeks said, they were like people stranded beyond the world's end: These Greeks were hardy, tough, decent fellows; their contempt for Nekht as an Egyptian changed into respect ere long. The food was coarse but sufficient; there was wine, and water to mix with it. The inner chambers were crammed with a vast, incalculable treasure of all kinds, gathered over centuries.

"But you can't carry it all away," said Nekht, when Peleus called him into conference with them later that day. "Whether some of you come back later, if you can find your way, is of no consequence. I advise you to take your time and make bundles of what each one can carry."

"And you know how to get out of here?" questioned one man.

Nekht assented. "I, and I alone."

"Then when do we depart?" Peleus demanded. "They'll be sacking the city, up above, for days to come."

"That's what I fear," Nekht answered. "When we leave, I want to reach safety, not run into madness. You agreed to land me upriver at my village."

"The promise holds, my friend. But when?"

Nekht pointed to the clepsydra—the water-clock.

"That marks the hours; I'm keeping track. On the seventh night of our stay, I think it will be safe to leave."

They consulted about this, and all agreed. The Greeks went off to play with the treasure.

NEKHT rejoined Amenartis, and found her beside the lamp, examining the great emerald with help of the enlarging glass.

She looked up to ask:

"Have you given this stone any close examination?"

"No."

"Do it, then." She gave him the glass. "Look into it for a while. See what it tells you."

To humor her whim, he complied, smiling.

He knew rather vaguely that the Great Sphinx by the Pyramids, and its mate, over in the eastern hills, had been erected by the Ancient People in the days before any dynasties began, and were accompanied by shrines to Thoth, or Horus. It was obvious that the little figure composed of flaws and bubbles was a freak of nature—yet this shape in the emerald was so exact, so perfect, as to awaken superstition. It was an impossibility—yet here it was before his eyes.

And to his surprise, there was something further in the beryl, something unseen but felt distinctly. He searched those greenish depths with growing intensity, becoming more aware of this intangible something. Then he sat back and reflected. Acquainted as he was with the inner secrets of the Mysteries and the curiously involved instruction of the priesthood, he perceived that here was some manner of hypnosis induced by looking into the heart of the crystalline beryl—a mental effect, not a trick or contrivance.

This fascinated him; and he pored anew, glass in hand. What he could distinctly sense was a feeling of radiant happiness, a pleasant strength and heartening. He looked up as Amenartis returned.

"I see what you mean, my dear. Tell me what it says to you."

"Peace," she replied, cool and composed as ever. "Assurance, firmness—oh, I hardly know! It just gives one the feeling—does it do that to you?"

"Yes, but in another way," he said thoughtfully. "I think the secret is that it says no one thing to all, but something different to everyone. It makes some mystic appeal to the mind, the physical brain. Perhaps it wakens what is latent within the mind. Those who see it only as an emerald, a jewel, might go mad over its beauty. To one with deeper knowledge, it might say other things. You're naturally a composed person; it may well bring you a feeling of quietness, of firm balance. That's only a guess. Well, I'll have to drop it for the present—the day's getting along. We must keep exact hours for eating and sleeping."

Even in nothingness there was no lack of things to do. . . .

A week? At the first that looked tiny, a mere nothing; but after a couple of days it began to loom with appalling heaviness. Once the pleasure of toying with such treasure as they had never even imagined, began to pall on them, the Greeks had nothing to do. From this they went to gambling; but with sacks of gold-dust under the door, the stakes presented no allure. They came at last to songs and storytelling. Nekht sat in at these, and traded Egyptian tales of magic and adventure for those of Greek heroes.

He learned from these gatherings, also. Cambyses, leader of the Persians, was a madman, drunk most of the time and given over to strange Persian vices; he had even murdered his own brother to gain the throne, and the Greeks said the gods had doomed him to be harried by the Furies, in consequence.

Nekht, however, devoted much of his time to the strange Sphinx emerald, whenever he could get it away from Amenartis. He liked the autohypnosis it induced; he divined that the effects were good. It gave him a surer grip on himself. After spending an hour gazing into those green expanses and shimmering depths, he felt a stimulation, a fresh strength and assurance, a quickened vitality—and a new peace within himself. This never ceased to amaze him.

He even tried out the effect of the stone on Peleus, getting the Greek captain to sit and look into the emerald for a half-hour. The result was entirely different. Peleus sat clutching at his sword-grip, keen eyes dilated, his breath coming rapidly, excitement bringing color into his cheeks.

"Hey!" A sudden ringing shout burst from him and he leaped to his feet. "By Ares, Egyptian! Can your damned magic lift a man out of this underground hell to the windy plains of Troy? The clash of chariots at the gallop—the ringing rattle of arrows on the war shields of heroes—oh, madness, madness—the glorious madness of battle—"

He broke off, staring and shamed by his own outburst; then tears streamed out on his face, and he went striding away.

So Nekht was satisfied that he had divined the truth. In Peleus, the mesmeric power of those green depths evoked battle-lust and a heroic ecstasy; with every person would come a different result, as imagination wakened the dominant impulses of the individual mind. He saw now why that eye, the symbol of truth, had been cut in the beryl—truth indeed! Whatever was in the man would be brought forth, however hidden.

"Blessings on you for this gift, old priest!" he murmured, awe in his heart. "A very talisman of the gods, indeed; you could have given me nothing more wonderful, nothing more deeply calculated to give me strength and resolution when they were most needed."

But what of Amenartis? He could not tell; he did not question her, but noted well that she spent long hours with the silent emerald. He could give her no hope at all. He knew with sad assurance that there was none to give. If she stuck to him, there was life ahead, with luck—a life of drudgery in a peasant's humble hut, with never any change, never any higher ambition; complete submission of self to an indefinite and vague formula of some dimly guessed good to come in future generations—why, it was absurd to expect such things of a woman brimming with young life, a woman high-placed, wealthy, proud! And yet her whole world had come to an end.

PELEUS said this very thing, as they talked after a meal.

"Where are you going, lady?" he asked bluntly. "Greatness is gone; show your face in the world, and some Persian will drag you off to his harem. Your entire social system has gone crash. . . . Have you some refuge?"

"Yes," she said. "Hiding. Playing the part of a farmer's handmaid."

Nekht caught the bitterness in her tone.

"Oh, bah!" cried Peleus. "Get out of here, you two—come to Samos, to any Greek city where beauty is worshiped and intelligence given place! Why waste yourselves on some petty farm? Nekht, you could be a great captain if you would!"

"But I wouldn't," said Nekht, smiling. "My world's gone. Some day I'll help to build it up again, in my own fashion. Not as I would like, but as I must."

Amenartis gave him a look. "There's no reason why you couldn't go to Greece."

"Yes," he said. "My own choice. My own free will."

On the last evening but one, Nekht found her on the couch in tears that could not be checked. He sat beside her, holding her hand.

"It's not any lack of love for you, my dear," she sobbed. "It's just the life—the life of slavery, of hopelessness! Condemned to a patch of mud all my life—me! A patch of mud! I can't face it."

Nekht laughed softly. "Yes, that's one way of looking at it, true. Well, I'm not trying to persuade you; this choice must be yours alone, without interference. Once we're in the open air, there's no turning back, no changing. One decision is final, to be endured or made the best of, my heart! A patch of mud—yes. But a patch of mud with love might be better than a palace in Samos without love. What we think a bitter hard thing, may turn out otherwise—I don't say it will, but it may."

"You're hard," she said angrily. "You're stone—cruel stone."

"Yes, I think so," he agreed thoughtfully. "Stone, inflexible. Tears don't soften stone, but water does, across the long years; water blends with it, softens it, wears it gradually down to some mutual end. And love is like water, sometimes."

"Go away," she said. "I want to be alone."

He complied. He saw that she was clutching the emerald; he left her to herself, and to the curious, silent conversation of the little Sphinx.

NEXT day the Greeks made ready—polishing weapons and armor, rubbing their bodies with oil, getting their final selection of treasure bundled securely, shaving and preparing to face the world once more. They had supreme confidence in Nekht's promise of boat and safe egress; their trust in him was almost pathetic. He had set the hour of midnight for departure, and those last hours were hard waiting, and even harder as the end approached.

*"The Last Pharaoh" will carry on this fascinating series in our forthcoming August issue.*

Amenartis had shut herself up alone after their final meal, and he left her undisturbed. Of the treasure he took none, wanted none. Peasants had no business with gold-dust and gauds. He kept the sword she had given him—and he would keep the emerald, if she decided against going with him. He divined easily that the trusty lion-hearted Peleus would be glad to make her a princess in some Greek city, did she so desire.

He waited, in silence. The time dragged on; eleven o'clock came and passed. At a sound, he looked up, and saw her coming to him. She had laid aside her fine garments and wore the simple blue robe in which she had come here. He sprang up.

"Amenartis—we can leave now, any minute. Have you decided?"

She looked at him, a queer little shadowy smile twisting her lips.

"Yes. I'm cruel, Nekht. I have to be. There's no other way."

His heart sank. "Oh! I—I'm sorry, bitterly sorry—"

"You don't understand," she broke in. "I mean cruel, as you're cruel. Strong, resolved, firmly decided at last. I think the emerald helped me to it. I'll not fail you, dear Nekht. A farmer's wife—yes. But *your* wife! That makes all the difference. The water that softens the stone, over long years. We can do this, together. We can do anything—together. And there's gladness in it, Nekht."

He took the hand she held to him, and lifted it to his lips. Then his arms went around her for a long moment, and they stood silently.

Peleus came in, looked at them, and grinned.

"Pardon the interruption," he said. "I came to inquire how long we must wait, but by the looks of things—"

"We go now," said Nekht, and he kissed the woman in his arms, and laughed.

The emerald knotted in his girdle, he led them—into the treasure chamber, out by a secret door, along an interminable passage adrip with dampness, and finally into open air at the river's edge, amid long reeds and trees. Here Nekht showed them where a boat was hidden securely.

THE stars were misty; over the river drifted a pall of smoke from the city. The moon hung high and white. The boat was dipped, soaked, put afloat. They climbed in, and the oars began to bite the water. Ships were black on the river; Cambyses was here.

The Greeks rowed carefully, silently, upstream, then dipped more deeply. They were safely away, without alarm, their bundles of treasure weighting the slim craft. On and on, Peleus watching the water and shores ahead.

He put in at last, just below the dark village. Nekht stepped ashore, took the hand of Amenartis, and she joined him. There was a low chorus of farewells.

"May the gods be kind to you!" said Peleus.

"And to you, friends," said Nekht.

The boat pushed out. Peleus, looking back, saw them standing there in the moonlight, hand in hand. He raised an arm in silent salute.

One of the men grunted. "What, Cap'n? Saluting a brown native?"

"No," said Peleus. "A bit of green stone. I almost wish I were staying!"

# Is There Fame in a Name?

## by BILL WERNICKE

HERE'S a BLUE BOOK quiz on some Blue Ribbon Americans gifted not only with unusual talents, but unusual first names. Below is a list of some of these celebrated personalities that you are to identify through their first names and professions.

How many surnames can you correctly fill in? A score of 15 is good, 20 or over is excellent. A perfect score is—er—what did you say *your* first name was?

(1) RING (HUMORIST) .....
(2) GOUVERNEUR (STATESMAN) .....
(3) ROCKWELL (PAINTER) .....
(4) ZANE (WRITER) .....
(5) BOISE (POLITICIAN) .....
(6) HOOT (ACTOR) .....
(7) CASS (ARCHITECT) .....
(8) JO (SCULPTOR) .....
(9) CHAMP (STATESMAN) .....
(10) KIT (SCOUT) .....
(11) COTTON (PREACHER) .....
(12) HARLAN (JURIST) .....
(13) LAFCADIO (ESSAYIST) .....
(14) BURGESS (ACTOR) .....
(15) O. (WRITER) .....
(16) BOOKER (TEACHER) .....
(17) CESAR (ACTOR) .....
(18) HANNIBAL (U. S. VICE-PRES.) ...
(19) OMAR (GENERAL, U. S.) ....
(20) MARC (ADMIRAL, U. S.) ....
(21) JAY (FINANCIER) .....
(22) SALMON (JURIST) .....
(23) ETHAN (PATRIOT) .....
(24) WHITELAW (JOURNALIST) .....
(25) DEEMS (MUSICIAN) .....

(Answers on page 96)

# The Case of Jenny

A brief drama by the author of "The Littlest Ghost."

by BASIL DICKEY

WHEN a fellow runs a small gas and service-station on a not very important highway, he has a lot of opportunities to observe people and a whole lot of time, between observations, to think about them and catalogue his thoughts. Also, unless he's mighty careful, he'll come to fancy himself as a shrewd judge of human nature and bore his friends with all the gags and platitudes about man's reasoning power versus the intuitiveness of the ladies. Or maybe he'll write pieces for the paper, like I'm doing now.

So right at the start I want to make it clear that, after several years of observing both males and females, from the shadows of my desert pump, I don't know any more about why they do this or that, than the surgeons and scientists who have been taking them apart and putting them together again, or the church folks who, after ages of valiant effort, have never been able to isolate and put a finger on the thing they call a "soul." Up to a few months ago, I would have generalized to the effect that, when they are alive, every human being is entirely different from every other human being, and when they are dead, they all behave exactly alike. Only I can't quite reconcile this with the case of Jenny.

She drove up to my pump early one morning in what the newspapers describe as a "popular-priced car." There was a rolled-up tent sticking out of the luggage compartment and a cloud of steam coming out of the radiator and both she and the car were pretty well covered with dust. She said:

"I've got to get to Tucson and I'm out of gas. Also I'm out of money—so what had I better do?"

Her voice was low and pleasant and sort of husky. The kind of huskiness that we "lungers" can always spot, the minute we hear it. I guess I forgot to mention that I'm one of them. That's why I run this place on the desert. So then I looked her over carefully for the other indications and they were plain enough to an expert like me. Not that she looked sick or emaciated or anything like that. She was a darn' pretty girl, in spite of the dust and khaki slacks and heavy, laced boots that she wore. She had blonde hair and dark eyes that were just a little too big and a little too bright. Also she had those bright spots of color in her cheeks—the kind of color that you can't buy in any drugstore.

"You'd better have something to eat, first," I said. "I was just about to get breakfast. You'll find eggs and bacon and coffee in the kitchen. Suppose you get things started while I put in some gas and oil."

She looked kind of surprised and then gave me a smile that sent shivers running up and down my back. You get kind of sentimental living alone in the desert, especially we fellows who don't know just when it's going to happen. She didn't make any long speech about what a swell guy I was. Just said, "Thanks—I am hungry," and climbed out of her car.

I filled up the flivver and in the meantime a couple of trucks stopped for gas, so it was ten or fifteen minutes before I was free to wash up and go in to breakfast. She'd tidied up my little back room, dug out a clean breakfast cloth from some drawer where I'd forgotten it and had prepared the best coffee and the first unscorched eggs that I'd had in a long time. She was standing by the table waiting for me and she said:

"Of course you understand that I'm coming back to square this sometime."

I tried to think of something gallant to say but of course I'm out of practice and the best I could manage was to tell her that the smell of the coffee was worth a lot more than a tank full of gas and a couple of quarts of oil. It wasn't a very good speech, but it had the merit of being true. We had our breakfast with only a couple of interruptions from folks stopping for gas, and while we ate she told me about herself.

It seems she and a younger brother, Bill, were orphans and she had been working at one thing and another, trying to make a home for the kid and keep him in school. She'd done pretty well up to the time both of them developed TB and the doctors told them they'd have to get into a dry climate.

"There wasn't enough money for both of us to go," she told me, "so I sent Bill, intending to come myself later."

"Why Bill?" I asked. He was only a couple of years younger than she was and after all he was the man of the family. But she said that taking care of Bill had always been her job and I had to let it go at that. Anyway, she was choking a little in her talk by now. She'd had a telegram from the hospital in Tucson telling her that the kid wasn't going to get well and she'd sunk her savings in the used car and come along. Said the cost of the car was about the same as railroad fare and it would be a sort of an asset when she arrived.

She wanted to stay and wash up the dishes, but I told her she'd better be on her way and walked out to the car with her. She was a couple of steps ahead of me and as she came up to the car she stopped and stared at it a moment and then said, in a kind of frightened voice:

"Why, Bill!"

I took a quick jump toward her, but before I could reach her she turned around to face me, her eyes even bigger and brighter than before.

"Bill's dead," she whispered and she would have fallen, if I hadn't grabbed her. I carried her inside and put her on my cot. I got my bottle of brandy and forced a little into her mouth, and after a minute she opened her eyes, but just lay there looking up at me. I went into the office and put through a long-distance call to the hospital in Tucson.

It took a couple of minutes to get the right party on the line, but pretty quick the head nurse came on, and when I put my question she answered:

"We are sorry. . . . The young man died about five minutes ago."

Jenny was standing at my shoulder when I hung up.

"You needn't have done that," she said. "I knew—I saw him."

She looked older and more tired, but she wouldn't hear of my closing up and going to Tucson with her, nor take the check I tried to force on her. At the car she gave me her hand and a smile like that first one.

"Don't forget," she said, "I'm coming back to square things."

AFTER she'd left I went inside and did a lot of figuring. This station of mine pays pretty well and, of course, I don't spend any money at all, except for a little grub, so I have a fairly respectable bank balance over at Tucson, for a fellow like me. Late that afternoon I called the hospital again to tell them that my bank would take care of all the bills and funeral expenses and so on. The same nurse answered the phone and told me that Jenny had not quite made it. She had died in her car, just outside the hospital. . . .

It sort of upset all my philosophies and generalities about people and things. In spite of what I call my good, common sense, I sometimes find myself watching for Jenny—listening for the sound of that husky voice. She said she'd come back and, after all, why shouldn't she? Bill did!

*"Fancy running into you, Bridger," Hillyard purred. "What's the beef?"*

WHAT Hillyard saw from his berth window, as the train rolled to a stop at Los Angeles Union Station, warned him that he was riding into a trap. Bridger was out there on the platform. He must have flown here from New York to intercept this train. The two equally alert men with Bridger could be L. A. plain-clothes men.

Hillyard took the hot package from his inside coat pocket and sat on it. He thought jerkily. The discharged soldier who had shared this section with him all the way from New York was engrossed in promoting a six-hour-old romance with a girl across the aisle. "What about letting me call you up sometime?" the boy was saying. The girl, a college-age brunette, gave a deep-dimpled smile. "My number," she said, "is Highland Nine Six One Five."

The porter having already moved all hand-luggage to the forward vestibule, the only article left in Hillyard's section was the dischargee's Army overcoat. Dave Hillyard weighed the probabilities. First, the soldier would carry the overcoat home on his arm. Second, this G. I. woolen being too heavy for Southern California climate, the coat would be hung up and forgotten.

Hillyard took the hot package out from under his leg and slipped it deep into the overcoat's inside pocket. Maybe he could prowl for it later, and maybe he couldn't. At the worst, it would cheat Bridger's frisk here at the station.

The train jolted to a complete stop. Passengers were crowding forward in the aisle. The dischargee stood up, tossed his overcoat on his arm and said to the girl: "Wait a minute. I better write that down." The only thing he could find to write on was a Southern Pacific timetable which he took from an outer side pocket of his overcoat. On the margin of the timetable he wrote, in pencil: *"Marfa Wilton, Highland 9615."*

He shoved the timetable back into the overcoat's outer side pocket and turned with a smile to Hillyard. "Well, so long, Mr. Hillyard. This is the place where I came in—four years ago."

"Good luck, Sergeant Horn." Hillyard shook hands with him heartily. "You'll be peeling off that uniform, I suppose."

"This time tomorrow,"—the dischargee grinned,—"I'll be wearing the reddest tie in town."

Hillyard took his time and was the last passenger off the coach. From luggage piled on the concrete outside he selected his own bag. Then Bridger, sharp as a hawk, snatched it from him. "I'll be your redcap, Dave," Bridger said. "And just to be sociable, meet Ferris and Tatlow of the L. A. police."

To protest would make a scene; and Hillyard, always smooth and quiet, never made scenes. "Fancy running into you, Bridger," he purred. "What's the beef?"

# The Watched House

*As the police admitted, Bill didn't fit the case. But when the money was found in his locker, he had to turn detective himself.*

by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

"Keep an eye on him, Ferris," the New York man said. "Don't let him ditch anything."

"Maybe he's already ditched it," Ferris growled. His eyes darted to other passengers who had disembarked, appraising each as a possible accomplice.

"You stay here and work the train, Ferris," Bridger said. "Talk to the train crew and get the pedigree of everyone who came in on this coach."

"Looking for what?" Hillyard inquired amiably. He was careful not to glance toward Horn, who, with an overcoat on one arm and Marfa Wilton chattering at his elbow, was following two luggage-laden redcaps toward the tunnel steps.

Bridger, Tatlow and Hillyard took the same direction. Would Fay Quinn be in the station waiting for him, Hillyard wondered? If so, she'd be smart enough to stand clear when she saw it was a pinch. Fay had a head under her blonde bangs. Was there any way he could tip her to the situation?

They were in the tunnel now, elbowing along in a mass of incoming passengers. Hillyard could see Horn's tall, lean figure about ten yards ahead. He knew where the boy lived. During three days of idle conversation in a Pullman section, Sergeant Bill Horn of 3802 West Almond Street had talked of almost nothing except his family and home.

As they disgorged into the station concourse, Marfa Wilton's parents swooped her up and bore her away. "Don't forget to call me up, Bill," she said over her shoulder to Horn.

No one was there to meet the dischargee. But Hillyard saw the trim, smartly tailored figure of Fay Quinn close by in the crowd. He caught her eye briefly, then looked straight at Sergeant Horn and said distinctly:

*"Esta en el sobretodo del soldado."*

It was a chance he had to take. If either Hillyard or Tatlow understood Spanish, he, Hillyard, was sunk. Fay, of course, did, thanks to two years when both of them had found it discreet to lie low in Mexico City.

The puzzled expressions of both Bridger and Tatlow reassured him. "What's that you said?" Bridger demanded.

"I said you haven't answered my question. You're looking for what?"

IN the police car, on the way to Headquarters, Bridger told him: "We're looking for fifty grand that disappeared from a safe in New York."

Relaxing, Hillyard lighted a cigarette. It was up to Fay now. The last he'd seen of her, she was following Horn toward the taxi line.

"The safe," Bridger said, "was picked by an expert. You're an expert."

"And of course," Hillyard bantered, "I left my fingerprints on the safe."

"Not on the safe," Bridger admitted. "But twice on the marble handrail of the stairs. One set going up; one set going down. Charwomen scrubbed that marble between eight and ten that night. The safe was tickled at about eleven, and you caught a midnight train west. Talk yourself out of it, Dave."

Hillyard shrugged. "Why should I? Is there a law against walking up- and downstairs in a public building?"

"There was an elevator running, Dave. But you didn't want to be seen getting off at the seventh floor."

"It's thin, so far," Hillyard said. "What else?"

"When we searched your New York hotel room," Bridger told him, "we found a torn-up rent-receipt which shows you keep an apartment here in L. A., under the name of Birch."

A cop, Hillyard guessed, would be staked out in that apartment right now—to pick him up in case they'd missed him here at the station, also to intercept phone-calls and get a line on his local connections. But his only local connection was Fay Quinn; and Fay, now that she'd seen the pinch, most certainly wouldn't ring that number. . . .

Demand exceeded supply at the station taxi curb. Fay saw cab after cab loaded before Horn was able to get a seat in one.

"Ambassador Hotel," a fat man shouted as he bruised his way into a back seat. "Me too!" A thin gray man crowded in with him. "That's right on the way to my bivouac," Bill Horn said, getting into the front seat by the driver. "3802 West Almond."

"Is there room for me?" Fay asked in a timid voice. "3917 West Almond." Without waiting for an answer, she squeezed into the back seat between the two Ambassador fares.

All of them had luggage except Fay, who had only her purse. The purse matched her smartly tailored brown suit, her brown gloves and a brown feather in a chic disk of coiled velvet which served as a hat. The taxi lurched away and began threading traffic up Alameda Street. Fay saw that the dischargee was holding the overcoat across his lap. She took a compact from her purse and powdered her nose. How could she get a packet

of fifty one-thousand-dollar bills out of that overcoat? At random she had named an address a block beyond the one given by the soldier. She'd have to begin from there.

The two back-seat men were dropped at the Ambassador. "3802 West Almond, d'yuh say?" the driver asked. The soldier nodded, and they drove on.

Almond Street was quiet and inviting. Pepper trees lined the parkings. Mostly the houses were the California bungalow type, neat, white, some with bougainvillea sweeping over hewn shingle roofs. Lawns were green and rose-lined. A homey hum came to Fay as the taxi stopped. This was 3802, and a twelve-year-old boy was mowing the lawn.

Sergeant Horn went bounding across the walk. "Tommy, you little devil, you!" Unashamedly he hugged the boy.

Tommy's shriek woke not only the house but the entire neighborhood. "It's Bill, Mom! Bill's here. Bill's come home. It's Bill!"

People began pouring from the house: two middle-aged women who might be Bill's mother and aunt, two middle-aged men who could be father and uncle, a high-school-age girl, an elderly grandfather, a broad-hipped Mexican maid, a yelping Cocker spaniel. They swarmed over Bill Horn. The volume of greetings made a window fly up next door. "Lord bless me!" a woman at the window cried. "I believe that's Billy Horn come home!"

The taxi-driver stood by, grinning, patient, waiting for his pay and tip. This wasn't the first veteran he'd brought home. He took Horn's bag to the porch, set it down there. Fay was watching from the taxi. She didn't like it. A house with that many people in it, plus a dog, wouldn't be easy to prowl.

The family group surged toward the house. All were laughing except one, and she was crying. Bill had an arm around her. "None of those weeps, Mom!"

"But Billy, when you left, you were just a baby, and now—"

"Now I'm twenty-two, Mom," Bill said. She looked up at a scarred cheek and deep-sunk eyes that made him look ten years older. Bill kissed her. "Got anything to eat in the house?"

He shifted the overcoat from one arm to the other and paid the cabman. The cabman returned to his car and asked Fay: "You said 3917?"

"Yes." They drove on into the next block and angled across the street.

Thirty-nine seventeen was a vacant lot. Fay bit her lip as she got out.

"How stupid of me! I meant 3915." She paid him, and he drove on.

Fay walked east a block and a half. She sat down on a bus-stop bench in front of 3801, directly across the street from the Horn house. The family there had gone inside.

*Bill Horn came down into the basement again—this time alone.*

The house had to be entered, somehow. What would the soldier do with his overcoat? Most likely he would toss it on some chair or table in the entrance hall. Some woman of the house, Fay thought, might hang it in the usual front hallway cloak closet. It and fifty thousand dollars!

"I'll ring the bell," Fay thought. "'So sorry to bother you, but may I use your telephone? I'm overdue for tea at a friend's house near here, and I'm lost. I mean I thought it was on this street, but it isn't. If you'll just let me phone her— Thank you so much. Now please go right on with whatever you were doing.'"

Whoever admitted her would be eager to rejoin the group around Bill. Ten seconds alone with the overcoat was all Fay needed.

SHE crossed to 3802 and went boldly to the door. Then, as her thumb was poised to press the bell-button, she saw it wouldn't be necessary. The door was slightly ajar. Its top half was glass, and through this Fay could see a square entrance hall. A table there was littered with schoolbooks, and across these lay a woolen G.I. overcoat.

An arch at the far end of the hall led to a knotty-pine living-room. Across this Fay could see French doors wide open to a red-tiled patio. A walled garden made the patio, on this sunny afternoon, like an outdoor parlor. From her angle Fay could see no one, but a chatter of voices told her that everyone was in the patio. A dog barked there. She caught Bill's voice: "Gee, Pop! Isn't that the avocado tree I planted? It's bearing already."

Fay slipped into the entrance hall, and in four quick steps had the overcoat in her hands. With it she moved around a bend in the hall to a telephone alcove. There she searched the coat. Outer pockets produced nothing but a railroad timetable. She found what she wanted in the deep, inside lining pocket. It was a plain letter-size envelope enclosing a packet of one-thousand-dollar bills.

Fay had barely touched them when she heard footsteps on the front porch. The doorbell rang. "See who it is, Tommy," a voice called from the patio.

As Tommy came romping forward through the house, Fay retreated. Two steps down a narrow lateral hall brought her to the half-open door of what at first seemed to be a broom closet. Fay stepped in and closed the door. "It's Miz Pitkins, Mom," Tommy's voice shouted.

Then, as Fay's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she saw that she was not in a closet, but on a landing at the top of steep basement steps. She moved softly down the steps, hoping for a basement exit. There wasn't any. She was in a concrete-walled rectangle, with a gas furnace at one end and with trunks and a fruit cabi-

net at the other. Dim light came in through grilled vents high on two walls.

She could hear Mrs. Horn greeting Mrs. Pitkins. "I won't stop but a minute, Mrs. Horn. But I saw Billy come home, and I just must say hello to him. I was just taking these doughnuts out of the oven. I remembered he likes them, so—"

"That was sweet of you, Mrs. Pitkins. He's in the patio. Let's take them right back there. Tommy, you only lack five minutes of finishing that front lawn. Why don't you get it over with, so you can visit with Bill?"

Footsteps of the two women moved back toward the patio. Tommy yelled from the front door: "Hi, Skinny! My brother Bill's home!" Tommy's feet scampered across the front porch to the lawn, whether to finish mowing it or to tell Skinny about Bill, Fay didn't know. It was evident, though, that the coast of escape wasn't clear.

A door at the top of the steps opened, without warning. Fay slipped quickly under the steps. A barrel of rags helped to hide her there. Light from a ceiling bulb flooded the basement. Someone had snapped on a switch at the top of the steps.

Someone was coming leisurely down the steps. Fay crouched behind the barrel, tense. She opened her purse, and her hand gripped a .38 revolver there. Then she saw who it was. A Mexican maid crossed to the fruit cabinet, took a bottle of port wine from a shelf and went back up the steps with it. The light clicked off, and the door up there closed.

Fay relaxed. A mower hummed from the front lawn. After a while the hum stopped, and Tommy's feet went scampering back through the house. She might be able to slip out now. Fay went to the top of the steps, opened the door a crack, peered out. She had to close it again at once. A high-school-age girl was at the telephone. The girl called a number and then spent ten minutes telling another girl that Bill was home.

Another neighbor dropped in to greet Bill. Mrs. Pitkins left. A laundryman delivered some laundry. Steps seemed constantly to cross Fay's only route of escape. She might as well be patient. Meantime she could have a look at those fifty grand.

Her hand groped for the switch and turned on the light. Then she moved to the bottom of the steps and examined the money. There were fifty new crisp bills in an unbroken bank packet, and she saw that the serial numbers were consecutive. It meant that the police would know the numbers, but she had expected that. Hillyard would have to let the bills cool off for a few months, and then either shove them cautiously or fence them at a discount.

Fay put the money into the envelope and the envelope into her purse. The overcoat was behind the barrel under the stairs. She went to the top of the steps, snapped off the light and came down again. The front doorbell was ringing. Another neighbor, she supposed. Instead, a man's voice boomed: "Baggage for W. S. Horn." Then Fay recalled seeing the soldier, at the station, hand a baggage-check to a transfer man.

"That's my foot locker," Bill said from the hallway. "Might as well chuck it in the basement."

Fay hid herself under the steps. Bill came down the steps with a baggageman. They stored a regulation Army foot locker on top of a larger trunk and went back up again.

Fay settled herself to wait till the family was at supper. It would be easier to get out then. It was now four-thirty.

In a short while Bill Horn came down into the basement again, this time alone. Fay saw him take a key from his pocket. He went to his foot locker, unlocked and opened it. From a tray he took a flat cardboard package about the size of a pound of butter. He left the key in the trunk lock and raced back up the stairs, shouting: "Hi, Mom, your letters kept askin' what I had to eat over there, so I brought you a K ration."

The basement light remained on. Bill had closed the door but had neglected to snap off the switch.

Waiting there, Fay considered Dave Hillyard. Assuming that Dave would eventually be released for lack of evidence and would later make contact with her, how much of a split would he give her? Probably not more than ten per cent. Dave was stingy. Considering the risks she was taking, it ought to be fifty-fifty.

Then it occurred to her that there was nothing to keep her from taking all. It would be safer that way, too. The police were watching Hillyard, but they weren't watching her. The Hillyard connection had always been dangerous. Hillyard had a record, and Fay didn't.

The idea tempted Fay. The danger was that Hillyard, who could be both vindictive and persistent, might keep hunting till he found her. Then she'd be in for some rough handling.

A run-out would be safer, she thought, if she could give the police an added reason for holding Hillyard. She knew that a cop was staked out in Hillyard's Los Angeles apartment to check up incoming phone calls. Could she plant that telephone number where it would tighten the case against Hillyard?

Fay found a pencil in her purse. Then she took a railroad timetable from Horn's overcoat side pocket. She was about to scribble an incriminating telephone number on the timetable's margin, when she saw that another number was already written there: *Marfa Wilton, Highland 9615.*

That could be some girl the boy had met on the train. Sooner or later he'd be calling her up. Fay considered this until an idea jelled. Her pencil had an eraser. Carefully she erased *"Highland 9615"* and printed *"Vermont 4487"* in its place.

Reluctantly she took five of the fifty bills from her envelope and went to Horn's unlocked foot locker. She concealed the five bills in a G.I. sock and slipped the sock under everything else in the tray. After locking the trunk, she put the key in a pocket of Horn's overcoat.

She sealed the envelope with forty-five thousand dollars still in it. In pencil she addressed the envelope:

*Mrs. Brenda Warburton*
*Care General Delivery*
*Pomona, California.*

The Horn family were at supper when Fay moved stealthily up to the entrance hall. She tossed the overcoat where she had found it—across schoolbooks on the entry-hall table. A minute later she was walking briskly east in the twilight of Almond Street.

Three blocks brought her to a drugstore, where she dropped a dime into a stamp-machine. With nine cents in postage on it, she slipped the envelope into a mail-box outside.

IN the morning Bill Horn put on a suit of civies. He put his honorable discharge button in the lapel. As he adjusted a red tie in front of the mirror, he grinned. "All I need now is a date, Mom."

A minute later he added, half to himself: "Which reminds me!"

He went to the entry-hall and found his overcoat. From this he took a timetable and glanced at a memo which read: *"Marfa Wilton, Vermont 4487."*

Bill rang the number. A man's voice answered.

"Is Marfa there?" Bill inquired.

A slight hesitation at the other end. "Marfa? Wait, I'll see. Who shall I say's calling?"

"Bill Horn."

Bill waited, but no further response came from the connection. Then he heard the other phone hang up.

"Must be her old man," Bill thought. "Maybe he's allergic to G.I.s who get acquainted with his daughter on trains."

In midafternoon, while his mother and aunt were out shopping, Bill answered a ring at the door. The caller was a stocky man of about fifty, with a gray mustache and friendly blue eyes. He spoke in a soft cultured voice. "Are you William Horn?"

"I am."

"My name's Wade. I'm a special detective from the District Attorney's office."

Bill thought he looked more like a banker than a detective. "Come right in." He led the way to the living-room. No one was there except a little baldish man whom Bill introduced as his Uncle Clem. Uncle Clem was smoking a pipe.

"I like a pipe myself," Wade said genially. He took out a pipe, and as he stoked it, his eyes fixed on the button in Bill's lapel. "You don't fit this case, young man. Not a bit."

Bill couldn't help liking him. "What case?"

"The case against Dave Hillyard. Know him?"

"I shared a sleeper section with a man of that name, New York to Los Angeles."

"Why did you call him today?"

Bill stared. "But I didn't."

"I'm afraid you did," Wade said. "The number is Vermont 4487."

"That sounds like a number I called. But I wasn't calling Hillyard."

"Did Hillyard tell you to ask for someone named Marfa?"

"Say, what the hell's goin' on?" Bill demanded. His face flushed. "A girl gave me her number, and I wrote it down. Hillyard had nothing to do with it."

"Where did you write it down?"

"Wait a minute. I'll show you." Bill went to the hall and came back with his Army overcoat. He took a timetable from its pocket and gave it to Wade.

The detective looked shrewdly at a memo on it. "You write this number yourself?"

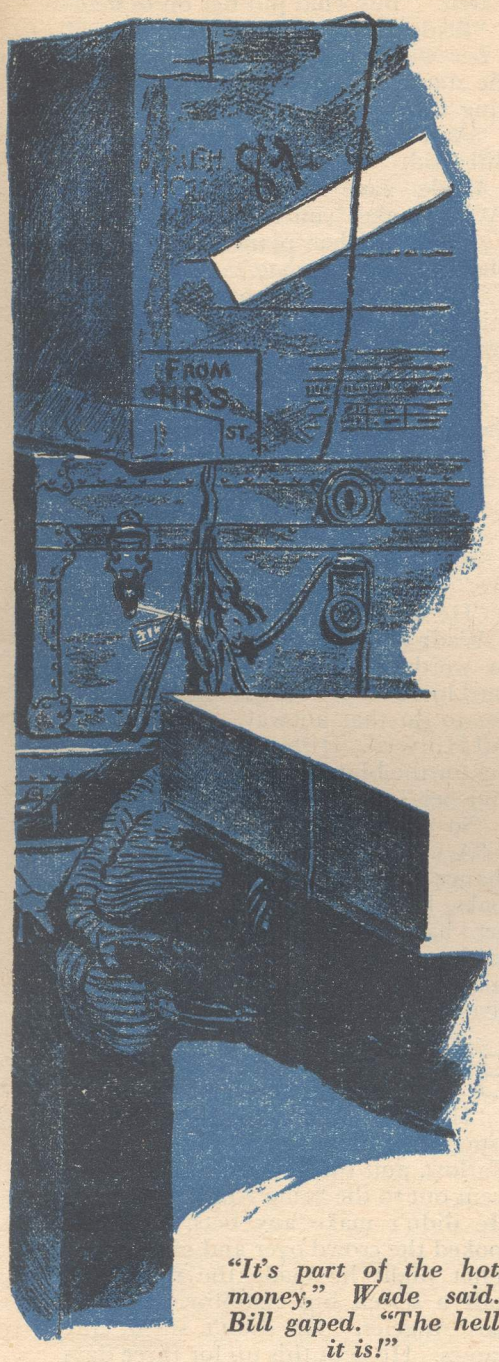
"Sure I did. Just as the train pulled in."

"Where was this overcoat at the moment?"

"On the seat between me and Hillyard."

"Did Hillyard give you a package to mail for him? Did he tell you to telephone Vermont 4487 and notify a woman named Marfa that you had mailed it?"

"Hell, no." Bill's flush deepened. "Say, what is this, anyway?"



*"It's part of the hot money," Wade said. Bill gaped. "The hell it is!"*

Uncle Clem came padding across the room and held a light to Wade's pipe. "Something seems to be mixed up, Billy. Mr. Wade will explain, I'm sure."

"Hillyard," Wade explained, "is a crook who had hot money on him. Maybe he saw the police waiting for him and got rid of it. Maybe he slipped it into your luggage, young man; you were in the same section."

"All I had," Bill said, "was a suitcase and an overcoat. Look 'em over, if you want to."

Wade nodded and stood up. "Not that I expect to find anything. It's just an angle we have to cover."

Bill took him to his bedroom and pointed out a suitcase. "It hasn't been unpacked yet. Here, help yourself."

Wade searched the suitcase and found nothing of interest.

Returning to the living-room he went through the pockets of the overcoat. Here he found only a small trunk key.

"You had a trunk, too?"

"My foot locker," Bill said. "It was checked on my ticket and came in the baggage-car."

Uncle Clem put in: "That's an odd place to carry a loose key, Billy. In your overcoat pocket."

"Say, that *is* funny!" Bill exclaimed. "I always carried that key in my pants pocket. How did it get in my overcoat?"

"That is Funny Thing Number Two," Wade said. "Funny Thing Number One is your calling Hillyard's apartment. Are you claiming that someone switched the trunk key from your pants to your overcoat?"

"I didn't put it there myself," Bill insisted.

"Since the trunk key figures in some mysterious way," Wade said, "we'd better take a look at the trunk."

Bill led the way down cellar and pointed out a foot locker. Wade opened it with the key and rummaged through the tray. "You're wasting your time," Bill said. "Hillyard didn't even know I had a trunk. By the way, where is he now?"

"We're holding him on suspicion. We'll have to turn him loose in a few days, though, unless we build a better case. What's this?"

The rustle of stiff paper in a sock caused Wade to uncover five new one-thousand dollar bills.

He looked at the serial numbers. "It's part of the hot money," he said.

Bill gaped. "The hell it is!"

Wade's mild blue eyes searched him. "Funny Thing Number Three," he said, "is that I don't believe you put it there."

"Sure I didn't. But why don't you think I did?"

"Two reasons," the extremely personable Mr. Wade told him. "Your face, and the discharge button. Didn't I say right at the start, son, that you didn't fit this case?"

BRIDGER, the man from New York, had other ideas. To Bridger, a clew was a clew. "No use being sentimental, Wade," he argued. "It's open and shut. When Hillyard saw he was riding into a cop trap, he gave his seatmate ten per cent to get the money off the train. He told Horn how to contact him. Horn salted away his own split, put forty-five grand where Hillyard told him to put it, then phoned the contact number."

"But I've found a Marfa Wilton in the city directory," Wade said. "She admits she gave this boy her number, and she saw him write it on the time-table."

"So what? The number Horn called was Hillyard's. You found both it and the money on him. Stick to the facts, Wade."

"One outstanding fact," Wade said quietly, "is that you're a bull in a china shop."

"Whadda yuh mean?"

"I mean that what you're doing right now is bull-in-a-china-shop technique. You've got Ferris and Tatlow out on Almond Street shaking down all the Horn family and neighbors. And they're nice folks. Ferris will antagonize every one of them. Worst of all, it'll break the story into the newspapers."

UNDER a heading, "LOOT FOUND IN DISCHARGEE'S BAGGAGE," a morning paper gave all the known facts.

There had been a telephone-call, so the newspaper account said, from William Horn to Hillyard's hide-out apartment. Calling this hide-out, Horn had asked for Marfa Wilton, débutante socialite and daughter of ex-Senator Forest X. Wilton. The police were holding Hillyard, but no warrant had yet been issued for Horn.

At eight that evening Bill parked the Horn family car in front of an imposing stone mansion. An English butler answered his ring at the door.

"Is Marfa Wilton home?" Bill asked.

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"I'm Bill Horn."

The servant stiffened. His chin tilted upward, and his voice was ice. "Miss Wilton," he said, "is not at home."

Bill was disappointed. He wanted to talk it all over with Marfa. "Well, will you tell her I'll drop around later?"

A booming voice sounded from the hallway. "Never mind, Jennings. Let *me* handle that fellow."

"Very good, sir." Jennings withdrew, and his place at the door was taken by ex-Senator Forest X. Wilton.

"If you're the young whippersnapper," Wilton exploded, "who dragged my daughter into a crime scandal, will you kindly go away? And stay away!"

"I don't think you understand," Bill protested.

"I understand quite enough. You picked up my daughter on a train. As a result we've had police and reporters out here asking insolent questions. And her name in the papers!" Irritation swelled the Senator's broad red face. "Go away and don't annoy us again."

He didn't quite slam the door on Bill, but he shut it suddenly and with energy. Bill was left standing alone in the gloom of a front veranda.

Then he heard two sharp whistles. They were inviting notes, and of a

cadence which, upon occasion, he had used himself. Looking up, he saw Marfa. She was wearing overalls rolled to her bare knees, and was leaning far out from a bedroom balcony.

She climbed over the iron balcony rail and hung by her hands. Hanging there, her feet lacked about three yards of reaching the ground. "Catch me, Bill."

She dropped. Bill caught her in his arms.

"Im supposed," she whispered, "to be confined to quarters. Where's your car?"

Bill pointed. She took his hand and they ran to the car.

When they were in it, Bill asked: "Where shall we go?"

"Let's go to Santa Monica," she said, "and ride the roller coaster."

The round trip to the fun zone on the Santa Monica pier was forty miles, and it was two o'clock in the morning when Bill got her home.

As he was boosting her up a trellis to the balcony, she said: "Don't let me fall, Bill."

Bill grinned. "I didn't let you fall out of that roller coaster, did I?"

JUST before noon Bill dropped in on Detective Wade at the D.A.'s office. Wade was cordial. "Come in and mull things over, Bill. What've you been doing?"

"I had me a job and was supposed to go to work this morning," Bill said.

"Why didn't you?"

"My prospective employer has been reading the papers. They changed his mind, and he says he doesn't need me after all."

"Anything else?"

"Yeh. I went out to Marfa's house last night. Her old man threw me out. He's been reading the papers too."

Wade eyed him shrewdly. "You don't seem very sore about it."

"I really am, though," Bill blurted. "I'm sore as hell. I feel like taking a sock at somebody."

"At whom, for instance?"

"At the gink who planted that dough in my trunk. Look, Mr. Wade: Why don't you let me help find him? I'll work for nothing and throw in the use of the family car."

"How could you help me, son?"

"Well, I could start out by interviewing the cab-driver who took me home from the station."

"Hop to it."

"It was a Yellow Cab with four passengers: Two men for the Ambassador Hotel, myself and a woman who was still in the cab when I got out."

"I'll tag that taxi for you, Bill." Wade reached for a phone to call the office of the Yellow Cab Company.

Two hours later a taxicab drew up in front of the courthouse. Bill was waiting for it. "You dropped me out on West Almond Wednesday afternoon. Remember?"

The taximan remembered. "Yeh! You had a family reunion right in the yard."

"Did you notice if another car trailed us from the station?"

The driver shook his head. "I don't think so, buddy. I can usually spot 'em in the mirror."

"What about those two men we dropped at the Ambassador?"

"They looked like ordinary drummers to me, bud."

"What about the woman?"

The cabman's eyes narrowed. "You mean that blonde in brown? Yeh, she gave me an address just a block farther down your street. When we got there, it was a vacant lot. Then she said she meant 3915, next door."

"Did you take her baggage to the door?"

"She didn't have any."

"How can you remember 3915 after two days?"

"I can't. But we keep a record of calls. When the head office said you wanted to check that trip, I looked up the record. And now I remember something else."

"What?"

"I cruised a few blocks further out Almond Street. When I didn't pick up a fare I made a U-turn and cruised back east toward downtown. As I passed your house, the blonde in brown was sittin' on a bus-stop bench right across the street."

Maybe, Bill reasoned, there'd been no one at home at 3915. So the woman caught a bus back downtown. But she could have caught the bus at the 3900 block instead of walking to the 3800 stop—or hailed this empty taxi.

"Thanks." Bill gave the cabman a dollar and hurried to the nearest telephone. Well acquainted in his own neighborhood, he knew that a family named Childress lived at 3915 West Almond. He rang up Mrs. Childress.

"Were you at home from two to four Wednesday? . . . Did a woman call on you? . . . No? Thanks, Mrs. Childress."

TEN minutes later Bill was reporting to Wade.

"Looks like you got something, Bill. And while you were gone, I got something too." Wade produced the timetable on whose margin was the memo: *"Marfa Wilton, Vermont 4487."*

"You admitted writing that down, Bill. So I didn't immediately check the handwriting. But today I did, and the expert's report just came in. It's his opinion that you wrote *'Marfa Wilton,'* but did not print *'Vermont 4487.'* The figures, he says, look like a woman's."

"And now we've turned up a woman! And a phony, at that." Bill was elated. "But what put her on to me?"

"Bridger tells me that Hillyard said a few words in a foreign language at the station. He could have been tipping this blonde in brown."

"And later she double-crossed him," Bill said.

Wade gave him a sharp look. "What makes you say that?"

"Because she planted Hillyard's phone number on me."

"M-m! And that not only compromised you but it tightened the case against Hillyard. Hillyard won't like it."

"Not if we're guessing right," Bill thought.

Wade drummed his well-manicured fingers on the desk. "All right, Bill. Let's find the blonde in brown."

"How?"

"We'll ask Hillyard what her habits are."

"He won't tell you."

Wade smiled. "We won't ask him in words. Instead, we'll turn Hillyard loose for lack of evidence. We've got to do that anyway. Tatlow will tail Hillyard. Hillyard will start looking for the blonde and probably won't find her."

"So where will that get us?"

"A woman," Wade explained, "can change her name, her address and her looks, but she can't or won't change her habits. Hillyard knows those habits. We don't. Go home and relax, Bill. When something breaks, I'll give you a ring."

BILL spent a restless week waiting. Then Wade summoned him.

"Hillyard," the detective told him, "spent the first day trying to shake Tatlow, and thinks he did. Then he went out to the Santa Anita race-track. He didn't make any bets. He just looked the crowd over and came away. That night he made the rounds of half a dozen big gambling clubs in Los Angeles. He didn't sit in any games. He kept this up for three days and then caught a train to Frisco. There he went to the Bay Meadows track and Tatlow says he didn't bet a dime. Now he's in Reno looking over the crowds in gambling joints. Does that tell you the habits of the blonde in brown?"

Bill laughed. "Right on the button. She gambles."

"So now we've got police from coast to coast looking for the blonde at all tracks and big-time clubs. Meantime, Tatlow's still keeping tab on Hillyard."

"She could be in Florida or New York," Bill said dismally. "How the heck would police there know her if they saw her?"

"They won't—unless she tries to shove one of those thousand-dollar

bills. If she doesn't, then no one can really identify her except you or the taxi driver."

"That being the case," Bill said thoughtfully, "I'd like to look over a few joints myself."

"Where?"

"Well, the piker games along the beaches." Bill was reminded of them by certain concessions he had noticed last night on the Santa Monica pier.

"M-m-m!" Wade gave an approving nod. "You mean the X-Ray poker tables, the pin-ball arcades, the midget racing counters and the Bingo—no, they don't play Bingo any more. But it's an idea. If she's smart enough to freeze the hot money, and hasn't anything else except chicken feed, she might take on small-time games for amusement. Keep in touch with me, son."

Bill went out and called up Marfa. "Want to go piking tonight?" he asked her.

"I'd love to."

"Then meet me at the boulevard corner right after supper."

Marfa was there. Bill told her about the blonde in brown as they drove west out Santa Monica boulevard. "So tonight we don't ride the thrill buggies. It's strictly business."

WADE was right. There were no Bingo games, but Bill and Marfa did find plenty of cheap chance games. They spent the evening covering fun zones at Santa Monica, Ocean Park and Venice. Pin-ball arcades and X-Ray poker counters were aligned, in some areas, almost door to door. They looked into beach and yacht clubs, interested only in the slot-machines installed there. Munching hot-dog sandwiches, they lingered longest at a midget racing concession with stools for twenty players. This place put on a race every five minutes with twenty electric-eye horses racing down a huge wall board as each player manipulated a magnet machine. You bet your dime and collected a dollar if your horse won. The race caller had a megaphone and a machine-gun voice —"They'reatthepostthey'reoffSeaBiscuitoutinfrontRedWingcomingupCornfedthirdCornfedinaspurtnowheleadsRedwingbyaneckpassesBiscuitCornfed wins!"

Marfa played a race herself. "It's fascinating. Tomorrow night we'll do Long Beach," she told Bill.

But the next night Bill left her at home while he covered Manhattan Beach, Redondo and San Pedro alone. At innumerable arcades he failed to find the mystery blonde. By the end of the evening the whole idea seemed stupid. A woman in the habit of playing roulette and big-time tracks would hardly play five-cent X-Ray poker. He took a room at a San Pedro hotel and went to bed.

*Illustrated by James Ernst*

In the morning he checked by telephone with Wade. "Don't give up," Wade advised. "That kind of work takes patience."

"Is Tatlow still tagging Hillyard?"

"Right. Hillyard went from Reno to Las Vegas. Now he's back in L.A., looking over dives in Chinatown."

Bill made two other calls, to Marfa and to Uncle Clem. He told each just where he was and what he was doing. "I'm goin' to stick it out," he said, "even if I have to go to Tia Juana."

*"Catch me, Bill! I'm supposed," Marfa whispered, "to be confined to quarters."*

The Long Beach pike opened at one in the afternoon and ran till midnight. For the entire eleven hours Bill watched slot games. There were hundreds of them and thousands of customers. A mile of blazing pike and scores of barkers enticed any and all to place five cents or a dime on the maneuvers of small white balls. "Knock Coin out of Circle and Win Coins or Cigarettes!" "Play X-Ray Poker, 5c." "Pick your Horse and Change Dimes into Dollars—hurry, hurry, hurry!"

But the woman Bill hunted wasn't there.

In the morning Bill checked again with Wade. "We've lost Hillyard," Wade told him. "He gave Tatlow the slip in a Chinatown alley."

*Bill could see her face—the girl of the taxicab! She was dropping nickels into the one-armed bandit.*

Driving on down the shore line that evening, Bill's first stop was Seal Beach. Here he found no games at all. It was the same at the next two stops, at Newport and Balboa. He learned that he had crossed a county line and that here there'd been a recent crusade against slot games. "You may find a few of 'em under cover," he was told.

It was nearly closing time when Bill drove into the resort town of Laguna Beach. An electric sign drew him to a sprawling arcade which was called the "Frenchman's Hut."

THE Hut had a bar and a dance floor. No games were in sight at first glance, but faint clicking sounds now familiar to Bill's ears lured him to an arch at the rear. Here he found a tented area with a shell floor. Its posts were pseudo palm trees and imitation bamboo. Tapa cloth hangings and Hawaiian music from a jute box gave garish tropical atmosphere. There were a dozen well-patronized pin-ball games. Bill looked them over and saw that the pay-off was only in prizes or cigarettes.

Then he heard a series of sharp clanks. They came from a wall booth almost completely obscured by tapa hangings. Bill peered in there and saw a woman dropping nickels into a standard cash-paying one-armed bandit. She clanked a lever each time she dropped a nickel. She seemed past middle age, was dressed in black and her head was covered with a Mexican mantilla.

Bill wasn't interested. He was looking for a young blonde.

A new crowd came in and Bill stood by to look them over. Then he heard the woman of the wall booth speak. She was now at the cashier's counter and her voice startled him. It was young. "Let's have another dollar's worth of nickels." A mantilla still covered the woman's hair.

But now Bill could see her face and he knew it. She was the girl of the taxicab.

He watched her go back into the tapa-hung booth. Again came successive clanks as the machine in there absorbed another twenty nickels.

When the woman passed through the bar and left by the street door, Bill followed. He saw her cross the beach highway and turn up a curved, eucalyptus-lined road. The night was cloudy. Bill kept fifty paces back of her. A sign told him that this street was called Canyon Road.

It was a steep, twisting street with no sidewalks. The woman's high heels clicked on its pavement and Bill saw her turn in at a small, neat cottage. She unlocked the door and entered. Lights came on. The cottage was numbered 314.

Ten minutes later Bill was at a pay-phone talking to Wade. "Found her," he reported eagerly. "The blonde. She's at 314 Canyon Road, Laguna Beach."

"Get a stake-out close by and wait for me," Wade said. "I'll be there in the morning."

BILL met him at the Frenchman's Hut at nine in the morning.

"I've rented two rooms in a house close by," Bill said.

They drove up Canyon Road to a ramshackle two-story rooming-house about a stone's throw downhill from the cottage. Wade parked his coupe back of it and they went up to a pair of adjoining rooms on the second floor. The detective looked out and saw a shuttered cottage a little way uphill and across the road. "I'll show you a better O.P. to watch it from," Bill said.

He took Wade down to a wide front veranda with a chain swing, and well screened by a trumpet vine. From the swing they could look between the vine stems and see the cottage.

Presently its door opened and a young woman emerged to pick up her morning paper. She wore a blue dressing-gown, and a blue bandana covered her hair.

When she went back inside Bill said: "She's been there a week. It's a furnished cottage and she rented it under the name of Anna Marsh."

Wade leaned back and closed his eyes. "Let's begin with her character, Bill. First, she's cunning. It took plenty of cunning to get into your house and do what she did there. Just how she did it we may never know. Second, she's cautious. She won't even go out to pick up her paper without hiding her blonde bangs."

"Ever see her before?"

The detective shook his head. "I've looked over our gallery of molls and con women. She doesn't match up."

"Why don't we search her house?"

"We will. I've got a search-warrant in my pocket. But I don't think it'll do us any good, Bill."

"Why?"

"Because she's too cunning and cautious to hide hot money in her house. She'd be more likely to bury it somewhere. Or she could stow it in a safety bank-box, rented under an alias in some distant town, and then hide the bank-box key in a knothole a mile from where she's living. That's what we're up against, Bill."

"Then what was the use of my finding her?"

"Plenty. Now we've got her cornered in a watched house—and maybe we can outfox her."

"How?"

Wade lighted a cigar and puffed for a brooding minute. "She knows two enemies are looking for her. The police and Hillyard. She's not afraid of the police, assuming she's sure we can't find the money or a key to it in her house. But she *is* afraid of Hillyard. Hillyard could beat her up, or worse."

"So what do we do about it?"

"I'll show you tonight, Bill."

Waiting restlessly for night time, Bill called up Marfa. He told her where he was and what he had done.

Fog came in from the sea just after dark. In it Fay Quinn left her cottage and walked briskly toward the beach. Wade followed her, leaving Bill on the vine-screened porch. "She knows you, Bill, but she doesn't know me. So you keep out of sight."

In a short while the detective rejoined Bill. "She went to the Hut and put about forty nickels through a slot-machine. Then she went to a movie. That'll give us time to search her house."

The cottage was locked. Wade had to try a dozen skeleton keys before finding one that fitted. They entered and switched on lights. There was a snug living-room, a bedroom, a bath and a kitchenette.

"Start looking, Bill—for either a package of money or a bank-box key."

"Would just finding the right key convict her?"

"Yes. Bank-box keys usually have the name of the bank stamped on them. Finding the money in her bank-box would be the same as finding it here."

With long practice at searching jobs, Wade went skillfully through the house. He sifted all baggage, clothing, books, furniture. Even the food in an electric refrigerator was examined, item by item. A quart of Scotch whisky was on the kitchen drainboard. Wade held it to the light, making sure a key hadn't been dropped into the bottle. He shook every vase and jar, and even raked through wood ashes in a fireplace.

Nothing was found except a brown shopping suit and a hat to match. "It checks the cab-driver's description, Bill," Wade said.

He cut off the lights and they went out, locking the door. They were back on their vine-screened porch when the woman passed them. She went into her house and Bill saw lights go on there.

"Get ready to move," Wade warned. "I think she'll start moving herself, and fast."

"Why?"

"She'll see that her house has been searched. She'll know it was either the police or Hillyard. It won't look like the police because she'd expect them to crash right in on her with a search-warrant. A sneak search will look like Hillyard. And she's afraid of Hillyard."

"I get it. So she might dig up a tin can in the back yard, take a bank-box key from it and hike for the bus station."

"Something like that. She has no car, so if she leaves town it'll have to be by bus. I've got one of the local cops watching all the outgoing buses."

They took turns watching the cottage all night. But the woman there did not leave it.

"Looks like my scheme went sour, Bill."

For another day and night they watched. The tenant at 314 still stood pat.

"We can't play cat-and-mouse any longer," Wade said wearily on the second morning. "Nothing to do now but walk in and shake her down."

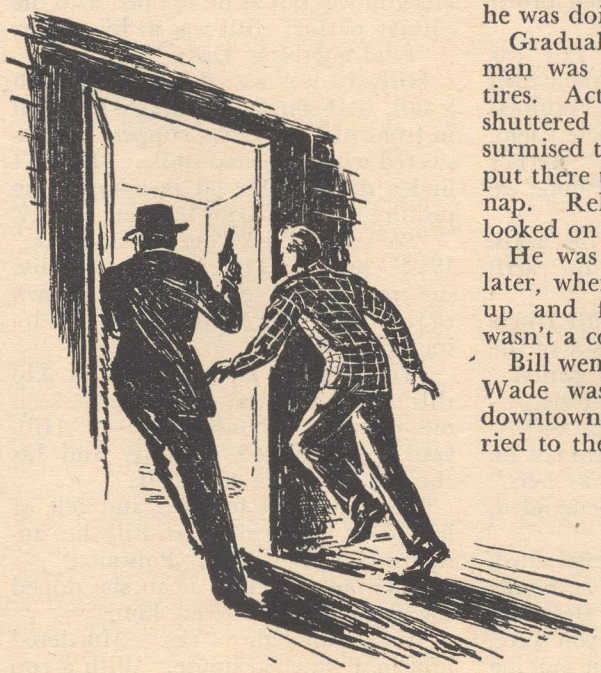
WADE went to the cottage and knocked. Fay Quinn, in yellow slacks, opened the door. Her eyes gave quick appraisal and then fixed with a smile on Bill Horn. "Hello, soldier," she greeted sweetly. "How does it feel to be out of uniform?"

"Pretty good," Bill said. "This is Mr. Wade."

She put out a hand. "Awfully glad to know you, Mr. Wade. Won't you come in?"

It took the wind out of Bill. They went in, and Fay gushed to Wade: "I was in a taxi with him when he came home. Did he tell you?"

"Yes, he told me," Wade said. "You seem to remember him well, Miss—"



*They waited twenty minutes. Then Wade said: "Okay, Bill. Let's go get him."*

"Mrs. Marsh. Yes, you see it was impressed on me by a family reunion scene in the front yard. Can't I get you something to drink, gentlemen?"

"Never mind," Wade said bluntly. "I'm from the L. A. police."

"You are! Well, then, that explains everything. I read in the papers about Dave Hillyard. They suspect him of stealing some money, don't they? Or was it bonds? You found out I used to know Dave, I suppose."

"You admit knowing him?"

"Of course. I know him quite well. Isn't that why you searched my house last night?"

"Your house was searched?"

"It looked like it. But nothing's missing."

"How do you know it wasn't Dave Hillyard?"

"Oh, I'm *positive* it wasn't Dave."

"How can you be sure?"

She laughed. "Because I left a full quart of Scotch on the drainboard. It was still full when I got back. And Dave Hillyard never passed a quart of Scotch in his life without pouring himself a drink."

"She was laughing at us all the time," Bill said when he left the cottage with Wade. "But why did she admit knowing Hillyard?"

"She thought we already knew it and so she beat us to the punch," Wade guessed. "Better get some sleep, son. I'll watch her house."

Bill went to bed and slept till late afternoon. Then he went down to relieve Wade. But the detective was not on the porch. Where could he be? It wasn't like Wade to leave the cottage unwatched.

Bill looked at the cottage through his screen of vine. It was shuttered and quiet. A car was parked directly across the road from it. The car was jacked up, and a man on his knees at a rear wheel was changing tires. But he was doing it leisurely, Bill noticed.

Gradually he became aware that the man was only pretending to change tires. Actually he was watching the shuttered cottage. Bill smiled. He surmised that the man was a local cop put there to watch while Wade took a nap. Relaxing in the swing, Bill looked on idly.

He was jolted to his feet, minutes later, when the man at the car stood up and faced down Canyon. He wasn't a cop. He was Dave Hillyard!

Bill went racing up to Wade's room. Wade wasn't there. Had he gone downtown on some errand? Bill hurried to the parking lot at the rear to

see if Wade's coupé was missing. It wasn't. Wade was sitting in it, smoking a cigar.

He beckoned Bill. "Business is picking up, Bill. Hillyard's in town."

"I've just seen him," Bill said. "He's watching her house."

"Mainly," Wade amended, "he's scouting to see if it's being watched by anyone else. When he's sure it isn't, he'll wait till she goes piking tonight and then prowl the cottage."

"You mean he traced her here the same way I did?"

"No, he must have located her hideout some other way. He couldn't have seen her at the Hut because she hasn't left the house all day."

Bill went back to the front porch. He was just in time to see Hillyard unjack his car and drive away. Wade's coupé came coasting out of the rooming house driveway, and followed.

Soon Wade came back and reported: "He went to the Laguna Hotel and took a room. I telephoned Tatlow and told him to get right down here."

Bill whistled. "You know I kind of feel sorry for that blonde. Us watching her. Hillyard watching her. If that guy gets to her first he might beat hell out of her."

"It's up to us," Wade said grimly, "to see that he doesn't."

SOON after dark Fay Quinn emerged from her house and walked to the Frenchman's Hut. Wade made no move to follow. "I've got Tatlow planted at the Hut. He'll cover the woman. I've tipped a local cop to cover Hillyard."

"And we?"

"We cover the cottage."

Soon they heard a car turn off the beach highway and change gears as it climbed Canyon Road. "That'll be Hillyard," Wade whispered. "He'll park in the shadows and then prowl the cottage."

But Wade was wrong. The car stopped squarely in front of their own rooming-house. Out of it jumped Marfa Wilton and Bill's Uncle Clem. "This ought to be the place," Marfa's clear voice trilled. "Gee! I hope we haven't spoiled everything."

Bill was rocked back on his heels. "Marfa!" he cried. "What on earth are *you* doing here?"

She came up the steps with Uncle Clem and Bill drew them back of the vines. Both of them looked guilty.

"Oh, Bill! I've done something perfectly awful. I hope you won't—"

"Let me tell it," Uncle Clem cut in. "It was my fault as much as hers."

"What the devil," Bill demanded, "did you do?"

"Yesterday," Uncle Clem explained, "I answered the telephone at home. A man's voice said he was Detective Bridger and he asked where you were, Bill. I said you were still out looking for a blonde in brown. Later I found out that Bridger hadn't phoned me at all."

"And today," Marfa said, "the same voice fooled me. A man said over the telephone that he was your Uncle Clem. I knew you had an Uncle Clem. So I said: Hello, Uncle Clem. And he asked if I'd heard how you were getting along. And I said you'd found what you're looking for—at 314 Canyon Road in Laguna."

Bill's eyes met Wade's. "Hillyard!" Bill groaned. "No wonder he went straight to the house!"

"Quiet!" Wade cautioned. "Someone's coming up the road right now."

A man on foot passed, moving stealthily. He stopped at the cottage and circled it, warily. Then he disappeared back of it. Soon they saw light come on inside.

"He jimmied a window," Wade whispered. "Likely he scouted the Hut first and saw her there."

Marfa was in an ague of excitement. "Suppose she comes home and finds him! Will he murder her?"

"Yes, and you too," Bill said sternly, "if he finds you lured him right into our laps."

"Coming, Bill?" Wade asked.

"Sure," Bill said. "Marfa, you stay right here with Uncle Clem."

He followed Wade to the cottage. "Hillyard's a better man than I am," the detective whispered, "if he can find anything."

"So what do we do?"

"We let him prowl for a while and we hope he finds the money. Then we crash in and pick him up. At least we can hold him for house-breaking."

They waited twenty minutes. Then Wade said: "Okay, Bill. Let's go get him."

He knew the right key this time and so was able to make a sudden entry. His gun was out as he stepped into the cottage parlor. Bill was at his elbow.

"Find anything, Dave?"

Hillyard was seated at a table with a tall, half-consumed Scotch highball in front of him. "No, copper," he answered with a twisted smile. "I didn't find a thing." He sat in a sprawling posture with his arms hanging limply.

"So you mixed yourself a drink," Wade said. "That checks, because she told us you've never been known to pass a quart of Scotch without helping yourself."

"Yeh, and she knew I wouldn't skip this one, damn her! She must've seen me—casin' her house. She—" Hillyard's eyes glazed abruptly and his chin slumped on his chest.

Wade stepped forward and felt of his heart. Turning to Bill he announced: "He's dead. Poisoned!"

Bill stared. "You mean she doped the Scotch! Murdered him?"

Wade nodded. "Yes. Murdered him in a watched house. With a cop escort to prove her own alibi at the Hut."

"You mean," Bill gasped, "that we can't convict her?"

"Not unless we can prove intent. The house was locked and it's no crime to leave poison in a locked house. Her very act of locking it can be construed as meaning she didn't want anything in it touched." Wade paused and his eyes flicked about the room. "Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless that forty-five grand is really in the house. That would fix a motive. A motive for Hillyard's entry and for her to kill him. The motive could convince a jury of intent."

Wade searched Hillyard's pockets, on a bare chance that the man had found the money or a bank-box key. "No such luck," he said.

Then Bill heard the click of a woman's heels coming up the road. "That's her coming home," he said.

"She'll come in and play Miss Innocent," Wade said.

The footsteps came nearer. Fay Quinn appeared in the doorway, trim and smiling.

"Hello there!" she said cheerily. "I seem to have visitors."

"One of them's dead," Wade said. "I'm arresting you for his murder."

"Me?" Her voice was derisive. "I locked the house. Is it my fault if he broke in?"

"You had a double motive," Wade said. "By killing him you could gain two ends: keep him from grabbing back money you'd double-crossed him out of, and keep him from getting tough."

"You can't prove that motive," Fay challenged.

"Can't I?" A sudden note of confidence crept into Wade's voice. His keen blue eyes which had been flicking about the room now were focused on a definite spot.

BILL followed their stare to a half-consumed highball. Three large ice cubes in it were nearly melted now. One of the melting cubes exposed the ends of a tiny, flat key.

Pallor swept Fay's face. "Damn him!" she murmured. "He used to take it straight."

Frosting would have made the ice cube opaque when first taken from the refrigerator tray.

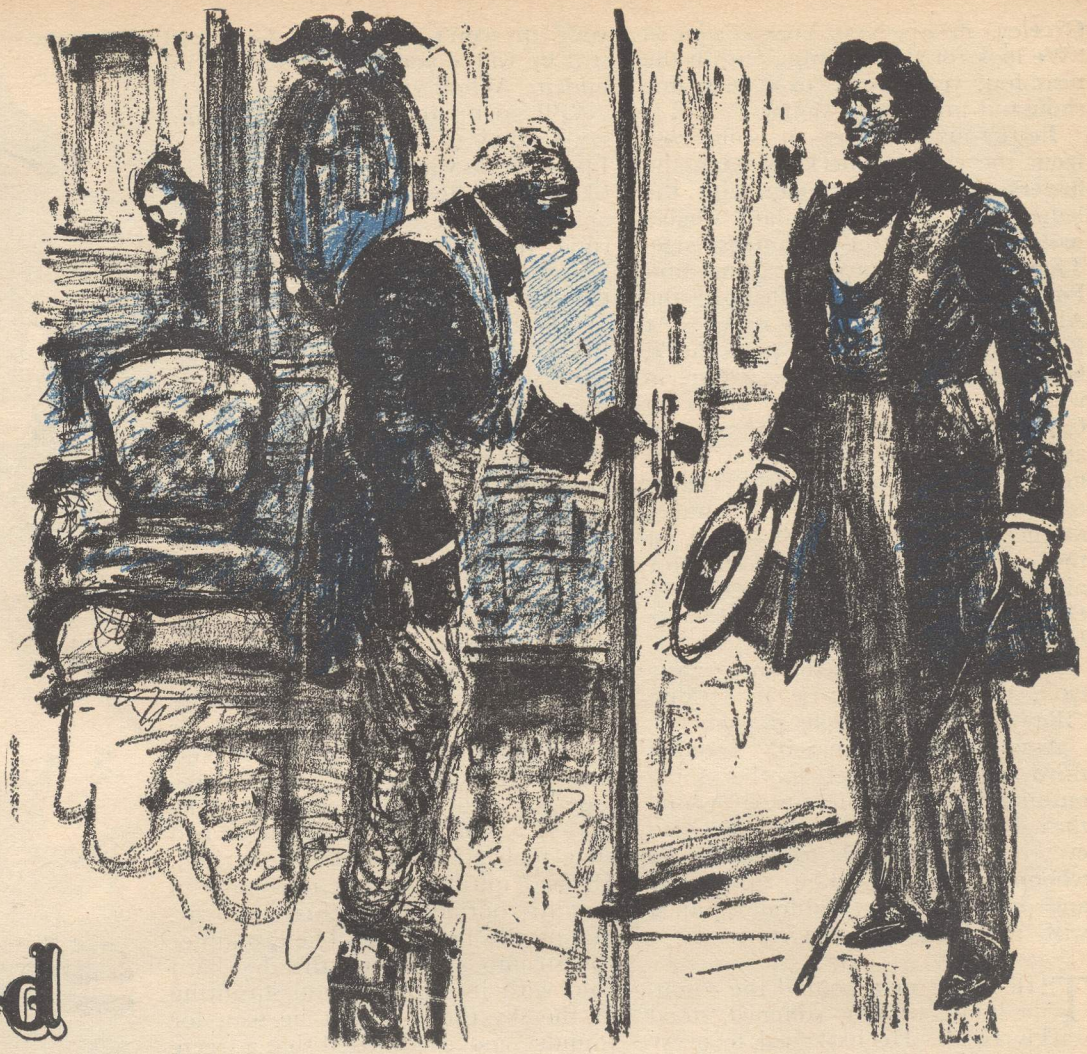
"But this time he mixed one," Wade said as he fished the key out.

On it was engraved the name of a bank in Pomona.

Bill went outside and found Marfa. He told her about it in a breath. He took her hand and led her deep down the shadows, well clear from sight of the watched house.

"Think of the publicity! Your dad's not gonna like this," Bill said.

*Illustrated by John Fulton*



# Gold Is Where You Find It

**A story about Stephen Foster and the gold-rush to California.**

*by* NEILL WILSON

THEY'D come over the mountains, after the War of Independence, for the green gold of forest lands. They'd come by trails that the Indians knew, and made settlements on the Ohio River. But some pressed onward for the black gold of prairie soil, incredibly rich—or for the brown gold of beaver pelts, immensely marketable. Now it was 1849, one of the magic dates in history, and another thrust was on—for the yellow gold of the Pacific shore, immeasurably distant.

At No. 4 Casilly's Row, a block of warehouses on Cincinnati's Front Street, a young man with brown eyes and slender hands dipped nib to inkpot, traced balances upon a ledger page, and tried to shut his ears.

Impossible. The window at his elbow looked out upon a mile-around curve of the river, and this bend, between Gilmour's and Wiggins' landings, was the great Public Landing with its shouts, rattle of wheels and steamboat whistles. He had never been able to shut out those sounds. He'd never been able to keep sober figures on the page from turning, in fancy, into human figures leaping, shuffling, scraping in hoe-down and juba; to keep entries of bolt goods, pork, hardware, whisky and flour from turning into snatches of doggerel. And in recent weeks a new note had come into the medley of Landing noises: An excitement—an urgency. There were more whistles, more yelling, more black men trundling boxes and barrels, more omnibuses clattering, more chanteys and chuffing and farewells. Soon the river would freeze and traffic for the year would be over. But now *on, on!*

The clerk at the high ledger desk turned his slim back to the window. Those throngs, jammed on the packets' decks down yonder, had caught the tidings brought on horseback over deserts and plains by Kit Carson: gold—real gold, in California! Gold on the tributaries of the Sacramento River, boys—a man on the Tuolumne took out fifty thousand dollars in a few days—a man on the American scooped up two thousand dollars at his cabin doorstep—a man on the Yuba gathered eighty thousand dollars in six weeks. "Gold!" cried the emissary of the military commandant of California, arriving at Washington with a tea caddy full of grains and nuggets. "Gold enough, out there, to pay for the Mexican War a hundred times over." And: "Gold!" had cried Horace

Greeley, in his New York *Tribune*. "We look for the addition, within the next four years, equal to at least one thousand millions of dollars."

Boisterous attempts at song rose from the crowded decks, staying the fingers of the young man with the ledger pen. Those jubilant singers had come from the Atlantic's edge. They'd come by turnpike, canal and Portage Railroad—cars pulled over the Allegheny mountains on ropes. At Pittsburgh and other river ports they'd loaded their gear upon the gay stern-wheelers and would float down to Cairo, turn up into the Mississippi and the Missouri, and far away at Independence would raise the canvas tops of their wagons, shoe their mules, fit their oxen's yokes, and set off on the overland trail. New scenes for old! New lives for old! *"Old Zip Coon,"* they bellowed, *"is a very learned scholar—"*

From another craft, thrashing away from the Landing, rose in rivalry, *"Way-ay, blow the man down—"*

America on the march! From a third boat roared yet another song, outblooming the rest in gusto. A song that bore irresistible challenge, to everyone who heard, to join in its whooping chorus. The zip-cooners and blow-downers, outdone, joined with the high-hearted victors.

THE young man behind the counting-house window stiffened, stood starkly rigid. He harkened to every last note. The chorus grew small with distance. He drained it like a goblet.

As he stood there, it came again from another craft, swelling as it approached. A rollicking song, full of devil-may-care, of vigor and valor and impudence and brave farewell.

A young nation was once more upon the march!

He stabbed his pen into the sand-box and slammed shut his book.

"Mr. Irwin," he announced, "I'm going."

The commission merchant, looking across the top of the double desk, did not seem surprised. Every "buckeye" steamboat or keelboat that touched at the Landing took its share of the youth of Cincinnati.

"Mr. Irwin," insisted the bookkeeper, "I've got to join in."

"Because each boat is loaded with fools who expect to pick up nuggets for the stooping?"

"Because every boat is loaded with men who are singing. Listen!"

Into the dingy room odorous with stores of acrid tobacco, mellowing wines and musty calicos, bawled *"Haul the bowlin', the good ship's a-rollin'—"*

Mr. Irwin said: "I don't blame you, Steve. If I were five years younger I'd go myself. But remember this: shovel and pan won't be enough. Pluck and sweat won't be enough. A tune on your lips won't be enough. Gold will still be where you find it—and if you find it. When will you set out?"

"I'll go up to Pittsburgh first and say good-by to my parents. Then, as I pass by this window, I'll serenade you like those fellows."

Up from the water came a refrain, rude, full-throated: *"Hi-O, away we go, floating down the river on the O-hi-O!"*

"I see what you mean," sighed Mr. Irwin. . . .

Pittsburgh, when Steve reached it, seemed twice as active as Cincinnati. The long Point, where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio, was a choke of casks, crates, provisions, hardware, clothing, fancy gold-sifters and sway-bellied wagons; an ant-heap of humanity. A hundred times, at a score of gangplanks, Stephen heard the song that had so startled him at his ledger.

He'd known Pittsburgh from childhood. But this was almost another city. It was a port of departure for the gold mines rivaling Boston or New York or Philadelphia. Nor was passage easy to obtain. Finally the *Telegraph*, a smart packet when it had time to be tidy, agreed to take him. He had until day after tomorrow to buy his outfit, choose his company, and pay his farewells. The captain of the steamboat, sniffing the dry hard cold with its sting of soot, squinting at the sky that couldn't be seen for foundry smoke, adjudged that a freeze was coming and his would be the last craft out. Then winter would clamp down and no more paddles would churn. . . .

Steve's mother was a dark-eyed, olive-cheeked woman of sensitive features and gentle ways. "Do you know what you are undertaking, Stephen? California is endlessly far away. You never have enjoyed muscular work. Nor is the gold everywhere, nor for everybody. It's only where the right man finds it."

"Mr. Irwin told me that. But I'm going, Mother. Who can resist? Every able-bodied young American man has joined the rush, and they're singing, Mother, they're singing!"

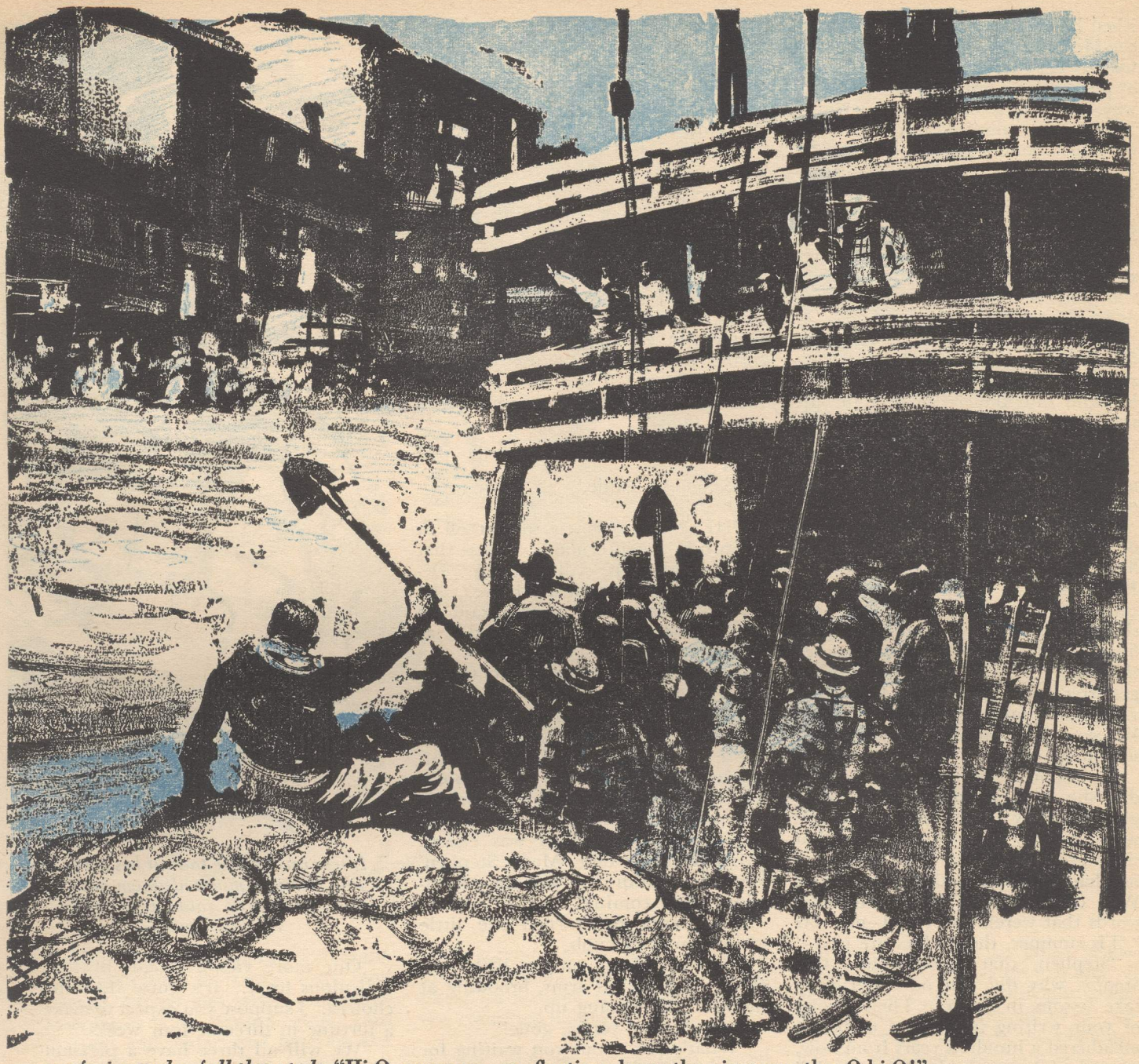
"I've heard them singing. Well, Stephen, you must lay in plenty of warm clothing and strong boots. Will you do something for me this evening? Run over to Dr. McDowell's house and ask him for some sulphate zinc and rose water for your father's throat. He's known you since you were a baby, and will be glad to see you. He has inquired about you frequently—with some alarm, I'm afraid."

Dr. McDowell's was a brick house with white door columns and a fan-light, very near the Point. Stephen was admitted by an old colored man with a kinky white poll. "Doctor aint in right now, Marse Stephen, but Miss Jeanie is. Step into de parlor and I'll fetch her."

*Up from the water came*

Impatient to be done with his errand, Steve entered the parlor. A coal fire burned behind a bright brass fender. A rocking-chair and a small sofa flanked it. But he did not sit down. He glanced restlessly at the clock. How long would the doctor be from home? In the corner was a little piano, square and dainty, its keyboard not quite centered over the pedals. He stepped to the instrument, drew his hands over its sleek rosewood, brushed its mother-of-pearl keys. He loved their silken feel, their elfin tinkle.

Jane McDowell entered. When last he'd seen her, she'd been a romp, a touslehead, a playmate among a dozen at picnicking, at sledding. But now she was a young woman, and extra-



*a refrain, rude, full-throated:* **"Hi-O, away we go, floating down the river on the O-hi-O!"**

ordinarily pretty. Her cheeks were free now of freckles, though wearing the flush of brisk outdoors. Her natural tumble of sorrel-auburn hair had finally been restrained—with what difficulty?—into a decorous part and knot. Her gold-brown eyes matched her hair.

"Steve! I'm so glad to see you! What's Cincinnati like? As savage and wild as we hear?"

"It's a beehive, but not equal to this. . . . You've turned really pretty, Jeanie. In fact, you've quite grown up!" Overpowered by this miracle, he caught her hands. She quietly drew them back.

"What," she asked demurely, "were you making my piano say?"

"I didn't mean to strike a note, Jeanie. I was just thinking."

"How like you that is! Most people use a piano to draw forth music. You pour the music into it, instead. Tell me, what was the air?"

"An odd notion I got, when Uncle Joe let me in just now." He touched the keys experimentally, letting them ring, and hummed softly.

"Why, that's lovely, Steve! It's as nice as the other song you had in your head and fingers the last time you were here. What was it? 'All de world am sad and dreary—'" She sang it with the gayety of nineteen years, when nothing is the least bit sad.

"You've a good memory, for a girl."

"'For a girl,' indeed! I'll have you know a woman's brain is quite as large as a man's. I recall that you started that song with 'Way down upon de Peedee Ribber,' but didn't like 'Peedee.' Have you thought of another stream to be homesick for?"

"Yes—the Swanee. I found it on a map. But I'm going to be homesick for Pittsburgh, Jeanie."

"Why, you're here!"

"For a couple of days only. Then I'm off for California."

"Oh, Steve!"

He said good-by at ten-thirty, said it formally, standing on Jane McDowell's doorstep. For of course there would be no more time for visiting. A man of twenty-three has a man's concerns to think of, and one who plans to be a great traveler, roaming up and down the whole creation—even to California and back—mustn't waste time on folly. He reached his mother's house before he recalled that he'd gone to the McDowells' for a bottle of medicine.

Although he was extremely busy getting odds and ends together, he aston-

ished himself by pointing his steps to the McDowell house again on the next night. He further astonished himself by purchasing a bunch of flowers on the way. The old colored man grinned widely as he admitted him. "Reckon that little bouquet must be for Missus McDowell, aint it?" he said mischievously.

"Why, so it should be," decided Stephen.

Uncle Joe laughed his rich laugh and took Steve's coat and hat. But it was Jane, not her mother, who came down the stairs.

She was graceful. She was merry. She didn't seem to be nearly as puzzled by his presence as he was. She led him into the parlor and the fire again was blazing. She led him past the sofa and straight to the piano.

"Now, Mr. Off-for-California, play me the latest things you've thought of! Play every one of them!"

"But, Jeanie, you know how scraps of tune clutter up my head. I scarcely find time or paper to put them down." He dropped to the stool, gingerly because of tight trousers, tossing the skirts of his coat behind him. His fingers rambled exploringly, then settled into a mood. "Here's a notion I got after visiting my cousin John Rowan's plantation near Louisville lately." He sang in a mild baritone: "The sun shines bright—"

She listened, her head cocked. Why did she have to be so disastrously pretty? Why hadn't she given him warning, last time he saw her, that she'd grow to be like this? Why did her hair shine so under the candles? Why did her eyes fill with tears at words that weren't a bit sad—not yet? "'Tis summer, the darkies are gay—"

"Stephen, that's wonderful. Oh, Stephy, why did you never seriously take lessons in music? Then a song of your writing might live to be remembered a hundred years from now, instead of being—Father says—trash."

STEVE dashed his hand along the keyboard, producing discord, and sprang up. "But I'm not a student, Jeanie. I hate teachers and teaching. All their chatter of dominants, tonics and subdominants mixes me up completely. I know these things that run through my brain are terribly simple. But I *feel* them, Jeanie."

"Have you tried publishing any?"

"Why, yes!" Steve's eyes shone. "Mr. Peters, in Cincinnati, published two of them for nothing. One piece goes like this. I call it 'Old Uncle Ned.'"

Jane listened thoughtfully. "It—it makes me so happy I could cry! And the other, Steve?"

Before he could play it, Dr. McDowell came in, and Mrs. McDowell, and Uncle Joe with cakes and raspberry shrub. Dr. McDowell was a hearty man, but there was restraint to his cordiality. And soon it was again ten-thirty.

"This time I'll really say farewell, Jeanie," said Steve on the doorstep. "It's just as well."

"Oh, Steve! I know Father doesn't approve of your—your fondness for minstrel songs, and some of your associates have been theatrical people, haven't they?"

"He's a strict Methodist, Jane, and I'm kind of a minstrelizing bookkeeper. And I smoke and drink. But none of that matters, does it? Not where I'm going. I'm off for California tomorrow. By the way, did anybody ever tell you that your hair looks like a glass of sherry held to a strong light?"

"Then I won't see you again? Not ever?"

"Good-by, Jeanie."

THE *Telegraph* was to cast off at two in the afternoon. But at that hour, goods were still arriving. Departure was postponed to five. To seven. Finally the captain said he would positively start the paddles at ten forty-five.

Ten forty-five! Opportunity for another glimpse, after all, of Jane.

Leaving his boxes on board, Steve hurried to the brick house with the white door columns and the fanlight. Uncle Joe opened to his sharp knock. The colored man gave his rich chuckle and nodded his head toward the parlor, the door of which was closed. "Miss Jeanie in dere, Marse Stephen. Yes, *sah*. She in dere, but she got anodder caller coming!"

Steve, annoyed, turned the little white porcelain knob.

Jane was sitting on the little sofa of the low, curved arms, brooding at the fire. She sprang up.

"Steve! But you've gone!"

"What's this about you waiting for another caller?"

"It's only Dick Cowan. Did you expect every girl in Pittsburgh to sit home alone of evenings until you come back rich? Steve, what happened to your boat?"

"Starting's postponed until ten forty-five tonight."

"Then you shall sit by the fire with Dick and me. Here he is now!"

Uncle Joe's deep voice could be heard welcoming the newcomer. Presently Richard Cowan, a tall young lawyer in choker, wide tie, long-skirted coat, and well-shaped trousers strapped neatly under fine kid shoes, was shown into the room. His low bow over Miss Jane's hand, and his presentation of a nosegay bound in frilly paper, froze like a swift icing of the Monongahela when he saw Stephen. "Thought you were California-bound!"

"I am."

*It was impossible to shut his ears. The throngs jammed down yonder had heard: gold—real gold, in California!*

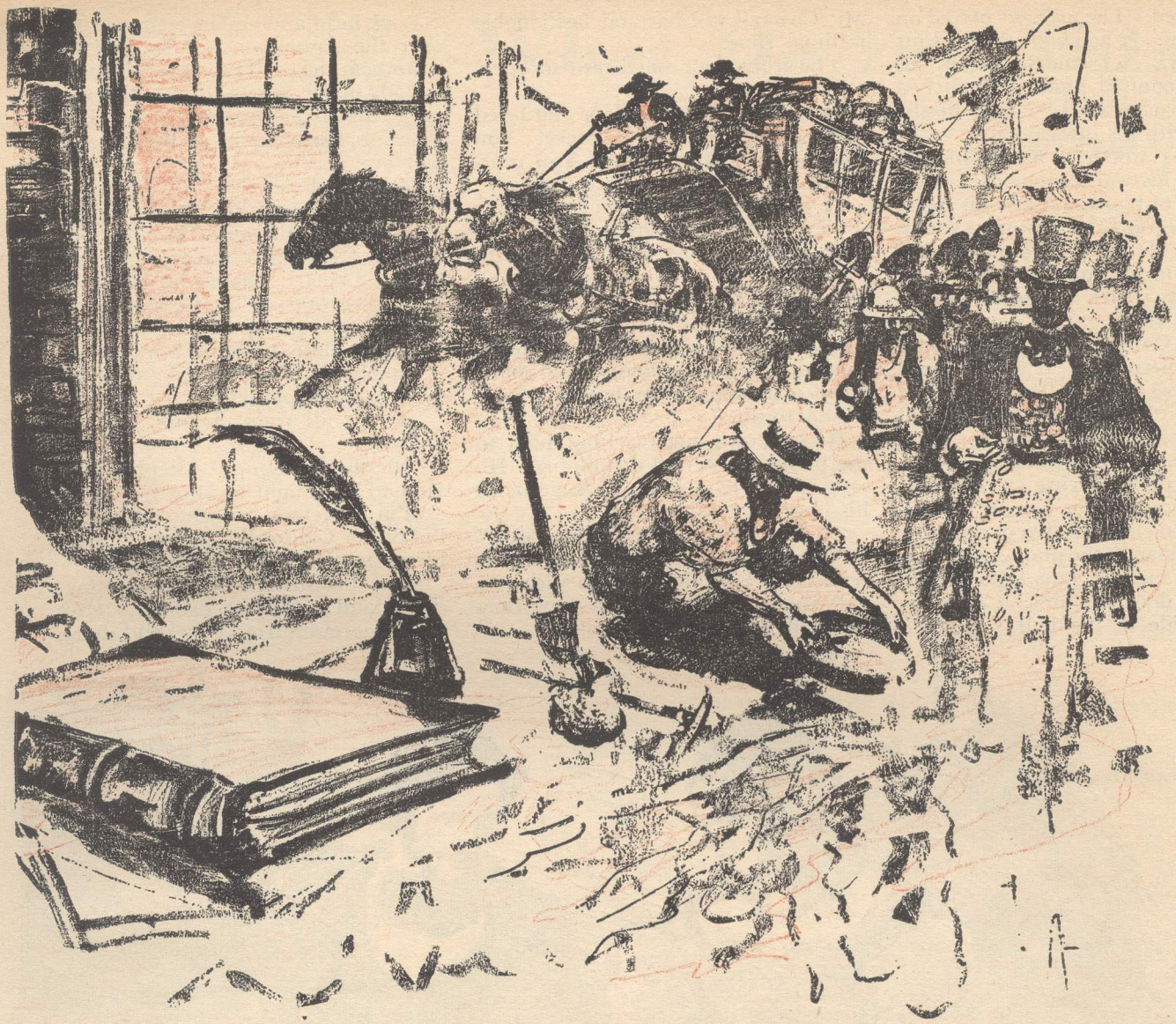
"One more victim caught by that ridiculous fever. It's worse than the cholera. I suppose you expect to make a fortune in three or four weeks?"

"We will all three have a pleasant chat," said Jane hurriedly. "Dick about his latest legal case, and Steve about his Cincinnati warehouse. Dick, take the rocker. Stephen, do stop that restless pacing."

Stephen stopped pacing. But, morose, he went to the window and looked out. Dick Cowan, confoundedly handsome and very distinguished-looking, slid comfortably into the rocker facing sofa and window.

Stephen turned his back on them both. He had not the slightest interest in Jane McDowell. Not the slightest. But he had supposed that he and she would have this unexpectedly granted evening to themselves. There wasn't a thing, not one thing, that a lawyer could contribute to the occasion. The faithfulness of women! Accepting another caller the instant one said good-by!

Through the parted blinds he could see the activity at the Landing. Blaz-



ing pine knots lit up the *Telegraph* from waterline to stack. Carts and wagons, barrels and boxes, omnibuses and hacks with trunks atop, card sharpers and loafers and hawkers and roustabouts, shouts and chanteys—it was the scene all over again that he knew well, but this time he was to be a part of it. He, with those men beginning to crowd the decks, was about to start on the long journey by many rivers, by plains, mountains, desert and more mountains. The journey to the diggings.

Clearly, but as from a distance, those sounds came through the glass panes.

Abruptly Stephen bent forward, listening intently. It was that resounding song again, with its challenging chorus, that he had heard being flung at Mr. Irwin's countinghouse window in Casilly's Row and so many times since—that swinging, rousing, uplifting, uproarious chant.

He glanced toward Richard Cowan and Jane McDowell. Richard's chin was sunk into his cravat. He was probably telling Jane, in confidential tones, something that had occurred in the courtroom. Something that had tested his acumen and prowess. Drat the conceited fellow!

JANE, after an exclamation, moved into the angle of her sofa. Perhaps he wasn't telling her about a courtroom incident after all. Perhaps he was pleading another kind of a case, and she was his judge and jury. If so, she was postponing her decision. The side of her face was toward Stephen. It was grave, composed. It was sweetly womanly. On the hearth beyond, antics of the yellow flame made Stephen think of campfires. Of campfires twinkling by hundreds, by thousands, on the endless overland trail.

That song from the docks, that booming, high-hearted chorus! It rose like a tocsin. It swelled. It pealed. Pine knots flickered down yonder on the Penn Street landing. Roustabouts yelled, barrows creaked, wheels rumbled.

The song changed to *"Hi-O, away we go."*

Steve moved over to Jane's piano. Her profile still was toward him. If he wanted to be in a difficult mood, plainly she didn't intend to be disturbed by it. Besides, she obviously had the well-to-do, brilliant Dick. Always, seemingly, she would have Dick. His tongue was smooth, his manner assured. He was, to Steve, a wholly abominable thought. Ah, but California offered gold! Gold would make Steve head and shoulders more important than he had ever been before. Not to Jane McDowell merely. To them all. To the pretty girls of every town on the Ohio River. He'd come back rich, and take his pick of them. Oh, he'd make them clamor for him! He'd return a success. No longer just a bookkeeper, a dreamer, a waster, a rover among waterside minstrels, an associate of theatrical riffraff. Gold! He'd bring it back a-plenty. Gold is where you find it. Well, Jane McDowell or her captivating like would find it spread in bagsful by his hand at her pretty feet.

Now she was laughing at something Richard Cowan had said. Her profile

was animated. The firelight played on her features. It heightened the glints in her hair. A theme sprang in his mind. It amused him. He touched the mother-of-pearl keys soundlessly, listening with his inward ear.

This was worth a memorandum. He felt in his waistcoat pocket, drew forth a bit of paper. It was his ticket on the *Telegraph*. He found a stump of pencil. He sat on the piano stool and began to jot squiggles and words.

Ten-thirty struck authoritatively in the mantel clock.

Richard Cowan, polite and proper young barrister, rose. It was the hour when suitors who called on young ladies in Pittsburgh were expected to ask for their hats and coats. Steve, still wrapped in his own broodings, saw Richard's inquiring eye turn his way. He scowled for answer. Richard shrugged elegantly, swept an ironic bow to the man at the piano, and whispered good night to Jane, who opened the parlor door for him. Uncle Joe stood outside in the hall. He held Mr. Cowan's tall hat and fashionable military cape.

The front door was heard to open, to close.

Jane shut the parlor door and faced about. She was angry. "Steve! You were so peculiar tonight! You practically forced me to ignore you."

"I was listening."

"To what Dick Cowan said? I'm quite convinced he talks like that to every girl. You mustn't let him vex you into surliness."

"I didn't pay any attention to what he said. I was harking to other things, some outside at the landing and some, all of a sudden, in my head. Listen, please, to this."

He sat down and twirling about to the piano, he started drumming. He sang in his light, pleasant baritone as his fingers moved.

"Why, Steve! It's really beautiful!"

"So are you. Strange, how I just realize it. Sing these words with me, will you? I want to hear how they sound from your lips."

Dark head and amber bent together over the scrawls on the back of the steamboat ticket. The room filled with melody in gay, wistful duet. *"I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair, Floating, like a vapor, on the soft summer air. . . ."*

"Oh, Stephen!"

"Jeanie! Jeanie McDowell, will you marry me? Will you be Mrs. Foster?"

"But, Stephen, you're going to California! You're leaving at once—you must hurry—or you'll miss your boat!"

"Jeanie, is it no or yes?"

A long blast shook the windows.

"Stephen! They must be dragging away the gangplank!"

"That's all right, Jeanie. I'm on board."

"On the *Telegraph?* Stephen, you are here! I ought to know!"

"I'm there too, on the steamboat. I'm off for California. Listen, Jeanie! Listen to those men singing."

From the steamboat's decks, above churn and splash of paddles, above yells of farewell from vessel and shore,

*As she talked to Cowan the firelight played on Jane's hair. . . . A theme sprang to Steve's mind. . . . He found a stump of pencil.*

came the chant. The anthem of men who were off on an epic journey. New scenes for old! New lives for old!

"It's my song, Jeanie. The one Mr. Peters published in Cincinnati when he published Old Uncle Ned. Hark!"

*"Oh! Susanna, don't you cry for me,*
*I'm off for California with my*
*basin on my knee."*

"It's my song!" The young man's eyes glowed. "They've changed *'Alabama'* to *'California'* and *'banjo'* to *'basin'*, that's all. It's my own song! I wrote it! Jeanie, I'm off with them wherever they go. Down the Ohio, up the Mississippi and the Missouri, across the Platte, up and over the Rocky Mountains, at their campfires, in their cabins at the diggings—yes, and on tall ships at sea—whoever they are and wherever they go, I'm marching in their hearts!"

"But, Steve, you've missed the steamboat. You'll never be rich."

The young man dragged her to him, ran his slender fingers through her

tresses, rumpled them, let them trickle and fall as a miser trickles his coins. "Jeanie! Jeanie darling! Jeanie of the light brown hair!"

Old black Joe, opening the door with Steve's coat on his arm, looked in, chuckled softly, and started to close the door. Somebody called from the upper floor. Mrs. McDowell, probably. "Joe!" repeated the voice gently.

"I'm coming!" Swiftly as his rheumatism and old bones would let him, he pattered up the stairs. Perhaps he had important news for the mistress above. "I'm coming!"

The parlor firelight danced in reflection on rosewood piano, on walls and mirrors. It glinted on Jeanie's head against her lover's breast. He tousled and stroked her flame-flecked hair, and it was indeed pure gold.

# What Do *You* Think?

## *A Readers' Forum*

**Conditions governing contributions to this department are the same as those for "My Most Amusing Experience," page 41.**

### Teacher of Heroes

OUR boys are coming back. They are once again in the classroom. They went away college boys; they have returned to us heroes. Not in their own estimation! Far from it. They take what they have done as a matter of course, a sense of duty. They say very little about their missions over the enemy lines, or the number of planes they shot down.

Teachers, even on the college level, seldom make the headlines or history. Their thrills come mostly from the reflected glory of the men and women they teach, men and women who later make the headlines. But now we are teachers of *heroes!* Something to crow about! Those men who sailed beyond the sunset, who had experiences which would make Jules Verne's deep-sea yarns mere baby-talk, who learned about the blue heavens as well as the blue sea, about Greenland's icy mountains as well as India's coral strands, are in my classes. They have Presidential citations and Congressional medals, but I have the pleasure of teaching them. Not "my boys," but "my heroes!"

Yes, I think it a delight to teach them. I think they deserve my best, and the best of every teacher who has the privilege of helping them. They gave their best for me, for my home and family. If I can show a wee bit of appreciation by helping them over a few thorny spots in my subject, let no one deny me that pleasure.

At first, the men were restless, often uncertain of themselves. They didn't know whether they were sick or well. They didn't know which courses they wanted, or should take. They had left us cocksure themselves but their experiences often left them uncertain, often afraid to express their own desires.

At any rate, when it came time for one man to show us his own kodak pictures of the "second-best bed," of the Ann Hathaway Cottage and other Shakespeare exhibits, he told us much about the dramatist that I could not give the class.

In short, why not use the experiences of these men? A teacher in a class of nutrition had a student who had spent ten months in a German concentration camp. He could add much to what the instructor knew about the minimum of what it takes for a man to live.

I was in World War I; and as I recall, we used to tell some amusing things about our experiences. That is, we saw a funny side. Not so these men now in my classes. They refuse to write on amusing subjects. Life to them is still a very serious matter. If it be true there were "no atheists in foxholes," it is also true there was no humor there. If there was any, our men do not remember it.

I rather enjoy teaching heroes. But I confess it is a bit humiliating.

*C. T. R.*

### One World to an Ambulance Driver

I FIND myself in a strange and unhappy situation. A short time ago I returned from three years in the Middle East, North Africa, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, England and India. I spent those years serving as a volunteer ambulance driver with the forces of our Allies. I have lived and served with men from England, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, India, France, Belgium, Holland, Poland, and even with men of the Italian Partisan Units.

I came to admire and respect and like these men, as much as I respect and like men from my own country. I found that most of the things that concern them concern me. What happens to them is important to me.

Spiritually, I am disturbed and shaken to the depths of my being by the ignorance, indifference and selfishness which are all too apparent in America today.

I have come home to find that I am regarded as a fool, and worse, because I admire and respect the "Limeys;" or because I disagree when someone says we are playing Santa Claus to the rest of the world. I find that the principles and faith that took me through some times that I don't like to remember have no place in my life here.

It seems to me that my fate is inextricably bound up with that of Sandy MacLeod of Glasgow; with that of a captain named Stefan of Cracow; with that of a Subadar Major I knew in Madras. It seems to me that it is one world. Maybe I'm wrong—but I don't think so.

*Charles Morrow Rector*

# JEDBURGH MISSION

THE softly lit London restaurant was alive with the hum of conversation; in the background an orchestra was playing; waiters bustled about bearing steaming dishes of what was known as the best food in London. Outside, on this June night of 1944 the darkened streets kept the Londoner ever-mindful of the threat of German raids; but here in this famous café, twenty-six-year-old Bob Anstett, a former fledgling Jackson Heights, N. Y., lawyer, now a member of the Office of Strategic Services, could for just these few hours forget that tomorow night he would be plunging from an airplane down into the darkness of enemy-occupied France. Looking about him at this socialite gathering—at the very next table sat Winston Churchill's daughter—Anstett could put from his mind what his colonel had said to him and the other men who would make up the Jedburgh Missions: "If any of you comes back from this alive, I won't be able to think of a medal high enough to give you!"

It had been in the summer of 1943 that the one-hundred-sixty-five pound Anstett, a graduate of Lafayette College recently commissioned after O.C.S. and now acting as aide to the commanding general at Camp Edwards, Mass., had first heard that the United States Government was seeking "volunteers for hazardous missions with guerrillas behind the lines." Receiving permission from his general, he put in his name. Several months later, when he had practically forgotten about it, he was suddenly ordered to Washington, where he joined one hundred and fifty other officers combed from Army installations in every part of the U. S.

It was then that Anstett found that he had been selected for duty with the famous Office of Strategic Services, that carefully chosen and highly trained group of men who, under the leadership of General William J. ("Wild Bill") Donovan, were to make new history in wartime sabotage and intelligence.

For two months the group, representing the finest and bravest available in the Army, were intensively trained and rigorously screened. They were told dispassionately by their instructors that their work would involve less than a fifty-fifty chance of survival. Gradually, through numerous aptitude and psychological tests, their number was reduced. Then on December 13, 1943, with the top fifty, Anstett was shipped to England.

Now it was that he learned momentous news—he was a member of the "Jedburghs," the legendary and highly successful secret international teams whose dangerous and heroic achievements with the European underground was to be hailed by the Supreme Allied Commander thus: "The disruption of enemy rail communications, the harassing of German road moves, and the continual and

# HAMISH

Some of the most exciting of all OSS operations were the exploits of the so-called Jedburgh teams of Allied officers who parachuted to the aid of the Maquis in France. Herewith the adventures of "Mission Hamish," commanded by Lt. Robert Anstett.

by Lt. Comdr. RICHARD M. KELLY, USNR

increasing strain placed upon the German war economy throughout occupied Europe by these organized forces of resistance played a very considerable part in our complete and final victory."

Born out of a Joint Chiefs of Staff desire to harness the resistance forces of occupied Europe to the main Allied military effort, the Jeds were a joint American, British, French, Belgian, Dutch effort. The final training, which took place at a huge secluded English country manor called Milton Hall, was probably the most extraordinary and unique of that given to any Allied soldiers in World War II. Each Jed team was made up of an American or British officer, an American or British radio-man, and an officer of the country where the team was scheduled to operate. Most Jeds were used in France. American participation was handled by OSS; the British sponsorship was under the comparable secret operations department of His Majesty's Government.

The Jeds' training consisted of weapons—American, British, French and German; instructions in living off the country, scouting, code, cipher, radio sending and receiving. They were taught about German police methods, and heard lectures by a survivor of the Gestapo brutality. It impressed them that there was only one such person available. Guerrilla tactics of surprise, hit and run were drilled into them. All forms of sabotage, and a thorough briefing on intelligence were stressed. In short, they were given every available bit of information that would qualify them to train, lead and direct the underground forces with maximum effectiveness.

The greatest care was given to the formation of the Jed teams. For weeks, various members would "court" each other. Complete confidence in the ability, courage and loyalty of every member was vital to a successful team. Anstett had to find the man in company with whom he would risk his life. A weakness, a lack of compatibility, a betrayal under German torture would mean death. Small wonder that the selection or mating period was called "courting," or that once a team was mutually agreed upon, that its confirmation by the Commanding Officer at Milton Hall was called a "marriage." These daring young officers were choosing partners for their Jedburgh missions with a great deal more care and less emotion than many of them would probably apply to their brides.

During the training period, Anstett had been impressed with Lt. Lucien Blanchère, a slim young French officer, and was delighted when they agreed to parachute into France together. Blanchère was a former schoolteacher and graduate of the University of Strasbourg. He spoke not only French and English but German, and all German dialects. As for their radio-man—Anstett had met a Sergeant Lee Wa-

*and* EXPERIENCE

ters when they were opposing pitchers in an officer-versus-enlisted men baseball game. He was an excellent radio operator, and in all respects a good companion. So was formed Jed team "Hamish."

D Day came, and with it a tremendous disappointment. Why were they not already in France? Then, several days later, Anstett was called from a training problem to the office of the C.O. to hear the momentous and almost unbelievable message: "Your mission is ready!"

He rushed to break the news to Lucien; the young Frenchman's face glowed with happiness—he was going back to fight for his France. Their turn had finally come—all three gathered their vital gear and were rushed to London for the final briefing.

It was here that Anstett learned for the first time what his destination was to be. They were to drop into the Département of Indre near the town of Châteauroux in the middle of occupied France. They would be 190 miles south of Paris, and roughly 350 miles behind the German battle lines in Normandy.

The Paris-Limoges railway ran through their area, and their principal mission was to cut it and keep it cut. In addition, they were to recruit, organize, arm, train and lead French underground forces in harassing attacks against all roads, bridges, transportation and communications. Other directives were to furnish London with all possible intelligence on German troop movements, and prepare their underground forces for an all-out effort when the word came. It was a big job, but they were well prepared and eager to tackle it. Their reception was to be handled by another Jed team that had gone in a week before.

THE final hours in London were busy ones and carefully supervised. From the moment they had received their final briefing on the details of the mission, they were guarded day and night by security officers who never left them—even on the evening of their final farewell dinner in the exclusive London restaurant.

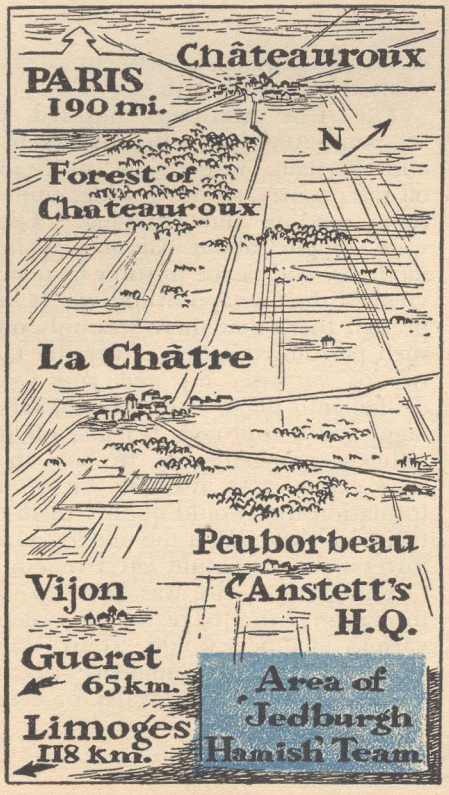
It was just twenty-eight hours after that dinner that Anstett, a bulky armed figure in the darkness, stood before his commander, ready for the start of the mission.

"We had made a final check of our identification papers, the password, our radio, codes and personal gear. They asked us if we wanted to take any 'sleeping pills.' These were quick-acting poison capsules supplied to agents. If captured by the Germans, they assured one of a quick death without torture. All of us refused to take any—we intended to stay alive as long as we could.

"We took off in a B-24 at 10:29 on the night of June 12—just six days after the invasion. I really think the plane-ride was the worst part of our operation. Our route took us over Saint Nazaire, and we touched off a terrific anti-aircraft barrage. All of us were worried about German night fighters, because ours was a solo flight. I remember just sitting there with that stuff bursting all around us. My greatest fear was that we might all be killed before we had a chance to get started. Fortunately we came through the flak okay, and were soon preparing for our jump.

"Lucien had begged for the chance to go first because he was a Frenchman, so I consented. Sgt. Waters was to go next, and I was to be the last. The pilot found the signal fires all right, and after circling for a minute we started our run. We were all pretty nervous when the dispatcher started dropping the packages. We didn't have much time, as both our supplies and the three of us were to go out on the one run.

"Lucien and Waters were there one minute, and had vanished the next. Then I was plunging into the darkness myself. My 'chute had a slight malfunction, and I dropped very fast. The first thing I noticed after the 'chute opened were the fires dead ahead of me at eye-level. I barely had time to get my feet set when I crashed into the ground. I knew then that we had jumped at about three hundred feet. Fortunately I was all right; above all, I had a great feeling of elation at knowing that at last I was in France.




"I had landed in a wheatfield, and after getting out of my harness I headed toward the fires, where I could hear shouting in French. When the voices were about fifty yards from me, I shouted the password in French: *'Does Grandfather like milk?'* Back through the smoky air came the answering shout: *'Yes, only when he's in the woods!'* Then the question, *'Who are you?'* When they heard I was an American, they went wild with joy, and after a dozen embraces I was led to the fires, where I met the local underground leaders and Jed team 'Hugh,' who had arranged for our reception.

"MY first concern was for my men, and I was shocked to find that my radio-man had nearly been killed in the drop. He had got caught in a spin which had almost collapsed his 'chute, and had hit the ground while still spinning. Both his legs and ankles were badly sprained, and he was terribly shaken up. This near-tragedy could have ruined our mission from the start, as we would have been in a bad way without contact with London.

"Once Lee was taken care of, I had a chance for a real talk with the members of Hugh and the local leaders, who were now busy directing the gathering of all our supplies. To my great surprise, the containers were quickly packed into a big truck which the underground had on hand. I was amazed at this degree of organization, and began to think we should be able to do a really big job with such a start. The other Jeds gave me the dope on the Département of Indre, which we were to split between us.

"We all sat down for chow then, and the air was filled with *'Vive la France; vive l'Amerique; vive la victoire!'* The underground leaders were greatly impressed with my credentials, which were signed by both General Eisenhower and General Koenig, head of the French resistance. We had one day's rest, and then made the preparations for the trip to our area of operations. I was pretty worried about Sgt. Waters, because it was very evident that he would not be able to walk for some time—in fact, he still walks with a limp today. Early on our first morning we had seen our first Germans, when one of their planes came hedge-hopping over the dropping area; but since every sign of the drop had been removed, we were not too worried, although we knew now that our arrival had been marked by them.

"The trip to our part of Indre was accomplished in an old car. I was amazed at the casualness with which the Maquis seemed to cruise along over these roads in broad daylight. I was slightly apprehensive all during

the ride—especially after we ran straight through a German convoy at a crossroads, passing within fifty yards of an armed German truck. Our French escorts were so calm about this meeting that I was not aware of it until we suddenly burst into high speed. The Germans evidently were as surprised as I, because they did not follow us.

"We finally arrived at the farmhouse which was serving as headquarters of the leaders of my Maquis. Here I met Robert, the local chief. He was a tall, clean-cut young Frenchman of twenty-four who had been working in the underground for four years. He had about three hundred men, but only fifty of these were armed. Their spirit was wonderful, however, and our arrival seemed to give them a tremendous lift. The first news I heard of their activities was disconcerting. Just the week before, they had celebrated D Day by attacking the local German garrison. This battle had lasted all day, and they had used not only every type of weapon that they had—which would tell the Germans of their potential striking force—but had also used up most of their available ammunition. This was serious, as I discovered we were in no position to counter a German attack. I immediately wired London for a supply drop.

"The first night, I organized a squad of five men and we went out to blow the Paris-Limoges railroad. This proved to be a cinch. There was a road running along by the railroad. We just drove down this road and stopped every few hundred yards and blew the tracks. We made twenty-four cuts that night and the same number the next two nights. The Germans would come out and fix it in the daytime, and we would blow it again at night. After the first three nights I didn't go out any more myself, but organized a special group which had no other assignment. From the time that we entered the region until we left, not a single German train got through on that railroad, and we never lost a man while accomplishing it—though there were plenty of close calls.

*"I grinned and said: 'Well, Mac, how do you feel?' 'Good Lord,' he said, 'are you an American?'"*

"WITH my primary mission in hand—the interruption of the railroad—I next made a study of the problems confronting us: The German concentrations in my area were altogether too big to be comforting. At Châteauroux, about a half-hour's drive to our north, was an airfield where they were training Stuka pilots. A large German force serviced the field and the anti-aircraft installations around it. They had an additional three thousand mixed troops billeted in the town itself. I knew that our poorly armed three hundred could offer but slim opposition to these forces, particularly with the air strength which the Germans could throw against us.

"The population as a whole was against the Germans, but there were plenty of Gestapo agents and Vichy sympathizers whose presence made the existence of the underground extremely perilous. I immediately had Robert tighten up on his security regulations. Another serious factor was the Nazi propaganda to the effect that we were all bandits and terrorists, which very cleverly aimed at splitting the country people from the Maquis forces. This propaganda was particularly aimed at British and American parachutists. To combat this, and to enlist recruits, I planned a number of trips to the small Maquis camps in the area, to show them that an Allied team had actually come to fight with them and for them. Finally I realized that our greatest need was for supplies and a training program to instruct these expected volunteers in the weapons we hoped they would use against the Germans.

"The first drop came a few days after my arrival, and started us off in grand style with the Maquis. Four planes came over; and when Robert saw the tons of weapons and ammo that were in the containers, he wanted to take on the whole German army. Lucien set up a training program, and as the planes came streaming over—four every forty-eight hours—recruits joined up by the hundreds.

"Our mission was billeted in a small out-of-the-way farming settlement called Peuborbeau. We all slept

in separate houses to cut down the chances of a total loss in case of a betrayal. Several times we had some bad scares when German patrols were reported in the area. Each time we took to the fields, because we never knew whether or not the reports were true. On these occasions my radio operator would have to be carried to a hiding-place, and we spent many hours crouching in the bushes with our weapons ready, but fortunately we never had to use them.

"WHILE Sgt. Waters kept himself busy handling radio traffic and trying to get himself into shape, Lucien developed our training program, teaching the French how to use the weapons we were receiving from London, and I devoted most of my time to building our organization, arranging for the reception of our supply drops and planning additional sabotage operations.

"The railroad-cutting was proceeding very well, so I next turned my attention to blowing bridges and interrupting road traffic. Our first targets were a couple of small culverts which we blew without interference. The ease with which these first small operations were accomplished made a great impression on the French, and I soon had a large group learning how to handle explosives and undertake operations on their own.

"The reaction of the Germans to our railroad and road activities was prompt and emphatic. Seven hundred specially trained anti-Maquis Austrian troops moved into La Chatre, which was less than five miles from our headquarters. These troops started the usual terrorizing of the population, and we had to be continually on the alert, for their heavily armed patrols were constantly sweeping the countryside on the hunt for us.

"This new threat made our position extremely precarious, for our forces were in no way able to stand up to a determined German attack. And I was therefore chiefly concerned about building our own intelligence set-up which could warn us of the German movements in time for us to keep ahead of them.

"While I was pondering over this difficulty one day, Robert brought me two men who I immediately discovered held the principal answer to the problem. They were telephone workers, and came to our camp to offer their services. After their security had been thoroughly checked, we explained that we had to stop the German communication system for the Département, and needed some sort of quick system ourselves.

"One of the two looked at the other. 'That's simple,' he said. 'You cut; I repair!'

"Their system was really as simple as that, and it was also completely effective. Their telephone company was of course controlled by the Germans, and used by them for all their local communications. One of them took the job of traveling around in his official car and cutting the lines. He would report the breaks (which he had 'discovered') to his partner, who would then take his time about repairing them. Their perfect knowledge of the telephone installations made it possible for them always to keep the line cut in strategic places without arousing German suspicion. From the time they started their unique campaign under the very noses of their German supervisors, the enemy's telephones were kept continuously out of operation.

"On the positive side they were just as helpful. Not content with depriving the Germans of communication, they stole wires and telephones and set up a complete system for us. This enabled us to keep a pretty accurate check on German moves from our various hidden outposts, so that we were always able to withdraw and disperse when an enemy force came after us.

"In addition to using the regular French telephone system, the Germans had also set up a separate military telephone line which served all their units in France. My French telephone allies reported to me that there was a small guarded cement building in Châteauroux which was the nerve-center for this military system. They also produced five telephone workers' caps, so I immediately planned a sabotage operation to destroy this vital objective. To lead this mission I selected Pacqueton, the commander of our Second Battalion, veteran of four years in the underground, a nineteen-year-old whose courage, ability and leadership were outstanding among the Maquis in our area. He selected four of his best men, and together we made an elaborate plan, prepared the charges and rehearsed the operation.

"Because of the danger in moving about the roads at night with the increased German guards and patrols, it was decided to make the attempt in broad daylight. High noon was chosen as the best time, in the hope that complete surprise could be effected. The disguised men coolly drove into the city and approached the sub station as if on official business. The explosives were carried in their 'repair kits.' Fortunately, there was only one guard outside at the time, and while one of the group diverted his attention, the rest rushed into the building and began to place their charges of plastic explosive.

"They had originally planned to set them strategically so as to blast the equipment. But suddenly the man outside signaled an alarm—he had spotted more Germans approaching. Hastily the men piled their charges together, set the fuses and took off in their car. As they were pulling away from the surprised German, the blast went off and leveled the building, completely wrecking the installation.

"While these activities were going, we kept receiving additional drops, the organization of which kept me going nearly twenty-four hours a day. The dropping grounds at which Robert had previously received an occasional container or two had been in use for several years. They were inadequate for our mass drops, and I was also concerned about their security, so I set up five new pinpoints. The Maquis manning these fields became so expert, and our distribution system so effective, that arms which hit the ground at two o'clock in the morning were cleaned, inspected, loaded and in the hands of a proud Maquisard by ten the same morning.

"On the Fourth of July we learned that a large German truck loaded with butter had broken down in La Châtre. This was a tempting proposition, and immediately we set about taking advantage of it. A relief truck had already been dispatched by the Germans to pick up the butter, and a squad of our men was sent to ambush it. The ambush was a complete success, the truck captured and the driver killed. Then Pacqueton took a squad and immediately infiltrated into the town itself—the stronghold of the seven hundred German troops who had been sent to exterminate us.

"They loitered around, calmly observing the repair of the truck by a work crew. The job finished, the crew gathered up their tools and walked off to headquarters to report the truck repaired. The drivers approached, and in a flash Pacqueton and his men jumped the truck and stabbed the drivers, throwing their bodies into the rear. The men scrambled for cover in the back; Pacqueton and another chap took their places in the front, and casually started the vehicle. They rolled calmly out of the town through the German-patrolled streets, receiving only a cursory glance or two from the troops who assumed that this was the repaired truck on its way again.

"IT was the type of exploit that appealed to the French, who loved to show up the hated Germans, and every face was beaming as the truck finally rolled into our headquarters with its fifteen tons of butter. This was my special present for Fourth of July, they informed me; and believe me, I had never seen so much butter in my life. Since I've been back in the States, I have often thought of all that butter! We gave it away to the people from whom the Germans had

taken it. Naturally this *coup* made the Germans mad as hell. They broadcast that underground bandits had stolen the butter which they had been 'sending to the relief of the starving people of Paris.' This gave the French a laugh, because we knew mighty well it was scheduled to go to the German Army.

"Several days after this exploit one of our agents reported that an old man who knew a great deal about our organization had been seen going into the house of the Gestapo official in the near-by town of Gueret. This treachery caused us to move our headquarters immediately from Peuborbeau to Vijon, where we set up again. Two days later some of our men caught the traitor; he confessed and was quickly shot.

"TO celebrate Bastille Day, I called for an extra-heavy supply drop, and my headquarters came through gloriously with seven plane-loads. The Maquis were hilarious, and I had more difficulty than ever keeping them in line. After four years of suffering the arrogance of the Germans without means of striking back, they were overwhelmingly anxious to get even. I knew very well, however, that they were still no match for the specially trained German troops, and my orders were to build up my forces for the time when we could catch the Germans on the run. At the moment I realized that the odds were still all against us, as was soon emphasized.

"On Sunday the sixteenth of July we sent a couple of trucks back to Peuborbeau to pick up some extra supplies which we had been forced to leave behind when we retreated to Vijon. On their way back, about two miles from our new headquarters, our trucks ran headlong into a German light-armored car, which immediately opened up on them. Our men replied with machine-guns, and after a fifteen-minute exchange both sides withdrew, leaving one of our loaded trucks damaged and the other completely destroyed.

"This engagement could not have caught us at a worse time. It was Sunday afternoon, and the men were celebrating the success of our big drop. Many of their wives and sweethearts from the near-by towns were visiting them in the woods, and in spite of my intense concern for our situation, I couldn't help being amused at the sight of a large number of frightened screaming French girls rushing out of the woods, followed by their menfolk hastily strapping on their ammunition belts and carrying their weapons. War and Germans were never able to curb the French seriously at their lovemaking.

"We badly needed the supplies on that second truck that had not been

*"One took the job of traveling around and cutting the lines. . . . The enemy's telephones were kept continuously out of operation."*

destroyed, so I hastily ordered out a vehicle with Challou, our master mechanic, to bring the damaged truck back. Menwhile, our leaders got their men together, and I dispatched two sections of sixty men to reinforce the perimeter defenses around our camp. Challou drove up to the damaged truck and was bending over the engine when a German column consisting of nine armored cars, three truckloads of soldiers, a 37-mm. cannon and several 20-mm. pieces came barreling down the road and opened up on him. He and several of those with him were immediately killed, but fortunately our supporting sections, which had been ordered to hold at all costs, were able to stem the German rush.

"I REALIZED the situation was critical: the Germans not only had superior firepower and better-trained troops, but also outnumbered us. The only thing in our favor was that it was now about two in the afternoon, and I believed that if we could hold them off until nightfall, we might be able to withdraw under cover of darkness.

"We immediately set up defenses on all roads in our area and rushed every available man up to hold our lines. By two-thirty we had five hundred men in position with about the same number of Germans opposing them. Our men dug in and held their ground very well, and we were finally able to check the German advance about a mile from our camp.

"While this fighting,—our first real pitched battle with German troops,—was going on, a little Spanish Maquisard heard that the Germans had set up a command post in a house of a small village about three hundred yards behind their lines. Taking three grenades, he crawled slowly right through their lines and worked his way to the house from which the German offensive was being directed. Carefully biding his time between couriers, he eluded the sentries, tossed his three grenades through the windows of the house and raced off. This courageous act, one of the bravest things I ever heard of, killed the German colonel in charge of the column, and his executive officer. It also seriously disrupted the German drive, and we managed to hold them off until darkness, when they withdrew in the direction of Châteauroux.

"While the battle was going on, we had been preparing furiously to move out ourselves, and all that night we retreated to a new position in the thickly wooded country about eight kilometers north of Vijon. Our losses in the battle were fifteen killed and three wounded. We didn't get the details on the German casualties, which must have been as much or more; but it was announced in the newspaper

*"He crawled right through their lines . . . killed the German colonel."*

and over the radio at Châteauroux that we were to be exterminated for killing the commander of the force. A price of one million francs was put on every member of Jed team Hamish—dead or alive.

"For the next few days all of us lived in a state of suspension—one hour we would feel comparatively safe; the next, as though the trap were ready to spring. As I had expected, the Nazis came back in force to Vijon the very day after we had left, but we had apparently melted away, and they could find no trace of us.

"They kept searching the area intensively with light observation planes and small patrols. They were out after us—and this time, we all knew, they meant to get us. There was scarcely an hour of the day when an alarm wasn't sounded and we would have to take cover. I canceled all supply drops and suspended all activities. If they ever spotted us, there would be an all-out attack; and at this stage of the game it was only common sense to face the fact that this would mean capture, with torture and death, for most of us.

"For five days we sweated it out, and then my intelligence brought me the most discouraging news I had had to date. Two full German divisions, recently transferred from the Eastern front, had just completed a mop-up of the Maquis in the Département of Creuse immediately to my south. Now, London had warned me that in the event of an all-out German attack, I was to retreat south to the Creuse, where there was a large Allied military mission and a strong Maquis. The Creuse was mountainous country which lent itself to Maquis operations much more than Indre, which was quite open and very flat.

"I was pretty sure that these two divisions would come after us next. If we did retreat southward to the mountains, we stood no chance of getting any help. Furthermore, the Germans were probably anticipating a retreat to the south. I resolved to fool them—I would head north, meanwhile dispersing our men into the smallest possible units and trying to avoid any contact, however minor, with German forces, since the one thought that London had drummed into us was: 'Conserve your strength!'

"Accordingly we moved north to the vicinity of Beddes, where we spread our Maquis over an area of about thirty square miles. We had received some wonderful walkie-talkie radios in our last drop; and these plus the help of our telephone men, enabled us to keep constant contact with all our units. Our intelligence coverage was really remarkable for such a wide area.

"At Beddes we established liaison with another Maquis of twelve hundred men from the Département of Cher to the north. They had no link with London, so we radioed for another Jedburgh team to take over their direction.

"AT this point we were all tense; the men were extremely jumpy, and I found myself hard put to it to keep from getting the same way. Then an incident happened that gave us all a little chuckle.

"I had with me a group of Communist Maquis whom I knew very little about. To try them out, I dispatched a squad on an operation to destroy a German grenade factory. I was sitting outside our chateau several days later when I saw the group returning. The leaders came up to report—they had been unsuccessful in their attack on the factory, but had managed to kill thirty-three Germans without loss to themselves.

"I was congratulating them on what I considered a pretty good show, when

I noticed a little cluster of my men talking excitedly over at the left. In their midst stood a little fellow in the battered remnants of an U. S. Army Air Corps uniform. He was gesturing wildly, and from what I could hear of the conversation was attempting to say something in atrocious French. My curiosity was aroused; more than that, my suspicions. Behind the lines, any newcomer was suspect; but now in our extremely dangerous situation, this fellow might well mean our betrayal and death.

"I walked over to the group. The little fellow looked up at me hopefully. Since I was dressed in civilian clothes because we were on the run, he had no clue to my nationality, and desperately he started to jabber his would-be French. I could understand just enough to know that he was trying to say that he was an American pilot; I could see from his appearance that he had been badly shaken up. Evidently he had bailed out over our territory, and had been rescued by my group.

"I casually laid my hand on his shoulder, grinned and said: 'Well, Mac, how do you feel?'

"Never have I seen such an expression of amazement. His voice was weak with relief. 'Good Lord,' he said, 'are you an American?'

"HAD it not been for the shape he was in, he would have presented a ludicrous picture; but as it was I could feel nothing but sympathy for him. I had one of our doctors fix him up, and then I asked him what he would like for dinner.

"He looked up at me and laughed. 'A nice thick steak with French fried potatoes, red wine—and champagne for dessert!'

"I said 'Okay!' and three-quarters of an hour later the pilot, whose name was Albert Debecker, sat down to just that meal. He couldn't believe it, ate every bit ravenously, and between mouthfuls told me that he had been operating his P-51 in support of Patton from an advanced airfield in France where the only chow had been K and ten-in-one rations. Our food supply situation at Beddes happened at that time to be very good, and it gave me great satisfaction to be able to surprise a fellow-American with such a feast.

"He asked me if he could radio his friends back at the base about the chow he had discovered, and promised me that if I would let him send the message, the whole squadron would bail out in short order! Several days later we picked up a B-24 pilot, and sent him and the grateful Debecker north to the American lines with some guides.

"On the fifth of August a courier brought us news that a detachment of French Mélice, the Vichy militia whom the Maquis hated even more than the Germans, were proceeding from Mont Lucan to Châteauroux to pick up some gasoline. I was very anxious to get that gas for our own trucks. I dispatched ambush parties to points along every possible road that the Mélice party could take and then sat back and waited.

*"In broad daylight Jacques boldly sought out the leading French collaborator and shot him down."*

*Illustrated by John McDermott*

"Sure enough, they came down on one of our ambushes, but unfortunately our information underestimated their strength, because now our section of thirty found themselves attacking eighty Mélice. These Vichyites were very tough customers when fighting the Maquis, because they knew that capture meant death, which was what they themselves meted out to any Maquis they caught. They were prepared to fight to the death—and fight they did.

"Our men found it impossible to capture the gas trucks, so they blasted them with bazookas and then withdrew after killing nineteen Mélice, including the wife of the leader, who was riding in the cab of the first truck. This failure was rotten luck for us, particularly since the survivors had got away, and I knew that the Mélice, being French, would be harder to avoid than the Germans. My fears in this respect were to be justified sooner than I realized then.

"The next night, August 6, we received the new Jed team that was to take over the Maquis in the Département of Cher. This turned out to be a grim task. One of the team members, an American sergeant radio-man, a good friend of both Waters and myself, was killed in the drop. A piece of a container broke as it left the plane and then hit his 'chute, causing it to deflate. He dropped to his death. The other two men on the team had misfortunes on the drop too. The French officer landed all right, but on landing whipped out his forty-five and in his excitement accidentally shot himself in the foot. The English officer, in charge of the team, had badly sprained his legs when he hit the ground.

"The next day we held funeral services for our friend in a small village church. While the services were going on, a courier rushed in to report that five German trucks were headed for one of our near-by camps. We cut the ceremonies short and rushed out to set up an ambush which was very successful—twenty-two German dead, with no casualties for us.

"Several nights later a suspicious character, a twenty-one-year-old Frenchman, was picked up outside my headquarters. He was interrogated and finally admitted that he was a Mélice agent and had been sent to capture or assassinate 'the American officer.' He implicated nine others in his confession, and they were all quickly picked up, tried before the Maquis military court and sentenced to be shot for treason.

"The executions caused considerable interest around the countryside, and quite a few people came to witness them. The young Frenchman asked to see me, and I had a talk of several hours with him before he went to his death. He asked me a good deal about the United States, our system of government and the kind of people we were, and then he admitted to me that he was sorry and realized now that he had made a mistake. He was particularly sorry that he was going to be shot on the charge of treason, and asked me if he might command his own firing-squad,

to show the crowd that he was a real Frenchman and could die bravely.

"I asked the Maquis leaders what they thought of this and recommended that he be granted his request. They agreed, and I went outside to witness one of the most extraordinary spectacles I will ever see.

"IT was midsummer, and the prisoner was stripped to the waist. He was led over to a building off the village square and given the traditional glass of wine and last cigarette which the custom of French justice decrees for doomed men.

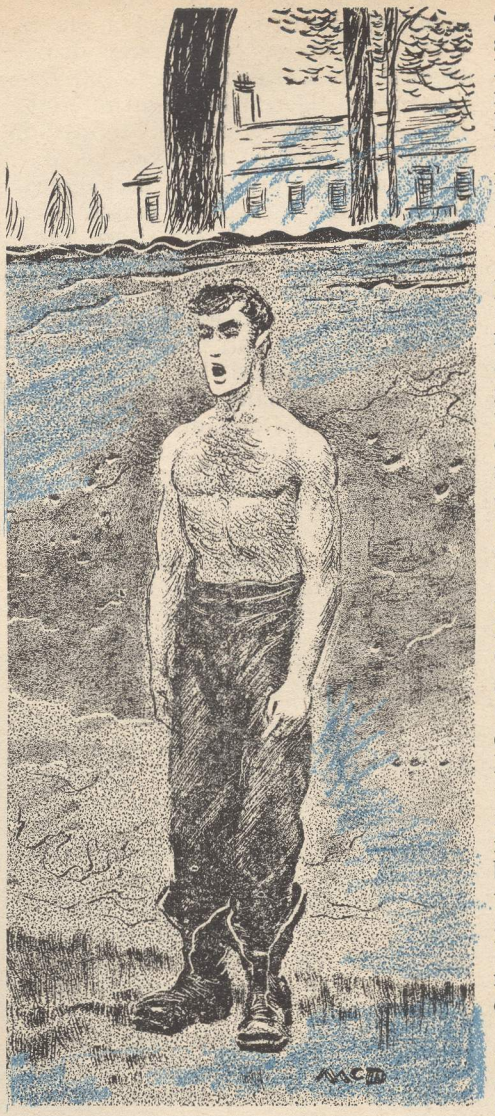
"Calmly he drank his wine and smoked his last cigarette. Then he called the firing-squad to attention. 'Aim at the heart!' he said, pointing to the left side of his chest. Then he made a little speech in which he admitted his crime and asked the forgiveness of his people.

"He took up his position against the wall, looked straight at his twelve executioners and then, without a tremor in his voice, slowly gave the commands: 'Ready! Aim! Fire!' The bullets ripped into his body, and he fell dead, a brave but misguided man who had been a victim of Nazi propaganda. The crowd was hushed, their last token of respect. . . .

"That same day the other nine Mélice spies were shot in another camp.

"General Patton was rocketing across France at this time, and I began receiving reports that the Germans were getting jittery. My radio was also coming through with warnings that something big was to be expected soon and we should be ready for an all-out effort on German communications. The night before, August 14th, we received word of the Allied invasion of southern France, which was to take place the next morning. Immediately we intensified our railroad-cutting activities and set up roadblocks all over our area.

"Our forces were now built up to approximately two thousand well-armed men, and I felt that we would be ready for the big push when the orders came or the local situation should develop. Our main target was the Châteauroux airfield, and I made elaborate plans for its capture. We were greatly helped in these preparations by two German deserters from the airfield who gave us details of the installations and defenses. Another character who was very helpful in this regard was a fabulous Maquisard named Jacques. He had been a member of the local underworld, and with the organization of our group had readily shifted over to the underground. Jacques outfitted himself with false papers attesting to the fact that he was a member of the French Mélice. He had a high-speed motor-car with two Bren guns—kept constantly loaded—protruding from the roof for fore-and-aft firing.



*"Without a tremor in his voice he gave the commands: 'Ready! Aim! Fire!'"*

"In this car and with three buddies, Jacques put his experience at eluding the authorities to good use. He performed some truly incredible exploits. He was first brought to my attention when, several days after our big battle at Vijon, he raced into Châteauroux, forced his way into the hospital and spirited away one of our Maquis boys who had been wounded and captured by the Germans.

"Jacques had a fierce hatred of collaborators. It was he who was driven into the town in broad daylight and in best American underworld fashion boldly sought out the leading French collaborator and shot him down in the street. His real *tour de force,* however, was the assassination of the Gestapo chief at Châteauroux. He had heard that this German was dining at a certain restaurant. He walked into the café, inquired of a waiter where the German was, walked over to the man's table and calmly shot him four times as he sat there. Later that day he learned that the man had not died but was in the town hospital. Obtaining entry to the patient's room with his false papers, he marched up to the bed and stabbed the man dead with his knife, then walked out of the hospital.

"Jacques and his cronies kept us pretty well posted on German moves in Châteauroux. I was just about ready for our projected attack on the airfield when I received word on August 20th that the German garrison was starting to move out. This was our signal for all-out warfare—the climax of our whole mission. I gave orders for an all-out attack. We were thoroughly ready and for the next seven days we really went to town.

"The whole operation was directed from my command post in a farmhouse about fifteen miles south of Châteauroux. Our telephone radio and courier system blanketed the entire area, and we had ambush parties deployed along every possible road or held in reserve to strike at our direction. Our tactics were simple but effective. Each section, consisting of from thirty to fifty men armed with bazookas and machine-guns, automatic weapons and grenades, would prepare an ambush, the length of which would be determined by the amount of ammunition allotted to each man for each particular operation.

"The first German column of two thousand men started moving out at two o'clock in the morning of August 21st. Unfortunately they headed north, away from our main strength, but we hit them with every available man and it took them twenty-four hours to move less than fifty miles. This column was motorized and very well armed, but our pressing tactics cost them about half their transport and over three hundred killed before they managed to leave the Département.

"THE following afternoon we had word that a second column was heading south in the direction of La Châtre. This would take them within a few miles of our main camp. First reports put this column at one hundred and fifty cyclists but they turned out to be one thousand strong. Our first ambush position was betrayed to the Germans by a man whom we later apprehended and shot. The Germans streamed steadily down the road toward our hidden men and then stopped about two hundred and fifty yards away to bring heavy fire down on our ambush. We lost nineteen men because of that betrayal, but the survivors managed to escape and join the others at the next lower ambush, where they got their revenge.

"We attacked that column almost continuously in hit-and-run raids for

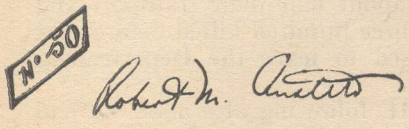
three days, the time it took them to go fifty-eight miles. We chased them completely off all main roads, killed over three hundred of them, wounded many more and so demoralized them that few ever got back to Germany.

"For that six-day period which was climaxed by the liberation of Châteauroux on August 27th, we killed over seven hundred Germans and destroyed more than a hundred vehicles. Considering that they outnumbered us two to one and had superior firepower, I felt that those Maquis did an outstanding job. Our losses were only thirty killed and a few wounded.

"When we entered Châteauroux the population went wild with joy at their liberation. Wine and champagne flowed freely and we were hailed as conquering heroes. I was in the middle of a victory drink with some of my leaders when the chief of neighboring Maquis asked me to go to London to see if we could get the help of two armored divisions from General Eisenhower to trap the estimated two hundred thousand Germans who were still in western France and were expected through our area on their way back to Germany. We had a plane due that same night to pick up another Air Corps pilot who had crashed in our area, and I agreed to return to Allied headquarters and make the request.

"Within a few hours after I had been directing an all-out fight to the death with a large part of a German division, I was back in England in the comparatively quiet refuge of OSS headquarters.... It was a very strange feeling. I understand our request was immediately sent up to SHAEF, but as all available troops were already committed, it was rejected.

NAME OF BEARER.




SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

Assistance to Allied Forces.

The bearer of this document is a regular member of the Allied Forces under the command of General Eisenhower whose object is the liberation of your territory from the enemy.

It is required that you should give such members of the Allied Forces any assistance which they may require and which may lie within your power, including freedom of movement, provision of information, provision of transport where possible and provision of food and shelter.

The Supreme Allied Commander counts upon your assistance in carrying out his wishes as expressed above, which are hereby endorsed by the French High Command.

By command of General Eisenhower.

Signed .....
KOENIG

General Commanding
Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur

"I was anxious to get back to my men, and I finally wangled a plane-ride to Limoges and then drove through the German lines to our Département. Here I found an interesting situation: Nineteen thousand German troops, harassed by the Maquis, including my group, had agreed to give up if they could march to a spot where a large American force would take their surrender.

"The German commander was afraid that if his men gave up to the Maquis or FFI, as they were also called, they would be slaughtered. Knowing how many of my own men felt about the Germans, I could appreciate his attitude. The surrender was finally agreed to, and though we didn't bag the whole two hundred thousand, we at least helped several other Jed teams and some American officers to catch nineteen thousand in addition to those we killed on our own.

"This surrender cleaned up Indre, which was never actually liberated by an Allied force other than the part played by Jedburgh Missions, and the Maquis. Our final action ended on a note of tragedy when Albert, the leader of our railroad sabotage group which had kept the Paris-Limoges railroad cut every night since our arrival, was killed—ironically enough, when he went forward to tell his troops to break off the battle with elements of the already surrendered German force."

Several days later Jed team Hamish returned to London by way of Paris, and from London, Anstett was shipped back to the United States in November, 1944. Several months of training and preparation, and he was in the air bound for China and another parachute operation that he recalls with a shake of his head. Sitting reminiscing in the law office of Kenyon and Kenyon in New York City, he says: "China was pretty bad—give me *la belle France* any time!"

As to what happened to his colleagues in the French underground, Anstett has but sketchy information. Robert is now editing a newspaper in Châteauroux, but Jacques, the underground assassin—"The last time I saw him was shortly after the liberation. He was in jail for robbing a jewelry-store, so I knew he had reconverted and was back in business at the old stand."

WHAT the Supreme Command thought of the work one Lieutenant Robert Anstett accomplished during those summer months of 1944 is well stated in his citation for the Silver Star which we reprint, along with his portrait, on the inside front cover of this issue.

As we went to press, Lieutenant Anstett was informed by the War Department that he had also been given a "mention in despatches" by the British Government. And the French Government has gratefully awarded him the Croix de Guerre with Palm. Sgt. Lee Waters of Sandusky, Ohio, also received the Silver Star for his heroism on Mission Hamish.

## Quiz Answers

**To "Contraptions of Yesteryear," —page 31**

1. SELF-HEATING BATHTUB: In the days before central heating, this bathtub—heated through the round oven under the seat—was a much-valued device.

2. BUSTLE: The well-known silhouette of the ladies of the Eighties was not based on purely natural lines, but accentuated with the help of this contraption, which was advertised much as our beauty aids are today.

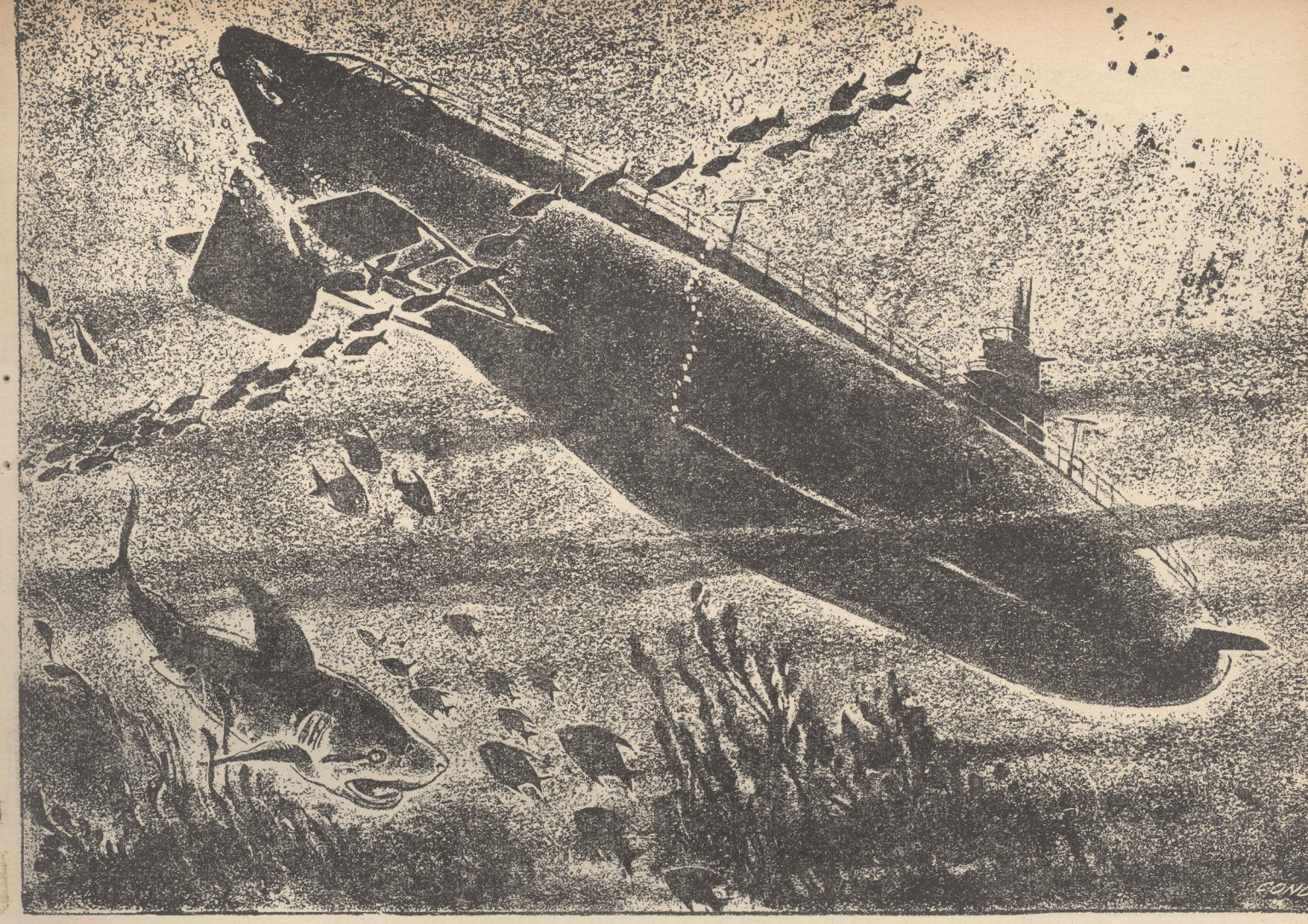
3. STREET LOCOMOTIVE: The American inventor Matheson constructed a tramway-steam-locomotive, the head of which was thus disguised in order not to frighten the horses.

4. RESPIRATOR VEIL: A medical suggestion for protecting the respiratory organs against cold winds, made by the director of a London hospital. The lining was stiffened with thin wire.

5. RAILWAY TRAVELER'S OVERCOAT: During the days of early railway traveling, this garment, worn over the ordinary overcoat, served well against any unexpected rigors.

**"Is There Fame in a Name?" —page 66**

(1) Ring Lardner
(2) Gouverneur Morris
(3) Rockwell Kent
(4) Zane Grey
(5) Boise Penrose
(6) Hoot Gibson
(7) Cass Gilbert
(8) Jo Davidson
(9) Champ Clark
(10) Kit Carson
(11) Cotton Mather
(12) Harlan Stone
(13) Lafcadio Hearn
(14) Burgess Meredith
(15) O. Henry
(16) Booker T. Washington
(17) Cesar Romero
(18) Hannibal Hamlin
(19) Omar Bradley
(20) Marc Mitscher
(21) Jay Gould
(22) Salmon Chase
(23) Ethan Allen
(24) Whitelaw Reid
(25) Deems Taylor



# BLUEGILL ON PATROL

**A story of cutlasses, gunfire—and depth-bombs.**

## *by* REAR ADMIRAL R. W. CHRISTIE, USN

NEW LONDON was plenty cold in the winter of '16-'17. New London is always cold, but it was a little colder that year to me, a young ensign, when a nickel was a nickel and the sub base was a long way from Glenwood Park. A nickel had to be considered in an ensign's budget.

The submarine base wasn't much in those days and not much different from the coaling-station it had been for so many years. The submarine school, then in its second session, was housed in a two-story brick building, formerly the Marine Barracks. The forty-four officer students were mostly ensigns a year or two out of the Academy.

Lieutenant Eric Barr commanded the submarine *E-1*, which was stationed at the sub base as school boat. She was small but modern, with Diesel engines and a Goertz periscope which marvelously could be rotated around the horizon. A little later, after our entry into World War I she battered her way through an Atlantic hurricane to the Azores. But this is a story of another war, another submarine, and another Eric Barr. . . .

When Eric Jr. reported to me with his new *Bluegill* in Fremantle, West Australia, in early '44, I found her to be, like all the new submarines, clean, fit and ready, with up-to-the-minute radar devices and other war-developed improvements, including, of course, the indispensable ice-cream maker and washing-machine—luxuries, to be sure, but worth their weight and space, and like the air-conditioning machinery, essential to physical fitness and morale on the long patrols. The greatest tonic to a submarine crew is the sound of torpedoes exploding against the bottom of enemy vessels, but creature comforts helped to maintain the efficiency and, hence, effectiveness and meant more tons of enemy shipping sunk. . . .

*Bluegill* carried extra weapons. Like others of her class, she had ten torpedo tubes, a five-inch gun, forty-millimeter, twenty-millimeter and fifty-caliber anti-aircraft weapons. But she had something else—six Navy cutlasses, relics of the days of hand-to-hand combat and boarding parties. These, said young Eric, were a gift from the old man who thought "they might come in handy some day." And so they did. Now I don't mean that the old man was of the days of iron men and wooden ships, cutlasses and boarding pikes. On the contrary, he was a very active part of the Navy in World War II in command of the V-12 organization at the University of Washington, Seattle. But he believed in preparedness and in keeping all weapons ready for all possible eventualities. And young Eric was like his old man. He be-

lieved in readiness with all weapons to take advantage of the wily Jap whenever and wherever.

His five patrols in command of *Bluegill* covered the Solomons, the Admiralties, Philippine waters, Macassar Strait, Java Sea and the South China Sea. On his first patrol, he sank the fast freighter *Asosan Maru* of 8,812 gross tons with three torpedo hits which capsized and sank her before they could get their boats out. His second, of forty-nine days' duration, was marked by tough enemy opposition by aircraft and surface patrols. He was forced down by enemy aircraft forty-nine times. Two heavily escorted cargo vessels of about five thousand tons each were sunk by torpedoes, and one of the numerous and hated "Chidori's" was blown out of the water. These "Chidori's" and "Otori's" were of very shallow draft, fast, handy, well-manned and well equipped for anti-submarine operation. They were almost impossible to hit with torpedoes. These vessels were the "A" squad of the Japanese anti-submarine effort. They roamed the Java Sea and Macassar Strait too freely for the comfort of our submarines.

You see, it is really quite simple to avoid a torpedo. Changes in speed or course make it difficult for the attacking submarine to solve the problem of maneuver into a position favorable for attack without being detected. Likewise, radical and timely changes in speed or course made after the torpedoes are fired may make them miss. The reluctance of some ship captains to zigzag cost them their ships and their lives in both the Atlantic and Pacific. . . .

*Bluegill* proved herself on this patrol to be well handled, aggressive and lucky. "All depth charges are close, and any is too many," say the submariners. She pressed home her attacks in glassy calm seas where even a few inches of periscope exposed at dead low speed made a point of aim for the depth-charge counterattacks. Sixty-eight blockbusters were *Bluegill's* ration this time, served up hot by Mr. Nip, but the score was ten thousand tons and one Chidori in *Bluegill's* favor.

Patrol No. 3 of sixty-eight days was broken by a brief stop in our advance base at Mios Woendi in northern New Guinea for refueling and rearming. Part one was very active and successful. Five vessels were sunk and three damaged. The *Arabia Maru* of 9,500 gross tons and a four-thousand-ton transport were sunk in a daylight submerged periscope attack of six torpedoes for four hits. In a counter-attack lasting one hour, *Bluegill* escaped serious damage. Such is official language. Behind that officialese is encompassed the emotions of many lifetimes—drama, near tragedy touching some seventy-five young men. Fear—someone has said, the man doesn't live who hasn't felt fear. I say the submariner who does not fear the depth-charge does not exist. That is an emotion common to all. The difference lies beyond that emotion. One man, through training, has acquired a confidence that raises him to heights unrevealed and unsuspected, where the next man may dissolve in a panicky reaction. The shape of his head or the size of his biceps is no key to his reaction. The key word is *character.* "Heart" or "guts" mean the same thing.

There is a difference in being depth-charged in a submarine—there is nothing else quite like it. For one thing, you are in surroundings that, regardless of experience, are unnatural and abnormal. Then, you are motionless—in a state of suspense. Too much time to think. Too much opportunity for the imagination. The only two officers I knew personally who simply could not stand it were men who had seen recent service in destroyer escorts in the Atlantic anti-submarine campaign against the Germans. Their knowledge of the power of the destroyer escort against a submarine kindled too vividly their imagination of what was about to happen.

LET'S read it in the official language of Eric Jr.: "We've been spotted! Target has swung hard left, heading for us. Take her deep fast. Rig for depth-charge attack and silent running. Destroyer is shifting to short keying and speeding up. Stand by. Depth charges Nos. 1, 2, 3—close, too close. Depth charges 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Emergency lighting failed; using flashlights. Depth charges 9 to 28, saturation bombing. Left full rudder, all motors ahead full under cover of the noise. Didn't do any good—force of explosions knocked us down one hundred feet. Bow planes, stern planes and rudder batted back and forth. Clutches to planes knocked out. Depth charges 29 to 47—all single and aimed. QP sonic out of commission, air-line forward ruptured, alcohol fumes in the after torpedo-room from ruptured sewage tank. Boat too heavy to hold. Must speed up. Sanitary tank flooded into the boat. Electrical grounds all over. Forward torpedo-room reported flame through torpedo loading hatch."

*Bluegill's* experience was a typical experience in this area at this time, and by no means the most severe. The Japs were pouring men and equipment into Mindanao through Davao, and all shipping in the gulf was well escorted. We were inclined to doubt the report that flames were seen inside the boat in spite of the fact that several cool-headed and experienced men reported that they themselves had seen it. We thought that any charge that close must surely tear open the hull. But there have been too many similar reports—we must believe it. In the submarine *Kingfish,* one officer and two men swear they saw flames coming through the main shaft stern-tube bearings after a specially heavy depth-charge explosion close aboard.

The Golden Age of submarine warfare in the Southwest Pacific had definitely come to a close with the end of 1944. Two-thirds of the Japanese merchant fleet had been destroyed, and the remaining bottoms were mostly small stuff, sea trucks and the like. In addition, the submarine hunting-ground was now restricted. Acquisition of air bases in the Philippines and in the Marianas permitted our planes to cover ocean areas previously reached only by the submarines.

On *Bluegill's* fourth, no enemy vessels were sighted, and the patrol was therefore designated "not successful for the submarine combat insignia." But she gave valuable assistance to the operations of American forces in the reoccupation of the Philippines through reconnaissance. She was out fifty-three days, steamed 12,131 miles, burned 142,725 gallons of fuel—hardly a pleasure cruise. . .

Largely through the initiative of Captain Bill Jinkins of the Australian Imperial Forces, liaison was established between our submarines and the specially trained "Commandos" of the Australian Army. These men, some British, some Australian, and some former residents of Malay, Borneo and the Dutch East Indies, had one thing in common—guts. Their specialized training was most thorough and included all the tricks of the trade on the water, in the water and in the jungle. We thought so well of them that when it was suggested that they accompany the submarines on patrol, we agreed heartily. [You'll hear of "Bill" Jinkins and his brood in the story of the *Harder* later on in this series.] They were put ashore in enemy territory to contact guerrilla leaders, to act as coast watchers to send us information on shipping and other enemy movements and to destroy shipping in ports or roadsteads inaccessible to submarine gun or torpedo fire.

TWO of these men, Lieutenants Cecil H. Anderson and Clifford J. Owens of the A.I.F., joined *Bluegill* when she left Fremantle 12 March 1945 on her fifth war patrol. She was assigned the Cape Varella area of the Indo-China Coast in coördination with two sister ships, *Blueback* and *Blackfin.* In the forenoon of 28 March, *Blackfin* sighted a convoy consisting of two Marus and eight escorts. Such a heavily escorted convoy indicated that they were valuable ships, but also posed a very difficult approach-attack

problem. *Blackfin* made the first attack—got through the outer screen but was spotted by the inner screen and suffered a particularly heavy counterattack which, however, drew off the escorts. Then *Blueback,* coming in from the flank, tumbled more of the interference, leaving the field clear for *Bluegill* which hit a large tanker with two torpedoes. In the inevitable counterattack, *Bluegill* suffered and survived 112 depth charges. Her teeth rattled and her bones quaked. The mercury spilled out of the compass bowls, torpedo-tube doors were jarred partly open, fifty-six light-bulbs were broken, over a bucketful of miscellaneous bolts were picked up from the deck. And after four hours of this inferno, she cautiously came up to periscope depth to find her tanker not sunk but hard aground on the island of Hon Doi.

Here was work for the boys in the back room, Anderson and Owens. All they had to do was launch a rubber boat from a submarine, paddle about three quarters of a mile in a fairly rough sea, black as indigo, board an enemy vessel,—possibly manned and waiting to capture or kill,—inspect the vessel if abandoned, set explosive charges to complete the destruction and, not the least difficult, paddle back to the submarine somewhere out there in the blackness. Their report is, from its laconic tone, almost funny:

> "Wreck reached at 2245.
> No one aboard.
> Papers collected.
> Set incendiaries and limpets.
> Returned."

The vessel was identified as the *Honan Maru,* a converted tanker of 5,700 gross tons. The delayed action explosives placed by the boarding party blew the vessel into bits. A machine-gun found in the charthouse was a Colt-Browning manufactured in Hartford, Connecticut. And, ladies, a box of Kayser silk stockings made in the U.S.A. was in the captain's cabin.

Well, we haven't used *Bluegill's* "secret weapons" yet—the cutlasses—but the commandos have had a trial spin and of that trial spin was born the idea which resulted in the capture of an island on the next patrol.

*Bluegill* was on her way north through the China Sea to keep a date with a flight of Allied bombing planes. Her task was the rescue of aviators from planes crash-landed or planes abandoned. This air-sea rescue service, invaluable to our heavy bombers on missions over enemy waters, was called "lifeguarding." To this rescue service rendered by our submarines throughout the war, over five hundred aviators owe their lives. It was supplementary to the famous "Dumbo" service which was made up largely of long-range flying boats, the Catalina and the Mariner. The submarines could reach areas untenable to the "Cats," and at this stage of the Pacific War the "lifeguard" submarines were a downed aviator's only hope in areas so far from Allied bases and so close to enemy bases.

With a little extra time on her hands, *Bluegill* jogged to the eastward to take a "look-see" at tiny Pratas Island, a dot in the vastness of the South China Sea 180 miles southeast of Hongkong on the air line from North Luzon. Its location gave it value as a weather station and for detection of Allied planes headed for the Japanese-held Chinese and Indo-Chinese coast.

*Bluegill* dived. Unseen by the enemy from her point of vantage below the waves, she studied the island at leisure with her 6-power periscope. She spotted a lighthouse, radio towers, a radar installation, a flagpole displaying the Jap colors, barracks and other buildings. Gun emplacements were suspected rather than seen. There appeared to be two usable landing beaches but according to Anderson and Owens the surf conditions were bad. To draw enemy fire and learn something of their strength, young Eric decided to ease out to the extreme range of his 5"s, come to the surface after dark and lob over a few steel-jacketed calling-cards. This he did, with a "Battle Surface"—a maneuver which brings the vessel to the surface as quickly as possible and the gun-crew on deck to clear the gun and open fire immediately. It's not popular in the cold waters of unsheltered seas, because it means half a bath for the gun-crews. But the Jap wouldn't play, and with no response from the enemy on the island, *Bluegill* rang up "All engines, ahead standard" and proceeded on her way to the assigned lifeguard station forty miles off Hongkong, filing away for future reference everything that she had learned about Pratas Island.

CONVERSATION at mess turned to Pratas Island, its value to the enemy, why our planes hadn't bombed or strafed it, the strength of its garrison, size of its guns, whether they had radar control and searchlights. Captain Barr knew well enough what was in the thoughts of his commando friends, Anderson and Owens, and he was himself turning over in his mind the same thing: Why not capture the island themselves? The submarines had done about everything else, sunk battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers and submarines, put agents in and taken them out of enemy territory, supplied guerrillas with ammunition, food and medicine, rescued women and children from enemy hands, planted mines, reconnoitered harbors, spent many long days on scouting lines when planes couldn't maintain their searches and even, in one delightful bit of comicality, had bombarded Iwo Jima, one little submarine with its one 4" gun putting in its two cents' worth with the thundering chorus of the 16's and 14's of the battleship formation. "So," said Eric, "why not? You, Andy, draw up a plan, make an estimate, and we'll think it over."

With supper over, the green baize replaced the white tablecloth and all hands not on watch huddled around the wardroom table—more kibitzers than a family poker party. The ridiculous but clever blah-blah of Tokyo Rose was snapped off and the wardroom radio was, for once, silent. "Darken ship!" interrupted the party momentarily while those who had to preserve their night vision donned the red goggles called "Night Adaptation Glasses." These red goggles permit a man to go directly from a lighted room to the bridge without impairment of night adaptation. Otherwise, even momentary exposure to a light would make it impossible to see in the dark for some time, a fatal spot for an officer of the deck to be in.

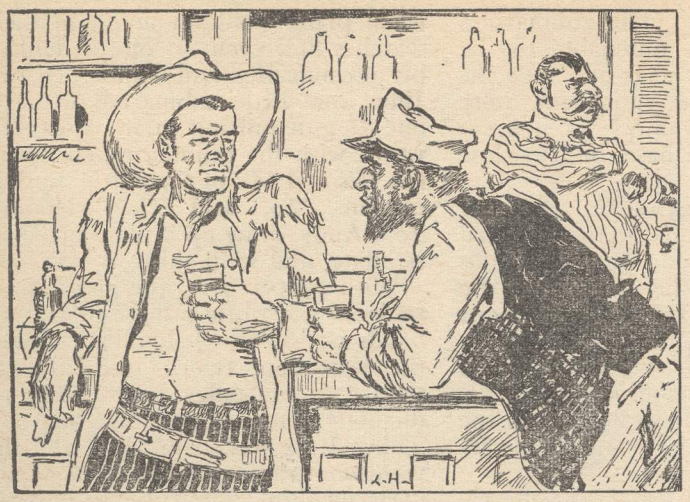
"Thirty Japs on Pratas," thought Anderson.

"Twenty," said Owens, but he was notoriously optimistic. I guess a commando wouldn't be a commando if he weren't an optimist.

SOMETIMES two weeks is a long time. For a high-point G.I. in Okinawa or Naples, it's a year. For *Bluegill,* it was a long two weeks because it was a dull two weeks. No enemy ships contacted, no calls for help by our airmen. The bombing operations were postponed again and again, and finally canceled, and *Bluegill* was ordered back to the Subic Bay base.

The Jap is, by our way of thinking, a funny bird. His evident eagerness to expend his life and join his honorable ancestors was in evidence throughout the war. The stubbornness and inflexibility of mind which led him to repeat again and again an attack into a strong point rather than admit a tactical error, cost him heavily in Guadalcanal and elsewhere. The evacuation of Kiska was held by the Jap to be a glorious victory for them because they had tricked us. It was their victory but our island, without the loss of a man.

And so, I suppose, they thought *Bluegill's* capture of Pratas was a Jap victory because no Jap was there to oppose it. They had abandoned the island sometime between the *Bluegill's* reconnaissance and her return. The only Japanese witnesses to the display of the colors of the U. S. on the staff of Pratas Island were the rats and lizards,—Pratas rats and lizards,—but symbolic of the former inhabitants.



# The

**A novel about wild days in 1852 Panama, when a railroad was pushed across the Isthmus past the many graves of gold-seekers slain by bandits.**

REAGAN settled himself in the *Cora's* gig, and waited there for Captain Slocum, cursing the delay, and the sticky heat, and the gnats swarming out of the jungle. What he could see of Panama strengthened his determination to cross the Isthmus as quickly as possible, and get on to California and the gold-fields. Somebody else was welcome to command the railroad constabulary—a job Slocum had urged him to take; somebody else could have the boom town of Aspinwall, sprawled yonder on a swampy island, and the whole miasmic, fever-ridden country beyond. Reagan was a Texas man; and a Texan liked room, and the wind blowing over the prairie.

Most of his fellow Argonauts were still aboard the tall-masted ship. Reagan had congratulated himself on Slocum's invitation to go ashore with him, although he knew the Captain wanted to talk about the job again. But now three clumsy-looking native bongoes, hung with low awnings of palmetto leaves, were alongside the *Cora,* and Slocum waited to superintend the lightering of some of his cargo.

This came over the side to the accompaniment of shouts and the creaking of tackle—a collection of long, heavy packing-boxes marked GOLD WASHING MACHINERY, COLONEL TOMAS BISHOP, ASPINWALL. Reagan leaned on the gunwale and watched. Gold, he reckoned, was where you found it—even in Panama. And any man was entitled to a new beginning, no matter what his past difficulties had been. But the idea of Tom Bishop's being a colonel afforded him a faint amusement.

Slocum's voice, always lifted as if to compete with full gales, boomed above the thin complaint of the pulleys. "That's well!" he said, and Tom Bishop appeared at the bulwarks, ready to go ashore. Bishop had changed clothes; he was darkly handsome in a white linen suit. And then Reagan saw the girl who leaned out from the palmetto-topped cockpit of the nearest bongo. . . .

It had been a long voyage, and womanless as far as Reagan was concerned, but this was hardly sufficient to account for the manner in which the mere sight of the girl stirred him, nor for the surge of anger he felt when she waved to Tom Bishop. He stared, fascinated, caught up in a breathless admiration.

There was a spray of pale, exotic flowers in the midnight gloss of her hair. She wore a green dress, made with a jaunty bolero, bright as the jungle's lush foliage, and richly embroidered with gold. Her eyes were dark and long, intriguingly tilted, and marvelously alive. A warm, vivid blend of gold and olive and cream glowed in her cheeks, and she held her head with Castilian pride.

Reagan had known that kind of beauty in San Antone and Monterrey, but never so much of it in one woman. The girl looked his way, half-amused, half-annoyed, and then moved back under the palmetto canopy. As she did so, the awning brushed her hair, and the spray of blossoms fell into the water.

She uttered an impatient little cry, and Reagan came out of his trance to see the flowers floating his way on the brown tide. He leaned from the gig and rescued them.

Tom Bishop was watching from the *Cora's* deck. Reagan smiled insolently in his direction, and nodded to the seaman at the oars.

"Pull over to the lady's boat," he ordered.

There was an elderly man in the cockpit with the girl—a man with coffee-and-milk complexion, and the white mustache and goatee of a Spanish grandee. Reagan removed his wide-brimmed hat, and did his best to bow while sitting down. The elderly man took off his finely-woven straw hat with a courtly gesture, and the girl smiled.

"Your flowers, señorita," the Texan said in Spanish, and some mad, reckless impulse made him go on: "They are beautiful, but not so lovely as you. I have never seen such a blossom!"

He was looking at the girl. Her lashes dropped, and she murmured her thanks as she took the spray from Reagan's outstretched hand. It was the old Spaniard who spoke.

"That bloom, señor," he said gravely, "is an orchid found only on the Isthmus. It is called *El Espiritu Santo* —the flower of the Holy Ghost—and it blooms only every other year. Observe, señor, the figure of the dove formed by its petals!"

"A fortunate blossom, indeed," Reagan said, and then Captain Slocum was bawling orders for his gig to come alongside the ship, and Reagan saw Bishop clambering down to join the pair in the bongo. The girl gave him one look as the gig moved away. . . .

Captain Slocum took his seat in the gig, and looked sidewise at Reagan. He was a spare, spade-bearded man with a lantern-jawed face and a bluff, profane way of speaking. He had sailed these waters long enough to know the innermost workings of the province.

"See anything to make you change your mind, hey?" he demanded with a chuckle. And then, to the man at the oars: "Make the landing at the inn. Damn me, but I need a drink!"

Reagan smiled silently. The bongoes bearing the girl and Tom Bishop's gold-washing machinery moved ahead of them, vanishing around a bend in the channel. He thought he heard Slocum sigh with relief.

"If Bishop shines up to that girl," the Captain said abruptly, "he'll get his tail in a bight."

"Why?" Reagan asked.

"Because he's tied in with the New Granada government, such as it is, and she's hooked up with the revolutionary party. Her name's Maria Galiano. Her father was a *hacendado*—a big landowner. But he mixed up in the independence movement. First they took his land away from him. Then they 'dobe-walled him."

# Trail *of the* Crosses

## *by* ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

*"Your flowers, señorita," the Texan said. "They are beautiful, but not so lovely as you."*

"Then who was the old man with her?"

"Her uncle—Don Enrique Oviedo. He's smart, and respected, but he can't handle the girl. Sooner or later, they'll stand her up against a 'dobe wall too. A shame—she's the prettiest little piece this side of New York!" He leaned back, relaxing. "Well—the stuff's off the ship, and I can wash my hands of it. But if I'd known what it was when Bishop put it aboard, I'd have turned him down!"

Reagan eyed him curiously. "You mean it wasn't gold-washing machinery?"

"Gold-washing machinery, my eye!" Slocum said. "It was two hundred new Sharps rifles, and ten thousand rounds of ammunition! The State of Texas ordered 'em for your old outfit—the Rangers—to fight Indians with, and then the Legislature failed to appropriate the money. Bishop bought 'em from the factory, and took delivery in Texas. In other words, he's double-crossing his friends in the government, by running guns to the revolutionaries!"

Reagan kept silent. He hadn't mentioned that he had known Tom Bishop as a court-martialed and cashiered American Army officer during his own service with Colonel Jack Hays' Texas Rangers with General Taylor, in the Mexican War. Bishop had come to Panama in 1850—four years before—presumably on his way to California.

*"Step up, gintlemen!" O'Malley bellowed joyously. "Sure, and it's I that can lick the lot of you!"*

He followed Slocum into the bar of the inn, part of an old *hacienda* at the beginning of a road that led into the Cruces Trail, and they had a drink there. It was not until then that the Captain came back to the subject of the job he seemed determined to fill for the builders of the Panama Railroad.

"Well," he said, lifting his glass, "here's hurricanes!" And he eyed Reagan with a speculative gleam. "Suppose you wouldn't consider changing your mind, hey? If you do, you'll find John Seavers at Barbacoas. The road's been built that far, but they're having hell trying to throw a bridge across the Chagres. It's more than six hundred feet wide at that point."

Reagan shook his head. "I'm going on to California."

"Gold fever," Slocum said. "You hear about them that strike it rich—not about the poor devils who dig their hearts out and find nothing. I've hauled 'em both ways."

"I'm not going to dig," Reagan said. "I'm a cattleman. I've got nearly ten thousand dollars in my money-belt, and they tell me there's good grazing land in California. Somebody's got to raise beef for all the people coming in there."

Slocum nodded. "Somebody's got to build this railroad, too," he said. "Swamps to fill, streams to cross—fever and hell and high water! Seavers no sooner gets a little track laid than the outlaws and robbers rip it up. The Cruces Trail is lousy with them. He'll never get enough rock and gravel hauled from the coast to make a roadbed, unless somebody cleans the robbers off the Trail. He's an old friend of mine, and I've been trying for a year to get him a man. But—everybody's in a sweat to get to California."

He tossed down the rest of his drink, and looked at Reagan again. "Well," he said, "I can take, 'Hell, no!' for an answer. Here's luck, Reagan. Mind your eye, crossing the Isthmus with that money. Don't travel alone, and keep your gun handy."

Reagan thanked him, and said good-by. The barroom was beginning to fill with red-shirted Argonauts, and overalled men he took to be from the railroad construction gangs. Some of the latter were bronzed; others were yellow with the ravages of fever. Among them all, Ran Reagan was marked by a look of the range country that went beyond his big hat, and his duck jumper and cowboy boots. He was tall, with a rangy width of shoulders; he had a generous, almost reckless mouth, and quiet blue eyes. It had taken Slocum until today to realize the stubbornness of purpose shown in the angular set of his jaw. . . .

He left the bar and went to the grilled window that served as the office. It would be morning or later, the innkeeper told him, before he could possibly arrange for a mule, or any other method of transportation over the Trail of the Crosses. A room for the night? He was so sorry, señor, but the rooms had long been taken. For three dollars he could let Reagan have a room for just a little while—long enough, perhaps, to shave and change his clothes.

Reagan took it. He chuckled when he saw his whiskers in the mirror, and suddenly found himself wondering what Maria Galiano had thought of his rough appearance. Bishop, of course, had shaved; Bishop hadn't been in such a rush to get ashore. . . .

There was a crowd five deep at the bar when he went back down the stairs, and others were coming in. A towering redheaded man shouldered his way through the throng and began hammering on the bar with a brawny fist.

"Quiet!" he yelled. "Quiet! Now—and did I ever tell you about the time I was after tangling with the jaguar in the jungle?"

He wore overalls, and no hat. The railroad men lifted a derisive shout, and the redhead glared at them.

"Well," he said defensively, "it's not every wan of you has heard it. And it's fewer than that who have ever seen a jaguar, in the first place!"

Reagan went on the rear of the place to return his room key. When he came back, elbowing through the crowd toward the door, a half-dozen Argonauts, bellying the bar with glasses and bottles before them, had been caught in the narrator's spell.

". . . so there I was, be jabers! Deep in the jungle, without a shot left in me gun, and the wounded jaguar crouching for a charge. I could see his yellow eyes, burning like coals from the Pit itself. I could see the devil's tail twitching. I tried to jump back, and thin I tripped on wan of thim crapers, and fell. Holy Mither, but it was a tight place to be in! Before I could get on me feet again, the baste was in the air with all his claws out!"

The big man paused for effect, looking around him. Reagan saw one of the Argonauts swallow his suspense.

"My God!" he breathed. "What did you do?"

"Oh—I had me wits about me. I said to meself, I said: 'O'Malley, ye'd better be kapin' cool, be jabers!' And I remimbered something. In the very nick of time, I grabbed a handful of yores and threw thim in the baste's eyes, blinding him. Thin I rolled out of the way, and—"

*"Yores?"* the Argonaut asked blankly. "What's yores?"

A quick, likable grin lighted the face of the story-teller. He said: "Faith, and I'm glad you asked me that. Mine's whisky!"

The railroad men roared. O'Malley calmly reached for the Argonaut's glass, and drained the contents.

"It's a sell!" the red-shirted man yelled. "Why, you damned mick, I'll learn you to cadge my drink!"

He swung on O'Malley. The redhead carefully put down the glass, and retaliated with a sledgehammer blow that sent the Argonaut bouncing into the arms of his companions. The others sprang at him, and suddenly the hostilities spread, as gang fights do—without rhyme or reason, or respect for neutralities.

Reagan saw what was coming, and quickly took his pistol from its holster, lest some hot-tempered individual should be tempted to snatch it, and shoved it under his jumper at his back, with the barrel thrust into his belt and the muzzle resting in his hip pocket. He was already caught in a press of struggling, sweating men, and over their heads he saw O'Malley with his back to the bar.

"Step up, gintlemen!" he bellowed joyously. "Sure, and it's Seamus O'Malley can lick the lot of you! Step up, wan and all!"

Somebody swung a bottle toward Reagan's head. He fended the blow, and slammed his fist against the teeth of the man who struck it, and saw that the man wore a red shirt. O'Malley chortled, "Foine work, me boy, and it's more of the same for you—and for you, too, you dirty spalpeen!" And now Reagan was against the bar alongside the Irishman, crashing his left elbow into a bearded face, following up the elbow with a right hook.

The fight unaccountably became a personal thing. Reagan had a stake in it now: his pride, and a contempt for the six men who had jumped O'Malley over a joke. He lashed out with his fists, and took a body blow that slammed him against the bar and bruised his hip on the revolver, and lashed out again. O'Malley was laughing through the blood on his lips. "Give it to thim, me bucko!" he shouted. "Here's wan for ould Ireland!"

Then a fist exploded against Reagan's jaw. He shook his head, and punched back at a blurred face, and out of the corner of his eye he saw a dark knot of men at the doorway. They poured in, and the oil lamps gleamed on rifle-barrels.

That, Reagan thought, was the way with saloon brawls: the police always won them. A gun laid its loud report down the room, and the place went quiet, as if authority had spoken. The newcomers moved toward the bar.

*A gun laid its loud report down the rooms. . . . . The newcomers moved toward the bar.*

*"El hombre con el sombrero grande!"* said a voice. The man with the big hat. . . .

O'Malley glanced quickly at Reagan. "Be jabers!" he exclaimed. "It's you they're after!"

Reagan was still dazed, but now he saw that the armed men wore bandanna masks, and he remembered the money in his belt. He reached for the pistol, cursing at his awkwardness in drawing it from such an unaccustomed place. Somebody grabbed his arm.

There was a warning shout, and a gun blazed its split-second brightness, and he never knew whether the shot came from his pistol or from one of the rifles. Something slapped him hard on the side of his head. The oil lamps dimmed and whirled; he turned to clutch ineffectually at the bar, and the revolver became too heavy to hold.

Blackness rolled over him. Seamus O'Malley's roaring curses, and a faint, confused sense of struggle faded with the light.

## Chapter Two

THE same roaring seemed to be in Reagan's ears when he awoke. His head throbbed, and an oppressive, sticky heat enveloped him; he looked on whitewashed walls, and the glare was like a blow across his eyeballs. He groaned and tried to sit up, but a big hand pushed him back down.

O'Malley said: "Aisy, me boy! It's a nasty gash you've got on your head. Take it aisy."

Reagan squinted at the big Irishman. O'Malley's left eye was swollen shut, and his lip had been split, and even his red whiskers failed to hide the marks knuckles had left on one side of his jaw. But he grinned cheerfully at the Texan.

"Where are we?" Reagan asked.

"In jail," the other said. "Sure, and I knew it even before I opened me eyes. I can always tell by the size of the bugs and the manner of their biting, having been here before."

Reagan remembered his money-belt, and reached inside his shirt. O'Malley shook his head sadly.

"You might as well be scratching while you're in there," he said. "I looked already, hoping you might have money enough to get us out of here. But whatever you had is gone."

"But why are we in jail?" Reagan demanded. *"We* got robbed, not the others. Is that the way the law works down here?"

O'Malley grinned again. "The law don't work down here, me boy!" he retorted. "That spig who is after running the saloon says we started a fight and wrecked his place. The police don't like me—I've had to bate up a few of thim in the past. No, it's here we'll be staying until I can get word to Seavers, and find out if he has any forgiveness in his heart!"

"John Seavers—the railroad man?" Reagan asked.

"Wan and the same. You know him?"

"No, but I've heard of him." He eyed O'Malley curiously. "I understand he's been looking for a fighter to clean up the Cruces Trail. How come you didn't take that job?"

"Sure, and a foine chance I'd have getting it!" exclaimed the Irishman. "Besides, Seavers fired me four days ago. That's fifteen times I've been fired off this railroad—and this time, if I can get the money, I'm l'aving the country!"

He rose from Reagan's bunk, and began pacing the floor. Reagan looked once around the narrow room with its high barred window, and then closed his eyes again. The roar was more of a drone now, and he decided it was rain. But it was an intense, furious sound, and of a volume not even approached by any Texas rain of his memory.

He considered rather impersonally the pass to which things had come. This was a long way from Texas, and California was even farther. His money was gone. A man reaching California without a stake would have to dig, one way or another.

FOOTSTEPS SOUNDED in the corridor, and keys jingled. The lock turned rustily, and a ragged, barefoot sentry entered, carrying an old-fashioned rifle. Behind him, framed by the door, stood Maria Galiano.

Reagan sprang to his feet with a suddenness that sent pain rocketing through his skull. "Good morning, señorita!" he exclaimed. Then he stood waiting, trying to reconcile the girl's loveliness with smuggled guns, and the dangers of a firing-squad, wondering why she had come. O'Malley, he saw, had retreated to the wall and was standing there with a curiously suspicious look on his battered face.

Maria came swiftly to Reagan's side. She was pale, and some undercurrent of excitement moved with her, as if she were running a risk in this visit. She said, "Please sit down, Señor Reagan—you are hurt. And you must listen carefully to what I have to say!"

*"Hist!"* called O'Malley, making warning gestures. "I don't like the looks of this! Don't be after making promises, me boy!"

The Texan laughed. "Do you understand Spanish, O'Malley?"

"No, but I know the ways of the spalpeens!"

"Then we'll speak in Spanish," Reagan said in that language.

"Good," said Maria. She looked around to make sure the sentry was not in hearing. "At any moment, señor, a *politico* named Dr. Simon Garay will come to the jail and offer to arrange for your release. But—and this is *muy importante*—you must agree to leave this country at once. Do you understand?"

"No," Reagan frowned. "Why does Dr. Garay care whether I go or stay?"

The girl shook her head. "That I do not know. But I know he will insist upon such an agreement, and he will provide a horse if you wish to go to Panama City." She looked at Reagan with trouble deep in her dark eyes. "You will agree to leave, señor?"

Stubbornness tightened the Texan's jaw. He said: "Happens I'd planned to leave. But what if I changed my mind?"

"Then they may even kill you!" Maria exclaimed. "They will say you killed a man last night in the fight, and that you were shot as you tried to escape! Oh, you must believe that I speak the truth, Señor Reagan!"

He stared at her incredulously, wondering how much of this was the product of an overworked imagination. "But that's crazy!" he said. "I didn't kill anybody. I was robbed of ten thousand dollars. Even if they overlook that little item, the worst they could do would be to give me a few days in jail for fighting, or disturbing the peace, or—" He frowned at Maria again. "Who told you these things?" he demanded.

"Everybody knows of the fight," Maria said. "As for this other, my uncle and I have some acquaintance with the *politicos*, such as Dr. Garay. He is the collector of the port at Porto Bello. It was my uncle who heard of this plan to get you out of Panama."

Reagan had the feeling that she wasn't telling all she knew, and a jealous thought crossed his mind: *She had an acquaintance with Tom Bishop, too!* He dismissed the suspicion that came on the heels of that thought; he could imagine no reason why Bishop should desire his departure.

"I reckon," he said, forcing a smile, "that they've got me mixed up with somebody else. Anyway, maybe they didn't know how anxious I am to get out of the country. You run along, señorita, and thank you for tipping me off. I'll take Garay's horse, all right!"

Maria moved toward the door. "When you cross the Isthmus, señor," she said, facing him again, "stop in and see my uncle and me. We will be at the *hacienda* of José de la Cosa. It is not far from Barbacoas, on the Cruces Trail."

O'Malley turned on Reagan when she had gone. "It's divil a word I know of what she told you," he said. "But I know who she is. The less you have to do with that colleen, the better. She's working to overthrow the Governmint!"

Reagan grinned. "And a few Irishmen have done just that, down in these republics," he said. "Besides, if what she told me is true, maybe this country needs a new Government."

"And what was that?" the redhead asked suspiciously.

"Somebody wants me to hightail it out of Panama—wants it bad enough to threaten me with a murder charge if I stay. Did I kill anybody last night, O'Malley?"

"Not that I remimber," the Irishman chuckled. "But it's a good man you are to have alongside in a fight. Sure, and I'm believing the Galiano colleen only wants to put you in her debt. She'd like a fine, upstanding lad like yourself for a gineral!"

"Wait, and we'll see," said Reagan. The sentry was coming back, and the footsteps following him now were heavy and important. This time, a big, flabby man entered his cell.

"SENOR REAGAN?" HE ASKED, and coughed behind a pudgy hand that held a cigar. "I am Dr. Simon Garay. I have a matter to discuss with you."

"Shoot," Reagan said coolly, and studied his man. There were pouches under Garay's little unwinking eyes, and his skin was more yellow than brown. He wore expensive clothes, but they were unkempt and dirty; those were soup- and wine-stains on his linen jacket, with a sprinkle of cigar-ash lying in the wrinkles.

"You are in a considerable trouble," Garay began. "It is—ah—unfortunate."

"Yes," agreed Reagan. "I was robbed."

"Unfortunate," the flabby man repeated. "Yes, there are rogues who frequent that inn. Of course, if it were not for the killing that preceded the robbery, there might be some chance of restitution. But—"

"That's a dirty lie!" accused O'Malley. "Nobody was kilt!"

Reagan waved him down. The Texan knew his money was gone; any claim filed through American

representatives, even if it were successful, would take months—perhaps years.

"The man who was killed," Garay went on, "was of high family. It is better to let his family think he died in some—ah—other manner. It is better not to have a trial."

"Let's get to the point, Dr. Garay," Reagan suggested.

"Very well. You must leave Panama at once. I can effect your release immediately. There is a horse ready for you if you intend to sail from Panama City."

"And a guard, I reckon?"

"An—ah—escort," Garay said, coughing again behind his flabby hand. "Naturally, we wish to see you safely over the Trail."

"And without communicating with any American authorities," said Reagan.

O'Malley didn't give Garay a chance to answer that. "Be jabers!" the Irishman exclaimed. "It's in the hospital you ought to be, with that head! You can't ride. Tell him to go to hell, Reagan! Faith, and I'd rot, first!"

Garay's little pig-eyes glittered on the redhead. "Of course," he said significantly, "there are the alternatives of deportation, or a murder trial. Both take time."

REAGAN CONTROLLED HIMSELF with an effort. His head ached, and a cold anger was rising within him; he wanted nothing so much as to slam his fist into this man's yellow putty face. More than Las Cruces Trail needed cleaning up, in this country. He wondered if it had been someone like Simon Garay who stood Maria Galiano's father against an adobe wall. . . .

But he could find out nothing of what lay behind all this—not if he stayed in jail.

"Have you got two horses?" he demanded. "If I go, O'Malley goes with me."

"Faith, and be damned if I do!" spluttered the man who had been trying to get out of Panama.

Reagan turned his head and silenced O'Malley with a surreptitious wink. Dr. Garay was rubbing his pudgy hands, and smiling an oily smile. Two horses, he said, could be arranged. . . .

They moved out on the Cruces Trail with two swarthy, villainous-looking native soldiers, ragged men who carried pistols and machetes in their belts. Rain was still coming down in a steaming flood, and Reagan had no hat. His sandy hair was plastered over his eyes; the crude bandage around his head was quickly soaked.

But the simple fact that he was in the saddle again made his spirits rise, and brought a nostalgia for the range country. The horse Garay had provided for him was a bay, darkened by the rain, small and wiry like most Spanish mustangs. That kind made good cow-ponies.

And no trail, anywhere, Reagan decided, could be worse than this ancient trade-route across the Isthmus—marked at its many turnings with the moss-covered religious shrines that had given it its name. After a time the rain ceased and the sun shone hot, and they began overtaking Argonauts traveling by muleback, or in porter chairs, or afoot in the mud. Then the swamp-lands gave way to rugged hills and wild chasms.

There was little shade now, and the sun beating on his head brought an intensified throbbing pain that kept time to his horse's hoofs. There was no water O'Malley would let him drink, and the two guards would not stop. Reagan began to feel light-headed.

His plans had not crystallized, and he was in no condition to shape them now. He thought back on the night before, and reasoned that somebody who knew he was carrying the money had pointed him out. But Slocum was the only man he had told, and Slocum was above suspicion. Maria's visit—Garay's insistence that he leave Panama—nothing made sense.

He was holding to the saddle-horn. A limb tore the bandage from his head, and the cut bled afresh, drying

*"Texas—you've been hurt too! God, what a country!"*

on his cheek and attracting mosquitoes and flies. And somewhere about that time the sun dropped behind the farther hills, and his consciousness became as elusive as the thickening shadows.

He didn't know when he fell from the horse, but there were the two guards bending over to lift him, and then he had a cameo-clear memory of O'Malley, springing suddenly from his own horse and knocking the two men's heads together with a force that must have cracked them. He chuckled weakly at the Irishman's profane anger, and lost consciousness again. The next thing he knew, he was being lifted from the saddle.

There were lights, and people, and one familiar face became clear in the glow of a lantern. It was a woman's, and pretty in a flashy, painted way. He remembered her from the ship. She was Molly Drew—on her way to California with an assortment of roulette wheels and pretty-girl croupiers.

"Texas!" she exclaimed. "Texas—you've been hurt too! God, what a country this turned out to be!" And then, to O'Malley: "Well, don't stand there with him, you big ape! Bring him inside, so I can dress that wound!"

## CHAPTER THREE

MOLLY DREW gave him water from a gourd. It cleared his head, and he lay quietly, watching her prepare the bandage. Beyond her were red-shirted men, and Reagan recognized some of them as fellow-passengers on the *Cora*. They slept on the floor of this thatch-covered long room made of rough lumber; or played cards, or sat staring blankly at the lanterns. Molly went for more water, crossing the room

with her swinging, provocative walk; and when Reagan's eyes followed her, he saw a paper partition that had been perforated with scores of knife-holes.

"The ladies' chamber!" Molly said with a grimace when she came back. "A peep-show for every man on the Trail. Things have come to a pretty pass when a lady can't undress without forty men spying on her!" She sighed, and added with unconscious humor: "I'm speaking of Parson Whittaker's widow."

"Widow?" Reagan said. Parson Whittaker had been hale and hearty when the *Cora* reached Aspinwall. "What happened, Molly?"

"This bunch took the train to ride to the end of the line," she said, and her lips tightened. "Somebody had pulled up the track about five miles from here, and when the train stopped, a bunch of spigs came out of the jungle and held us up. They—they shot two men, Texas—Parson Whittaker, and one I didn't know. Shot them in cold blood!" She drew a long breath. "Damn me for a lady, Texas, but if I'd known Panama was like this, I'd have gone around the Horn!"

"Me too," Reagan said, and thought: *Whittaker was a gentle harmless kind of man. He wouldn't have hurt a fly!* He raised on an elbow. "Where's O'Malley?"

"If you mean that big mick who brought you in here, he's gone over to the railroad camp. They're building a big bridge a couple of miles from here. He said he'd be back in the morning. But you aint traveling any farther tonight. My girls are fixing you some broth, and you're going to stay quiet."

She started away, and then turned back. "It could be worse, Texas," she said. "I lost everything but a couple of greenbacks in the First National Bank—" She smiled, and displayed an expanse of beautifully-filled stocking. "I can get to Panama City, and they say gold is where you find it!"

The rain came again, and the shed was filled with variegated snores and the mutterings of restless men, and a leak somewhere in the roof dripped with a maddening monotony. Reagan lay wide-eyed, thinking of what Molly Drew had told him. One way or another, he decided, he would have been robbed. Shot, probably, if he had come with this group on the train, because he wouldn't have given up his money without a fight.

It was odd, he thought, how many people started for California and didn't get there. Bishop, and probably O'Malley, and Molly and her girls; Parson Whittaker, and that other one. Yonder in the room Molly called the peep-show, a woman began sobbing out her soft, agonized grief. Mrs. Whittaker, most likely.

REAGAN WAS SUDDENLY sitting erect, cursing in a strained, bitter tone. Molly Drew hurried out of the ladies' section, a shawl over her shoulders, and her yellow hair down.

"You're delirious, Texas!" she exclaimed in alarm, and felt his forehead. "Lie down."

"No," Reagan said slowly. "I'm not delirious, Molly. I may be crazy. Anyway, I'm not going on to California, either—not for a while. I'll stay here, and all hell can't run me out! And by God, I'll clean up this Cruces Trail, or know the reason why!"

It was silly, of course, for him to admit that Maria Galiano had anything to do with this decision. But her dark eyes haunted him; he was still thinking of her when sleep finally came. . . .

O'Malley was back, and had his horse saddled when he awoke. They rode into a jungle trail, and came to the Chagres, curving like a lazy brown serpent toward the sea, and then suddenly upon the railroad. The sight of its wet wrought-iron rails glistening across rock and gravel-filled stretches of swamp and over flimsy-looking wooden trestles was like finding the time in this land turned forward by centuries. They followed the track, and a muffled clamor of hammers and pile-drivers came to Reagan's ears.

O'Malley turned off the trail toward a cluster of squat, ungainly buildings. "Seavers," he said, "is in the hospital. *'Tiene calentura,'* as these natives say—got the fever. Oh, it don't bother him any more, Reagan. He can see you. I told him about you last night, and he had a letter from Slocum."

They swung from their saddles before the hospital, and yonder under an adjacent shed was a high stack of crude pine coffins. The building, when they had entered, smelled of the sickish animal odor fever makes in hot countries. O'Malley led the way between a double row of cots where bright-eyed, emaciated men tossed, and came to a patient who sat propped against the wall.

JOHN SEAVERS' EYES were overbright, too, but he gave the instant impression that this was as much due to nervous energy as it was to the fever. He was a lean man with a graying mustache and a crease of worries between his thin, sandy brows; you looked deeper into his eyes, and saw the dream that drove him, and would keep driving him until he fell. He shook Reagan's hand, and motioned to a pair of camp-stools.

"Please sit down," he said, smiling. Reagan liked him at once. "O'Malley tells me you've had a little trouble."

The Texan nodded. "I should have come to you at first, if I wanted a job," he said. "The way it is, I reckon I've got the Government on my tail."

"I hardly think so," Seavers said, frowning a little. "It's a curious set-up. But the Government of New Granada, crooked as it is, would hardly dare handle an American citizen that way. No, it sounds more like an individual who is misusing his authority for some personal reason."

"Do you know Garay?" Reagan asked.

"Only slightly. Our friend Slocum has a better acquaintance with him. Garay bleeds every ship captain for port fees, tonnage dues, and everything else he can. He's rich, no doubt. But don't let his actions disturb you. Those two soldiers O'Malley knocked on the head will be afraid to go back—they'll probably join the revolutionaries. You'll only have to watch out for Garay as an individual, I think. Now—I'd like to explain what we're up against."

"And pure, unadulterated hell it is," O'Malley muttered.

"Exactly," said Seavers. "In the first place, the Bogotá Government has admitted its utter inability to maintain law and order in Panama. It has given the railroad company full authority to police the Isthmus, with the right to exact the death penalty if necessary. There'll be some trouble with local *jefes* at times, but Bogotá will back us up. We paid a lot of money for this concession."

Reagan nodded. John Seavers looked out the window at the steaming green land.

"See those piles of ties?" he asked. "We found that pine lasts about six months in this climate—we're cutting lignum vitæ, now, out of the jungle. There's a saying that a man has died for every tie laid by this road—an exaggeration, of course, but thousands have died. Death is in the very air down here, Reagan! The jungle breathes it in daytime. Creeping Johnny—that's the fog—brings it across the swamps at night. And the fever isn't all. We have to haul rock from the Porto Bello quarries for these bridge pilings, and gravel from the San Blas beaches for roadbed and swamp fills. Outlaws tear up our track; they jump our work-trains and work-crews. We've had a lot of men killed and wounded that way. The outlaws are well-organized and well-armed. The outfit that held up the train yesterday had new Sharps rifles."

Reagan sat up straight. "New Sharps rifles?" he echoed.

"Yes. The Government troops aren't that well equipped." He looked at Reagan, and drove a fist into

his palm. "Time's running out, Reagan! We had a six-year concession. If track doesn't reach Panama City within a year, we'll lose everything, and some other other company could move in. We've lost a year trying to bridge the Chagres. We fought rivers and floods, swamps and jungles, fever and outlaws—all the way from Aspinwall. The outlaws are perhaps the toughest problem of all. They're why people go around the Horn. Until they're wiped out, you can neither build a railroad, nor run it after it's built!"

"I don't know anything about a railroad," Reagan said slowly. "But I've spent ten years in the Texas Rangers, fighting outlaws and Comanches, and cattle-rustlers. If you still want me to try the job—"

"Start now!" Seavers broke in. "There'll be money for what you need. Recruit men—take O'Malley and go to Aspinwall and see who's available there. You'll want guns."

"And horses," Reagan said.

"Horses? In the jungle?"

Reagan grinned. "In Texas, they say a man without a horse is only half a man. I figure that goes anywhere."

Seavers waved his hand. "All right—try horses. It's your show. I'll write you a letter to a *hacendado* who raises them. José de la Cosa. His place is seven or eight miles from here."

"De la Cosa?" Reagan repeated, and then remembered where he had heard the name. He would see Maria, after all, and not merely to tell her good-by. And he wanted to ask her a question about those Sharps rifles.

He sent O'Malley to Aspinwall alone, reasoning that Simon Garay—or the persons Garay represented—would not be greatly concerned over the fact that the Irishman had not left the country. As for his own agreement to leave provided he was released, Reagan had no twinges of conscience. That promise had clearly been given under duress. He would know, before his campaign was over, what lay behind Garay's threats.

Reagan was still a little weak as the result of his wound, but a large breakfast at the construction camp made him feel immeasurably better. By noon he was in the saddle again, following the directions Seavers had given him to find the *hacienda* of José de la Cosa.

THIS WAY LED THROUGH what was called the *tierras baldias*—the unappropriated lands. Much of it consisted of broad, rolling savannas, lush with grass to gladden the eye of a cattleman, and Reagan came across the first scattering of de la Cosa's livestock with no surprise. The horses were like the one he rode, small and mustang-bred; the cattle were rangy beasts despite the abundance of food.

He rounded a conical hill and saw the *hacienda,* a stone house resembling a fortress more than it did a dwelling, commanding a green knoll and enclosed by a high stone wall. When he neared the iron-grilled gate, a voice called *"Alto!"* and the muzzles of two rifles were thrust through the grill.

Reagan swung down, and handed Seavers' letter through the gate. While a courier moved lazily toward the house with the message, the Texan rested in the shade and slapped at a swarm of insects. Inside the walls, what appeared to be a score of men moved about, clad for the most part in muslin trousers and calico shirts, carrying rifles wherever they went. The *hacienda* was virtually an armed camp.

The messenger returned, and indolently gestured to the sentries. The gate opened. Reagan mounted again, and rode up a flagged pathway. That would be José de la Cosa on the terrace—a slender man, past fifty, wearing a short jacket and flared velvet pantaloons. He had a black waxed mustache, and a carefully barbered goatee, and de la Cosa's eyes shone like black beads in the bright sunlight.

*The sound of hoofs brought Reagan to his feet.*

"You are more than welcome in my poor house, Señor Reagan!" he exclaimed in a musical voice. "Any friend of Señor es-Seavers is my own friend. Be good enough to enter. Felipe, attend the *caballero's* horse!"

"I haven't much time, Señor de la Cosa," Reagan said as they shook hands. "You will forgive me if I must hurry. But there are two things I would like to do: Look at some saddle-horses, as Señor Seavers has explained in his letter. And—"

Something soft brushed his cheek, startling him into silence. He looked at his feet, and saw the orchid lying there. It was the flower of the Holy Ghost.

"My daughter," de la Cosa said quickly, "is of the foolishly romantic age. Pray pay no attention to the interruption, señor!"

"Your daughter?" Reagan said. He looked up, but he could not see beyond the vine-clad balcony on the second floor.

"Yes. She is very young, and she should be studying instead of dreaming of such romantic nonsense. Please come in, señor—I would like you to meet a friend. You were saying?"

"That I would like to pay my respects to Señorita Galiano and her uncle, Don Enrique. They are here?"

"Why, no," said de la Cosa. "I am expecting them, Señor Reagan, but I have not seen them for some weeks. It is too bad. But you must do me the honor of drinking some of my Madeira, and meeting my friend. He is Antonio de Hoya—the *alcalde* of Panama City."

Reagan went inside, trying his best to appear calm. But within, he wondered if there were any place and any person in Panama not ruled by mystery and intrigue. He was certain that Maria had thrown that blossom.

De Hoya was a big, shaggy-looking man, with some defect of vision that made him thrust his head forward and a bit to one side. He was younger than de la Cosa, and had more of Indian blood than Spanish. A beaked nose and a baldness that made his forehead high gave him a buzzardlike appearance.

Reagan drank the Madeira, and fretted at the delay. De la Cosa smiled to see his impatience, and graciously rose to escort him to the stables.

"You like them?" he asked when the Texan had looked over the horses. "I am not sure that they will do for Señor Seavers in the railroad work. They are light for draft animals."

"Oh, they'll do for carrying messages and the like," Reagan said carelessly. "I'll take thirty head. Bays and sorrels, and none of them with more than one white stocking. If you could deliver them in Aspinwall within three days, and you and Mr. Seavers can agree on the price—"

"It is nothing," said de la Cosa. "There will be no difficulty. The horses will be in Aspinwall on the third day."

Reagan moved around the corral and managed to study the upper story of the house, but he saw nothing more than the vines climbing in a high, rioting tangle to the wrought-iron railings of the balconies. He left, then, with a friendly farewell from the Spaniard, and rode out the gate.

It closed behind him. Reagan kept going until he was out of sight behind a turn; then he took concealment in a grove of *cuipa* trees, unsaddled the horse, and let it graze at the end of a stake-rope while he smoked and thought. Maria Galiano, he was sure, held the key to at least part of the mystery that had been deepening around him. He would take a chance on finding her in the *hacienda,* but he would need the cover of darkness.

And while he waited, the sound of hoofs on the road brought him to his feet, watching from behind the trunk of a *cuipa* tree. The rider was Tom Bishop—still clad in white linen, still darkly handsome with his black mustache and almost Spanish coloring.

Bishop went by; and listening to the sound of his horse's hoofs, Reagan judged that he had been admitted to de la Cosa's guarded gate without even the formality of a challenge. They knew him there. Perhaps, the Texan told himself jealously, he had gone to see Maria.

When darkness came, he saddled again and turned off the road to approach the wall from an angle safely distant from the gate. He left the horse in another clump of trees, and moved through shrubbery with Indianlike caution, listening at the wall. The sentries were quiet. From somewhere toward the stables came melody made on a guitar.

Reagan leaped, and hooked his fingers over the parapet. He drew his lean body upward and over, dropping hurriedly inside. Now there was light gleaming from the window whence the orchid had fallen, and he jackrabbited that way, from shrub to tree, until he stood panting against the wall of the house. Then he climbed the vines, threw one long leg over the wrought-iron railing, and stood on the balcony.

Through the parted curtains he could see Maria Galiano, and she was alone. She sat at a dressing-table, brushing the blue-black sheen of her hair. An ornate, gold-rimmed mirror reflected the delicate oval of her face, and Reagan saw the sadness in her eyes.

HE TAPPED THE WINDOW with his fingernails. Maria sprang up, startled, and then crossed the room with a whispering of her silk dressing gown.

"Señor Reagan!" she exclaimed in a guarded voice. "You understood. You knew that it was I who threw the flower!"

"Yes. But there are a lot of things I don't understand. Why did de la Cosa say you weren't here?"

"Because he is holding me prisoner!" the girl said angrily. "And Tio Enrique also, although there is much work to be done. You must help me! Come inside—come out of the light, and be very quiet!"

She opened the casement wider, and Reagan entered. She was prettier than ever in the candlelight, with her hair down this way, and a subtle perfume moved with her in the room.

"Are you armed?" she asked.

"No."

"It does not matter. There is another way, and perhaps a better one. I will tell you what to do."

She began putting up her hair, quickly and simply, and she disappeared behind a screen and began dressing hurriedly. Looking that way, Reagan caught the entrancing gleam of a white shoulder, and was annoyed at the manner in which she stirred him. She would tell him what to do; she had the air, now, of one accustomed to being obeyed. There were a lot of things that needed explaining, and with the job he had taken there could be no time for romance, no time for love. . . .

But he glanced toward the screen again, as Maria appeared, wearing a riding-habit and a short jacket.

"It is dangerous to go out the window," she said. "There is a servant guarding my door. I will call him in. You seize him in such a manner that he cannot give the alarm, and I will show you how to get out of the grounds. Are you ready?"

Reagan looked at her. *I came here to ask her questions!* he thought. *I've got no business mixing in revolutionary schemes—no business going against Seavers' friends. De la Cosa may have her locked up for a good reason. . . .*

But there was a way about her, and it went beyond the heady, intoxicating spell of her beauty. Reagan wavered.

"Call him in," he said.

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE servant was a fat, heavily-breathing, saddle-colored man. He stepped into the room, and asked, *"Qui quiere va, señorita?"* and then Reagan's left arm hooked around his neck and shut off his wind. "Do not hurt him, please!" Maria said softly. "He is only doing the bidding of those so-stupid ones." But she brought a silken sash as red as her lips, and helped him gag the man, and bind his hands and feet.

"This way," Maria said then. "You have a horse, señor?"

"One horse," Reagan said.

"Then he will carry us both to the *hacienda* of friends, who will give me one. Make no noise, señor!"

The house was quiet. They turned down a dim hallway, and into a corridor that reached into another wing of the house, and found stairs that were narrow and dark. Maria took his hand as they descended these—going, Reagan thought, below the level of the ground floor. Then she guided his hand to a massive door-handle.

He pulled, realizing that she would not have been strong enough to come this way alone, and the door opened. Damp air blew into his face.

"Four steps down," Maria said. "After that the passageway is level. It leads out beyond the gate. I came this way once, with my father, fleeing Government troops. That was before he—before they caught him."

The girl led him through total darkness, underneath a low, dripping roof. He reached up and touched it, and found that the passageway was covered with arched stones.

He said, "They'll do the same thing to you, some day! Why was de la Cosa keeping you locked up?"

"Oh, that stupid one! He said it was for our own protection. He said an important Government official was visiting him, and it would not do for this man to know that I was there, or that Tio Enrique was on the place."

Reagan chuckled. "Well, there was an official. I met him. But is de la Cosa a member of the revolutionary party?"

"To be sure, Señor Ran!" the girl exclaimed. Then she added, in a sober tone: "There are many such, and it is not good to tell their names. They cannot show themselves—not yet. They help, and wait until we are ready to strike."

"How about Tom Bishop?" Reagan demanded.

"I cannot tell you anything about Colonel Bishop," she said quickly. "He is of the Government, and—"

"You can't tell me much I don't know," said Reagan. "He came to de la Cosa's this evening. I reckon he's still there."

"But they should have let me—" she began, and abruptly checked her words.

"Let you see him?" Reagan finished. "Why? To arrange for more guns?"

Maria halted. He could not see her face, but she had whirled on him, and her voice was angry. She said, "I do not know what you are talking about, Señor Ran!"

"I'm talking about the rifles that were shipped as gold-washing machinery. The two hundred new Sharps rifles. What about them?"

Maria seemed to be struggling for words. "Wait," she said at last. "We should not be talking in here." She took his hand again, and a little farther they came to another door. Reagan opened it, and they emerged in a clump of trees. Stars blazed above the leafy canopy with all the brilliance of the tropic night, and now the moon was up, full and golden.

"Well?" Reagan said.

She put her hand impulsively on his arm. "Señor Ran," she said, "if you are leaving Panama, there are some things which are none of your business. If you are staying, and will help me, there are things I can tell you. The revolution needs fighting men—leaders. Will you go, or stay?"

The moonlight was on her face, and her eyes were pleading. Reagan shook his head.

"I'm staying," he said. "But I'm going to clean up the Trail. Fighting for freedom is one thing, and holding up trains and people on the Trail is another."

Maria stiffened. "What do you mean?"

"Those new Sharps rifles were used yesterday in a train-robbery. They're a brand-new make, and it's not likely there are any others in Panama. It's an old, old story—rebels always get out of hand. Give them a gun, and they go out and murder and rob!"

He was unprepared for the blazing fury that possessed her. She cried, "That's a lie!" and her hand left his arm and came up in a stinging slap against his cheek. He seized her shoulders for self-protection, and laughed at the wildcat rage he had unleashed. And all at once she went limp, and was sobbing in his arms.

Reagan held her for a delicious interval, thrilling to her nearness and at the same time feeling awkward. She said, brokenly: "Then that's why Tom Bishop came! The mule-train with the guns never arrived, Señor Ran. And he came to tell us that the *bandidos* killed the escort and took the guns—I know it!"

It sounded reasonable. Reagan said, "I'm sorry, Maria," but she kept on crying. He put his hand under her chin, and tilted her head back, and moonlight and madness conspired to overwhelm him. He kissed her on the mouth, and she clung to him for a moment.

Then she drew away, and looked at him searchingly. "We are crazy, Ran!" she said. "This is only the third time I have seen you. And—and there is five miles to ride. You will lead the way to your horse."

REAGAN REACHED ASPINWALL early the next morning, after leaving Maria at the *hacienda* of friends. She had told him good-by in a simple, friendly manner—but that, he liked to think, was because the elderly *hacendado* and his wife were watching. And she had told him many things during their ride: the petty jealousies that needed to be ended before there could be unity among the revolutionaries, the difficulty of obtaining that unity in a country where feudalism still flourished, and every large landowner had a private army of his own.

He understood things more clearly. Secret passageways—private armed forces—intrigue: all of these, with a rich trade-route to be preyed upon. Revolution took root easily in such a soil. It was in the very air of this country, where Nature herself incessantly conceived and destroyed, and set about creating some new beauty. Even the plant life seemed predatory, with each new growing

*"Señor Reagan!" Maria exclaimed. "You must help me! Come inside—and be very quiet!"*

thing strangling, by vine or root or tentacle, some older, weaker growth.

Even Aspinwall, new as it was, had the air of mildew. Mud filled the streets; squalor lined them. Frame buildings shouldered swaying palms out of their way, and building materials lay piled, forgotten, to rot in the rain. People jammed wooden sidewalks under second-story balconies, and the town was on a twenty-four-hour schedule. A sign, two stories high, proclaimed the "Railroad House," and Reagan went into the bar there and inquired for O'Malley.

The name alerted three bartenders. They stiffened at the sound of it, and reached for bungstarters.

"O'Malley?" one repeated. "And what would ye be wantin' with the likes of him? I haven't seen O'Malley, and that wouldn't be the last of it. I don't want to see O'Malley."

"But he's in town," Reagan grinned.

"Look up the street," said the other. "There's evidence ye'll be findin'!"

He found the evidence in the next saloon—a broken mirror, six smashed chairs, and a general atmosphere of tornadic ruin. But O'Malley wasn't among the few customers who tolerated the wreckage.

Reagan's heart sank. O'Malley couldn't be trusted to recruit men for the Isthmus Guard. He was drunk again. He was most likely in jail again, by now. Another sign said, "Whiskey, Gin & Rum," and as he neared this place, the sounds issuing from the door told the Texan that Seamus O'Malley was still definitely at large.

He halted in the doorway. It was a different redheaded giant he saw embattled in a ring of spectators that swayed across the sawdust floor. O'Malley was still battered, to be sure; he bled afresh at the corner of his smiling lips as he pounded away at a roughly-dressed man who was fully his own size. But he fought warily, and it was plain that he had not been drinking.

*Simply being in the saddle made Reagan's spirits rise.*

"Top of the morning to you, my bucko!" he sang out as he saw Reagan. "I'll not be a minute. It's a little religion I'm after hammering into this Lowland heathen!"

He gave and took a blow, and both men grunted. The other man's gimlet blue eyes sparkled with the joy of battle. He panted: "Ay, and I have me doots about that minute, ye bog-trotter! I'm verra—"

His Scottish burr broke off in the middle as O'Malley doubled him up with a body blow, and followed it with a whipping left to the chin. The Scot hit the sawdust with a vengeance.

O'Malley immediately hoisted the other man to his feet. "His name's Campbell, and it's a foine recruit he'll be making!" he told Reagan. "And better than stoking coal in the glory hole of a steamship it'll be, too. How are you, me boy?"

Campbell blinked, and shook his head. Then the blankness of his face vanished in a slow, wry grin.

"Weel, I had my doots, but I was wrong," he said. "Bring on your domned constabulary, O'Malley. You win, and be domned to the ship!"

The three had ale in a saloon as yet untouched by O'Malley's recruiting methods, and the big Irishman proudly announced that he had five men already signed up.

"I said to meself, I said: 'O'Malley, me boy, if a man can't put up a dacint fight forninst you, he's not worth the salt of his kape. So I wint around asking 'em to join —after picking a fight. This wan"—he nodded toward Campbell—"was the toughest of the lot."

"Can you ride a horse, Campbell?" Reagan asked.

The Scot frowned. "I can, but I'm not verra fond of so doing. Why?"

"I've got thirty saddle-horses coming. We'll have to ride, or we won't be able to hit hard and fast enough. We've got to use six-shooters, too—rifles are no good in the brush. Seavers gave me money, and letters of credit. We'll go buy guns, and ropes. And we need a couple of guides who know the country!"

They prowled the town that day and the next. It was O'Malley who turned up two dwarfishly built San Blas Indians, who claimed to know every trail on the Isthmus. And it was Reagan who went down to the pier when the *City of Savannah* arrived from Galveston, and saw three big-hatted men landing in a bongo from the steamer.

"Joe Alvin!" he yelled at one of them. "Why, you old son of a gun! You're a long way from the Nueces!"

Alvin whooped back at him, and stepped out of the boat with a rawhide grace. Sun wrinkles crinkled the corners of his blue eyes as he shook hands.

"It got kind of unhealthy back there," he drawled. "Ran, you know the Collins boys?"

Reagan did. Brad Collins, the elder brother, was black-haired and sallow, with unhealthy-looking, hollow cheeks. But there was a dangerous, snake-cold glitter in his black eyes, and a quickness in all his movements no sick man could match. Jasper, the younger, was a lanky, loose-jointed newer edition.

"He ought to," Brad grinned. "Camped on my trail for two weeks when you was a Ranger, didn't you, Ran?"

"I sure did," Reagan said, and went to the point. He said: "I know you boys are headed for California. So was I, but I hit a side trail, and I'm riding it. How'd you like to work on the side of the law for a change?"

"Kind of late to switch over, aint it?" Brad grimaced.

"Not down here. I need you. I'm organizing a constabulary, kind of like the Rangers. I've got horses, and—"

"Horses?" Joe Alvin spoke the word reverently. "Man, I'm going to kiss the next horse I see! I was seasick all the way down from the U. S. We brought our saddles along, but—"

"Come on up to the hotel," Reagan grinned. "I think maybe we can make a trade."

O'Malley and Campbell appeared a bit dubious as to the fighting abilities of these new recruits, but shook hands with them in a friendly manner. The other four men O'Malley had signed up—all bearing his marks—were present, and Reagan proposed a toast to the Isthmus Guard.

He drew a deep breath of satisfaction. The thing was started. Tomorrow he'd take this nucleus on the Trail, and report to Seavers, and go on to Panama City to look for recruits there. The horses, O'Malley told him, had arrived and were penned at a stable on the edge of town. Everything was working out.

## Chapter Five

IT was dark when Reagan went upstairs to his room. The wooden sidewalk outside was loud with roistering Argonauts, and rain laid its sodden monotony on the hotel roof. Reagan opened his door, and struck a slow sulphur match to light the oil lamp. Then he saw that the shadows wavering on the wall were not his own, and Tom Bishop's voice came from the dimness.

"Put your hands up, Reagan!" he ordered. "These soldiers have you covered—plenty!"

Reagan whirled, more angry than surprised, cursing himself for having been unwary. The light showed Bishop seated on the bed, a malevolent smile on his handsome face. Four other men, barefoot and ragged, held new Sharps rifles pointed at the Texan.

"Still playing both ends against the middle, eh, Bishop?" Reagan said. "Selling Maria Galiano guns, and then having Government troops grab them before they reach the *hacienda*. And those were your men who robbed me the other night at the inn. You figured I'd have money."

"Prove it!" Bishop taunted. "Talk's cheap." Without rising, he reached out and took Reagan's new pistol from his holster.

Reagan said, "That makes twice you've lifted a gun off me. Twice too often, Bishop. Next time—"

"There won't be a next time," Bishop broke in. "You had your chance to clear out, and you weren't smart." He stood, and his black eyes were cold as he motioned toward the door. "Get going! Make a run for it, if you like. That would suit me fine. Ever hear of an old Spanish custom, Reagan—an old custom called *ley de fuga?*"

Reagan fully understood what the "law of flight" meant, and as he moved into the hallway with four rifles at his back, he realized that Tom Bishop intended to force its application in this case. Bishop was loudly ordering his men to shoot to kill if the prisoner made a break. The loudness, Reagan knew, was for the benefit of any potential witnesses who might hear.

He started down the narrow stairs. Two of the ragged soldiers flanked him, one step behind; Bishop was just above them with the other two. It would be an easy matter for Bishop to shove him headlong, and then yell for his men to shoot.

He descended slowly, his boot-heels making a measured clicking on the bare steps, his shoulders involuntarily taut against the expected tear of lead. The palm of his hand was sweating as he slid it down the worn smoothness of the banister railing.

"Move faster!" Bishop ordered. "We're in a hurry."

"I'm not," Reagan retorted. It came to him that the barroom had gone strangely quiet, and his hopes rose faintly. But the door to the bar was vacant, and there was nobody in sight in the lower hall, and only the rain falling darkly from the roof over the wooden sidewalk.

He was three steps from the bottom when his sliding hand struck something cold. Gun steel. His heart leaped as he closed his fingers over the butt of the six-shooter, and in that instant Brad Collins rose with that snakelike quickness of his from the shadow beside the stairs. He had slipped the gun into Reagan's grasp, and now his other hand flashed between the railing posts and jabbed another pistol into Bishop's side.

"Tell 'em to drop them guns!" he growled.

Reagan swung around with the pistol cocked to help enforce the order, but it wasn't needed. Joe Alvin and Jasper Collins were on the other side of the stairway, and they had the soldiers covered.

Alvin said: "You want Brad to paunch him, here and now, Ran? We heard him tellin' these *hombres* to shoot somebody if he tried to bust away, and we figured it was you. Just call it, Ran!"

Reagan retrieved his gun from the pocket of Bishop's linen jacket, and saw the cold sneer on the dark man's mustached lip.

"No," said the Texan; "he needs a little more rope. Trouble is, the Government thinks he's working for them, and if we killed him now, we'd be stirring up more snakes than we could handle. A couple of you boys hold them here, and the rest of you get your stuff, and round up O'Malley and the others. Then we'll march Bishop and his men down to the stables. I reckon we might as well ride tonight!"

The Isthmus Guard picked their horses, and saddled by lantern-light, and rode out of Aspinwall without fanfare on their first patrol—thirteen men, counting the two San Blas Indians. With them, riding bareback and surrounded by armed men, went Tom Bishop and his four soldiers.

The moon came up and shone dimly through a murky drizzle that soaked everybody impartially, and the hoofs of the horses made sucking sounds in the black mud. They sloshed past the inn where Reagan had first seen O'Malley, and where he had been robbed; then the dark, dripping jungle loomed, and opened to swallow the ancient Trail of the Crosses, and the men who rode it.

Halfway to Barbacoas, Reagan called a halt, and unceremoniously ordered Bishop and his men put afoot.

"Now's *your* chance, Bishop!" he warned, leaning out of his saddle. "You can pass the word to Simon Garay, and anybody else who's interested. I'm going to clean up this damned Trail. I'll work with and for any of you two-bit *politicos* who're straight. The crooked ones are going to dance the Texas cakewalk under a high limb. *Sabe?*"

"Listen to me," Bishop retorted, and his voice rose until it shook with anger. "No gang of cutthroats under a fugitive from justice can tell the New Granada government what to do! I've got some influence; and by God, I'll use it. I'll bring a whole regiment of troops from Bogotá, if necessary!"

"I wouldn't do that," Reagan said mildly. "You might have to cut them in on the loot." He raised his hand. "Let's go, boys!"

Joe Alvin gave a Texas yell, and hit spurs to his horse, and the others followed his example—all of them riding past Bishop at a pace that sent mud splattering into his face and over his sodden white linen suit. They turned a bend in the Trail, and lost his curses behind them.

The Chagres had risen in a swirling yellow tide, halting progress on the bridge, and imperiling that part of the structure already built. Reagan, himself driven by a fever of impatience to get into the actual work of making the Cruces Trail safe for travel, found John Seavers pacing up and down in his office, chewing a cigar.

Fever had left the construction engineer a little thinner, and deepened the crease of worry between his eyes, but he came out to shake hands with each of Reagan's men.

"You've got one job," he told them. "Clean up the Trail, and never mind whose toes you step on to do it. You've got one boss—Ran Reagan. Good luck to you all!"

Reagan went back into the office with him while the men unsaddled and had breakfast. He explained that he was going on to Panama City to see if he could find men there.

"You'll need them," Seavers said. "And remember—you never know who can be trusted down here. The Government has given us carte blanche, so to speak, and still I'd bet my bottom dollar some of the provincial officials aren't too anxious to see the Trail policed. They're probably getting their share of the loot."

Reagan thought of Bishop, but he held his tongue. There would have to be evidence; it was his job to get it. The time had not come for naming names. . . .

Later that day the Guard had its first real test in fording the Chagres. The river was broad at the point chosen, and looked sluggish, but its current was swift enough to take men and horses and pack-mules a quarter of a mile downstream before they reached the farther shore. It was necessary then to fight through a jungle, with John Bull and Tom Dadd—the two San Blas guides—hacking a trail with their machetes.

Now they came to a beautiful stretch of meadow-lands, and the sun was out to dry their clothing. Turtledoves made mournful melody; and black and yellow *turpiales* whistled in the tall palms. The Guard rode until sundown, and then pitched camp near one of the wayside crosses.

"Thought you said this trail was all downtrodden with crime!" complained Joe Alvin. "I aint seen any signs of sinfulness."

"You will," Reagan retorted. "How far to Panama now, Tom Dadd?"

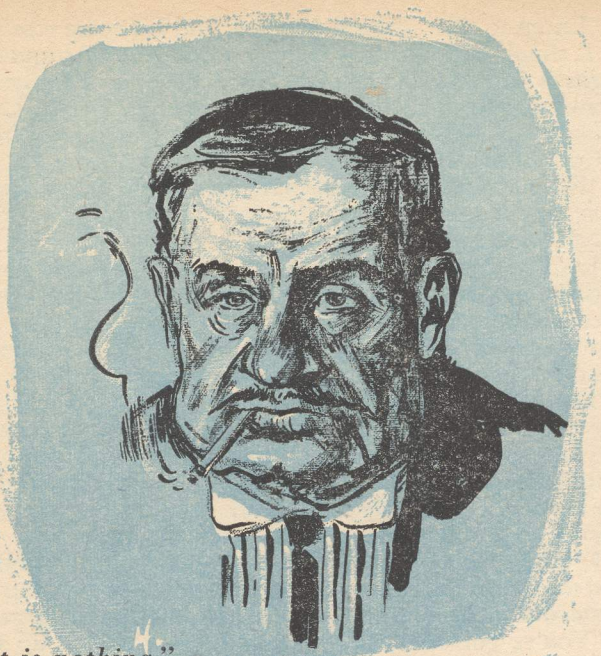
"From here," said the Indian, "it is only a little way to Culebra—the Snake. And then, señor, maybe fifteen miles to Panama City."

The moon was low over the trees in the west when Reagan sat up suddenly in his bed tarp, listening to the loud buzzing of mosquitoes over his head. Brad Collins also had been awakened; he was pulling on his boots.

"You hear something, Brad?" Reagan called to the sallow-faced man.

Brad turned, and somewhere west of the camp a sudden loud rattle of gunfire answered for him. Yells and screams came in the wake of the firing.

"Hit your saddles, boys!" Reagan called. "Here's your crime, and it sounds like a large dose. Jasper—get the



*"It is nothing," said de la Cosa. "The horses will be there on the third day."*

horses. Tom Dadd, you and John Bull stay behind and break camp. Everybody else in the saddle!"

Joe Alvin was at his side on a blaze-faced sorrel when they galloped past the stone cross and into the mud of the Trail. There was another straggle of shots yonder, not a mile to the west. Reagan looked over his shoulder and saw light coming up in the eastern sky.

"Be sure you're drawing a bead on a *bandido,* and not some poor devil who's fighting for all he owns!" he told his men. "Then let 'em have it!"

They rounded a turn. The gray light showed a pack-mule running toward them, its burden hanging awry and ropes flying. Two horsemen shot out of the trees in pursuit. Reagan needed only one look at their brown faces and the manner of their riding: they pulled rein guiltily at the sight of the Guard's charge. And those were Sharps rifles they held across their saddles. . . .

He thumbed back the hammer of his pistol, and fired the Guard's first shot. It cracked loudly into the drumming of running horses, and it was a miss. But Joe Alvin fired at his side, and one of the natives went out of his saddle with a queer, jerking movement. The new gun dropped barrel-down in the mud, and stuck there.

The other man turned his horse and shouted a warning, and a woman's scream came from farther ahead, as if it were an echo. Reagan fired again, and saw his man fall. Others were showing up in groups, in the Trail and at the sides of it, and it was easy to distinguish the robbers now; all of them had loot piled on their saddles.

A bullet sang under Reagan's ear. He bent low, shooting again, seeing the light grow stronger on the jungle trees and on the muddy road where the outlaws appeared —first bunching, and then scattering to take cover. The action resolved itself into a confusion of shots and yells and screams of pain; it was swift and hot and as violent as any fight Reagan had ever seen.

But bits stood out with cameo clearness: Seamus O'Malley, somehow afoot, seizing the leg of a small coffee-colored man who tried to run him down on a horse—O'Malley, dragging the man from his saddle with that leg hold, and then swinging him as a less powerful man might swing a rabbit. There was a swift glimpse of the robber's teeth, bared in terror, and then a crack, like a ripe coconut's fall, as his head struck a tree-trunk.

"That'll learn ye, be jabers!" O'Malley roared, and stalked away looking for new adversaries. Reagan knew in that action-filled moment that horses and guns provided for the Irish giant were only wasted.

Joe Alvin emptied his pistol and had no time to reload. One *bandido* was taking to his feet up a narrow jungle path, and Alvin holstered his gun and shook a small loop into his rope as he rode in pursuit. Reagan shot down a mustached rider who rushed him bravely enough, and saw Campbell down on one knee at the edge of the hoof-trampled road, calmly firing his new Sharps—reloading and firing again. Those were linen cartridges he was using, and one side of his face was strangely blackened by the leaking from the breech.

But now there were no more targets. At least a dozen outlaws lay dead or wounded in the muddy Trail of the Crosses; others had been shot down in the brush, and only a few had escaped. Reagan rode on up to the huddle of humanity and goods at the side of the road.

Men were trying to quiet the mules and untangle the confusion of broken packs. A woman sat in the mud, rocking back and forth and sobbing softly as she held the head of a dead man in her lap. Another man lay sprawled in the rank grass, his arm flung out into the mud, his hand opening and closing convulsively with the pain of his wound.

Reagan got off his horse and said: "Who's in charge of this party?" Before anybody could answer, Joe Alvin whooped out of the jungle with his rope on a choking, squealing native.

The Collins boys leaped from their horses and laid violent hands on Joe's prisoner. Reagan heard them arguing about the relative strength of certain high limbs, and he turned away. After all, there was the woman sitting in the mud, rocking and weeping.

When he looked back again, the light in the east had turned into a golden blaze with the sunrise. The man Joe Alvin had roped was high off the ground, in plain view of all who rode the Trail of the Crosses, his body turning grotesquely as the *reata* untwisted, black against the morning sun.

## Chapter Six

THREE of the members of the Guard had been wounded. Their hurts were not serious, but Reagan took no chances of gangrene in the hot, wet climate; he sent the trio back to the railroad hospital at Barbacoas, with a short written report of the action for Seavers. He rode with the others to Panama City.

If he had considered Aspinwall crowded, he was forced to revise his superlatives, now. Aspinwall was new, spawned by the railroad and fed by the traffic of the Cruces Trail, and the Argonauts who landed there, eager to get on to California. Panama City was old by centuries; it was a white-walled town dreaming by the western sea, remembering other and more hectic days when the pirates came, and not being too much concerned with the gold-seekers who came now. They poured into the town till it overflowed. They camped on its outskirts and waited for ships. Impatience seized them, and they gambled and drank; they carved their initials on the ancient seawall, and used the same knives for defense or assault in the nightly saloon brawls. Tomorrow only meant more waiting. . . .

Steamers of the new Pacific Mail Line were alone in making regular runs, and the space aboard them had been long reserved. Their captains told of a forest of masts and spars elbowing the new docks in San Francisco harbor—told of ships left to rot by crews lured shoreward in the common madness.

The Guard was more fortunately equipped than most parties of Argonauts, having its own bedding and camping supplies. Reagan chose a high, well-drained spot on the rocky peninsula where the city began, and warned the men against drinking and carousing.

O'Malley listened tolerantly. "Don't be after forgetting we need recruits, me boy!" he said. "I might pick up wan or two!"

Reagan strolled apart from the others when they went into town, keeping his eyes open for cowboy hats. But he saw none, and from the temper and tempo of the place, he reckoned that most men of that breed would have lost their hats by now. More than one pair of silver-mounted spurs, and more than one saddle hung in the secondhand shops.

He turned down a side-street, and it began to rain. He took shelter under a balcony.

"Hello there, stranger!" said a throaty voice behind him. "Feel lucky? How about a drink and a hand of poker?"

Reagan grinned and turned. "Howdy, Molly," he said.

"Texas!" exclaimed Molly Drew. "Well, damn me for a lady!" She was overdressed, and overpainted, but still undeniably good-looking. "Come inside!" she urged, and took his arm. "The drinks are on the house. You look like you're over that wound."

"Good thing it was on the head," Reagan said. They sat at a table in a dimly lighted corner, and a native girl who was part mulatto brought whisky. Two of the blonde girls Molly had brought on the *Cora* were dealing faro in a room opening off this one. There was a sizable bar, and a dance-floor.

"We're just getting started," Molly explained. "I got robbed, Texas. So I said what the hell—if that's the way they play down here, I'll play that way too. Somebody's going to take their money while they wait for ships. It might as well be me." She studied Reagan through half-closed eyes. "What are you doing now, Texas?"

He told her, and she nodded interestedly. "And God knows," she said, "the Trail could stand a cleaning. I see 'em every day, the folks who hit here, broke—robbed of every cent. And I can tell you something, Texas!"

"What?"

Molly leaned across the table, displaying the voluptuousness beneath her low-cut dress. "I see the ones who come back, too—the ones who started from this side with pack-mules loaded with gold, or hides, or anything else. Texas, somebody here sends out the word that a mule-train is leaving! They couldn't rob 'em so regularly unless they're tipped off!"

"I suspected that," Reagan said slowly, and heard a sound of commotion in the bar. "But who?"

"I don't know," admitted Molly. "But I'll try to find out for you. Excuse me a minute while I see what this ruckus is about."

Reagan watched her cross the room. The sway of her hips was gone; she walked straight and with determination. There was a crash, and a man came sliding toward him on his back, upsetting a table. Molly Drew's voice rose angrily above the hubbub.

The Texan got on his feet, fearing that she might need help. But she didn't. A resounding *thwack* came from the bar, and there were sounds of capitulation and retreat.

"Get out of my place, you drunken pig!" Molly stormed. "I'll have no fighting. This is a decent place. Get out!"

"Sure, and I—ouch! Holy Mither! Be jabers, lady, if ye'll be after turning me loose, I'll go! *Oww!*"

Reagan leaned against the wall and roared with laughter as O'Malley went by. The Irishman's big shoulders were bent under a rain of blows from Molly's fists; she pulled his red hair and scratched him unmercifully. O'Malley sought sanctuary in the street, and Reagan followed him.

"I'll see you again, Molly," he told her. "Much obliged for not killing O'Malley entirely. He works for me."

"He'll be shoveling coal in hell if he starts another fight in my place!" she blazed.

"Faith!" O'Malley said almost reverently, eying her as she stood in the doorway. "What a woman, Reagan! Have you ever seen the likes of her, now? It's Irish she must be!"

"Go away!" Molly ordered. "Texas, you're welcome any time. But don't bring this big ape with you!"

"I'll be coming back, colleen!" retorted O'Malley as Reagan led him down the street. The man he had slugged was limping away in the opposite direction, and O'Malley looked after him with contempt. "He wouldn't make a dacint recruit, anyway," he philosophized. "But that woman—it's a bit of the Ould Nick she has in her, and she's beautiful, entirely!"

They returned to camp at dusk. Reagan had made a discovery which pleased him highly—O'Malley could be trusted to remain sober if enough excitement were provided. It had been the boredom of railroad construction work that drove him to liquor. And, Reagan told himself, there should be enough excitement in the Guard to keep the redhead temperate.

This belief was borne out an hour later. A horse came up on the gallop, and brought Sanders—one of the men Reagan had sent back to Barbacoas—with a bullet in his arm.

"All hell's popping, Captain!" he told Reagan. "Mr. Seavers sent me. Outlaws wrecked more track yesterday, and ditched a work-train bringing gravel from the San Blas spur. And on the way over here, I sighted two parties of armed men crossing the river—heading east. They must be fixing to pull another raid!"

Reagan whistled, and looked at O'Malley. The Irishman shook his head soberly.

"Faith, and Seavers will never be finishing that bridge without he gets rock and gravel!" he said. "There's a spell of dry weather ivery June, and he counted on winding up the job thin, while the water's low. And besides the bridge, there's forty swampy spots along the line where the track would sink, intirely, if he didn't kape pouring the rock and gravel into thim."

Reagan's jaw set stubbornly. "Break camp, boys!" he ordered. "We'll see if we can't overtake the men Sanders saw."

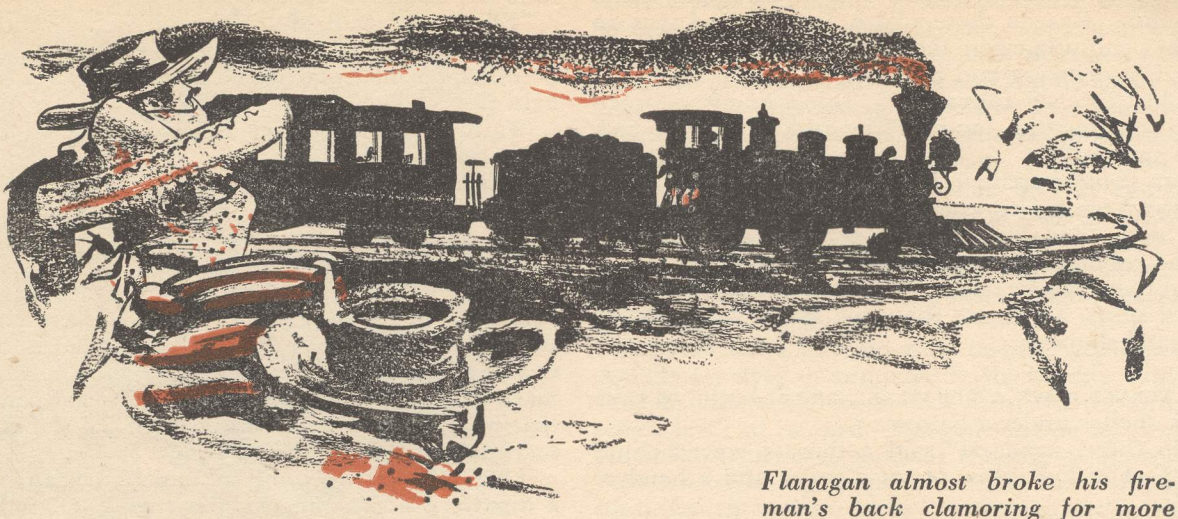
Good time was made to Culebra, and through the savannas beyond. They forded the Chagres again, well above the bridge site, and came back to the jungle, where mud was hock-deep beneath the dripping trees. About midnight Reagan called a halt to let the horses blow, while he rode forward to a tree-dotted knoll to reconnoiter.

He was back in a few minutes, with the word that there were three or four campfires ahead. These could be the men Sanders had seen, or only Argonauts camped along the Trail. That many fires indicated the Guard would be vastly outnumbered.

"We'll hit hard, and count on surprise," he said. "Joe, take three men and move in on the right. O'Malley, you and the Collins boys on the left. I'll come along in the center with Campbell and Sanders. Nobody shoots till I give the word."

O'Malley grunted. Brad Collins sliced plug tobacco and stowed it in his hollow cheek, and his eyes glittered in the moonlight. Joe Alvin tightened his saddle cinch, and the Guard divided and pressed forward, keeping in sight of Reagan.

The Texan felt the soft night wind full in his face as his bay horse topped the knoll, and the breeze brought rank jungle smells, and the scent of wood smoke. Now



*Flanagan almost broke his fireman's back clamoring for more steam as they raced.*

he saw the fires again, and heard a murmur of voices rising from the camp. He drew rein, lifting his hand to signal a halt, and sat listening for a moment, doubting that *bandidos* would be so unwary. Then the firelight moved, and he saw that it came from torches, instead of campfires. Two—three—lights drew together and became fixed behind a clump of trees in a little depression.

Reagan moved forward again, until he could look down into this natural amphitheater. It was dark with men, and spangled with the gleam of the torches on a scattering of rifles. These were natives, not Argonauts, and he estimated there were thirty or forty guns in the crowd.

He signaled another halt. The crowd stirred. A ripple ran through it, and a murmur that grew and swelled until it became a shout:

*"Viva! Viva la Chiquita! Viva revolucion!"*

Maria Galiano—"the Little One"—was mounting a flat-topped boulder in the torchlight. She was slender and piquant; she was herself like a flame in the softness of the tropic night, with the power to warm the blood of all who saw her. The torches gleamed on a spray of orchids in her hair. She lifted both hands, and the cheering died, and it was so quiet in the hollow Reagan could hear the lazy wind rustling leaves on the hill behind him.

"COMPATRIOTS!" MARIA SAID. "Soldiers of the revolution! The time draws near when you must rise, and strike, and stand as free men against the tyranny of Bogotá!"

Another cheer shook the trees. Reagan felt a sudden sense of guilt. He was eavesdropping; this rally, this talk, belonged to the people. For the first time he realized how strongly entrenched Maria was in the hearts of the ragged countrymen. Now, with the light of the torches upon her, she looked more than a leader—she was the spirit of the revolution itself.

She was telling her followers that the guns she had promised them had been stolen. But a way would be found to provide new arms. The Bogotá government, she said, bled the province by taxation and levy, and gave nothing in return. Her voice rose, and pleaded and grew angry by turns; she stamped her feet, and made furious little gestures, and called upon all the saints to witness the perfidy of Bogotá.

Reagan had heard enough. He caught the eyes of O'Malley and Joe Alvin, and made a sweeping movement of his arm toward the rear. The Guard followed him back over the knoll, and another cheer came faintly to their ears as they made camp beside the Trail of the Crosses.

They dried their jungle-wet clothes at the fire, and O'Malley screwed up his thick eyebrows and frowned into the flames.

"Sure," he said, "and there was a French colleen who was after leading her country's troops. I'm not remimbering the name. But she came to a sorry end."

"Aye, lad, a verra sorry end," said Campbell. "They burned her at the stake!"

Reagan spread his hands. "We stay out of it, boys," he said. "But I don't see how she could win. Maybe forty guns—and I'll bet that was the flower of the rebel army on hand tonight."

"Well," said O'Malley, "it's not likely there'll be a fight. In the first place, not even that colleen can unite the people in a country where ivery *hacendado* uses his private army to fight the other *hacendados.* In the second place, the common people are too full of *mañana.* Oh, 'tis hotheaded enough they sounded tonight, but by tomorrow all the fire she has kindled in their hearts will be gone, and the spalpeens will be after taking it aisy. 'Tis nothing to worry about, me bucko—not nearly so much as kaping thim work-trains coming through!"

Reagan went to his bedding roll, but he was still disturbed by what he had seen. He lay looking at the star-heavy sky, angry at himself for being restless and anxious, and finally he came to the conclusion that it made not a damn to him whether Panama was ruled from Bogotá or Tibet. It was Maria's safety that concerned him. That kiss, that brief ecstasy of her embrace, had changed his whole life.

He forced his mind back to the job. Now he had to find a way to patrol the Trail and guard the work-trains, too. The raids on working-parties didn't make sense—or did they? Somebody was deliberately trying to delay construction of the railroad. . . .

Then things became crystal clear, so far as the motive of the *bandidos* was concerned. When the trains were finally running across the Isthmus, hold-ups would not be so simple. The steam cars were faster and more easily defended than a string of pack-mules. Somebody who stood to lose revenue was behind the tearing up of the track, the raids, the heart-breaking delay at the muddy Chagres.

He had planned to report to Seavers early the next day, but at the very point where the road turned off to Barbacoas, the Guard came upon a gruesome find in the Cruces Trail. Two men—*muleros,* by their costumes—lay dead in the mud. The carcass of a mule, stripped of its pack, sprawled by the roadside. A bale of cowhides had been broken, and the board-stiff skins were scattered for a hundred yards to show how one pack animal had fled.

Reagan studied the scene grimly, and Brad Collins cursed in a quiet, impassionate tone. Joe Alvin rode ahead at a trot, his eyes on the ground, his rifle held out from his side.

"Well," Reagan said bitterly, "this is it—this is what they're paying us to stop. We're playing hell doing it. I should have pushed on last night, instead of taking it for granted that everybody at that rally was a harmless revolutionary!"

Brad Collins got down and flexed the dead mule's leg. He said, "It didn't happen long ago, Ran. Three-four hours, maybe."

And Joe Alvin came back down the road in a mud-slinging gallop.

"Found their tracks!" he announced. "They branched off to the right up yonder only a couple of hundred yards!"

Joe Alvin had tracked enough cattle along the brushy bottoms of the Nueces to know what he was talking about. Reagan led the Guard up to the spot he indicated, and sat on his horse for a moment, frowning at the tracks. "I make 'em about twenty head," Joe Alvin drawled. "Horses and mules. And some of the mules was loaded a mite heavy."

"Ingots," said O'Malley, who watched the exhibition of plains lore with interest. "They bring gold across the Isthmus that way. Be jabers—one ingot, and 'tis rich you'd be!"

Tom Dadd's horse jostled Reagan's stirrup, and the Indian spoke in low-voiced Spanish.

"A word for your ears alone, señor," he begged, and when Reagan had followed him to one side, he added: "I have heard them talk of the Señorita Galiano, and I did not think it wise to tell you this in their hearing. That trail, señor, I have followed before. It goes like the snake, but at last it comes to the *hacienda* of José de la Cosa."

Reagan stared at the guide's impassive face. Tom Dadd was trying to tell him that Maria's own party might be guilty of the robbery—that when the rally broke up, her followers had fallen upon the mule-train. The words he had spoken to Maria came back to him, now: *"Rebels get out of hand. . . . They murder and rob!"*

She had slapped him for saying that. This discovery was like a slap in the face, too, he thought. It meant that he was duty bound to follow this trail, to have a showdown with Maria if it led where Tom Dadd said it did. . . .

He made up his mind swiftly. "O'Malley," he said, "you take the Guard on the Barbacoas. Report to Seavers, and then head for Aspinwall. You recruit more men—we've got to have at least thirty! Put the rest of the boys on the work-trains as guards. Understand?"

"And you, me bucko?" O'Malley asked anxiously.

"I'll be all right. Tom Dadd and I are going to take a little *pasear* to the end of this trail. Tell Seavers I'll see him tomorrow."

## Chapter Seven

THE trail he rode with Tom Dadd was, indeed, like the snake. It wound around gullies filled with yellow turbulence; it skirted ravines, and went between conical hills whose summits were lost in the rain that was now falling. And when it joined the main road to the de la Cosa *hacienda,* only a short distance from the guarded gate, the rain had wiped out the tracks they followed. . . .

Señor de la Cosa was not at home, the sentries said. Once more a lackadaisical messenger rode to the house, and returned with word that the Señorita Galiano would see Reagan.

Tom Dadd took the horses to the stable. The same fat servant Reagan had strong-armed on his previous visit let him into the large reception-room, and the young Texan grinned, thinking it was just as well the man had never had a good look at his face.

Then his smile faded. Maria stood waiting to welcome him, beside a large armchair with a wrought leather back representing the arms of Spain. But Tom Bishop was with her.

"Ran!" she exclaimed. "I am glad to see you! Of course you and Colonel Bishop are acquainted?"

Bishop's smile was a mockery. "For a long time, *querida mia,*" he said with a suave little bow, and the endearment sent a wave of anger through Reagan.

"It's something I don't brag about," he said, and Maria looked at him in a half-coquettish, half-reproachful manner.

"There is no reason why you two should not be friends, Ran," she reproved. And then, glancing at his clothes: *"Misericordia,* but you must come by the fire and get dry! Tio Enrique will be down soon."

She took his hand and led him toward the hearth. She looked not at all like a girl who had been up most of the previous night; and the touch of her hand made Reagan's heart race. He was conscious of his need of a shave, and of the water dripping from his sodden clothes. Bishop apparently had come here before the rain started; he was immaculate in white linen.

BISHOP HAD ACQUIRED the polish of Latin manners since coming to Panama. He said: "Well, my little one, it is difficult to leave such charming company, but I have a long way to ride. And"—he gave Reagan that malevolent smile—"I trust we shall soon meet again."

"Outside the walls, if you'll wait!" Reagan retorted.

Bishop laughed, and bent to kiss Maria's hand. He said, *"Adios, querida,"* and went out without a backward glance, while the Texan glowered at him.

"Ran," the girl laughed teasingly, "I believe you are jealous!"

"You know damn' well I am!" he said fiercely. "What's Tom Bishop to you?"

"A—a friend."

He wanted to take her into his arms, but he remembered what he had come to say—and he remembered her temper. "Maria," he began hesitantly, "there was another mule-train robbed last night. Two men killed—maybe more."

"I am sorry to hear that," she said. "Go on."

"The men who did it came this way."

There was that quick, imperious stiffening of her body, that sudden smoldering fire in her dark eyes.

"And if they did?" she asked coolly.

Reagan made an impatient gesture. "I've got to find out something! I'm in love with you, Maria—I'm more in love with you every time I see you. But I've got to know how much the revolution is tied in with the *bandidos.* It's my job to clean up the Trail. I don't give a damn who runs this country so long as the banditry is stopped and the railroad goes through. But—"

"You love me?" Maria flashed. *"Caspita*—wonderful! You love me, and in the same breath you accuse me of murder and robbery! And it is nothing new to me, señor, this saying of yours that you do not care who runs our country. Once I told you we needed fighting men—I asked you to help us. You refused."

"Now, wait a minute—" Reagan began.

"No, I have heard more than enough! You have gone too far, señor. I will ask you to leave, now!"

Reagan looked up to see old Don Enrique coming down the stairs, his thin, fragile face lighted by a smile, his brown hand lifted in greeting. Maria heard him, but none of the fire left her eyes. She said: *"Tio,* I have asked Señor Reagan to leave. Since you are here, I with-

draw that request. I shall go, instead—with your permission!"

She ran up the stairway, her high heels clicking angrily. Reagan stared ruefully after her, and Don Enrique chuckled dryly as he shook his visitor's hand.

"That one," said the old Spaniard, "is sometimes like the chicken with its head cut off—she flops this way, and that way, and she does not know why."

"She knows why, this time," Reagan answered moodily. He accepted a glass of wine, and strode restlessly before the fire. "I wasn't accusing her, Don Enrique. I only wanted to warn her that some of the revolutionaries may be using the cause as a mask for robbery."

Don Enrique looked puzzled, and Reagan told him of the meeting, and of the hold-up, and explained that tracks showed the robbers had come this way.

"They could have gone on beyond, of course," the old man said, frowning. "There are other *haciendas* up there in the hills." He eyed Reagan closely. "Maria was at the meeting, of course?"

"Yes," Reagan said, and Don Enrique put a hand on the Texan's shoulder.

"Señor," he said earnestly, "I would trust my niece with my life. If there are thieves among her followers, she does not know it. But what would you, señor? A revolution attracts all kinds of people, especially the young and hot-headed. She is that way, and impatient. She does not see that a revolution of another kind is taking place in this country. You Americans are bringing it—the railroad, the trade. Some day—oh, many have laughed at me for saying this—some day there will be a ship canal to join the two oceans!"

Reagan grinned. "Sounds impossible, to me."

"But nothing is impossible, señor. It will come. That is the revolution. Not the shooting and killing, and changing of government by force. That— But I talk too much. Can I help you in any way, Señor Reagan?"

"Yes," Reagan said, reaching for his hat. "Tell Maria what you have told me, and make her believe it—before she gets hurt. And tell her not to trust too many people. Particularly those who pretend to double-cross the Government."

Don Enrique nodded. "I too have wondered about that one!" he said. "But he has a way with him—and especially with the ladies. *Vaya Ud. con Dios, señor!*"

TOM DADD CAME OUT with the horses. The rain had stopped, and the land steamed under a bright sun as they rode out the gate and turned down the road toward Las Cruces Trail. There was no sign of Bishop: he was too cunning, Reagan judged, to risk a showdown fight when he could avoid it. Treachery was more to his nature.

"Señor," asked Tom Dadd, "did you learn anything of the gold?"

"Nothing," Reagan told him. "Perhaps it was taken farther into the hills."

"Perhaps," the Indian admitted. "But I do not trust this de la Cosa. He is a *hacendado.*" He rode close to Reagan, and spoke in a low, earnest tone. "All of them are robbers, señor! They took my people's land. All of them keep armed men to—"

Reagan heard a spatting sound, and Tom Dadd jerked upright in his saddle, his dwarfish body twisted spasmodically. He clutched at the saddle-horn, and would have fallen if Reagan had not caught his arm.

The shot cracked from the jungle's impenetrable green wall, and Reagan knew it had been meant for him—knew that it had been fired either by Tom Bishop, or one of his henchmen. He steadied the Indian, and then wheeled his horse and rode toward the spot where birds had taken wing. There was a crashing of the brush in that direction, and then only the dripping silence, and the shadows of the tangled trees. He could find nothing.

He came back, cursing, and bandaged Tom Dadd's shoulder as best he could. The Indian had fainted. . . .

During the next several weeks, Barbacoas seethed as if running a high fever, with the clatter of pile-drivers and hammers for its thunderous pulses. Work-trains—each guarded by two or three of Reagan's men—bustled noisily in from the San Blas spur, or brought rock from the ancient Porto Bello quarries. The stone abutments grew; men swarmed over the growing timber trestle like so many busy brown ants. Those who toiled through the steaming hot daylight wore gauze masks for protection against the insects, and other crews took over by lantern glow. When the *calentura* sent hundreds to the hospital, Seavers found other laborers—somehow, somewhere.

SEAVERS WAS EVERYWHERE at all hours, seeming not to eat or sleep, driving the crews and himself with an impartial, raging mercilessness. He paced his office, chewing black unlighted cigars; he walked the lengthening floor of the trestle, firing commands as new flanged iron rails were laid, wiping the strain from his face with tense, nervous movements of his hands. And Ran Reagan, remembering what Don Enrique had said, caught something of the engineer's spirit and thrilled to see the stilt-legged structure reaching for the other shore. This, indeed, was the real revolution in Panama: American enterprise was on the march, here, building a road to empire, cutting a continent in half and joining it together more closely than before. Whatever happened, this line of track had to go through!

Tom Dadd had expressed a preference for his own village over the hospital, and had gone to the coast on one of the work-trains shortly after he was wounded. Reagan rode on several patrols, and reported one day to Seavers as the latter stood on the bridge.

"Good weather coming up in a few days," the engineer said. "It never rains for a couple of weeks, starting with the twentieth of June. The Spanish call it *el Veranito de San Juan*—the Little Summer of St. John. And when it's over, the rainy season starts in earnest."

He paused, looking thoughtfully toward the other shore, and the feverish light burned in his eyes. He said, "Reagan, with luck we can make it—we can bridge this bitch wolf of a stream! If we do, we'll have trains running from Aspinwall to Panama City before the year's out. I've sent rails around the Horn; we're going to build both ways toward the middle."

"Well," Reagan said, "here's luck! If O'Malley finds those other men we need—"

"I wanted to tell you something," Seavers broke in. "The grapevine works fast in this country. It may be only a wild rumor, but I've got word that we may face trouble here at the bridge. I know you're anxious to patrol the Trail, and of course we've got to keep the work-trains running. But the bridge is paramount right now. If some gang attacked us here, and used blasting-powder, we'd be set back beyond recovery."

"Have you got any guns here?" Reagan asked.

"A few. Perhaps a dozen, all told."

"Then I'll find some men who can use them, and they'll keep the guns by their side as they work. I'll stay here a few days, myself. I've got an idea—I want to check your bills of lading, and the lists of all the shipments that were consigned to the Panama Railroad from California, but didn't get here from Panama City."

"Go to it," Seavers said, and asked no questions. "I'll have somebody in the office help you."

Reagan busied himself with the freight records, and with lining up the men he could count on for defense if the bridge crews were attacked. The time dragged for him; there came a day when Joe Alvin and the Collins boys arrived on a bullet-splashed work-train, and told of a running fight a few miles from the San Blas beach, and Reagan chafed because he had not been with them.

But the invoices and bills of lading were telling a story that interested him, and he tried to be patient. O'Malley was doing good work—word came that he had signed up ten new men, every one of them a holy terror. These recruits were placed aboard the more easily defended trains; Reagan sent Campbell, Sanders, the Collins boys, and Joe Alvin out on the Trail again, and had a small patrol working both ways, usually within recall of Barbacoas.

Things were ominously quiet, except for the occasional clashes when *bandidos* tried to hold up or wreck the work-trains. The Little Summer of St. John was half gone, and it was as if the outlaws preferred to commit their depredations in the rain, which both acted as a curtain and wiped out their trail. But Reagan had the feeling that a storm was brewing.

Then one day Brad Collins' horse came up on the gallop, carrying double. Reagan stepped from the porch of Seavers' office to meet the sallow-faced man, and saw that Tom Dadd had returned.

The Indian's shoulder was not yet healed; his arm still rested in a dirty sling. He was muddy and trail-worn, and only that endurance natural to his race enabled him to stand. He said: "I bring important news, señor!" and all but collapsed.

Brad Collins shifted his tobacco. "Met up with him out on the Trail," he said. "He was comin' in a high trot, like a chaparral cock. Wouldn't tell me what's wrong."

Reagan helped Tom Dadd to the porch, and poured whisky down his throat. The Indian lifted his over-sized head.

"Señor," he said, "that man Bishop has been among my people, telling them great lies. He has told them that the white men are getting gold from the gravel they haul from the San Blas beaches. I know this is a lie, but there are few who will listen to me, because I have lived for so long a time with the white men."

"Go on," Reagan said grimly.

"A long time ago, señor, the San Blas had a great deal of gold. The Spaniards came, and took it, and my people have not forgotten."

"What does Bishop tell them to do?" the Texan asked.

"He has promised them guns and ammunition if they will rise up and fight the railroad workers. He wants them to tear up the tracks, and to march here and fight the men working on this bridge. These things, señor, I heard from his own lips as I lay in my house with this wound."

Reagan turned to Brad Collins. "Get him to the hospital," he ordered. "Then jump out on the Trail toward Panama City, and bring Campbell and Joe Alvin back here. We're going to make our first big strike!"

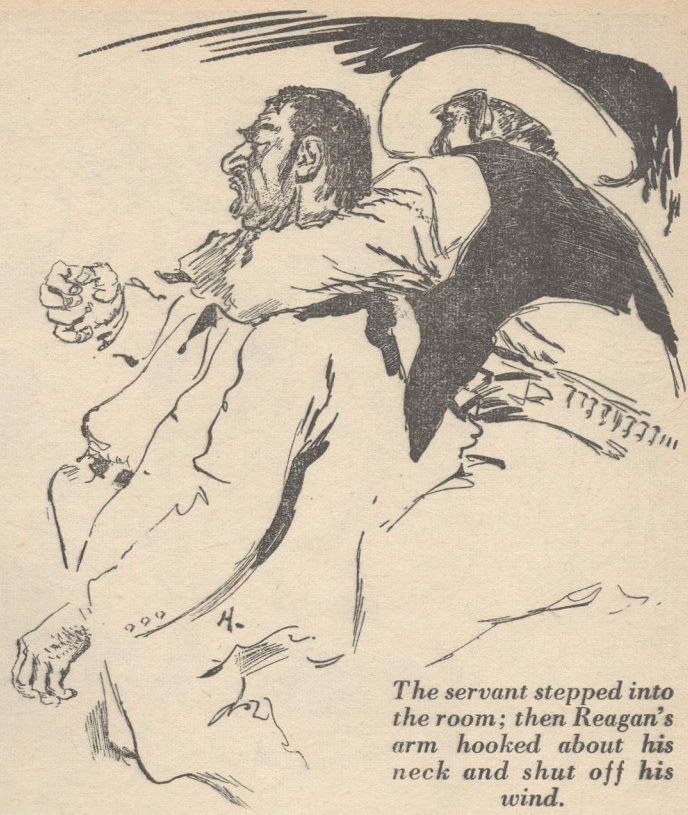
## Chapter Eight

WHILE Brad Collins rode to overtake the men patrolling the Trail, Reagan told John Seavers of the word brought by the Indian guide. The furrow deepened between the engineer's eyes, and he nodded slowly.

"Then the grapevine wasn't wrong," he said. "We've got to be ready. What do you suggest?"

"I'll hit them at the other end, before they can get started!" Reagan said promptly. "And I don't mean a bunch of ignorant half-savages—I mean the ringleaders. Look at these!"

He spread a stack of bills-of-lading on Seavers' desk. "These," he said, "represent the goods that have been stolen between here and Panama City—goods that were to be delivered to the railroad for transport from the end of the line to Aspinwall. There they were to be put aboard steamships of the Atlantic Mail Line. Am I right?"



*The servant stepped into the room; then Reagan's arm hooked about his neck and shut off his wind.*

Seavers nodded again. "Yes, we've lost thousands of dollars' worth of business that way—gold included."

"Gold all looks alike," Reagan said. "But here's one consignment which was to have been put aboard the steamship *Georgia*. Silks, spices and tea—that cargo came from the Orient on a tea clipper. She discharged her cargo at Panama City, and took passengers to San Francisco on her way back to China. That stuff will be in bales and casks and boxes—it'll be easily identified."

"What's up your sleeve, Reagan?" Seavers asked quietly.

The Texan grinned. "You may think I'm taking too drastic a step. But you can hack a dozen pieces off a snake's tail without stopping him from biting. Cut off his head, and he's through!"

"This particular snake has more than one head, I take it?"

"I've added them up to three," Reagan said. "Maybe more."

Seavers frowned. "Well—I promised you free rein," he said, and then thrust out his hand with a smile. "Good luck, Reagan!"

There were only six men in the party that rode eastward before dusk. The dry weather had improved traveling conditions; the Trail seemed quiet enough. Two parties of Argonauts passed, and cheered the riders; they were new arrivals, and the gold fever was still strong upon them, and they knew nothing of the delay at Panama City.

Reagan waved to them, thinking of the others who had traveled this ancient way—Spanish *conquistadores*, helmeted and plumed, proud and cruel—Jesuit priests, burning with religious zeal—Morgan's freebooters, sacking and burning even the churches, showing no quarter to anyone. The lust for gold had moved most of these, even as it moved the Argonauts now; only the Jesuits, those cowled and sandaled men who had erected the stone crosses, came with unselfish purpose. And only the crosses, themselves a symbol of a faith intangible but everlasting, remained unchanged by the discovery at Sutter's Mill. . . .

*Illustrated by L. H. Hamilton*

*Reagan said, "That makes twice you've lifted a gun off me. Twice too often, Bishop. Next time—"*

There was a moon, and Reagan and his men rode all night. They went past the newer Aspinwall road, keeping to the Trail of the Crosses until dawn. Then they stopped for food and rest, just within sight of Porto Bello.

Reagan crawled out of his bedroll in midmorning to see the town, with its crumbling stone fort standing sentinel over the curved harbor, and the tangled green hills rising behind. There was only one ship in the harbor, and the streets looked deserted. He called the men together.

"This is where we take the law into our own hands—on a hunch," he said. "Seavers didn't know I figured on making quite so big a gamble. Anybody want to pull out of the game?"

Nobody did. Reagan smiled his satisfaction.

"It all ties in!" he declared. "Aspinwall took all the trade away from this town—because of the railroad. Simon Garay is the port collector here, and the graft that came with that job was cut by the railroad. He wanted me out of the country, because somebody told him I might take the job of cleaning up the Trail. Once the railroad is built, the *bandidos* are going to find tough pickings. I figure that it pays Garay—and the others—to delay the road every way they can."

"Makes sense," drawled Joe Alvin. "We going to pay a little social call on this Garay *hombre?*"

"We are," Reagan grinned. "Now, take a look at these invoices, and pay attention to what I'm going to say."

THE CUSTOMHOUSE was an ancient structure, facing a narrow alleyway near the pier. It was after the hour of siesta when Dr. Simon Garay's carriage brought him back to his office, after the manner befitting a wealthy and prominent official. The vehicle was large and shiny, with a driver on its high seat, and the horses pulling it were fast and fresh. Simon Garay had just chosen a fresh cigar, and was about to alight, when Ran Reagan stepped quickly into the carriage and sat down beside him.

At the same time, several horsemen rode into the narrow street, converging on the customhouse door. The carriage lurched again as Brad Collins left his saddle and sprang nimbly to the driver's seat.

Simon Garay jumped, and glared at Reagan. "What is the meaning of this, señor?" he demanded haughtily. "You are a fugitive from the law. You are— Driver! Tomas!"

The carriage had begun to move. Reagan said: "Tomas isn't driving any longer. And we have an escort of four men—and any of 'em could shoot that cigar out of your hand, shaking as it is. That is, unless I have to shoot you first!"

His gun poked the flabby man's belly. Garay quaked, and his yellow face turned the color of an underripe lemon.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

"That depends. Aspinwall, perhaps. You see, Dr. Garay, while you enjoyed your siesta, we took the liberty of waking your clerks and arguing them into an inspection of your warehouse. You were very careless to leave those shipping-tags on so much of the goods there. They matched the invoices of loot stolen on the Cruces Trail. If you're willing to sign a full confession, naming your *compadres,* I might give you the same chance you once gave me. I might let you leave the country."

Garay licked his lips. "And if I do not sign this—this lie?" he asked hoarsely. "If I call the Government troops?"

"In that case, *I'll* call the troops," Reagan corrected. "There is evidence enough to make them stand you before a wall. At least, you'd die a soldier's death."

"But I am not a military man, señor! Before God, I swear—"

"The revolutionaries might like to have you," suggested the Texan. "One of their main complaints is against crooked officials like yourself. Or the San Blas Indians may have some quaint methods of torture unknown, even, to the Comanches. Think it over, Dr. Garay!"

They were rolling out of town, now, and out on the road that skirted the coast. Simon Garay looked hopefully to the rear, but there was no pursuit, and Reagan's

men rode with them, leading two horses. It began to rain. The Little Summer of St. John was over. . . .

That night they roused Seamus O'Malley out of his bed in the Railroad Hotel. The Irishman came to his feet belligerently, but quieted as soon as he was awake. His cheek was bandaged as if for toothache, but the muslin showed blood.

"Anybody else get hurt?" Reagan asked.

O'Malley's eyes danced at the sight of the still-trembling Garay. "Wan of the new men," he said. "That sailor—got a bullet right through the tattoo of the dancing-girl on his thigh. Be jabers, Reagan, but you missed wan glorious fight! There we was, guarding the gravel-train, whin all of a suddint thim haythens popped out of the jungle. I thought, O'Malley, you'd better be kaping cool, and—"

"I know," the Texan grinned. "You grabbed a handful of yores and threw it into their eyes."

"The divil take you, Reagan!" O'Malley grumbled, but Joe Alvin rose innocently to the bait.

"*Yores?*" he asked. "What's yores?"

"Mine's ham and eggs," said Reagan. "And coffee strong enough to float a horseshoe. Round up some grub, Joe, and have it brought up to the room while Dr. Garay writes his memoirs. And have the clerk come up as a disinterested witness."

IT TOOK FOUR DRINKS to steady Garay's judgy hand. Rain laid its monotone on the roof; inside, there was only the scratch of the flabby man's pen, and, at intervals, his half-scared, half-boastful speech. He spoke awhile, then wrote what he said, while the members of the Isthmus Guard squatted around the room, cow-camp fashion.

Studying them, Reagan knew a fierce pride. Not all of the men O'Malley had recruited were cowboys; there was one giant Negro from Jamaica, speaking with a British accent, and one Mexican as swarthy as many of the Panamanians. Two of the newcomers were sailors who might have deserted from some U. S. man-of-war. But out of this heterogeneous group he and O'Malley had built a hard-hitting, fast-striking force—a fighting outfit. And now, listening to the sound of Simon Garay's pen, the Texan knew he was, indeed, striking at the multiple heads of the snake. . . .

"And I myself have done nothing—I have only followed custom. All the collectors of Porto Bello, señor, all of them have been poorly paid. It was necessary to obtain additional income."

"Put that down too," Reagan said.

Garay wrote for a while, and then he began talking again.

"And in Panama City, there is a man of great wealth and wickedness. This is Antonio de Hoya, the *alcalde*. Think you, señor—one third of all the goods, or of the money they bring, this de Hoya has kept for himself! And is it fair? He does nothing, except to send word over the Trail that a certain ship has arrived, and that on the day after tomorrow her cargo from the Californias will be sent by mule-train over the Trail!"

"Tough!" Reagan murmured sympathetically. "That left you only two-thirds, eh, Garay?"

The scared eyes swung toward him, shining like beads above their pouches. "But no, señor! I am a poor man, and underpaid, but I could not do that. There had to be someone in between, someone to direct the operations of the—the troops, on the Trail. That took two men, señor. One of them is a *hacendado* who also is too rich: José de la Cosa. The other—"

"Wait a minute!" Reagan exclaimed. "De la Cosa! Isn't he a revolutionary leader?"

"How else would he explain, to some people, his maintenance of a private army?" Garay asked. "How else would he help to keep a state of unrest along the Trail, so that his depredations could be blamed on the patriots? He pretended to be a revolutionary, señor, but he is not. Neither is the other man who helps direct the troops. This is Colonel Bishop."

"I knew that," Reagan said quietly. "And you, Dr. Garay. Are you a revolutionary?"

Garay lifted a fat shoulder. "I am not in favor of some things the Bogotá government has done," he hedged. "It granted the railroad concession, and in doing that it robbed us. The Trail, señor, belonged to the people."

"What about Don Enrique Oviedo, and Señorita Galiano?"

"No," said Garay. "They have no connection with either de Hoya or de la Cosa. But it was to our advantage to have a revolutionary force active—but not successful. The Government blames many things upon them."

"Put that down!" Reagan ordered, and felt a weight lifted from his heart. This would be proof of Maria's innocence.

Simon Garay's pen made a final dismal scratching sound. He said, plaintively: "That is all I know, señor. You will let me go, now? You will let me board one of the ships? Otherwise—"

"Sign it," Reagan said. "Yes, I'll keep my bargain."

Garay's round little eyes flicked from the bottle of whisky to the window, and back to the bottle. He drank, and shuddered flabbily, and signed; then he walked to the window to look out on the gray, wet dawn.

He said, "The rains are so *triste*—so sad!" and went out of the door without looking back. They heard his heavy steps on the stairs, and the sound was reluctant and afraid.

Reagan paced the floor, listening to the rain. It was one down and three to go; he had to decide, now, where to strike next. De Hoya and de la Cosa might be found easily; Bishop would be on the move. And before he could reach a decision, his mind was made up for him. The hotel clerk who had witnessed Garay's confession returned to say that Don Enrique Oviedo was waiting in the lobby.

The old Spaniard made his gravely polite bow, but he was so agitated he could scarcely talk. Reagan shook his arm.

"Maria?" he demanded. "Speak up, man! Is she all right?"

"She has disappeared," Don Enrique said. "And the Government troops are after her. Find her, señor!"

REAGAN HAD TO TAKE HIM into the bar and steady him with a drink of brandy before the fragile old man could talk. Then he told his story jerkily, and without embroiderings.

There were new Government troops in Panama City, apparently sent to cope with the revolution. They had descended upon the *hacienda* two days before.

"They came to arrest Maria, señor. There was an altercation when de la Cosa objected to the search of his house. I escaped by the underground passage, but de la Cosa was killed. Then—"

"De la Cosa killed!" exclaimed Reagan. "Where was Maria?"

"She had left with Colonel Bishop the night before. They were planning to strike a blow for the revolution—to rouse the San Blas, and move on this same garrison at Panama City. Maria does not know it has been strengthened."

"Good God!" Reagan exclaimed. "And she can't see that Bishop is only using her, and the rebel cause. All he wants is to incite the San Blas to tear up the railroad tracks!"

"I cannot manage her, señor. I went to Panama City and made certain arrangements—there is space for her on a ship. We have relatives in California, at a place

*"Arrest?" de Hoya asked. "For what—at whose order?"*

called Monterey, and if I could send her there she would be safe!"

Reagan drank his brandy. De la Cosa's death made two down, but there was no taste of triumph, no elation. Nothing mattered, now, except saving Maria from the threat of a firing-squad.

"The bridge," Don Enrique was saying, "has been finished. It reaches the other shore. It will not be long until the railroad—"

"You get back to Panama City!" Reagan broke in. "Arrange for Molly Drew to hide Maria until we can get her aboard ship, if there should be any delay. I'll bring her across the Isthmus, one way or another!"

## Chapter Nine

REAGAN gave Garay's signed confession to O'Malley, to be delivered into the hands of John Seavers for safekeeping, and sent the Irishman out on the Trail with half of his men, under orders to go on to Panama City and wait for him there. The others he left to the increasingly important duty of train guards. There was already a jump in traffic on the line; word had spread among the Argonauts that the Chagres had been conquered.

But the score to be settled with Tom Bishop was partly personal, and the Texan wanted to attend to that reckoning himself. It was after noon before he was ready to go. And now time was more precious than he had thought. The hotel clerk, who had overheard part of his conversation with Don Enrique, called him aside and pointed through a rain-misted window at a group of men crossing the muddy street.

"Bogotá troops," he said. "They just got here from Panama City, and they're searching the town for rebels. Just seems that a Government official was shot, this morning."

He said that last in a significant tone, and Reagan looked at him questioningly.

"Simon Garay," the clerk explained. "The rains were sadder than he thought. He never got to the waterfront. I guess Bishop had some men here, and they knew Garay had squealed."

"I can't feel sorry for him," Reagan said slowly.

"Neither can I. But I feel sorry for the señorita, Mr. Reagan. They'll blame her. And in a little while these troops will be heading out toward the San Blas beaches. You'd better hurry."

"I'm going now," Reagan said. "You can do me one favor. Find the commanding officer of the troops, and tell him about Garay's confession—and the people it named. And make him believe it!"

He hurried out into the rain, heading toward the stables, and then halting abruptly. There was a faster way! He turned, and went to the railroad yards.

A locomotive with a tender and two gravel-cars attached stood in the rain, its oil headlight brightly cyclopean, smoke pouring from the huge, funnel-shaped stack. The engineer, a big Irishman, almost as redheaded as O'Malley, had seen Reagan at Barbacoas. He leaned from the cab and saluted him now.

"Have you got a clear track to the San Blas gravel pits, Flanagan?" Reagan asked. "I've got to get there—and quick!"

Flanagan looked at his watch. "That we have, by hurrying!" he said heartily. "Come aboard with you!"

THE FIREMAN OPENED his fire-door, and heaved cordwood into it. Sparks flew; the firelight in the cab widened and danced. Flanagan eased open his throttle, and they rolled out on the spur track.

Rain hissed against the firebox, and slanted past the gangways as the engine gathered speed. This was the first time Reagan had ridden the railroad he was fighting for; he smelled the wet smoke beating down in the cab, and leaned out to watch the two big drivewheels—almost as high as the boiler itself—making their strident click on the rails. He thrilled to think that the Isthmus Guard had made it possible to span the Chagres. Within a few months, if progress measured up to Seavers' expectations, trains would be running into Panama City.

And Reagan's job would be done, then. *Before then,* he amended. He could go on to California. He would have another stake, and this time nobody would take it away from him. . . .

Flanagan opened his throttle another notch, and howled to the sweating fireman for more steam. They came at last to a green point, and roared through a cut, and Reagan saw the beach curving in a white and dun crescent ahead of them, laced by a white embroidery of surf. Flanagan slowed to turn around a wide loop of track, and there were work-crews busy loading another train, yonder. Farther up the beach, dim in the rain, he saw one of the San Blas villages.

"Wait till I come back, Flanagan," he said, and swung to the ground to stride up the rain-packed sand. Starved dogs came out yapping at his arrival, and potbellied children, oblivious to the rain, followed the dogs. The adults emerged to watch from the doorways—men wearing calico shirts and trousers, women in dirty muslin dresses, and all of them stunted of stature, with oversized heads and puny-looking legs.

They watched Reagan's approach in dignified silence that could have indicated hostility. But when he inquired, in Spanish, for the house of the *jefe,* there was a cry from the interior of one of the nearer huts, and Tom Dadd suddenly appeared.

The guide's impassive face was as near to smiling as Reagan had ever seen it. "I did not stay long in the hospital, señor," he explained gravely. "There was the threat of too much trouble, and my shoulder is nearly healed. Is it the *jefe* you want to see—or the little señorita? She is in that house, yonder."

"Thank God for that!" Reagan breathed. He started that way, then halted. "And Bishop—where is he?"

Tom Dadd spat to show his contempt. "He left before daylight, señor. Word came to him that soldiers are on their way here."

Reagan thanked the guide, and strode across the little clearing to the hut Tom Dadd had designated. He called Maria's name, and she came to the door. But when he would have taken her in his arms, she stepped back and looked at him coolly.

"There is no need for you to worry, Ran," she said. "The San Blas are not going to harm your railroad. I have persuaded them not to fight. They have nothing but a few old muskets, and bows and arrows. The revolution can't be helped by such poor weapons."

"That," Reagan grinned, "was the smartest thing you've done. The revolution can't be helped by anybody, right now, Maria. I've come to take you across the Isthmus."

"Indeed? You are such a *caballero,* Ran! It must keep you very busy!"

He frowned at her mocking tone. "Busy? How do you mean?"

"Why, there is that señorita in Panama City—the one who was on the ship with you. Oh, I have heard about her. And—"

"I see," Reagan said grimly. "Tom Bishop! Some more of his lies. Did he tell you how he's double-crossed you and everybody else, including the Government? That's one reason you'll have to get out of this place, before the troops come. Bishop is just one of the double-crossers. De la Cosa was another one, Maria, and so was Simon Garay!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Maria. "You are only jealous, Ran—too jealous and too suspicious. Tom Bishop would end the silly feud between you if you were willing to bury the hatchet—he has told me so. But no, you are too—too bullheaded! As for the troops, I am not afraid of them. Tom has influence with the Government, and will help me. As for Señor de la Cosa, who has given *Tio* Enrique and me a place to live, I will not hear you call him a double-crosser. He is one of us. He—"

Down by the gravel pits, Flanagan's whistle tooted impatiently, and Reagan looked that way. He thought: *Bishop's got a way with him, like Don Enrique said!* And all at once jealousy and a rising, angry impatience overcame him.

"Oh, hell!" he exclaimed, and stooped to lift Maria off her feet.

"Ran!" she cried. "Put me down! Turn me loose—do you hear?"

He laughed, and turned into the rain. Naked San Blas children squealed and pointed and danced in glee. Dwarfish adults clustered in their doorways, staring. The engine whistled again, and there was a distant, rhythmic booming of surf like the beat of jungle drums, and Tom Dadd *was* smiling now, as Reagan strode past.

"I'll put you down in Barbacoas!" he retorted.

Maria screamed, and he clapped a hand over her mouth. "Or maybe in Panama City!" he said, and then she bit his finger, and kicked him on the knee. He laughed at a memory: once he had caught a young wildcat, back in the Nueces brush. He said, "I'll tame you, too, damn your wild heart!" and lifted her higher in his arms, until he could stifle her cries with a kiss that bruised her mouth.

"Or maybe I'll not put you down at all!" he finished as he took his lips away.

She wasn't struggling any longer.

FLANAGAN SHUNTED THE GRAVEL-CARS to an Aspinwall siding, for some lesser-favored locomotive to haul, and Reagan made a hasty reconnaissance in town. The troops had pushed on to the San Blas villages. Nobody had seen Tom Bishop. He hurried back to the rail yards. Flanagan got out on the main line ahead of a train that carried passengers, and almost broke his fireman's back clamoring for more steam as they raced through the rain-wet darkness.

Long before they reached the bridge, Reagan had told Maria of Garay's confession and death, and of the killing of de la Cosa. She was convinced, finally, of the duplicity of those she had trusted, and of the futility of the uprising she had tried to lead.

"You did the best you could, *querida,*" the Texan told her. "But the people are not ready—they are neither united nor armed. It is too big a job for one so small and soft and lovely as you."

*"Caballero!"* she taunted, and clung to him against the jolting sway of the cab, smiling through her tears. "Perhaps," she added thoughtfully after a minute, "perhaps *Tio* Enrique was right. This railroad may be the revolution!"

The eastern sky turned light, and the rain had stopped. Reagan lifted her to the ground at Barbacoas, and Campbell and Sanders, who had ridden a work-train earlier, came to meet them. Seavers, they said, had gone to Panama City—ships had brought iron rails and other supplies there, around the Horn, and he was in a fever to start laying track from the other direction.

"Said to tell you to look him up there," Sanders reported, grinning bashfully at Maria.

"Good!" Reagan said, wiping the weariness from his eyes. "We'll have to hurry. Get us a couple of the best horses."

He would have preferred to travel at night, but there was no choice. They delayed at Barbacoas only long enough for breakfast, and then saved the time and trouble of fording the rain-swollen Chagres by leading their mounts across the railroad bridge.

After that, they traveled at a gallop until the horses had to blow. Weary as he was, Reagan rode warily, with a danger-sharpness upon him, and once he caught the cheek strap of Maria's horse and led the animal off the Trail at one of the wayside shrines. A group of mounted men passed, headed toward the river; he never knew whether they were soldiers, or casual travelers. While they waited there, he saw an Espiritu Santo orchid growing in a rotted log that had sheltered it from the rain, and he leaned from his saddle to pluck the blossoms.

When they rode cautiously to the door of Molly Drew's gambling-house and saloon, Maria wore the flowers in her hair.

## CHAPTER TEN

DON ENRIQUE embraced his niece, and wrung Reagan's hand fervently. Molly Drew gave Maria a resounding kiss, and then went for a bottle of her best wine. Maria saw the way O'Malley's eyes followed the blonde girl's seductive retreat, and looked at Reagan with a laugh.

But the Texan was absorbed in more serious matters. He had the Irishman here, and the Collins boys and Joe Alvin—enough, he thought, to handle any situation. Nobody had heard anything of Tom Bishop. Seavers would be at Molly's place later in the evening; he was jubilant, O'Malley reported, over the Garay confession.

"Well," said Reagan, "we took a chance and it paid off. There's still de Hoya. We'll need more than Garay's word, if we can get it. After all, the two could have been political enemies. When it's dark, we'll visit the *alcalde.* Anybody know where he lives?"

"Sure, and I do," said O'Malley. "Molly told me. She knows iverything that goes on in the town, bless her swate heart."

Don Enrique cleared his throat. "Señor," he told Reagan, "I have a carriage and a boat waiting. It is best

that I take Maria to the ship at once. Oh, it does not sail yet, and there will be a time for you to say good-by on board before it does!"

The old Spaniard's eyes twinkled mysteriously, and Reagan nodded. In that moment, California seemed farther away than it ever had in Texas, more remote than on that morning when he woke in the jail with O'Malley, and found his money gone. But Maria was not safe anywhere in Panama, and would not be safe until the Bogotá Government had forgotten. . . .

Molly returned with the wine, and they drank a hasty toast. Reagan held Maria closely for a minute.

"Run along, now, *querida!*" he said lightly. "I'll see you on board ship."

"But I am afraid for you, Ran!" she whispered. "That man de Hoya—"

"Come, Maria!" said Don Enrique.

RAIN RETURNED WITH DARKNESS. Reagan led his four men through crooked streets, and found the house Molly had described to him as the *alcalde's* residence. It was one of the more ancient buildings, set in a spacious walled garden on the edge of town, its lighted windows glimmering faintly through the trees.

They dismounted a little distance away, and the others held back in the wet shadows while Reagan approached the gate alone. He rang a bell there, and waited. He was wet and weary, and depressed by the knowledge that Maria was leaving; he had a feeling that all that had gone before had been too easy. This time—

The muffled figure of a man came down a streaming walk, carrying a lantern that shed a feeble, bobbing circle of light. Somewhere down the street the wheels of a carriage slipped on cobblestones.

The man held his lantern high, and showed a saddle-colored, black-browed face at the gate. "Who is there?" he asked in Spanish, and Reagan reached a long arm through the grille and seized his wrist. There was a revolver in his other hand, catching the lantern's gleam.

"Don't cry out!" he warned quietly. "If you do, I'll shoot you. Open up quietly."

The servant complied, the whites of his eyes showing large in the light. Reagan pulled him into the street, and beckoned the other men to come up.

"There is an underground passage into this house," he told the native. "Take us to it at once!"

He pressed the gun against the servant's side, knowing that he was gambling on the chance of the passage. But most of the old houses had them, and de Hoya would need such an entry for his business. Breath came out of the man in an explosive sigh under the jab of the gun-muzzle.

*"Si, señor!"* he said. "As you will. Only do not shoot!"

Reagan searched him, and took a knife from his sash, throwing it into the gutter. The servant led the way across the street, and into a low-walled area hedged by trees and tropical foliage. Beyond were the crosses and sagging tombstones of an ancient cemetery. The man crossed himself, and pulled back the door of a stone vault.

"Lead the way!" Reagan ordered. "And hold the light."

They went down, and into the musty air of a tunnel that Reagan judged was taking them under the street. It turned, and water dripped from the masonry overhead, and a bat came skittering toward the light. O'Malley cursed under his breath.

Now there was a door, and the servant was reluctant to open it. Reagan prodded him with his gun again. He produced a heavy key, and turned the lock. They found themselves in a large, low-ceilinged room. Bales and boxes of goods were everywhere, and yonder stood casks of wine bearing the labels of Spanish exporters. De Hoya, Reagan saw, lived high.

He made a hasty inspection. Some of the goods bore the same shipping-tags he had found in Simon Garay's warehouse. There was no need to doubt Garay's confession any longer.

"All right," the Texan said. "Take us into the house—to Señor de Hoya. And if you make a false move, you're a dead man!"

*"Si, señor!"*

They climbed steps, and the brown-faced man halted at the top and blew out his lantern. The door he opened showed a faint gleam of candlelight. Reagan pushed noiselessly into the room, and the other four followed. The servant turned as if to put his lantern on a shelf beside the door.

Reagan saw that they were in an anteroom, with a large, high-ceilinged chamber opening beyond. He heard a murmur of low voices, and smelled the bouquet of wine, and noted a pleasant haze of cigar-smoke drifting from the bigger room. Then there was no more time for such irrelevant details. The servant jerked open another door beside the shelf where he had put the lantern, and slammed it behind him. He was fleeing along a hallway there, shrieking loudly of murder and thieves.

"Never mind!" Reagan cried. "We'll find de Hoya ourselves!"

He sprang into the large room, holding his pistol ready. Yonder was Antonio de Hoya, getting up from a chair near the base of a wide, curved stairway with a stone balustrade. He stood uncertainly, his hand inside his coat, his head thrust forward in that odd, sidewise fashion. The candlelight gleamed on his baldness, and brought his beaked nose into prominence.

"You're under arrest, de Hoya!" Reagan said. "Don't pull that gun!"

The *alcalde* took his hand out, empty. "Arrest?" he asked with a sardonic lift of his eyebrows. "For what, Señor Reagan? At the order of whom? An *Americano?*"

Reagan took a step forward, opening his mouth to answer. Brad Collins shouted something unintelligible, and leaped to his elbow, shoving him violently aside. A gun roared in the dimness of the stairway's upper landing.

Reagan jerked his pistol that way, and had a quick glimpse of Tom Bishop's face peering over the balustrade. He fired, and then de Hoya was running for the stairway too, and Bishop was shooting once more before he fled. A woman screamed, high and shrill, in the big room.

Joe Alvin's pistol blasted behind Reagan. De Hoya came to an abrupt and awkward halt, standing precariously on one foot while the other groped spasmodically for a step that didn't seem to exist. Then he lost his balance, and toppled backward down the stairs, and the woman screamed again.

Tom Bishop's footsteps hammered along an upper hallway, and there was a curious thump behind Reagan. He turned, catching his breath, and saw Brad Collins lying on the floor, his lank face twisted, his black eyes bright. Brad said: "Well—I figured it was mighty late to switch over, Ran. But—I couldn't go back to Texas—anyhow."

Reagan heard himself cursing a slow, bitter tone. Jasper Collins took one look at his brother. Brad's eyes closed, and opened again, and all their brightness was gone in that one flicker of his eyelids.

JASPER COLLINS SPRANG TO the stairway, and went up it on the run. Reagan said: "Get after him, boys! Joe—you watch this door. I've got a hunch!"

He turned, running for the anteroom. The woman who had screamed was bending over de Hoya's body, sobbing quietly; she wore a domestic's apron, and Reagan found time to be thankful that she was not the *alcalde's* wife. He jerked open the door that led down into the storeroom, and left it ajar. For a few seconds he stood on the steps, listening.

As yet there was no sound down here. But it was almost certain that there was another door from the house to the storeroom, and the underground passage would be

Bishop's logical choice of escape. The Texan moved on down, pistol ready, and stepped out of the faint glow shining through the doorway.

Muffled shouts and the sounds of slammed doors came to him from above. He moved cautiously across the storeroom, toward the door of the passageway, and then froze behind a stack of boxes. There was a noise nearer at hand—a creak of hinges across the storeroom.

No light showed, but the padding footsteps of a heavy man walking lightly sounded in the darkness. They descended a short flight of stairs. They moved on the level of the floor. The unseen man bumped into something, and grunted.

"You'll never make it, Bishop!" Reagan called. "You'll never live that long!"

Bishop cursed, and fired in the direction of Reagan's voice. The bullet drove into the stack of stolen goods, and the split-second lurch of gun-flame showed Bishop yonder by the row of wine-casks. Reagan shot quickly, and then moved catlike in the other man's direction, closing the distance between them. He heard the liquid trickle that followed his shot, and knew the bullet had hit nothing more than a wine-cask.

Now he crouched where he was, waiting. Bishop was coming, somewhere in the blackness, smarter, now—saving his ammunition. There was only an occasional rustle, the whisper of Bishop's linen jacket as his sleeve brushed some object. Then the sound of his breathing.

HE WAS REACHING FOR THE DOOR that would mean freedom. His empty hand came out, and touched the heavy door-handle.

Ran Reagan's left hand whipped out and caught Bishop's wrist. He jerked the other man toward him, and let the hammer fall on a shot that was so close the powder-flame struck Bishop's white linen jacket.

Bishop grunted, and the gun he held exploded, sending a bullet between Reagan's arm and his ribs. The Texan fired once again, and then a second time—and then he realized that only his grip on Bishop's wrist was holding the other man up.

He stepped back, feeling unutterably weary, remembering Brad Collins lying in the room above, remembering the love that was going to a place called Monterey. . . .

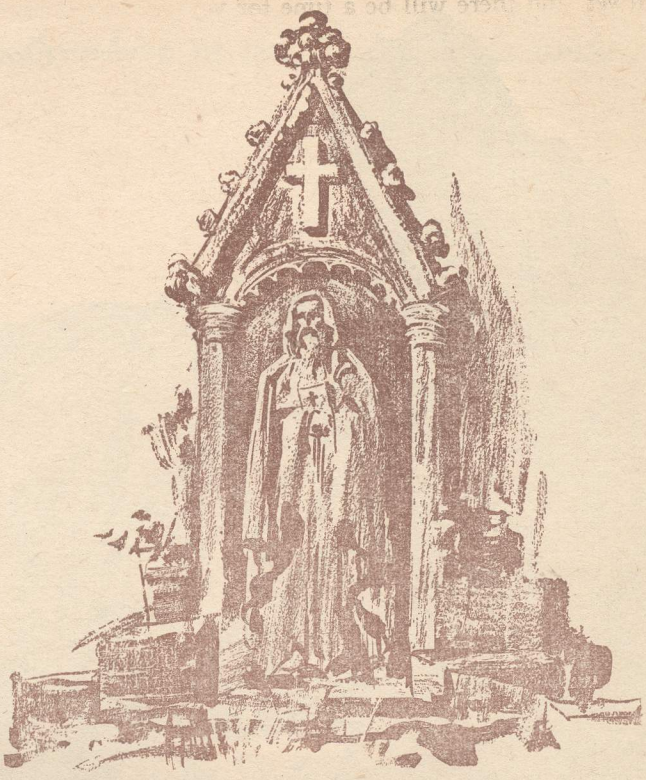
Past midnight; the rain had dwindled to a steady gray mist, and the smallboat bobbed on a long, rolling swell as they pulled up to the ship. Don Enrique had insisted on Seavers' coming along, and O'Malley and Molly Drew were there, and everybody, Reagan thought, was being gay to ease the pain of his good-by to Maria.

Not that it would be for so very long. That night's work, Seavers said, had seen the climax of all the Isthmus Guard had to do. Seavers had shown Garay's confession to the *commandante* of the new Bogotá troops, and they were at de Hoya's house now, gathering the evidence of his and Bishop's guilt. There would be, perhaps, a few minor skirmishes along the Trail of the Crosses; there would always be a few lesser desperadoes. But the heads of the snake had been severed. . . .

However, Reagan told himself disconsolately, it would be months before he could relinquish the job, and before he could book passage on a ship. This one, Don Enrique had said, had been sold out long before—it was only through a stroke of luck that he was able to reserve a stateroom for Maria. He led the way up a sea ladder that swayed with the swells, climbing nimbly for his age. Seavers followed, carrying a satchel that contained a parting gift for Maria.

Reagan stepped on the deck after them, with something vaguely familiar catching at his memory. Then a lantern came up, and he saw the spare figure and spade beard of the man who held it.

"High time, Reagan!" roared Captain Slocum in a voice that carried to the mainland. "Damn your eyes,



but I've been wanting to see you since I rounded the Horn. Come into my cabin. I'll send for the señorita. How about a drink—hey?"

They drank, and Reagan waited impatiently for Maria. Slocum said gold-hunting in California had declined.

"Hear that, acushla?" O'Malley demanded. "Faith, and it's glad you ought to be that you didn't go on. If you had, you wouldn't be getting your place the likes of me for a bouncer and gineral manager, to say nothing of a fine husband!"

Molly smiled, and squeezed the Irishman's hand. "Quiet, you big baboon!" she said fondly. "Captain Slocum's talking."

Slocum pointed a finger at Reagan. "But cattle, now," he said. "There's money in 'em. Hides and salt junk. That's something you know—hey?"

Reagan nodded, and looked impatiently at the door. The lantern swung in its gimbals, and the ship complained. Slocum glanced at his chronometer.

"We're taking the tide in an hour," he said. "Wonder what's keeping the señorita?"

Don Enrique brought her in the door at that juncture, and they saw the reason for her delay. She had dressed in a long, trailing gown of ivory silk and lace, and an exquisite veil of hand-made Spanish lace floated from her dark hair. The Espiritu Santo orchids were pinned on her breast.

Reagan could only look at her dumbly, and the significance of all this escaped him until Seavers slapped him on the back and shook his hand, and O'Malley began dancing an Irish jig.

"Reagan," Seavers said, "you're fired! O'Malley can take charge of the Isthmus Guard till it's disbanded. And here"—he grinned as he handed the satchel to Maria—"is your pay, plus a little bonus. After what happened the last time, I won't trust you with it."

"What—what—" Reagan began, but Slocum's voice drowned his bewilderment.

"I've been a master for twenty years—man and boy!" Slocum said, and took a Bible from his shelf. "And damn my eyes, I've never yet performed a wedding ceremony. But this time, it's got to be done." He winked at Reagan. "It's got to be done, because there's only the one stateroom for the two of you!"

*Out of his wartime experiences,* **Fulton**

# *The* Man Who Went

IT WAS THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE man's expression rather than surprise at his being there at all, which impelled Captain Benison to push aside his G-4 report and to stare up at him. The soldier, meanwhile, looked into the empty air; he was stiffly at attention, serious beyond thought—"A young man born old."

He might still have been in his twenties, but his expression implied ages of weighty care. His was one of those earnest faces that make you uncomfortable, as though the owner, merely by looking that way, were showing you what a shallow, trifling fellow you are in this sad, serious world. The head was long, the eyes large, the mouth rounded to an inverted U, giving an expression not only sober but also equine. There was intelligence, certainly, but Captain Benison could not miss the look of "horsiness" which stamped his visitor.

Tina brought him in. She had found him hopelessly lost in the outer hall, stooping under an overstuffed barracks-bag.

Tina, a young Italian war-widow, had a capacity for mothering which knew no limits; so, when the soldier had called out to her in rapid but badly pronounced Italian, asking for the Coördination Officer, she had taken him there and then under her wing and led him into the presence of her *Capitano.*

"Captain Benison?"

"Yes."

"Private Meddoes reporting for duty, sir."

Benison took notice. It had been a long time since anyone had reported to him for duty. Weeks ago, he had asked the Colonel for some enlisted help with the Italian job, but he had been told that in view of the scarcity of personnel in the Base, the Coördination Officer could hardly expect to get soldiers when many of the productive groups were short-handed. *"Productive"*—Benison had not missed the irony. The Army had long since taught him the futility of insistence, so he had gone on, short-handed and resigned. But now a soldier had actually turned up for duty!

The mimeographed orders gave essential information:

MEDDOES, MERLIN ICARUS, 64039786, PVT. 1ST CLASS, DTCHD FRM DTY W 1000 QM TSPT CO IS ATCHD FR DTY CRDN OFCE PBS. . . .

Merlin Icarus! Benison wondered what kind of background could have produced such a name.

"All right, Meddoes. You'll be billeted at Headquarters Barracks. Take

*Grant has evolved this vivid novel of adventure in the Italian catacombs.*

# *to* Rome

my jeep to move your stuff, if you like; it's downstairs. Bring it back after lunch. Nothing else for you to do until one o'clock."

The soldier surprised him.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know how to drive."

Benison supposed there must still be some persons in America who did not drive cars, but he had never expected to meet one in the Army. Tina contributed her own personal reaction, which was quite other than the Captain's.

*"Povero Regazzo!* But he is *molto carino."*

That afternoon Captain Benison took his new soldier with him, officially to inspect the arms repair shop, but privately to study his man.

Meddoes was not especially communicative; the best the Captain could get out of him was that he had been an instructor in Romance archeology in a small college, and that he was interested in ruins. He had a good book-knowledge of the Italian language and a seemingly uncontrolled thirst for history. Also, he disapproved of armies in general and of our own in particular, probably because he had been drafted into it away from a chance of obtaining a full professorship. He did not inspire Benison with any great enthusiasm. The only reason a man like Meddoes could have been sent to him, he felt, would be because nobody else wanted him. Still, one hardly examines the teeth of a gift horse. And this one could actually speak Italian, however badly. . . .

The Italian shop was in a cave. Benison had organized it to repair arms for the Italian forces recently incorporated into the U. S. Fifth Army. The cave itself was on the fringe of that slummiest of all Naples slums, Fontenelle, where tiny streets writhe and wriggle like scorched worms among habitations of a filthiness inconceivable to Americans. A smelly, muddy canal no longer used (except for an occasional suicide) sluices through the quarter carrying away garbage, human refuse and the carcasses of such dead animals as even the very poor and starving will not eat. On one side is a cliff of soft, cheeselike rock, which connects Fontenelle with the heights of Vomero on one end and to Capodimonte on the other. This cliff is fissured by natural and artificial caves such as this one which Benison had chosen for his operations. It made an excellent place for such operations during this period when German bombers came over two or three times daily.

As they drove into the lower entrance through a walled roadway, Meddoes emerged from his dullness.

"This is a treat to me, sir," he said. "I've read about the cave systems of Naples. Some of the grottoes are very ancient. There are catacombs under the whole city too, as old or perhaps older than those in Rome, although not as popularized. I should like to come here again and look around sometime if you don't mind, sir."

Benison was not interested in archeology.

"You'll come here, all right—you'll practically *live* here! But you won't have much time for history. You'll be my straw boss; your job will be to see that these wops repair a hundred machine-guns a day."

Meddoes seemed less than impressed. His attention was now fixed on the cave's scarred walls. Benison had misgivings as to the usefulness of a soldier who studies scratches while his superior is explaining the production schedules for semi-automatics.

THE raid came entirely without warning. No siren was sounded. A stick of bombs walked across Capodimonte hill in a series of vicious bangs, the last bomb exploding near enough to the cave to send the workers at the outdoor forge scurrying inside. Then hell broke loose as A-A guns from high points on Vomero, Capodimonte and Posillipo sent up their deadly spittle. An unseen 90-mm. had a spasm next door. Rockets shrieked like banshees, while overhead, bombers crisscrossed like frenetic

hawks above a chicken-yard, dropping their death-eggs at random as the flak thickened.

Crowds of panic-stricken civilians poured into the cave, as falling fragments added to the peril of bombs. Naples had no further concern for bravery. Bombed, starved, humiliated, disgraced, its people wanted refuge, not heroics.

"No point in staying out here," Benison flung over his shoulder. "Might as well get out of the rain."

It came to him as he went inside that the soldier was no longer beside him. He wondered if the man had gone panicky. Could be. What is S.O.P. for an archeologist under fire?

Then the noise stopped. The A-A batteries shut down. The drone of planes hushed. Jerry had departed, leaving Naples to lick her wounds. There remained only the excited murmur of voices and the thin wails of scared *bambini*. Hit-and-run raid. That mob would stay packed in the cave until the all-clear blew—it might be another hour. No more work today. No wonder they called 'em "nuisance raids." But where was that soldier?

*"E finito l'electricità!"* The power had failed—probably a main bombed out. Benison muttered an inaudible "damn!" Production was behind schedule; the G-4 report promised a hundred repaired Bredas for tomorrow. He'd planned to keep the shop working all night. Well, no use thinking of that now. Where *was* that damned soldier? No, the Italian noncom had not seen the *soldato Americano*. One of the workmen had, however.

"Before the first bomb, signor, I have already seen a soldier to enter inside the ammunition shaft. The *Capitano* desires him to be disclosed?"

Benison nodded and others joined the search. Meanwhile, the Captain issued instructions: A group of thirty mechanics would return at 7:30. Two electricians would also be needed. Did the noncom understand so far? . . . . *Buono!* . . . An American truck would arrive at eight, bringing a portable field-generator, which the electricians would cut into the line at the main panel. The voltage would be low, but the phasing would be all right and it would have to do. Was all that clear? . . . *Buono!*

The man who had gone after Meddoes returned.

"The *soldato Americano* is not in the shaft. We have searched, but he is not to be discovered."

Benison acknowledged the report with a nod. Meddoes was old enough to take care of himself, he thought, but still he was concerned. Nearly five o'clock—barely time to arrange for the portable generator. Soon it would be supper-time. Damn that soldier!

The all-clear had gone; the crowd had oozed out. On the chance that his soldier had got mixed with them, Benison walked through to conduct a private search of his own.

THE upper level of the cave was a hollowed-out chamber in the hill of Capodimonte, which served as a *ricovero* and also (with the aid of a crude altar and a cardboard shrine), as a church, for the destitute poor. It was on street-level and gave, through an intricate series of alleyways, onto one of Naples' main thoroughfares.

Benison told the noncom: "I think my soldier has gone out through the upper exit. But just in case he *is* lost down here somewhere, you will stay until the mechanics come. If he shows up, tell him to telephone me at the mess."

The Italian nodded and Benison drove away.

A telephone call did come through while the Captain was at dinner, but it was not from his missing soldier.

"This is Sergeant Truff of the Nth Engineers. We just put in that generator at your shop, sir, and it works okay. One of the wops up here said for me to tell you they didn't find your soldier."

Benison was depressed by the news. He felt a sense of personal responsibility which he feared might be a little absurd. He was aware of some colder intellectual process telling him that this man Meddoes was not worth his concern; that he was poor soldier material at best and essentially unsuited to the work. The Captain was entirely aware of his inconsistency of emotions, but could do nothing about it. He had lost a man. No good officer can shrug off such a loss. He put in a call to headquarters barracks, where Meddoes was officially billeted. The duty-sergeant had not seen him.

In the morning, Tina rubbed salt into his hurt. After her usual *"Buon giorno, Capitano!"* she demanded:

"And today again does not the new one come to us?"

***This light, although pale, was enough to show several trucks down on the chamber's floor.***

Benison had to tell his secretary the story of Meddoes' disappearance.

*"Mamma mia!"* Tragedy altered Tina's lunar face. "So he is already lost?"

Benison said nothing and Tina took a gloomy view: "But then he is surely dead!"

The officer inwardly damned her, and with her all female Latins; but immediately he felt sorry and ashamed. Poor Tina was a special case. Perhaps all Italian women caught in the wake of war were special cases. Frightened, belittled, bereft, emotionally and physically starved, they made a forlorn lot. Could American women bear up better than these under terror, starvation and chaos? Could the folks back home take with equanimity such bombings and beatings and the loss of all they loved and respected? Perhaps tragedy had so grown into this poor girl that she could feel nothing else.

But she spoke again, a new and gayer note in her voice:

*"Capitano!"*

"Yes?"

"He will not be lost, the *soldato*. For today comes my uncle Ippolito."

"Your uncle Ippolito?"

"He knows the catacombs like the buttons of his jacket. He once was a guide. He will find our *soldato*."

"But the soldier is in the Fontenelle caves, not in the catacombs."

"It does not matter. It is the same thing."

The ringing of the telephone intervened before Benison could reply to this. The Italian noncom whom Benison left in charge of the shop was excited.

*"E scoperto, Capitano!"*

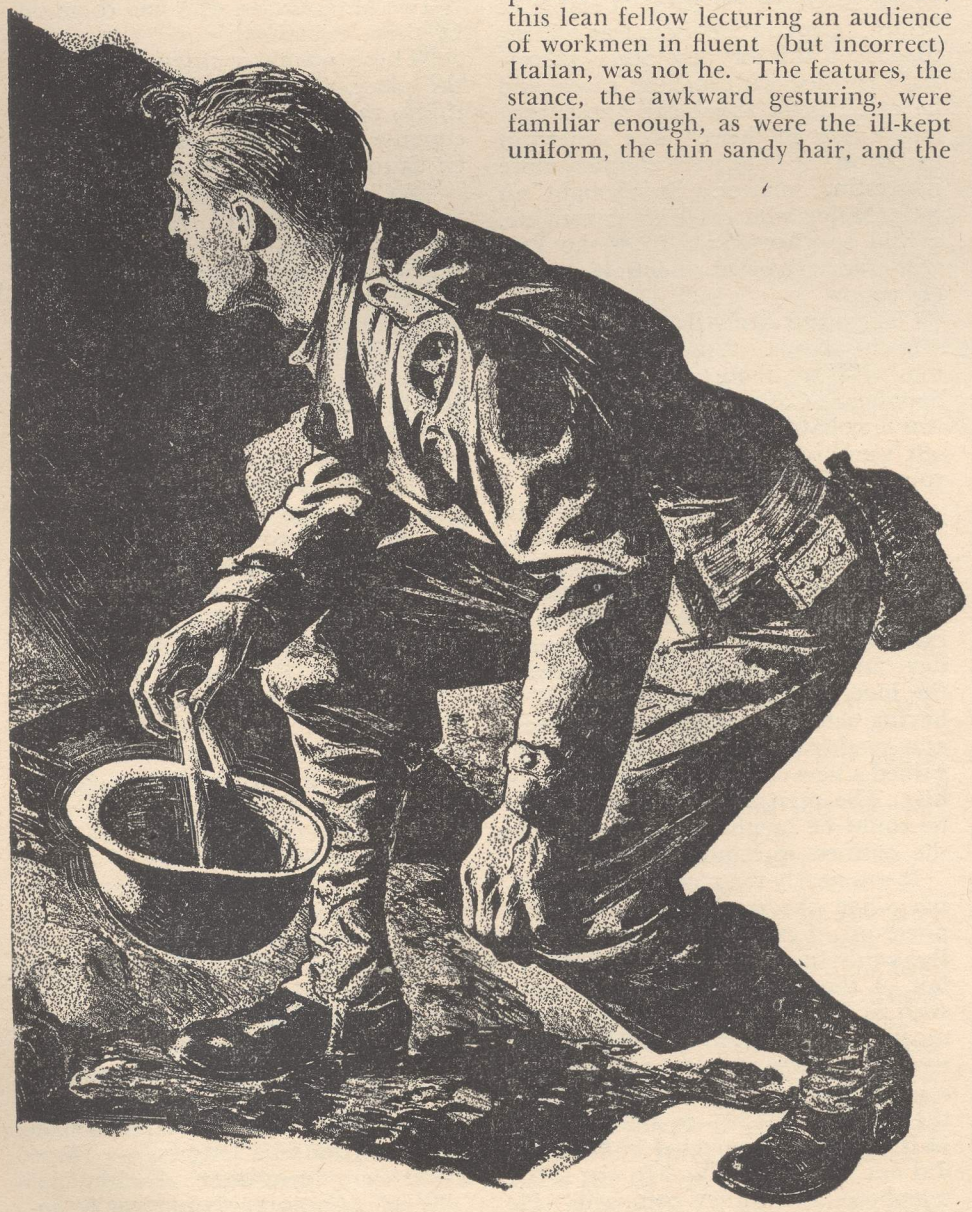
"What is? Who is?"

"The soldier, *il soldato Americano*, he is here. He has come back."

"Not injured? I shall come at once, then."

He barely heard Tina's *"Cara Santa Maria!"*—so bent was he on getting downstairs to his jeep. . . .

What struck Benison most was that his soldier had undergone a metamorphosis. Pfc. Meddoes had vanished; this lean fellow lecturing an audience of workmen in fluent (but incorrect) Italian, was not he. The features, the stance, the awkward gesturing, were familiar enough, as were the ill-kept uniform, the thin sandy hair, and the near-equine look. But all resemblance ended with these superficialities.



The voice was more assured, the stance less diffident, the whole personality—in so far as it was discernible to Benison, was transfigured into that of a far more substantial and mature man. Not "Private Meddoes, sir," any longer—but Professor Meddoes, ably and with dignity expounding raw history to the uninitiate.

"The real significance of these scratches struck me at once," Meddoes included the Captain now. "Since they were in the post-classical or vulgar Latin and because of certain mannerisms, we may assume them to have been scribed by the soldiery—"

The Italians merely gaped.

Benison enjoyed a grin. History was not his cup of tea, and still less so that of these workmen. This fellow did seem able enough in his own field, one had to admit.

"YOUR City of Naples was twice besieged and taken by Roman legions, first in 409 B.C. and again in the Fifth Century. Certain characteristics of these inscriptions lead to the assumption that they may be of this last period. Even the crudest scratches can show a great deal—"

There was too much of this. Benison's job concerned a present-day war, and left no time for historical speculation. But he held his peace.

"The renowned Byzantine General, Belisarius, in the time of Justinian, is known to have captured Naples by entering through a secret underground passage. Now it is quite possible that the underground passage may have been a part of the Fontenelle cave system. Some authorities mention a temple to Janus—"

"All very interesting, Meddoes, but not much use to us in this job." Benison could waste no more time on archeology.

There was reproof in the soldier's look.

"I was about to explain, sir, that I passed the night in an aperture leading out of the ammunition shaft. My flashlight failed and I had no choice but to stay there. This morning, I found I had stumbled upon an underground temple. The American trucks were—"

*"What* trucks?"

"Army trucks."

"Where?"

"I was about to explain, sir."

You could do nothing with the man. You were dealing no longer with a misfit soldier, but with one Professor M. I. Meddoes, who had been exposed to, but not subdued by, your Army and your little games of rank and authority.

"Very well, but get on with it."

The story seemed simple enough. Meddoes admitted without regret that

he had been more interested in the scratches on the cave's walls than in his Captain's plans for repairing firearms. He had found many Latin words and sentences scratched in the soft rock. Had a group of soldiers been billeted in the cave, such phrases could have been expected. He had wandered deep into the unused ammunition shaft, studying these inscriptions, unconscious that an air-raid was blasting the world above him or that his Captain had missed him. It was not, in fact, until his flashlight batteries gave out that he had realized his own situation. He was the type of man who can focus intensely on only one thing at one time. His sense of direction was uncertain. He had to grope his way along the damp walls, hoping vaguely to get back to the shop area. Finally he realized that it would be safer to remain where he was than to risk going deeper into the cave. And so, because it was not cold but only damp, he sat down on his own jacket and slept.

WHEN he wakened, he noticed a grayish light and made toward it. The light seemed to be coming from a break in the wall, but upon closer inspection the "break" proved to be an aperture overlooking a large area hollowed out in the rock, and from its high ceiling came daylight. This light, although pale and filtered through obstructions, was enough to show several automobile trucks down on the chamber's floor.

"How many?" Benison wanted to know.

"Oh, several." Meddoes was a vague soul. "Of course, in the obscurity—"

The trucks were a minor matter to the soldier-professor, but to a Captain in the Army, they had a special significance.

"You're certain they were American, not Italian?"

"They were G.M.C. 6x6's."

Benison wondered where a man who could not even drive a car had picked up such a descriptive phrase.

"Could you find this place again?"

"Certainly. I counted three stacks of that old Italian artillery ammunition from the first bend in that shaft. You see, sir, I lost my sense of direction in the dark, and I must have—"

"Never mind now. You've had no breakfast. Tell one of the Italians to drive you in my jeep to your mess. I'll telephone them to serve you. You may have made an important discovery, Meddoes, and I shall make a report at once."

"I think so too, sir. If I could actually show that the underground chamber is a temple to Janus, it will have considerable historical value. That story of Belisarius, for instance—"

But Benison had turned his back and was issuing orders to the Italian work crews. He had not implied historical values when *he* spoke of a discovery!

It is an open secret, shared by an army of American soldiers who served in the Italian campaign, that the theft of American vehicles in that theater was a scandalous fact. The scandal had already reached shocking proportions before the summer of 1944. Expert thieves spirited jeeps, trucks, weapons-carriers and command-cars out of parking areas, seemingly under the very eyes of sentries. No figures are available to the public showing the money value of such losses, but it is well known that the thefts had a depressing effect on soldier morale. Stories are still told hinting that parts and tires stripped from stolen vehicles were sold back again to the U. S. Army at prices higher than their original cost, but these tales are not confirmed. Theft of transportation, however, was factual, and it was a sharp thorn in our S.O.S. organization.

As to the underground chamber which Meddoes called a "Temple of Janus," Captain Benison was willing to accept this or any other theory. Italy is filled with ancient caves, and he cared little about the ghosts that might lurk in them. The American trucks on the floor were another, more interesting, matter. So thought an M.P. Major who came to investigate, as did another officer from the Provost-Marshal's office. Benison's report got action.

"These are Army trucks, all right," said the Major. "And they're stolen, too. I'd say there are several days' haul here. Captain, it looks as though you may have stumbled on a means of our smashing this stealing. I'll give you full credit in my report."

Benison cared little about credit. The matter was in proper hands now, and he could return to his job of repairing arms. All arrangements were made for a group of M.P. soldiers to raid the cache of stolen trucks next day, and Benison shook hands with the investigating officers, conscious of having acted promptly and decisively as a good officer should. He had also gained a new respect for this soldier of his. The man had qualities, if only he could be taught to apply them to the business in hand!

It was nearly ten o'clock next morning when the small army of M.P.'s piled out of two trucks and filed into Benison's Italian workshop. The affair of the stolen vehicles had made such a stir at Military Police headquarters that a full Colonel had interested himself and had come in person (in his limousine, not in one of the soldiers' trucks) to have a hand in it. Benison, engrossed in his work, did not join the party. He was at the telephone when they returned. He had been pleading with an AMG Lieutenant at the Economics Bureau to release a small quantity of special steel which had been discovered in a bombed-out Italian factory. The Lieutenant, aware that his strong bargaining position gave him consequence far above his rank, had been uncoöperative and enjoyed it. Benison, therefore, was in no good mood to receive the needlessly profane Colonel who had detached himself from the returning party and seemed to blame Benison for some misfortune. His silver eagles fairly screamed as the Captain appeared.

"We can expect any blank-blank thing from one of these blank-blank staff captains, I suppose! But you're blank-blank well going to learn that pulling M.P. soldiers away from duty for a blank-blank wild-goose chase is a blank-blank serious thing! And I'm blank-blank well going to see to it that the General hears of it—"

Benison lost patience.

"Frankly, sir, I don't know what you're talking about."

The M.P. Major, who had come up by then, explained:

"There wasn't a single vehicle in the place, Captain, and the Colonel thinks there never *were* any. Do you suppose your soldier could have taken us to the wrong place?"

"No." He didn't doubt his soldier.

The Colonel still blank-blanked loudly and freely.

"Sir," Benison's own temper was rising above his discretion, "my soldier found a place full of American trucks, and so reported to me. I reported it to your headquarters. Your Major came here yesterday with a Captain from Provost-Marshal and confirmed my report. You say there are no trucks there now. I believe you. But they *were* there, all right! I'm not responsible for 'em. My job is making this shop produce arms and I'm working at it. You can tell the General *that,* too. And now, if you will excuse me, sir, I'll have to get going."

The Colonel, perceiving that blank-blanking was of no avail with this Captain, went away, followed by his Major, who had enjoyed hearing the Colonel told off.

"CAPTAIN BENISON."

It was Meddoes again, standing at the desk and speaking breathily. The Captain was aware that the soldier should not have been at the office at this time of day. Technically, he was deserting his job and was therefore guilty of something or other. But common sense led Benison to say:

"Well?"

"I've been down into the Roman temple. I found a long rope. Those trucks *were* down there, all right."

"Yes?" Captains should not be infected by soldiers' enthusiasms.

"And there is a sort of road, leading out of the temple. There were oil-spots as well as tire-marks in it."

"Yes. There *would* be some kind of road into the place."

"Yes, but—" He seemed almost embarrassed.

"What?"

"This is not just a way *into* the temple, sir."

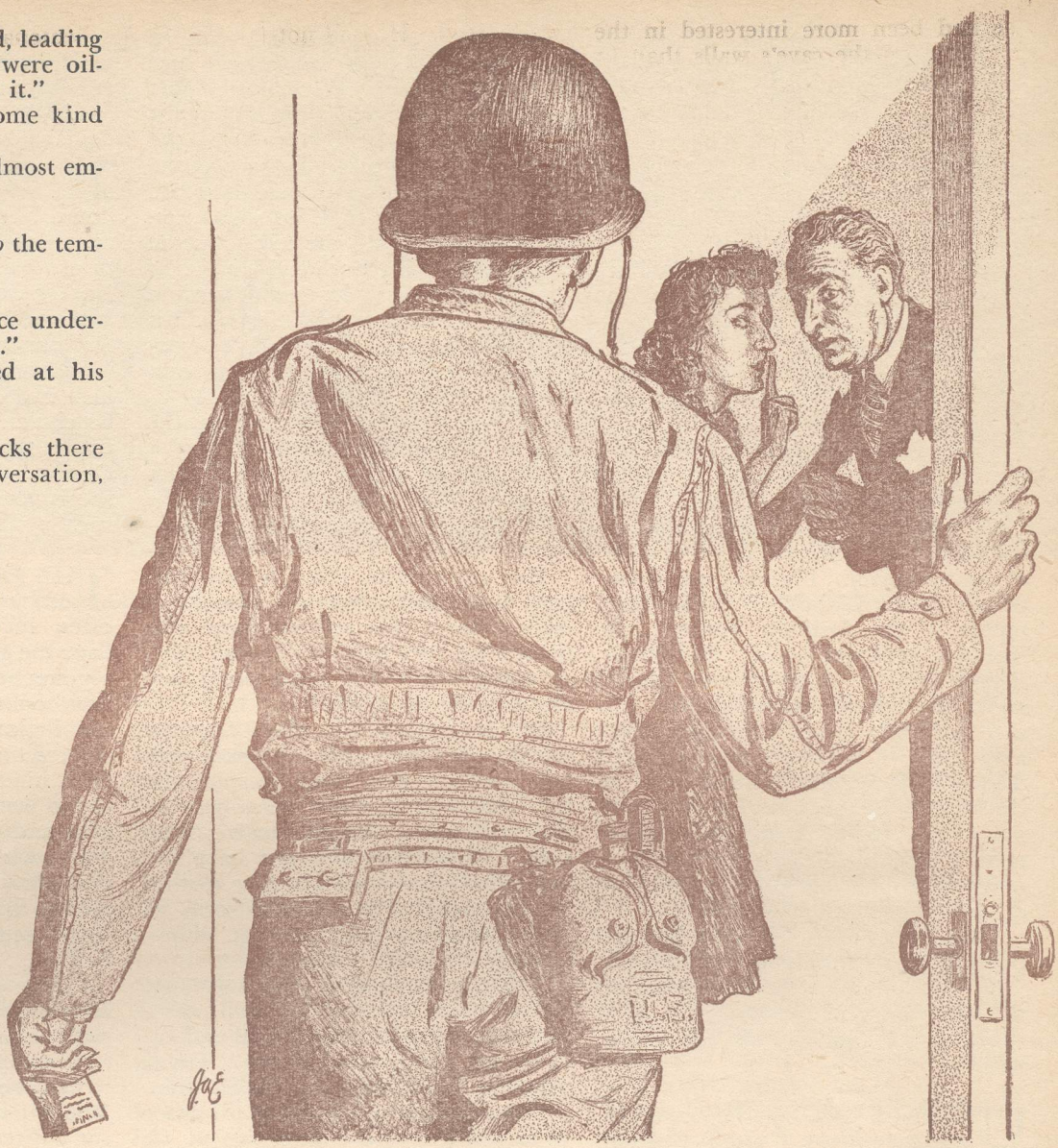
"No?"

"It goes for a long distance underground—beyond Naples City."

Benison, a little surprised at his own curiosity, prodded him.

"Go on, Meddoes."

"Last night in the barracks there was the usual — ah — conversation,



***Meddoes saw Tina talking to an old man . . . he could not recognize the fellow as the one person on earth whom he had best avoid.***

termed 'gum-beating sessions,' I believe. I mentioned those trucks to some of the fellows. You did not tell me to treat the matter as secret, sir."

"No."

"Two of the men were newcomers—Fifth Army soldiers. They had been at the front. They said something that disturbs me."

"Yes?"

"They said that the Germans are using many American trucks. It appears to be common belief among combat troops that the trucks and other vehicles stolen here in Naples are being sent to the Germans."

"So?" This was pretty far-fetched for an archeologist, Benison thought.

"That passageway from the Janus temple might actually lead to Rome, or to some point on the other side of the German line."

The Captain could not avoid a smile. "A subterranean route from Naples to Rome? Isn't that a little melodramatic, Meddoes?"

"I've been reading a book by the Italian scholar, Emanuelle Gallo. It is called *Napoli scoperta.* It amounts to a history of Naples, as revealed in the streets and alleys. There are two or three references in it to an ancient secret road from Naples to Rome—a tunnel, perhaps, or perhaps a system of underground roads."

"Tunnel to Rome? You don't really believe it, do you?"

"Nor disbelieve it, since this morning."

"This morning? Did you discover a tunnel to Rome?"

"Of course I am not sure."

"But you think so?"

Obviously he hoped so, at any rate, and Benison let him tell his tale.

He had, it seemed, followed the tire-marks and trailed the stolen trucks out of the place he called a "temple."

"I walked for twenty minutes before turning back. Evidently, then, it leads beyond the limits of the city so it is equally evident that those trucks went out of Naples, underground, sir."

"To Rome, you think?"

"It is possible. I have talked with several of the workmen who have had friends or relatives in Rome under the German occupation. They correspond with them almost as freely as if letters did not have to be smuggled through the battle lines. There is a regular black market postal-service. Letters are carried at fantastically high prices—"

"And you think they use this tunnel of yours?"

"It would be ideal, would it not?"

"Have you looked at a map as I suggested?"

"Yes. An underground road directly to Rome would have to pass under the sea. But why must we assume that the road is direct?"

"Why assume anything?"

"Because—" Quite evidently this fellow was even more serious than Benison had realized. Better humor him a little, let him down easily. Sensitive fellow—probably a brilliant man in his own field—of a higher cut than the average G.I., certainly.

"Let's have it, Meddoes."

The soldier plainly was on unfamiliar ground, and realized it.

"Well, sir, it occurred to me that—I am not familiar with military theory, Captain, but it seemed to me that if such an underground passage really does exist, it exposes this base to a surprise attack. And reciprocally, if such a route exists and were utilized by our own forces, it—"

Benison stopped him gently.

"Your logic is sound enough. But just what did you want me to do about it?"

"Nothing at all, sir. I came here to ask you for permission to look for—"

"I am sorry." Benison shook his head.

The long face became perceptibly longer.

"You mean I cannot?"

"I mean that the Coördination Office cannot interfere in matters outside of our authority. This business is Intelligence, not Liaison. I've made my report to the Military Police. It's their job to report to G-2. Our Intelligence officers must already know about the bootleg postal service. If there is a tunnel used in it, they probably have it charted and plotted. That's their regular business. So is the security of this base. But it isn't our affair. In the Army, one department doesn't trespass on the functions of another. I can't authorize you to do any investigating."

"But, Captain—" The man had apparently not anticipated a refusal. "But Captain, from the standpoint of the historian, the archeologist— If I could prove that it was the Janus temple—"

UNCONCERNED as he was with ancient history, Captain Benison still did not have the heart to blight this man's enthusiasm ruthlessly.

"Officially, I can't authorize you to do a thing. I told you that we can't act in a G-2 matter, and I can't have you playing around with archeology on Army time." His voice softened a little as he saw the dejected look on Meddoes' face. "Still, I have no control over what you do on your own *free* time. You are entitled to one free day each week, Meddoes, and if you choose to spend that day exploring ruined temples—"

The soldier was like a man reprieved from doom.

"You mean, Captain, that—" For a second an eager, delighted boy stood where a man of dry book-knowledge had been. It was hard for Benison not to smile.

"I mean that your weekly day off begins tonight at midnight, and that how you choose to use it is none of my business. I suggest that you sit down right now and fill out your pass form; then go back to your job and stay there until five o'clock." . . .

That noonday, Meddoes quit his Captain's office possessed of a day-off pass, a new purpose and a feeling of gratitude. He was not aware that the ironical Fates were making sport of him. He could not know that his talk with Captain Benison was the prelude to adventure. Even when he saw Tina talking to a withered old man in the outer hall, he could not, of course, recognize the fellow as the one person on earth whom he had best avoid. Before long he would, because of this old man, be fighting for his life; before long he would be very close indeed to becoming an outstanding hero of World War II.

As he glanced casually at Tina, the secretary's round face lighted up.

"*Ecco!*" she said to her ancient companion. "There he is. There is the poor soldier who was lost in the catacombs!"

Her companion lifted a face covered with parchment and gave Meddoes a stare. He seemed quite old, though his eyes were bright and wary, as though they distrusted what they saw as a matter of habit.

But most remarkable about the man was his costume. The suit was brand-new and of good cloth, despite the fact that half of Italy went bare in these times and even millionaires wore rags. This fellow did not have the aristocrat's manner. The fine clothes—even though the suit did seem to have been cut for a larger man—seemed shockingly incongruous.

"This," announced Tina formally, "is my uncle Ippolito." Then, apropos of nothing—unless it were to apologize for the man's clothes: "He is very rich." She turned to the old man. "The soldier is a famous professor in America, a great archeologist. It is a very distinguished man that you would have rescued from the catacombs, Ippolito."

The girl's insistence upon "catacombs" irritated Meddoes' love of exactitude almost as much as did her overstatement of his renown.

"It was in a part of the Fontenelle caves, not the catacombs," he pointed out as to a small child; a correction, not a reproof, however.

"But it is the same, no? Caves, catacombs— It does not matter."

"But it is not the same thing at all, *O ragazza stupida,*" the uncle broke in on her. "It is true that I am only a tourist's guide and not an educated man like the illustrious American professor, but even Ippolito Crusso knows that the caves of Fontenelle are not catacombs."

Meddoes found the old man distasteful. He regretted having made an issue of the exact term. Still, if this fellow *had* been a guide, he might have a practical knowledge that could be useful.

"Signor Crusso," he began, unconsciously flattering by the use of the polite address, "I have heard it said that Naples and Rome were connected by an ancient subterranean road. As a guide, you may know of such a road."

Ippolito merely shrugged and made denial. "I am not an illustrious archeologist, but only a simple employee of the state. I show visitors what they desire to see. I do not know of such things, Signor Professor." He seemed to grow reflective. "From Caserta to Naples, yes, there is a tunnel, but it has nearly all caved in. When the *Dottore Sisto Trècroce* of the *Comità Nazionale della gloria Romana* came here in 1927, it was my great honor to be chosen as his guide. With him I made the journey underground to Caserta. But Roma, Signor Professor, she is very far away. I do not think such a passage is possible."

THE Fascist "Glories-of-Rome" project was one of Benito Mussolini's often ludicrous attempts to camouflage the greed and bombast of his own regime behind the embalmed splendors of a long-dead Empire. These archeological travesties were well known to Meddoes. Old Ippolito would have been hired by the Propaganda Ministry to work with some dignitary, digging and probing in the Naples area, a fact which spoke less for the man's reliability as a guide than for his loyalty to the Fascist party. Nevertheless, it seemed worth questioning him further.

"Have you heard of an underground Roman temple, dedicated to Janus, and connected with the Fontenelle cave system?"

"A Roman temple *under* the earth? What is it that the illustrious professor desires to speak of?"

Meddoes told the story of his adventure, embellished by the anecdote of Belisarius and his subterranean conquest of Naples. Ippolito's curiosity was aroused.

"And the illustrious Signor Professor believes—"

"I do not believe so much as I hope to establish that the underground chamber is actually a Roman temple to the God Janus, possibly the same that served Belisarius."

"Has the Signor Professor returned again to this place?"

"This morning." He described his descent by rope into the subterranean chamber. "I came down upon a large rectangular block of stone, roughly carved with Latin and Greek inscriptions. Most of these were undecipherable, but there was a broken relief which, although partially effaced, *could* have been the classical representation of the two-faced god. I was able, also, to make out the letters *J-A-N-U,* which leaves little doubt as to the significance of the rest. It remains to establish that the legend of Belisarius' entry into Naples is factual and that this subterranean temple is

*Meddoes managed to retain enough presence of mind to fall flat on top of Ippolito before the light came.*

really the one involved. However, I was unable to investigate farther this morning, for I spent over an hour following the tire-tracks through the tunnel."

He had carefully avoided all mention of the stolen trucks. That matter seemed like a military secret now that it had been placed in the hands of the Military Police, but that bit about tire-tracks eluded his vigilance and slipped out in spite of him.

It had surprised the guide too, as Ippolito's face showed. And Meddoes, shocked though he was at his own inadvertency, could not wish it away. Tire-tracks, apparently, had touched a responsive spring in the secretary's queer old uncle.

"The Signor Professor found the imprint of *gomme,* of automobile tires, in that place? It is very curious, I think!"

Even Tina helped make it impossible to avoid the story.

"Ah, yes, Signor Merlino, how could it be that automobiles have passed down there underground?" Meddoes did not altogether dislike the Italianization of his name. "Signor Merlino" was euphonious and this pleasing euphony, no doubt, had a share in getting the truck story out of him. Anyhow, out it came, and Tina gave him an irrepressible *"Mamma mia!"* to show her appreciation.

Her uncle, however, responded quite otherwise. He appeared suddenly (too suddenly, Meddoes felt) indifferent and cold to what had, only just now, startled him.

"One hears of stolen trucks," he said. "No doubt the wicked thieves will be caught and punished. But where did these tracks lead to, Signor Professor?"

"Into an underground road," Meddoes admitted. There was no use holding back now. "I thought the road might lead to Rome, but I could not follow it far. That is why I hoped you, as a guide, had heard of some such passage. But since you have not—"

"A tunnel to Rome—no, Signor Professor; but as to this place you call a temple, it may be that I—"

"Yes?" It was hard not to display the excitement Meddoes felt.

"The grottoes of Fontenelle I am knowing very well, Signor Professor, and such a place as you have described. If the illustrious professor should have use for the services of a competent guide—"

The "illustrious professor" jumped at the chance. He disliked this man, but he did not fail to realize how much a guide's practical knowledge could mean to him.

"Indeed yes," he replied, too eagerly. "I had planned to go back there tomorrow and study the place carefully. If you can arrange—"

"Tomorrow?" The old man hesitated. It occurred to Meddoes that he was planning to drive a bargain as to the value of his services.

"Yes, tomorrow. I shall expect to start at nine o'clock, and I'll pay you one hundred lire for the day."

But Tina upset his plans.

"Tomorrow? It is impossible tomorrow, Ippolito!" And her uncle nodded agreement.

"Tomorrow, Signor Professor, it is the anniversary of my sister, the mother of my little Tina. For this feast only I have returned to Naples. No, tomorrow I cannot go. Another day, illustrious Signor Professor, I shall be honored to serve you. Such an honor, Signor, is sufficient pay. I am a rich man; I do not want money. The illustrious professor shall pay nothing at all."

"But—" The soldier could have only one free day a week. If this guide lived outside of Naples, as his own statement implied, he might not again be available. It would be a great pity to miss this chance—and Meddoes was prepared to offer money in spite of the protest. Ippolito saved him the trouble, however.

"Tomorrow, Signor, it is impossible, as I have said. But today I am free. For what reason do we not go today—now—this instant, Signor Professor?"

Meddoes began to explain that he had his duties at Captain Benison's shop, but Ippolito broke in on this with *"E doppo lavoro?*—and how about *after* your work?" The Fates were pulling the strings.

"Not before five o'clock," Meddoes insisted.

*"Alla cinque, allora,"* came the answer, almost too promptly, and the matter was settled.

At five o'clock, Ippolito would come to meet the "illustrious professor" at the workshop. He planned to reach the underground temple by a route which began in the vicinity of the shop and which he, as a guide, could demonstrate. All this was most satisfactory to the "illustrious professor" and so when a gnarled (and none-too-clean) old hand was thrust into his and he replied to the *"A rivederci, illustrissimo Signor Professore,"* Meddoes returned to his job. . . . How could he have known his destiny?

AT precisely the stroke of five by the only public clock left unshattered by the many bombings of Naples, the man Ippolito arrived. It was something of an event, this arrival. A large automobile of antique vintage but polished to an incredible luster over its scratched and time-worn paint, nosed through the lower gate and came to a stop with a screeching of mortified brakes. A small boy clad in what seemed to be the cut-down

uniform of a very large policeman got down from the driver's seat and opened the rear door.

Ippolito Crusso, wearing a velour hat which resembled a pressed mouse, got down and waved car and driver away with a gesture which, for sheer insouciance, was worthy of a king or a high Fascist functionary. He spoke to his small chauffeur.

"You know what to do, Piero?"

*"Si, signor."*

"You will forget nothing?"

"No, signor."

*"Buono!"* This last was the dismissal. The minuscule driver clicked a small pair of heels, cranked the old car, got into his seat and tinkered with dashboard gadgets until it lumbered wheezingly and unwillingly away.

Even Meddoes, whose sense of humor was not conspicuous, found it hard to suppress a smile as he witnessed this show of shoddy pompousness. Several of his workmen who had gathered to stare, were also grinning largely. They understood, perhaps, the pathetic irony of an old man who had lived his life on the shoddy fringe of respectability, now trying to delude himself with shopworn symbols of a wealth that existed only in his desires.

The soldier was quite ready. He had secured fresh batteries for his flashlight and carried two spares in a pouch of his Webb belt, from which dangled canteen, first-aid kit, automatic pistol, and two extra loaded clips, as required by Army regulations. With his steel helmet and leggings, both required in the theater of war, he presented a soldierly appearance that was incompatible with his horsy features and his concentrated manner. When Ippolito saw Meddoes approaching, he gave a servile salute.

*"Buono giorno, Signor soldato! Sono arrivato a punto*—no?"

THE guide seemed at once to take his responsibilities seriously, leading the soldier down one of those flights of stone steps that make many Neapolitan streets so arduous to a visitor.

"If your Roman temple, *Signor soldato,* is verily the place I think, then we shall save much time by entering it from down here. It is better than using a rope, I think—no?"

The street stairs gave onto the very lowest level of Fontenelle and into a narrow street, cluttered with dirty people and vegetable-carts. Its name was published on a nearly effaced corner sign as "The Little Street of the Miraculous Blood," and just under the ancient sign was a brand-new placard that read, warningly, "OFF LIMITS to TROOPS OF THE ALLIED ARMIES, *by order of the Commanding General,*" which put the place into a very low category indeed.

It would be wrong to suppose that Pfc. Meddoes was a willful breaker of military regulations when he disregarded that warning sign and followed his guide out of the stairwell into the forbidden street. He merely was unconscious of such regulations. He could and did read the notice which the M.P.'s had so carefully posted, but it simply did not occur to him to identify himself with "troops of the Allied Armies." Military notices (unless they had been carved in stone five hundred or more years ago) had no significance for Professor M. I. Meddoes, least of all when he felt himself to be upon the very threshold of a discovery.

They passed a broken ruin which had once been a little basilica before a bomb had fallen into it. Ippolito paused at the site and made a perfunctory genuflection. The exterior of the church was fallen, a mass of rubble, but at one corner the blue plaster walls of a tiny crypt or shrine had miraculously withstood the explosion, exposing to the street an ironical sight. The debris had been cleared away inside the shrine, revealing a gaudy plaster saint whose once-bright colors, bleached and smeared in the rains, now gave him a bleary, dissolute look. Clusters of candles, brought by the poor of the quarter, sputtered in the gray light of early evening.

"We cross here," said Ippolito. His voice struck Meddoes as oddly harsh, almost angry.

Across the street they entered a short driveway leading to double wooden doors across which a "Garage" sign had been painted. Ippolito led the soldier in, without the slightest hesitation.

Several persons crowded the small room inside—rough-appearing fellows, grease-smeared and looking like mechanics. Surprised by the unheralded entrance of Ippolito and his American soldier, they expressed their astonishment Neapolitan fashion, in loud, strident voices, accompanied by gestures, speaking in the Naples dialect —of which Meddoes understood not a word.

But Ippolito's own shouting seemed to pacify them and they became almost deferential, letting the visitors pass straight through. It was then that Meddoes saw that the far wall of this concrete room was a disguised door. Somebody pulled a lever and the entire wall lifted up, exposing a sloping ramp which seemed to lead into the lower regions of the earth. Immediately the door closed behind them with a thud and a click, and Meddoes felt the exotic thrill that attends adventures unknown and indeterminate.

"This," Ippolito stated in the singsong voice of all tourist guides, "is one of the entrances off the catacombs, Signor Professor. Presently we shall turn into a passage of which I know, and we shall go straight into the Fontenelle grottoes and to your Roman temple."

Ippolito produced a small, batteryless electric torch of the kind that provides a pale yellow glow when one's hand squeezes a mechanism in the case.

Stumbling and often off-balance on the badly laid stone paving of the ramp, Meddoes did his best to keep close to his aged companion, while marveling at Ippolito's surefootedness. He noticed, too, that the guide had grown silent and uncommunicative in contrast to his earlier chattiness, and he wondered why. You could never tell just what these old Italians were thinking—or *if* they were thinking. But his speculations were quickly interrupted.

"RIGHT turn here," said the guide almost sharply. One might have felt that he regretted having to speak at all.

They had not gone far in the new direction when the walls appeared to vanish, leaving nothing in front, behind or around them but blackness.

Then Ippolito's torch went out. Meddoes was ready for such emergencies.

"Is your light broken? I'll get my flashlight. Wait a moment."

But he had a sensation that Ippolito was no longer there in front of him. He reached out instinctively toward the spot where his guide should have been and contacted nothing but empty space.

"Ippolito! Where are you?"

No answer came, but Meddoes fancied that he heard a soft step to the left. As he fumbled for his flash, he stepped toward the sound, calling:

"Here I am, over here, Ippolito! I'll make a light."

The only answer was a quick movement close beside him and a blow and a numbing pain in the region of his left shoulder that resembled no pain he had ever felt before in his life.

*"A basso tutti i Americani cativi!"* It was a hoarse cry in the dark. Not a shout, but a violent and angry cry, and the voice was unmistakably Ippolito's. Why? Why, moreover, had the ancient guide who had been so friendly, suddenly stabbed him with a knife?

That was a moment of complete transition for Merlin Icarus Meddoes. Primitive urges such as a bookish assistant in archeology seldom experience in a lifetime, overwhelmed him and filled him and altered him—and probably saved his life. For the hurt, the shock, the darkness and especially the treachery of it worked in him to bring raw anger into his usually docile

breast. The whole of him, so to speak, exploded.

Possibly the old man misjudged the effect of his stab. Perhaps he half-feared the pedagogue's fury; anyhow, Ippolito had scarcely struck his blow in the dark when he lifted his shrill voice and cried out:

"Ricco! Carlo! Renato! *Aqui! A mi aqui!*"

Meddoes struck blindly at the voice. There was no skill in his hands, no knowledge of fighting. His fist failed to strike, but his hundred and fifty pounds collided so forcefully with the older man's body that the momentum alone was enough to bring it to the ground.

"Renato! Ricco! Carlo!"

There was real terror in the voice now. Meddoes struck again and this time his fist crashed against bone. Again a sharp pain in the thigh reminded him, almost too late, that his assailant still had his knife. He sensed the mass of the other's body beneath him. He lifted his knee and drove it downward into that mass with all his might. The clatter and tinkle of steel on stone meant that one danger was over for the moment.

But there was other danger. A pale glow bobbed about in the darkness. The sound of running feet was audible. A flashlight shone over at one side, not far away.

*"Ippolito? Dove e?"* The voices startled Meddoes into the first act of brutality committed by him in his entire life. Already he had his pistol in his hand, and now he struck down with it sharply upon the skull of his helpless assailant. Ippolito would not cry out again.

IT seemed an age before the bobbing flashlight grew fainter and finally disappeared. The footsteps gradually receded into some remote region underground.

But a roaring sound filled the cave and Meddoes understood at once that it was the sound of automobile motors, though he could not guess at the direction or the distance. If automobiles came into that chamber, he knew that their headlights would pick him out. The sense of danger produced a speedy reaction in him. He picked Ippolito up and ran with him straight away from the sound of motors, into the absolute dark. To use a flashlight would risk an attack. But as he ran, he reasoned that the Riccos and Renatos and Carlos had quit their search for Ippolito and had gone. No attack came, at all events.

The roar of motors grew louder. A yellowish glow told him that the vehicles were almost upon him, and he realized that he must find quick concealment. But the extra burst of speed ran him headlong into a stone wall. The shock was terrific; he almost slipped into unconsciousness, but he managed to retain enough presence of mind to fall flat on top of Ippolito before the light came.

He need not have been so precipitate, however. The headlights of a big vehicle flared; then another and another and another, until he made out five of them. But the very intensity of their glare cast the walls into shadow, so that Meddoes would be entirely safe unless a beam happened to turn directly upon him.

Five trucks and two more. They ranged themselves in broadside rows of four and three before shutting off motors and headlights. Then Meddoes heard voices, shouting in the raucous greetings of rough men meeting. Their flashlights, too, might have made a new danger for Meddoes, had their beams been stronger.

Then the truckmen went away, forming small groups and walking behind their flashlights. One fellow began singing "Ritorno a Sorrento" in a pleasing voice. It was the singing more than anything else that terrified Meddoes, for he felt that Italians are especially sensitive to music and feared that the sound might rouse Ippolito even where the roar of motors had failed to. The old man did not stir, however, and the danger passed. . . .

Just how long Meddoes remained flattened there after the trucksters had gone, he never accurately knew. It seemed a long time, and in truth it was long enough at least for him to discover his own injuries and to take some thought as to his own physical state.

Now that the active tension had resolved itself into a more passive one, he realized that he was really a sick young man. Previously, he had not noticed his hurt. Now it took deep root in his thigh and shoulder. Stiffness was setting in. Every movement was awkward and painful. But worst of all was the weakness. Loss of blood cannot be merely ignored, nor can a serious knife-wound.

Lessons drilled into Pfc. Meddoes' reluctant ears at training-camp served now. He used his regulation first-aid pack to stop the blood in the shoulder wound. Nor did he forget to crush the "sulfa" tablets against the butt of his pistol and to bind their dust inside the bandage. He tied the leg as best he could with a makeshift bandage torn from his shirttail—not very satisfactory, but it must do.

Next came the problem of the old man, his captive: To leave him there and fumble along without a guide would be to risk being lost. To carry a body might open the wounds again, and he felt far too weak for the task anyhow. But to leave Ippolito behind would be sure to bring an attack from the rear. Common sense might have impelled a professional soldier to settle the matter by shooting an enemy who had just now stabbed him, but he was incapable of such an action. Decision became urgent, however, for Ippolito showed signs of recovery. Meddoes gripped his pistol and pressed its cold snout against the old fellow's face.

"LISTEN carefully," he said, choosing his Italian words deliberately, "and do not move. You tried to kill me, so I should not hesitate to shoot. Your friends have gone. Some trucks came here while you were unconscious, but the drivers have gone, too. Just now I am in control: I can tie you up and leave you—I can kill you—or you can go on with me as my guide. Possibly you could lead me into a trap, but I doubt if anything could happen to me before I could pull this trigger. I'll give you your choice. Do we go to Rome?"

"You say trucks have come, Signor Professor?"

"Yes."

"Then we shall go where you will. I will not resist. I am not a fool, Signor."

Meddoes had not expected such submissiveness, but he accepted it—warily.

"Get up carefully," he warned.

The pressure of cold steel on Ippolito's neck insured great care. Presently a queer tandem was making slow progress through the dark: Ippolito ahead, his captor close behind.

A flashlight could bring no danger now, and by its light the soldier saw that the newly arrived trucks were only a few of many already parked in the area. The chamber was not more than a hundred feet long, and half as wide. The walls rose beyond the reach of the torch's beam.

"So that," said Meddoes aloud, but really to himself, "is the Roman temple?"

"No, signor." The guide was chatty now. "It is not a temple, nor is it Roman. The illustrious signor has seen the little church which the American planes destroyed with bombs?"

"I saw a ruined church." He did not believe that the Americans had bombed it, but he did not say so.

"It was the church of Saint January-of-the-Blood. He is the patron of Naples. This place is now the cellar of the church, but it is really a part of the catacombs, where millions of people are buried. Januario is buried down here. That stone block which you called an altar, is his tomb. Inside is a little *fiasco* containing his dried blood. Three times each year his blood becomes liquid again."

"That seems impossible."

"It is the miracle, Signor Professor. Three times a year the miracle of Januario blesses this city of Naples. But now, since the Americans destroyed his church, the miracle does not happen. It is a wrong to destroy a church."

*Then came the terrible moment when Meddoes knew he had lost. Sheer weakness made his knees sag.*

"And how about the road to Rome?"

It was clear that Ippolito was displeased, for he muttered an angry word. But the pistol in Meddoes' hand was effective, and he altered his tone, saying simply, "*Bene,* Signor Professor." And the two pushed on in the darkness.

It is impossible to describe that long underground trek in detail, for Meddoes, suffering from his wounds and weakness, was never able to reconstruct that stage of his adventure with complete consistency. He did notice that Ippolito led him out of the Roman temple (he persisted in calling it that, regardless) by the same crude archway through which he had followed tire-tracks in the morning. But Meddoes' memory is not competent otherwise, for he soon became very ill and vague.

Certain things, however, did not elude him. It was bad going, often slippery underfoot where moisture and scum covered the stones. Several times they waded through watery mud where underground springs flooded the passage. Vehicles, he thought, must have had a hard time getting through, for big stones and boulders made some places all but impassable.

More than once, also, they came upon broken pieces that could well (for all Meddoes knew of such matters) have been parts of wrecked trucks. Once Ippolito stumbled over a blown-out tire. Again it was a crumpled fender cast off in the dark.

Meddoes was increasingly aware of his weakness, his mounting fever, and the hurt of his wounds. He had no breath or strength for idle conversation. He must stay strong and well and alert. He was determined not to underestimate his dangers nor to be caught by them, however sick he felt. Ippolito, he knew, was not the least of those dangers.

They walked and walked. The old man grew silent, but otherwise seemed never to tire, while Meddoes felt fever dragging at his every step. Once he tripped and nearly fell; but Ippolito made no attempt to take advantage of this.

"Is the Signor Professor hurt?" he asked as though his interest were of the friendliest possible—and Meddoes instinctively grew the more guarded. But he *was* hurt. The poorly made bandages had slipped and he could feel blood making a warm place inside his shirt. The weakness that came from loss of blood and from fever grew more sapping at every step.

It must have been about this time, too, that Ippolito asked the seemingly innocent question which, had Meddoes been able to understand its underlying motives, would perhaps have warned him of misfortunes to come. But he did not understand, nor is it likely, under the circumstances, that he could have outwitted the mocking Sisters Fate, even had he understood.

"Signor Professor," asked the involuntary guide, suddenly and apropos of nothing at all, "you are certain that you have seen American trucks in that place while poor Ippolito was sleeping?" In another situation, even Meddoes might have smiled at the euphemism, "sleeping," but he merely replied:

"Certainly. Seven were driven in and there were several more already there. There is no doubt that they are stolen vehicles."

"The *ladri Napolitani* are famous, but this is the day of Tuesday, is it not, Signor Professor?"

To which Meddoes agreed and thought no more of it at the moment.

They passed through narrow places where Meddoes marveled that trucks had ever gone. His feet rolled in a patch of some muddy substance that, in the rays of his torch, looked like lime mortar and in which were several round fragments of stalactites broken off from dangling clusters overhead, perhaps by the passage of vehicles.

THEN came the terrible moment when Meddoes knew he had lost. Sheer weakness made his knees sag. His feet faltered; his hand almost lost its grip on the pistol that he held against Ippolito's back. A low roaring filled his ears and nausea swept through him. It seemed that he could not match the stamina of an old man thrice his years and half his size. His legs hurt too much and his upper body was lanced with pain. The roaring in his ears must be heeded or he would drop down and die.

"The Signor Professor is very tired," said his captive, without emotion. "But it is a consoling thought that he will not die here in this hole"—whatever that implied.

The roaring in his ears grew louder. He heard his lips demanding an explanation of those curious words, but his brain was not there to foster them:

"Just what do you mean by that?"

Then the torch slipped from his hand. His knees gave way. His senses whirled in a kaleidoscopic jumble. He knew that he was falling. Then he felt Ippolito's strong, bony old hand supporting him.

"I mean, Signor Professor, that on every Tuesday at eleven of the night, the stolen trucks are driven out of Naples and along this road—and that already I can hear them coming. That is why I came with you, Signor Professor, for I knew they would follow us tonight. The stupid Germans in Rome will pay me well for a prisoner." And before Meddoes was able to digest the entirety of that revealing statement, the old man made another that Meddoes will always remember for its sheer humiliation.

"It will be of no use, Signor Professor," said his captor's voice tonelessly and without inflection, "to pull the trigger of your gun. Such a pistol requires a clip of shells, Signor Professor, but yours are still in your belt, I think—*non e ver?*"

And the humiliation overcame him just as the roaring became thunder and a blinding light burst upon him. He fainted.

MEDDOES felt certain he was not dead, for when his eyes opened the pain was still there. So was the roaring sound that had troubled his ears earlier. He was lying upon his side, his head pillowed upon a hard flat cold substance that had a smell of iron about it, and that bumped his head every so often with an unpleasant smack. It was dark and chilly. Gasoline fumes were present, which finally led him to the realization that he was lying upon the iron floor of a truck which labored along at a slow pace. He recalled dimly the strange words of Ippolito: "The Germans will pay well for a prisoner." His hands, he discovered, were tied together at the wrists and his feet at the ankles. The jarring of the truck hurt his thigh badly. He lay speculating, trying to take inventory of events, reasons, chances. The pieces fell into a fairly dismal picture:

If he were Ippolito's prisoner, he was surely on his way to Rome, or at least to some point behind the German lines. The roaring sound had been, of course, the sound of motors;

the light that had seemed to be hallucinary had been headlights. Clearly Ippolito had been too smart for him. The Italian's easy acquiescence had been due to the fact that Ippolito had chosen the easier way, that of waiting until the trucks should overtake them before renewing hostilities. What still embarrassed him was that he had carried a gun and had forgotten to put the clip in. Why had he adopted such a superior attitude toward those training-classes? He felt ashamed.

The air no longer smelled of the underground. The dank, sweaty-metallic odor was gone. He thought he could smell grasses and dust and that peculiar broom-weed which poor Italian peasants cultivate so hopefully. If this were a road on ground level, he wondered—was it still a road to Rome?

HOW long he lay there in his discomforting position of pain, he was never to know. Later, when he signed a certified statement for an incredulous G-2 officer, he estimated it at two hours or perhaps longer; but he made it plain that he was guessing, as to both time and place where his truck must have been when the firing started.

However, there *was* firing. Meddoes heard a sound not unlike distant thunder. He also heard the screaming wail of a shell passing somewhere overhead. *Scream! Boom! Scream! Boom!* He conjectured that his truck was passing near some line of battle—not an entirely comforting thought for a man tied hand and foot at the bottom of a truck.

Whoever was driving seemed unhappy about the gunfire. The brakes were applied abruptly. A voice that seemed to come from somewhere ahead, shouted in Italian. Other voices answered and soon a veritable shouting conference seemed to be going on. Suddenly from almost beside him came a thin, harsh voice unmistakably that of Ippolito:

"*Avvanti*—go ahead, anyhow; there is only a few hundred meters before we'll be safe enough."

The truck started again. Meddoes was glad he had not tried to move. Ippolito was in the truck with him, and doubtless ready to deal with his prisoner at the first sign of movement.

*Scream! Boom!* Who, he wondered, was firing at whom? Untrained in the simplest lore of the combat soldier, he could not distinguish between the deep-voiced growl of the American 105s and the flat sarcastic bark of the German 88s. *Scream! Boom!* The column of trucks went slower. *Boom!* This last explosion was nearer and had a different sound. He heard Ippolito's voice behind him give a low exclamation, either of surprise or fear.

Then suddenly there were strained, raucous cries, and the crack of rifle-fire. The truck speeded up; Meddoes could scarcely hold back a cry of pain as it bounced and lurched.

"*Attenzione! Madonna mia!*" It was Ippolito's voice.

A roaring explosion nearby shook the truck as though it were being wrenched apart. A new voice cried out something frantic and incomprehensible. Meddoes felt the steel floor under him veer sharply to one side, lurch crazily, rise as though leaping into the air. Then he was thrown. He never quite remembered details, but he always recalled that last sensation of being hurled. His head struck sharply. Pain wrenched at his shoulder more terribly than ever, as though the knife that had caused his wound had returned to his flesh and was being twisted in him. He was propelled upward and outward and flung crashing against something hard. Then came blackness—and he knew no more pain. . . .

"*Signorina, signorina!*"

He was coming through the gray patch and heard his own voice, but it was strange to hear it so impersonally, as though someone else were using it—talking to an angel, but in his voice.

"*Signorina, per piacere. . . .*"

The angel answered:

"Stop it. Don't try to talk, especially in Eye-talian. Relax, soldier—relax!" Odd speech for an angel in any language, but it brought him completely through the gray patch. The angel came too, and kept on speaking with a New York accent.

"Feel better?"

"Thank you, yes." There was some doubt now about her angelhood. She had neither wings nor a harp. Besides, the angels in the Sunday-school prints of his boyhood wore splendid robes, whereas this one wore only an old patched dress. Neither did printed angels have red hair and turned-up noses. This young woman could not be called pretty; she had a broad scar along one cheek, but her eyes were very good. Intelligent, too. A trim, strong figure, but her bare feet and legs were frankly dirty. He tried to shift his position and discovered that he was in a bed, and that he was bound up in plaster and bandages.

"Don't wiggle around, soldier. I said *relax*. You've been sick for nearly three weeks now; you'd better not start up that fever again."

Three weeks! Why, it was only last night that— "Please, where am I? And who are you, Signorina?"

"I'm Maria," she said. "You'll find out plenty when Zozo comes, if he thinks you're okay."

"Zozo?"

"My husband. Zozo is an Italian nickname for Orazio or Horace, in English."

"But you speak like an American."

"Why not? I was born in New York and lived there practically all my life."

"But—"

"Skip it. Go to sleep, soldier. The doctor will be along pretty soon. I'll fix you something to eat."

He could not see the door she went through, but he knew she was gone. It was all too complicated. Perhaps if he went back to sleep it would come out all right.

WHEN next he became conscious of external life, he was trying to keep his eyes closed against bright light. Someone was watching him, trying to wake him. But he would outwit them. He would be stubborn.

But his confused intelligence classified a certain pleasant odor as the smell of cooking and he obeyed an urge stronger than mere will.

The angel's New York voice said: "Come, soldier. Sit up and talk to Zozo. He hasn't got much time."

Maria. . . . Red hair. . . . Zozo! Meddoes sat up.

The young man who stood near the foot of his bed was very tall, almost a giant. What was visible of a face, enveloped in the sheep's-wool collar of a leather jacket, was handsome, but not pleasant. The hair was unusually blond for an Italian and the eyes were either black or dark blue. The cheekbones were abnormally prominent, as if the face were emaciated from sickness or hunger. The mouth made a straight line over a short blunt chin. . . . A good face, but grim—decent, but hard. Nor was it especially encouraging to observe that the fellow dangled a rifle across his arm. It was a military rifle, but the man was not dressed as a soldier.

"Maria!" The voice was a whip. "Tell this so-called soldier—" He spoke Italian too fast for Pfc. Meddoes.

The red-haired girl emerged from somewhere.

"This is Zozo, soldier. He wants to know how you happened to be in that bunch of trucks he wrecked down near Gaeta. Don't try to fool him."

He had no intention of "fooling" anyone. He told his story briefly to the young woman. There was nothing to hold back; he had done no harm to these people. Moreover, he sensed himself in a contest of wills. But he felt confident in his own mental processes and certain that they were superior to Zozo's. Agile mental processes seemed incompatible with a name like Zozo, anyhow!

Maria translated. Zozo snapped words like bits of metal, and the girl turned to Meddoes again.

"He wants to know *when*. This is important, soldier. Zozo is pretty close to your Army, so you can't fool him. He can get the dope on you, so don't try to lie."

Why were they so antagonistic? Of what did they suspect him? What did she mean by saying that her husband was close to the American Army? Meddoes explained:

"I joined the Coördination Officer on May 9th. There was a German raid that evening and that same night I got lost in the caves and discovered an ancient Roman temple," (his belief in that temple was tenacious) "and the stolen trucks. Next day the M.P.s came to look at the trucks, and the next day again the trucks were gone. It was the following morning that I climbed down there on a rope. That night, it must have been, I set out with Ippolito as a guide."

Zozo's voice crackled again, and Maria asked:

"Who is this Ippolito?"

Meddoes explained and as soon as it was translated, Zozo said savagely:

*"E morto il suo Ippolito, pero."*

"He says this Ippolito of yours is dead," Maria translated. "Did you say his name was Crusso?"

When Meddoes nodded, the big Italian turned and left the room. Presently his place was taken by a very different man.

HE looked like a fat old owl and even when he spoke, Meddoes found it hard to convince himself that this was a small human, not a large bird. Never did human features possess a nose more like a beak over thin lips; the cheeks, too, puffed out from beside the nose like the feathery jowls of an old barn-owl. The resemblance was furthered by the peculiar effect of spectacles with very round lenses that sat astride the nose and gave to their wearer the exact expression of the classical bird of wisdom.

"And how is my patient today?" said the owl in strongly accented English. "I am the doctor. I do not dress so pretty like your Army doctors, but I am the only doctor here. Be satisfied with that which the gods bestow."

Next a claw came from under the soiled butcher's smock he wore and thrust itself at the soldier as the harsh voice said:

"How do you do, please? What is your name?"

Maria interrupted quickly:

"No need for names, Doctor! I'm Maria—you're Doctor—Zozo is Zozo—our sick friend is Soldier."

The owlish head wagged approval.

"Women," he said as if to himself, "contrive always to be right. It is fate, *nein?*"

As he stepped nearer to the bed and reached for the soldier's pulse, Meddoes was forced to turn his head away. The owl observed:

"So now the Doctor does not smell nice!"

The young woman's quick explanation was not unlike an apology:

"The Doctor escaped from a German concentration-camp and got into Italy through the Austrian border, to join us here. The Partisani don't have much sanitary equipment."

"Partisani?" The word was new to Meddoes.

"Partisans, you know. We have no hospital or nurses, but we get plenty of casualties."

MEDDOES had heard of Italian guerrilla organizations, but had not expected to come into contact with them. However, this accounted for many things that had hitherto been hard to understand.

"Then your husband is one of the—"

Maria was wary.

"No questions, soldier! It's no secret that we're Partisans, but you are in a bad spot for asking questions. Remember, Zozo picked you up with a lot of stolen American trucks. How do we know that you didn't help steal them?"

"But good heavens! You surely don't believe—"

"Zozo doesn't believe anything. He can't afford to guess—he has to *know.* He's checking you up through your own Army. But finding you with Crusso doesn't look too good, and your story about Roman ruins sounds queer too. So, until Zozo comes back—"

"But who was Crusso, really?"

"He was a dirty crook on the Fascist fringe. He would have sold babies for sausage meat if there was money in it, and he wangled a soft job out of the local *Gruppo,* guiding tourists. Lots of those tourists never turned up again, and meanwhile Crusso got rich. Figure it out yourself!"

It was evident that the Partisans had known of old Ippolito and his works for some time. Maria told how he had combined robbery, blackmail and even murder with his job as a tourist guide, and how his crimes were covered up by local Fascist functionaries who perhaps preferred to protect him rather than risk his talking freely.

The Allied Occupational Government had proscribed Crusso for his former Fascist activities and blacklisted him for peddling poisonous spirits to American soldiers at high prices. He therefore felt himself persecuted by the Americans and had worked to harm the Allied cause as much as possible. He had smuggled letters through the lines into Rome and had joined with others in the enterprise of stealing Army vehicles.

"There is no reason why I shouldn't tell you this," Maria said, as though to reassure herself, "because even if you are mixed up with that outfit, you can't do harm now. You're too sick—you'd die if you tried a break."

She explained that Zozo had been working with the American Intelligence and that, although he had often harassed the convoys of stolen trucks (as he had the one carrying Meddoes), he had been cautioned not to scare the ring out of operation until the Military Police could make certain arrests.

"But there *really* is a subterranean road to Rome?" Meddoes was irrepressible on that subject.

Maria, however, was either not informed as to details or else felt she had said enough.

"Better ask the Doctor," she said. "He's a nut on history. He's always proving that every pebble you find was once a button on Julius Caesar's toga."

The Doctor clucked and wagged his head. "In such matters," he demurred, "I am a dilettante only. But it was to me a vunderful privilege to study in Berlin under the most vunderful Professor Momsen—and such concerns iss my hobby ever since. One little thing I learn, Maria-who-chatters-too-much—I have learn' that the ancient Romans did not button their togas. That so-small pearl is for you, my child!"

Maria wiggled her nose at him, and he went on: "The soldier is both right and wrong about the tunnels to Rome and the old temple. Such a subterranean road from Naples to Rome, it iss not possible, but it iss true that a very large part of the distance can be covered underground. There iss many caves and tunnels and quarries through the hills and mountains along the ancient Via Appia. That old road was built—"

"By Appius Claudius Caecus, in 312 B.C. It connected Rome and Capua," Meddoes supplied, not in the dignified, measured utterance of a pedagogue, but as an eager schoolboy airing some cherished tidbit of information. The Doctor beamed approval.

"So?" said he. "We have mit us an American chentleman of culture, Maria! In such funny places it is we meet peoples."

This prompted Meddoes, his dignity now returned, to explain his profession and ambitions. But he did not forget to press the Doctor for more information concerning his pet theory.

THE Doctor was willing enough. "You assume you find a Roman temple because of Roman inscriptions, and you *believe* it to have been dedicated to Janus, but this Crusso calls it the shrine of Januario. For me it iss of no matter. I doubt in my head if a temple to the Roman Janus was built underground. More likely it iss much older than Janus and was consecrated to a Punic Baal or some Samnite divinity. Naples is not a Roman City. It was first Samnite, then Greek, then Romanized, then Greek again, then Byzantine, then Arabic or Moorish. Naples has a very curious race-mixture. If your temple iss part of

the catacomb system, it must be very old—older than Rome, and older than Janus. Who shall say what divinities have been worshiped there? If Januario of Benevento *iss* buried there, so much the better. That, at least, iss a fact *known*. Of what use is speculation?

"But I do not think you will prove that Belisarius ever came into Naples through *that* tunnel. The underground road you found runs from Naples to Aversa, on the road to Capua. At Capua begins the Appian Way. Those thieves drove the trucks through Capua to join the Via Appia. It iss a smart thing to do. Every day and night there are American truck convoys. Who would know what they were? A short tunnel cuts off a bend in the Via Appia and by-passes a Military Police station. They must have driven you through that. But a very long tunnel cuts across the Gaeta peninsula. I think the convoy that carried you has come already out of the tunnel of Spartacus."

"Of Spartacus?"

"That iss *my* name for it. In 73 B.C. a few slaves escaped from the gladiatorial school in Capua and got to Naples by that tunnel. Spartacus was their leader. The most terrible social war in the history of Rome came then. It iss well known, that rebellion."

Meddoes remembered the details of the Roman slave rebellion. He contributed a detail:

"Yes. The Via Appia was lined with the bodies of six thousand of those poor slaves crucified publicly, so Plutarch says."

"*Ach,* yes! And it was then that those old quarries and caves along the Appian Way were first used by the slaves. Later they served as by-passes to avoid the tax-collectors on the Via Appia. I do not know how it comes that today somebody remembers about them, unless your friend, this Crusso—"

Maria shook her head. She did not want this matter discussed, for some reason.

The owlish Doctor abandoned his theme and remarked:

"The patient should eat already. Maybe this girl she has soup and wine." Then he waddled out of the room.

The neck of a bottle was thrust into Meddoes' unwilling mouth. He had never in his circumspect life tasted wine, and would have refused now had he been able. But the aromatic juices of grapes grown on the slope of Vesuvius passed his lips before his protests could be uttered, and the basic chemistry of his reasoning was affected thereby. He drank, ate, drank again. And soon he slept.

The young giant sat biting his fingernails, a nervous display which Meddoes had already observed to be characteristic of him. Zozo was the purely physical type, admirable in his strength but childishly inadequate to cope with problems not soluble by brawn. Matters requiring the application of intellect caused Zozo to screw up his good-looking face, crease his Caesarean forehead and nibble upon his fingers as though to stimulate thought. Just now the Partisan giant was laboring over some detail that frustrated him.

His words labored across the smoke-filled room, falteringly: "There is still one thing upon the subject of you which I cannot understand."

"Yes?" Meddoes realized that Zozo was about to disclose something out of the ordinary and not quite pleasant. He could not see Maria's face back in her corner, but he was sure that he heard her catch her breath, and he could feel the pressure of their combined stares upon him. He was determined, nevertheless, to show no special concern. He had already adopted a policy of casualness during his convalescence. He had resented their suspicions and he took a mild revenge upon them for it by the stiffness of his manner.

"Yes?" he coolly repeated.

"One little thing I do not yet understand."

"Yes?"

*Illustrated by James Ernst*

*Meddoes scooped away vegetables to reveal a wooden box, which he pried open.*

By the feeble glow of the charcoal fire, Meddoes saw his host draw a long manila envelope from his pocket.

"That day when we found you upon the road near Gaeta,"—Zozo spoke Italian, but he had learned to go slowly for the benefit of the American—"one of my men picked up this envelope on the ground. It contains money—*German* money—nearly a hundred thousand marks—in a *busta Americana.* It lay between you and the body of this Crusso. It is your money, no?"

"No," said Meddoes. "It is not mine."

"It also contains the diagram of the system of connected caves along the Via Appia. It appears to be a tracing."

"It is not mine." He did not know what the man was talking about. As to German marks, the idea was absurd.

"And on this tracing, it is written in pencil a date."

"Indeed."

"The date is of June third."

What *was* the man getting at? Why did Maria sit there so silently? What was the undercurrent in the Partisan's manner?

"If it does not belong to you, Professor, then it it must have fallen from the *tasca* of the dead Crusso, but—"

*Suddenly a column of air smote him from behind. The tunnel shook and reverberated; a hail of debris fell all about him.*

"So?"

"The date is written by some person who is not Italian. It is easy to recognize the handwriting of an Italian."

That was true. Italian script is quite distinctive. A very definite mannerism distinguishes the calligraphy of many European cultures, and that of Italy is obvious enough.

"Well?"

"I am a soldier, not a detective agent," Zozo continued. Meddoes felt that this was a little ambitious for a guerrilla, but he made no comment. "It appears that the writing is either that of a German or an American."

"Yes?"

"You are an American soldier. The envelope is of the kind used without stamps by the American Army for official correspondence."

"Those envelopes," said Meddoes, "are not secret documents. Even civilian employees can have them."

Zozo's face was a study in dogged persistency. He resumed, ignoring the challenge:

"If it is German, then this Crusso has taken money from the Nazis in exchange for the original diagram of the secret road. If it is written by an American, then it must be yourself, who have betrayed your Army."

"Ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous!" was Meddoes' comment.

"Not so ridiculous," said another voice from the door, "but even the ridiculous iss possible. We do not desire to believe it iss you who have done this thing. But it iss not to be escaped that it *has* been done. It appears that Naples will be taken by the German Army on the third day of June."

"But we will prevent," Zozo cut in.

"A hundred thousand German marks is a lot of money," Maria said. "You were on your way to Rome, soldier, weren't you? Marks are still good in Rome?"

"I was a prisoner."

There was no mistake about the attitude of these people, and the very pressure of it silenced him.

"And we *will* prevent." Evidently Zozo did not easily abandon an idea.

"Sure, we've got to," assented Maria.

"There iss yet time," said the Doctor's voice. "But we cannot fight the entire German Army. Me, I also in Germany have made the military training. The Nazis will send many men. Tanks they will have already and *Flammenwerfer* and the machine-guns. I do not love the Nazis, but they are Germans of superior intelligence. With only your rifles, you cannot prevent them, Orazio." This last was in Italian.

"We will prevent," Zozo repeated a third time. "I do not know how—but we will prevent."

But then, like a rebuke, came Maria's voice again.

"I think," she said, very clearly in Italian, "that it is stupid to talk about these things while the soldier is here." Then in her American English:

"So good night, soldier." And the soldier, as he sat up and fumbled his way out of the room, understood that he could never really be accepted by these people, but was still a prisoner.

PFC. MEDDOES stepped carefully through the dark. The packed earthen floor was cold through his socks. His shoes dangled from their laces around his neck. His face wore the expression of a man who goes on a business against the judgment of others, but who is utterly confident of the ultimate success of his project.

It would be difficult to analyze the stimuli that had prompted his decision to escape from this house where he was both a guest and a prisoner, but it is safe to say that his distrust of Zozo's intellectual processes influenced him no little. The blond Partisan, in Meddoes' opinion, was not mentally equipped to deal with the business of "preventing" a German attack upon Naples via the secret route.

While it rankled Meddoes to be suspected of treachery, he was far more concerned with the possible danger to the American base than with clearing himself of suspicion. And so, early that morning after eavesdropping on the passionate farewell scene of Zozo and his Maria and after watching the young Italian patriot disappear into the dark, Meddoes had been seized with sudden resolve. If brawn were inadequate and only brain could save Naples from a stealthy Nazi attack, Merlin Icarus Meddoes would supply that brain.

He had retired to his cot after his rude dismissal by Maria and had devoted a full ten minutes to clear, detailed thinking. The plan which he was now putting into execution had evolved. That he could fail never even occurred to him. He took advantage of the moment when Maria was weeping in her room for her departed spouse, and her sobs formed a pathetic obbligato to the Doctor's lusty snores. He had dressed, tiptoed past Maria's door and stepped out into the pre-dawn darkness as confident as if he had spent a lifetime in the practice of guerrilla warfare, instead of delving into musty writings and printed abstractions.

His immediate destination was definite. The day he had been freed of bandages and had begun to walk about, Maria had showed him proudly about the little farm. When they walked to the far end of the vineyard, she had explained, like a child telling of a toy, that the little thatched half-cellar dug into the slope was not a storage pen for cabbages or garden tools, as it seemed, but a hiding-place for the explosives that Zozo and his Partisans had used in their pecking at the German installations. True, Meddoes had never seen, much less handled, a stick of dynamite, and had not the remotest knowledge of its use. Such were minor matters. Confident that his intellect would serve him when time came, he fixed his purpose. That the half-cellar would probably be locked and the explosives concealed never entered his head. So he walked on, clinging closely to vines which were already in fine leaf and which, in the dark, would help to conceal him. He found the shed. The door was locked. But one of the old hinges was broken and came loose as soon as Meddoes gave a tug, so that the door sagged enough to pull the lock-bolt from its socket.

Once inside and satisfied that there was no window to show his light, Meddoes used his flash. At first glance, there was no visible sign that the dug-out shed contained anything at all but onions and potatoes spread thickly over the earthen floor. But reason told him that the vegetables could be used for concealment and he scooped enough of them away to reveal a wooden box which he dragged out and pried open with the tines of a heavy digging-fork, revealing inside several layers of yellowish cylinders packed in dry onion husks, and on top of them some tiny copper tubes. This, reason again told him, was dynamite and the tubes were detonators. He filled his canvas musette-bag with the sticks. The chemical formula came dimly to the retina of his scholastic memory as he saw the fuse caps. Fulminate of mercury, he recalled—not for the inexperienced. So he scraped a little pile of loose dirt which he packed into the central section of the bag and buried two detonators in it, before stuffing onion scales around the dynamite as one might use excelsior. Strange as all this was to him, he felt that he had applied reasoning, and that his explosives were well insulated against shock and friction. Then, last, he coiled the long rope of fuse-material around his waist, and made his way out of the dugout.

SOMEWHERE a hungry dog was barking woefully. Somewhere a rooster challenged the coming of day. Somewhere a forlorn jackass emitted a bray to proclaim to a still-sleeping world that he was aware of dawn's approach.

These were uneasy signs to Pfc. Meddoes, laden with dynamite, and with determination firm within him. He would be conspicuous in his uniform, once the sun's rays actually got beyond their mountain barrier and pinked the morning. According to the maps he had studied with the Doctor, the Via Appia could not be more than a mile due west of Zozo's farm, and the entrance to the cave which formed the nearest section of the secret road should be there at hand, concealed by a clump of ilex trees behind a roadside shrine. But getting to that point would be dangerous business once twilight should become daylight. He clung to a fence-row of broom-bushes that led away from the sun. He splashed across a sudden stream and over slippery pebbles. He got to his belly and crawled across an open patch, awkwardly and unscientifically, the while wishing intensely that he had paid more attention to such procedures during his early recruit training-period. Once, halfway over this bare gap, he thought he heard a challenging voice, and he froze—but after a few panicky minutes of suspended animation, he knew that it had been his overwrought imagination. Presently he found himself on the very brink of the highroad, not five hundred yards from the shrine and crucifix.

HE had been walking for five hours, and his physical self was beginning to tire. The going had not been easy. The terrain was often slippery or rough or both. Several times in the first tunnel he had waded knee-deep in icy water and once, in the shaft near Sezze, he had fallen down and bruised his kneecap badly because his flashlight batteries had failed and he had tried going on in the dark in order to save his two spares as long as possible. This was the shortest of all the underground by-passes, not over a half mile in length, as nearly as he could estimate, but it had the worst going of all in it—rocks, broken stalagmite stumps, swift rivulets of sulphur-smelling water, a patch of quagmire where the rocks gave place to a sticky clay, even the gnarled roots of trees coming down from overhead.

But this, he realized as he reached the far end of it, was the ideal point for carrying out his plan. So, without leaving the shaft at all, he turned around and floundered his way back again to the entrance where, from the concealment of three great boulders that masked the cave and formed a sort of rough colonnade in front of it, he could look past the Appian Way and its stiff outline of olive trees to the lowlands of the Pontine marshes—beyond which, he knew, lay the Anzio beachhead.

The job to which Meddoes had assigned himself, no miner or sapper—however experienced in explosives—would have set about without some qualm. No holes had been drilled; there was no stemming material, even had Meddoes known of its use. The speed of the fuses was not known. He knew less of the use of mercury fulmi-

nate caps than does the average ten-year-old farmboy. As to the lifting potential of dynamite and the rules for its application to a given problem, he was totally ignorant—but he had utter confidence in his own brain as a reasoning organism, and so in his eventual success.

The habits of a probing scholar impelled Meddoes to his first experiment. He uncoiled the fuse from his waist and cut off a short piece. Very gingerly, he set down his pack, walked a hundred feet or so into the cave and squatted, the flashlight resting on a stone and a match in his hand, while his eyes studied the dial of his watch. He lighted the piece of fuse, let it burn out and thus made a rough calculation of the fuse-length needed to allow him to reach the other end of the cave in safety before the explosion. Then he returned to his plan.

At the entrance, some long fissures in the supporting boulders suggested that these might easily shatter. Into one of these cracks, he pushed deeply four of the yellow "broomsticks" and packed them with earth. He then examined the detonator capsules and discovered a sort of socket at one end big enough to take the end of a fuse rope. It seemed logical that the latter should be inserted, so he inserted it, crimping the soft copper to make sure that it would not jar loose, and thrusting the whole capsule deep into the earth packed around his explosives, packing it still harder again.

All being ready, he assumed his bag again, made certain that his light functioned, and set out once more for the far end of the shaft, paying out the fuse rope behind him. He had cut the coil into two sections of about seventy-five feet each—a little short, according to his calculations, but it had to do. He would simply have to go a little quicker.

Then he lighted the fuse and scrambled away, leaving a fire-spitting snake behind him.

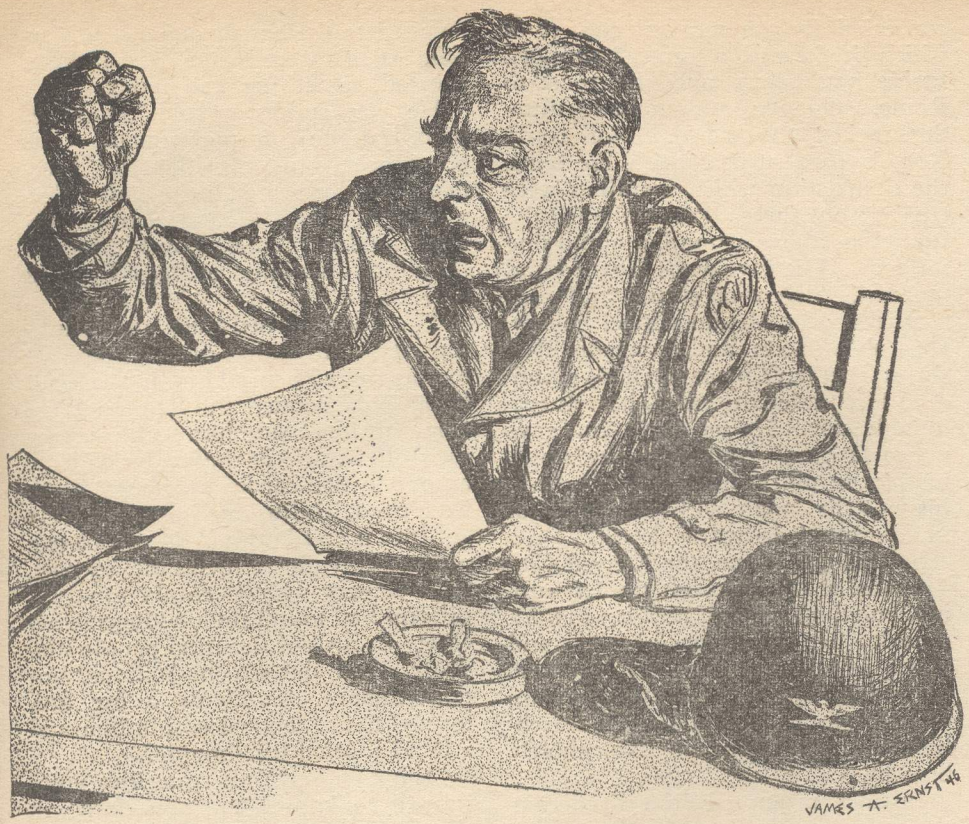
FROM that moment on, it was not unlike a nightmare in which one struggles to escape from a pursuer and one's feet become leaden weights, one's knees turn to rubber, the ground becomes slippery slime so that the most frantic efforts seem to retard rather than to achieve progress. It was only reasonable that Meddoes, barely recovered from wounds and fever, and tired from the day's hard labors, should at last give in. His bruised knee hurt. He had walked, he estimated, a good twenty miles, carrying his load. While it was not an especially heavy load for a trained soldier, to a bookish young professor who had slighted his basic training and who, before being drafted into the Army, had never walked a step farther than the distance across his campus, it had been a severe trial. And now that he needed speed and strength and endurance in order to save his very life, none of these were there. He flopped and floundered; he slithered and slipped. He missed his footing and seemed to be sliding back a foot for every yard gained. Worst of all, he knew the fuse was too short and he could not quite drive from his mind the danger which that shortness implied. In plain language, he was scared into a kind of paralysis.

At last he could see light ahead. A tiny white spot, still nearly a hundred yards away, was the end of this tunnel. A bright morning sun must be shining out there. Birds would be singing. Olive blossoms would perfume the outer air. Outside, men and women and all living creatures breathed the free ozone and walked and ran and laughed and sang and made love and fought wars. But inside, the gloomy cave road was like an endless-belt treadmill yielding no progress toward the light. Then suddenly a column of air smote him from behind. He pitched forward on his outspread hands while a compressed cyclone roared over him. The tunnel shook and reverberated; a hail of debris fell all about him; something banged at his back and shoulder with petulant force; dust filled his eyes and nostrils. A sort of nausea shut off his breathing. Then as he caught his breath again and was able to peer through the dark tunnel back to the entrance he had just fled, he could see no distant spot of daylight behind him. He had misjudged the fuse, but the tunnel was closed. Merlin Icarus Meddoes had been able to cope with the present as well as to unearth the past. . . .

If a single man, encumbered by a moderate burden, can walk twenty miles in five hours over such a terrain as the underground by-passes of the Appian Way, how fast could a convoy of heavily burdened trucks cover the same route? Certainly not much faster—at most, ten miles per hour.

Mental gymnastics made waiting bearable to Meddoes as he sat watching for the arrival of the trucks. The feeling that his thoughts had the sequential clarity of logic, gave him fortitude to stand the strain. By going over his original premises and conclusions, he could keep misgivings from growing into doubt and doubt from becoming panic. His was the textbook mind: When Life (for which he had discovered no textbook) refused to lay its phenomena out as a sequence of logical happenings, he either applied his own reason and made a pattern where none had been, or else buried his head in the sands of obstinacy by simply ignoring the offending phenomena.

Today, he had worked things out by using a series of assumptions that gave the semblance of logic: Assuming that there would be a German attempt by




*The Colonel burst out: "You blank-blank well are going to explain!"*

way of the secret road-system, then it was logical to assume that they would attack after dark. "Dark" occurred about six o'clock. Therefore, the assumed German forces, moving at an assumed ten miles per hour, would have to leave Rome (assuming that they started from the Eternal City) about twelve hours earlier. This implied that the expedition would set out at about 5:30 P.M. But the Partisans had obtained information which led Zozo to believe the Nazi forces would not set out until seven o'clock. This again implied that they wanted to make sure of taking the road from Capua to Aversa after nightfall.

Thus Meddoes reasoned that the German forces would reach the Sezze section of the road-system about noonday, since it was at the quarter-point of the run, and was the last tunnel whose beginning lay inside the German lines. All this boiled down to the likelihood that he still had another sixty minutes to wait. Only this game of hypothetical reasoning served to make the dragging time even bearable, mentally and physically. His bruised knee was throbbing. Fatigue lay upon his body. A chill from the moist stone brought back the fever he had only so recently shaken off.

BUT suddenly all weariness and pain left him. The monotony of the strange vigil vanished. He tensed, alert – unmistakably he heard the sound of motors. How significant had such sounds become in his life! If it came along the highway from the north, it could mean only German motors, those queer-looking battle-cars with Roman noses—or even tanks. If he should dash for the cave's entrance, he might be caught in the prisms of German binoculars. Motors! The sound grew louder and plainer now, although its direction was still uncertain. American motors would approach from the south—but American soldiers would be almost as unwelcome as Germans just now, because their mere presence would prevent his carrying out his plan.

The trucks appeared. Far down the Appian Way to the German-held north, he could see a column of vehicles. What confused him was that these seemed to be American, not German machines—yet they came from the German side! It was illogical.

His quandary did not last long. A shrill whistle sounded. The approaching column veered to the left, leaving the highroad and crawling like a troop of laboring ants over the rough ground toward the clump of olives where the cave's entrance was hidden. That explained everything: These would be American trucks in German hands, carrying German soldiers. It was so obvious that he had been blind to it. The Nazis would naturally use captured or stolen American vehicles so that they might pass unchallenged, if they should be seen by Allied soldiers.

There were twenty vehicles in all, separated by a considerable safety-gap between each two. For a moment, Meddoes feared that the total length of the convoy might be greater than the half-mile of the tunnel, but another calculation relieved his worry. If the distance between them were fifty feet, as it appeared, then the total column would be approximately something under fifteen hundred feet, allowing sixteen feet for the length of a vehicle. He tensed himself for action.

THE convoy was very near now, so near he could make out the plan of organization. Each of the first five carried one small tank, just big enough for a single operator. The tanks were cruel-looking bits of ordnance no bigger than the common American caterpillar tractor.

Apparently the rest carried soldiers. He remembered that G.M.C. "personnel carriers" had a capacity of thirty. These seemed to be packed beyond that, however, but it was a safe estimate that the force numbered at least six hundred fighting men.

He thought of the Partisan handful. He, and not Zozo, would "prevent."

His watch told him that it was now time to act, and he set about it coolly. Crawling on all fours to the point where he had placed the end of his fuse, he used his match carefully, watching the thin white smoke writhe toward the olive trees. Already more than half the trucks had disappeared behind the green screen of foliage. He got to his feet and ran—crouched over, straining to get to safety before the blast should come. Then there was a harsh cry, then the crack of a rifle and an invisible bee buzzed past his head. He ducked, then dropped flat. *Crack! Crack!* Several men were shooting now, and bullets flew all around him. He was afraid he might not live out the next sixty seconds. This, logic told him, was the end—an ignominious and futile end. Perhaps the Zozos were right after all. They, at least, could die retaliating—while he, with his superior brain, was caught like a rat!

But the next rifle-crack, if it came at all, he never heard. The earth shook. A blasting roar dimmed all other sound and a spray of dark matter smeared the patch of sky over him. A hail of fragments pelted around him. And when, having caught his breath again and recaptured his scrambled wits, he dared to lift his head and look toward the bushes to where his assailants had stood, there were only three twisted trucks and a ragged heap of limp, gray-clad bodies on the ground. The olive trees which had covered the tunnel's entrance were flat and torn. A chaotic debris was strewn where the entrance had been. The tunnel was sealed at both ends. The German soldiers with their tanks, were entombed for all time in the shortest section of the secret road.

Pfc. Meddoes did not tarry in the vicinity of the explosion. He did not wait to see whether or not the Nazis could extricate themselves. He remembered that the blast had taken place in German territory and he saw no advantage in remaining where scouting planes might spot him. He could not retreat, for the tunnel was sealed against him. To return to his own Army-held area, he would have to follow the Via Appia, a dangerous road just now. He could only go forward toward Rome hoping to get to the next by-pass before hostile soldiers could intercept him.

THE noise of the explosion proved to be a prelude to bedlam. Hardly had Meddoes caught his breath from it when the whole countryside to the south of him seemed to burst into a roar of gunfire. American guns miles behind were pouring shells along the roadway. American planes flew overhead, bombing points toward the German end of the Appian Way. *Bangs* and *booms* from the north evidenced that the Nazis were replying in kind, and soon the air overhead was screaming with projectiles, wailing, whistling, shrieking, roaring.

Safety lay only in getting quickly out of there and under cover. Meddoes decided to run—not back toward the American lines, but forward, dashing alongside the banked-up roadway, to the next section of the underground road, where walls and roof of rock and soil would shelter him. It was taking a dangerous risk to get there, but to remain where he was would be no less so.

Throwing away everything but pistol, flashlight and canteen, he ran. He did not inspect the wrecked trucks nor the bodies of gray-clad soldiers which lay scattered about them. Crouched a little, zigzagging a little, stooping a little, falling flat on his face whenever he heard the whistle of a shell, he ran along the Appian Way—seeing large chunks of it climb skyward where an H.E. shell burst ahead of him. For the first time in his life, he was wholly afraid. He had lost his calm; he forgot about cause and effect and probability. As he ran, he also prayed. Shells were dropping not fifty yards from him. Great war-birds were zooming and blatting and roaring and dropping bombs and machine-gunning the Via Appia. Had he been able at this moment to calculate his chances of reaching the culvert under the Appian Way which according to Zozo's diagram concealed the entrance to the next by-pass, before a bomb or a shell should blow him into another world, he would have taken a very dim view of such chances.

And, almost before he was fully aware, he was wading through shallow water into an old Roman arch concealed by the modern culvert of which it formed a central support. Inside was safety and the road to Rome. Outside, a man-made thunder rocked the world. Nor could Rome's Jove surpass, with his bolts, the destruction which manlings were creating out there. Pressure filled the tunnel as, above ground, a bomb dug itself in. The cave walls groaned and moaned. Slivers of crystal and rock spattered over Meddoes' steel helmet. Dust shook loose and stung his eyes. But in that dark place, perhaps a hundred feet under the earth, he was reasonably safe. He sat down and gave up to fatigue. And on a wet stone, his feet in muck, his head on a rock, his nostrils laden with the smell of underground decay, he slept. . . .

So this was Rome, the Eternal City—or was it? He had left the last tunnel sometime ago and now it was dark outside. He had dragged his sick and weary self along a modern concrete roadway. The night sky had an unreal glow from the antiaircraft searchlights which swept it like ghostly brooms.

Instinct prompted him to detour the crossroads and avoid the *"arrestata facultativa"* signs of trolley stops. Anything that suggested factories or public buildings, too, were to be avoided, common sense told him.

But was it *really* Rome? The famous Via Appia, built three centuries before Christ, was only a three-lane highway resembling almost any American national route. Back somewhere in the hills of Latium, the big guns were *boom-boom-booming* and unseen aircraft roared menacingly. The ancient gods were playing dissonant chords on a great cosmic calliope. It was the Music of the Spheres in the modern manner.

*Was* it Rome? Could that mass of dark buildings over there be the Baths of Caracalla? An Italian *ferrovia* crossed the concrete road, but where were the Appian aqueduct, the Palatine, the Claudian Gate? Here was the Porta di San Sebastiano (which must be avoided), but where was the Porta Capena? Through how many years had the studious Meddoes drunk in old glories from maps, photos, diagrams and texts? Vicariously and by proxy, he had known and loved every detail, every brick and cobble of the ancient city, its teeming, polyglot populace, its mad street-crowds, its madder rulers. Spiritually, he had lived in it, loved in it, shared in it. Rome! It had *belonged* to him. Rome was home and this was to have been his home-coming. But where was Rome? This place, surely, did not fit into his maps and pictures. This steel-and-concrete place surely never sang the *carminae* of Horace, never lisped the golden hexameters of a Virgil, never drank the passion of a Catullus nor laughed to the bawdy quips of a Martial. If this were Rome, he had been cheated, something was wrong.

He was suddenly cold, aware of pain, fatigue, disappointment. His bones ached, his fever flamed. Journey's end—an empty, futile end! Electric lights ahead, modern artillery behind, modern planes above! Modern buildings, winking modern eyes in derision.

The road turned just ahead into the city. He didn't care. Powerful motors roared behind him in the road. Headlights flooded the Appian Way. Some instinct made him seek cover by the trolley-tracks at the roadside where an overturned car lay as though it too were tired, disillusioned and sick. He got into it and huddled down as a column of crawling vehicles moved past. Even danger seemed empty now. A pilgrim had found the no-longer Holy City! Crowds of shouting people suddenly filled the streets—Italians, but not Romans. Suddenly a big uniformed figure loomed beside him and a hand joggled his shoulder.

"What in hell," an American voice wanted to know, "are you doing in there, soldier?"

Illogical—incredible—impossible, in Rome! The fellow was wearing the arm-band of the American Military Police. But it didn't really matter. Meddoes was too sick to care. . . . The whole world was sick—and especially he himself.

"I am looking," he heard his own voice saying thickly, "for the Eternal City."

The M.P. had seen many kinds of drunks in his day.

"Okay, chum—pull up your panties and come along. That's just where I'm gonna take you—to the Etoinal City. B'gees! Hey, Sammy, c'mere! We gotta *vino* case and he just passed out on me. Say, where you suppose this guy got so much so quick? Maybe we oughta find out before we drag him in, huh?"

A SQUARE card on the door in front of which the young Lieutenant halted was neatly lettered:

INVESTIGATING OFFICER
*Hq. Area X, Co. O. M.P.*

Here it came, Benison thought. He did his best to adopt a detached attitude toward his situation, but found it difficult. Nobody but a fool or an abnormally insensitive man can look upon the probability of disgrace with *sang-froid*. Not a minute of any day had passed since he had handed in the A.W.O.L. report that had not been filled with apprehension, and now he faced it. He had given up trying to justify himself, had ceased to make excuses. Generations of New England matter-of-factness made it impossible for Seth Benison to dodge

issues. A thing had to be faced. You face it. Get it over with.

At a big desk sat a man in an O.D. shirt, wearing collar eagles and a frown.

Benison saluted; the habit of saluting Colonels was strong in him.

"This is the Captain Benison you sent for, sir," the Lieutenant said, and departed. The Colonel peered across at his victim. Benison recognized this Colonel with mild displeasure as being the same cantankerous fellow who had come to the shop weeks ago and had blank-blanked him so loudly and persistently. Not that it mattered—when the neck is severed, it makes little difference who wields the ax.

"Sit down," commanded the Colonel. Benison would have preferred to take it standing up, but he complied.

"Your name is Benison—Seth H?"

Benison said simply, "Yes sir."

"What's the H. for?"

"Hezekiah." It no longer embarrassed him that his parents had thought it fitting to name him after Adam's third son and an ancient Jewish king.

"You are Base Coördination Officer, are you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you write this report?"

The Colonel flourished a document in his hand. Benison knew perfectly well what it was, but he felt it unjust that his interrogator should expect him to identify papers at a distance. So he asked, to lay the burden on the Colonel's shoulders:

"What report?"

"Reporting a soldier absent without leave."

"Yes, sir. I wrote one."

"Soldier's name is Meddoes, Merlin Icarus? Blank, blankety-blank! What the hell kind of names get into this man's Army nowadays, anyhow?"

"That," said Benison, who saw no useful purpose to be served in replying to the second part of the question, "is his name. Private, First Class."

"What day did he disappear?"

Benison decided against quibbling.

"His day off was 13 May. I gave him a city pass for that date. He failed to appear for duty on the 14th, the next day."

"But your report is dated the 27th of May. How is that?"

"I prefer," said Benison, very slowly and articulately, "not to explain it, sir. Call it neglect of duty."

Perhaps that made Benison feel better, but it was the wrong note so far as this Colonel was concerned. You can't oversimplify things in the Army. You can't just call things by names. You must arrive at those names by an involved process. There is, it seems, no royal road to disgrace. You have to disgrace yourself the Army way, or it's no go.

The Colonel burst out, exasperated: "You blank-blank well *are* going to explain! I'm givin' you an order, Captain, and you'll blank-blank well obey it." His face grew so apoplectically red that Benison felt constrained to humor him.

"All right, Colonel. I didn't mean to refuse; I merely feel that explanations are beside the point. Neglect of duty, it seems to me—"

"Who in hell cares what seems to you? I want to hear from you in your own blank-blank words just how it could happen that an officer—a Captain, too—doesn't make an A.W.O.L. report for two weeks after a man of his staff disappears. You're responsible for that soldier. Suppose he got killed or taken prisoner! Suppose he murdered somebody! Suppose he was a spy! Damn it all, Captain—you're old enough to know better."

*Old enough to know better.* The Colonel's choice of words was, in the main, accurate, although not especially inspired. Captain Benison, already turned forty, was certainly old enough to know better—better than to allow any ingenuous idealism to get him into such a mess as this.

"My reasons are purely psychological, sir." After all, the Colonel had asked for it.

"Psychological!" As the Colonel repeated the word, it sounded profane.

Benison could recognize futility when it roared at him, but decided to explain if he could. "You see, sir, this boy Meddoes—"

HOW *can* you explain to an old-time Colonel that some temperaments are entirely unsuited to the Army? How can you make him understand that a fellow like Meddoes lives in a scale-model world of his own creation that has nothing in common at all with this world, and that if you take him out of his private world, you are hurting him just as much as you hurt a fish by making it wiggle on dry land and breathe air? How can you explain to an Army Colonel that when the law of chance and the Selective Service Act has taken a man like this out of his natural habitat and tossed him into the Army, it becomes your duty—your decent human duty—to befriend him, to help him, to protect him, to feed him the spiritual oxygen he needs to keep him alive until the war shall be over, until the draft-board's error is corrected and he can return to his natural element. Your *duty*. . . . Golden Rule, brotherly love, human decency. Only you can't make a tough Colonel see it that way.

But you can try. Benison explained about this lost man being a scholar, a student of classical archeology, a fellow who lived in the past rather than in the present.

"—He even didn't know how to drive a car. I can't imagine how they pick such men, and send them overseas. They might be of some use on the home front, but over here in the theater of war they're just problems."

The Colonel may have had other ideas on this subject, but he was interrupted.

The door to the office opened narrowly and the head and shoulders of a smallish, sharp-faced officer thrust in.

"Ah, there you are, Colonel Jones. They told me you'd be in here. May I listen in? I take it this is Captain Benison."

IT was not until the Colonel scrambled to his feet that the Captain saw the silver star on the officer's collar and realized that the intruder was a Brigadier General. As Benison stood up and saluted, he also was certain that he had never seen him before.

"Please continue, Colonel," said the newcomer, folding himself into a chair. "Intelligence is interested in the Captain's runaway soldier from a special angle. Carry on, Captain."

Benison continued, somehow more at ease in the General's presence. He had often observed that courtesy and consideration, in the Army, seems to increase in direct ratio to rank.

"I had just told the Colonel, sir," he said, "that I have no alibi for neglect of duty. It was my military duty to report my soldier absent on May 14. I did not do so until May 27. My reasons are not military, but I was giving them at the Colonel's request."

He could not be sure, but it did seem that the General's eyes smiled.

"Continue, Captain," he said—and Benison did so.

In a few brief sentences, he described the soldier Meddoes and told the story of his earlier disappearance, embellishing the tale with an account of the stolen trucks and of the soldier's desire to prove the existence of an underground road to Rome.

"My first mistake," Benison said, "was letting myself feel sorry for him. I could see that he hated the Army and had been unhappy in it. He was a queer sort, but I liked him. I felt I ought to try to build up his morale a little. That's why I didn't object too much to his playing around with inscriptions and snooping after ruins."

The Colonel said, "Hurrumph!"

The General said, "I see."

"He had a good brain, too," Benison continued; "and I felt he should be encouraged to use it."

"Privates in the Army aren't supposed to have brains," opined the Colonel. The General made no comment. The Captain kept on talking.

"I couldn't let him go butting into Intelligence work, but I didn't think it could do any harm to let him explore caves on his own time. Apparently, he couldn't even wait until his day off to start. He went off with my secretary's uncle that same evening."

"Your secretary's uncle? Ah, the Crusso fellow. We know about him."

"All I know is that she calls him Ippolito."

"Go on, please, Captain."

"I realize now that I ought to have reported the whole thing to somebody when my secretary told me that her uncle had also disappeared. It seems he lives in Avellino and only came into Naples for her mother's birthday. Meddoes apparently hired him to help explore because he used to be a professional guide. When he didn't show up for the feast, the girl thought both of them were lost in the catacombs."

"THEN why in the name of God didn't you report it?" The Colonel felt, perhaps, that it was a plot to undermine Army Regulations.

"Because if I had reported the boy A.W.O.L. he would have been severely punished. He didn't mean to break any rules. It would have made him psychologically a total loss to me and to the Army if he felt himself punished unjustly—"

"Humph! Blast and damn!" The Colonel rebelled at that. "All blank-blank nonsense! 'Punished unjustly.' A.W.O.L. is punishable! The Army doesn't have to beg pardon of any blank-blank private!"

"So you waited, Captain, feeling that your man would turn up, eh?" The General, it appeared, was a man of understanding.

"Yes sir, exactly. I don't excuse it. I'm only telling how it happened."

"I see. And when you finally realized that a considerable time had elapsed, you did actually put your report in?"

"Yes sir. For a while, I was sure he'd turn up. There's a special Providence that seems to take care of people like that. But after a couple of weeks had gone, I—"

"You just sneaked your report in, hoping the date wouldn't be noticed, didn't you?" The Colonel was a man prone to expect the worst of humanity.

"No sir. I'm damned if I did!"

The General saved the situation.

"Pardon me, Captain, but did your soldier drink a great deal?"

"I don't believe he drank at all, sir. Not the type."

"Was his manner of speaking odd?"

"He certainly didn't talk like the average soldier. A very well-educated man, sir. Unusual vocabulary. But—may I ask why, sir?"

It would have been too much to expect Benison to have no curiosity at all, as the General apparently understood. But the Colonel glared indignantly. Captains don't ask Generals "Why?"

"None of your blank-blank—" he began, but the General cut in:

"Because a soldier named Merlin Icarus Meddoes is being held by the M.P.'s on a charge of intoxication, at our newest station, Rome."

"In Rome!"

"He was picked up as being drunk, the night before last. That was June 4th, Captain, the day we took Rome."

"Rome!" Benison was still out of focus. "You say he is in *Rome*, sir?"

"Yes, or rather quite near, in a field hospital. He was either drunk or sick when they picked him up. But I understand that his condition is not serious."

Benison was as a man reprieved. Gone was the feeling that Meddoes was dead and that he, Seth Benison, was responsible. But the Colonel was a man to pursue matters in hand.

"I can't see," he stated in a flat voice, "that it makes any difference, Captain. Your *man* just misses being classified as a deserter, but *your* case stays the same."

"One moment, Colonel, if you please." The General had other ideas. "I mentioned an Intelligence angle in this case."

"Yes, General." How obsequious Colonels become when a General sets the tune!

"I am not at liberty to divulge the whole story, but I can say that we have known about this soldier's escapade. Through him certain interesting documents fell into the hands of a group of loyal Italian Partisans with whom we have been working. It was thanks to these Partisans that a German attack was blocked. Your soldier had a finger in that, too, Captain."

Benison was unequal to replying. The General went on:

"It might be embarrassing if this story were to drift back home through the newspapers unless it were properly handled in detail and censored by Military Intelligence. And since many of the details are not for public consumption, it is my duty—and my intention too, Colonel—to see that it does *not* get out."

"Yes, General."

"Therefore, I want Captain Benison's report destroyed, so no copy of it remains in your files, Colonel. And all other documents pertaining to it."

"You mean, sir—" The Colonel was scandalized.

"Of course I can have that done officially, Colonel—but it occurred to me that if we should, between us, destroy all written record of this business, precluding of course any charges against Captain Benison—we should achieve our end informally and—er—more happily." Here was the steel hand in the glove of silk.

"You mean you want me to destroy military records?" Here was a General proposing what, to the Colonel's black-or-white mind, was tantamount to a felony.

"Exactly that, Colonel." The General was prepared to sweeten the pill. "There is such a thing as military expediency, Colonel."

"But the Captain, here, General—"

"The Captain has been guilty of neglect in the strictest sense of the word. We are confronted, however, by a proposition far bigger than that of error and punishment. It is my belief that any benefits to the Army that might be gained by pursuing your investigation and bringing charges would be more than offset by the risk of harm to the Allied Cause." He turned then to Benison and his voice grew sharp.

"Not," he went on, "that I condone the Captain's laxity! Captain, you have been a damned sentimental fool in your misdirected idealism. Only a fool would try to bring your brand of idealism into the Army. I understand your motives in holding off punishment from your soldier. But it is a form of egotism for any single man to assume that his way is psychologically right and that the Army's way is wrong. The Army is faced by much bigger problems than the tender feelings of one misfit or ten thousand misfits. The Army writes its regulations for the ten millions—the *hundred* millions—if you take into consideration that it has been handling psychological situations for a hundred years or longer and expects to go on for a few centuries more. It doesn't matter, Captain, how sensitive, how deserving, any individual draftee may be or how temperamentally unsuited to Army routine. There are a lot of those cases and they are often tragic, but they are trifling by comparison with the psychological welfare of the whole. What matters is the whole; what matters is that our Army should *be* a whole, not merely an aggregate of individuals. And when you or anybody else singles out an *individual* case and attempts to criticize the general regulations in its light, it is merely ridiculous. You may have the highest, most noble of good intentions, Captain, but you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

CAPTAIN BENISON looked squarely at the General and said:

"I am, sir."

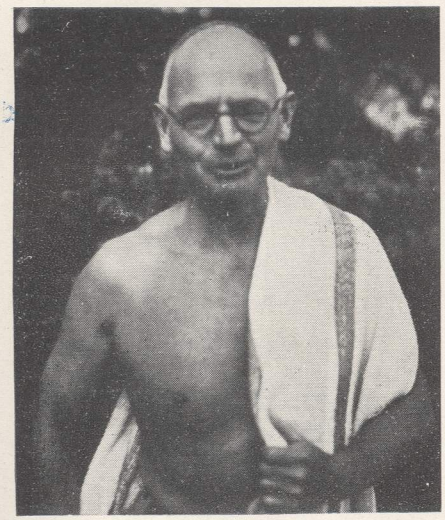
"Good," said the General. "If you really are, you don't need a court-martial." He nodded to the Colonel. "I'll leave the rest of it to you," he said, and turned to go. But just as he got to the door and as the other officers stood to salute, he said:

"Captain Benison, I almost forgot. I had a sort of message from your missing soldier. He asked the Intelligence Officer who interviewed him in the hospital to see that it got to you."

"Yes sir?"

"I don't know what it means, but I suppose that you do: Private Meddoes asked my Lieutenant to tell you that it was not a temple to Janus, after all."

# Who's Who *in this* Issue



## *Neill C. Wilson*

NEILL C. WILSON is a San Franciscan, once the drama editor of the San Francisco *Examiner*. In 1936 he published a book about the epic days of the Wells Fargo, "Treasure Express," and in 1937 "Silver Stampede," a chronicle of the exciting happenings at an early-day mining camp in Death Valley, Old Panamint. Both books reached the New York Herald-Tribune's list of national best sellers. Liberty's reviewer, Oliver Swift, paid "Silver Stampede" the compliment of 3½ stars and placed it at the head of his list (Liberty, April 3, 1937). Mr. Wilson also confesses to a volume of poetry, not too serious of style, dealing with the lights and shadows of San Francisco under the title "A City of Caprice." He served in the World War and won a commission. He was the second man to climb all fourteen of the Pacific Coast's fourteen-thousand-foot mountain peaks, and helped introduce skiing into his State. He admits, however, that all the progress in that art since 1927 has been made by others, not by him. He is married, with two children—Nancy Jane, fifteen, who has budding art talent and looks forward some day to illustrating her daddy's stories, and Bruce, 11, whose favorite pastime is to scoot past his father on a pair of skis and holler: "What's holding you back, Pop?"

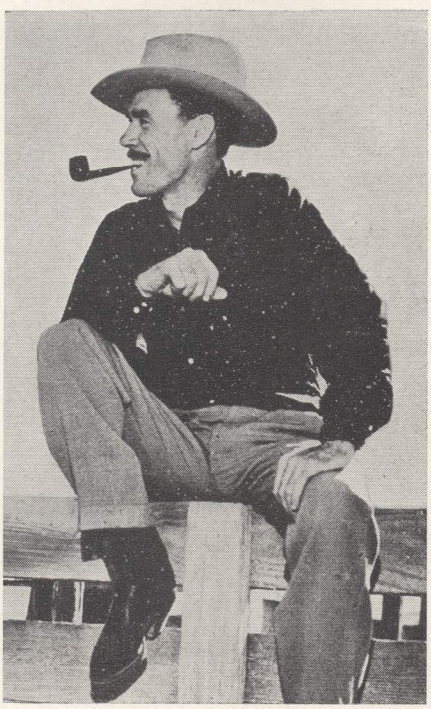
The four Wilsons bundled into the family car and toured Europe just before the outbreak of the war, doing eleven countries in seven mad weeks, including three forays through Italy, two through Germany and two into France—a sightseeing blitzkrieg which Europeans would deride as "typically American." But then, the Wilson family are exactly that—typical Americans.

## *Allan R. Bosworth*

I LIVE in California now, but my roots are deep in the heart of Texas, and I'm a third-generation Longhorn. Born forty-four years ago in a tent on a cow-ranch out near San Angelo, and raised around the Pecos country. Hadn't been across a Texas border—except the Rio Grande—until I joined the Navy away back in 1922.

In 1927, I was commissioned in the Naval Reserve, remaining in a rather inactive status until a year before Pearl Harbor, when I went to active duty. Wound up the late war as a commander, with more swivel chairs behind me than I like to admit; but I did get to Iceland with the North Atlantic Patrol, and to the South Pacific for a tour of duty after most of the fighting was over down there. Sandwiched in between was a brief flying trip to the Aleutians.

Have had three novels and some six hundred or more short stories published. I became interested in writing a story about the building of the Panama Railroad several years ago, but the war intervened. "The Trail of the Crosses" is based on fact. A Texas Ranger did clean up the Cruces Trail as head of the Isthmus Guard. I discovered recently—and a blow it was to my Texas pride—that a great many persons are under the impression that the Rangers were not organized until 1901. That was their *reorganization*—the Rangers actually date from 1835, and have a long and glorious record that extends from the Texas Revolution to the bandit troubles on the border a few years ago. My mother had a Ranger cousin before I was born. . . . And as you know, that was a long time back!



## *Fulton Grant*

FULTON THATCHER GRANT, was born July 4, 1897, at Randolph Center Vermont. Went to Holderness School and Hamilton College. Was for some years a member of the Faculté des Lettres, Universite de Clermont-Ferrand (France). World War I: U. S. Marine Corps, May, 1918, Commissioned 2nd Lt., July, 1919.

In 1936 his first story, "The Pirate's Beard," appeared in BLUE BOOK, and until war again interrupted his career, stories from his fertile imagination were frequent features on our pages. His famous novel "A Million for John Destiny" ran for *eleven* months in 1938-'9.

In World War II he was called into ASC (Army Specialist Corps) as Captain, 15 October, 1942, Commissioned Captain AUS (Intelligence) 5 December, 1943. Casablanca, Salerno, Naples, Leghorn. Attached to Base Ordnance (ABS and PBS) in charge of liaison and civilian labor, returned America February 1944 for hospitalization in Kennedy General Hospital, Memphis, until December 1945. Retired February, 1946.

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